

## *Giustizia*, The ILGWU's Official Italian Organ (1919-1935)

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«Smash the sweatshop!». Such was the burning resolve which united the representatives of the seven labor organizations that met in June 1900 in New York City to form the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU)<sup>1</sup>. By that time, as has been widely documented, the influx of thousands of immigrants in the needle trade and the reluctance on the part of the main workers' organizations to admit the foreign-born within their ranks had justified the emergence of a new unionism which was taking into account the impact of both massive immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe and the rapid evolution of the labor market in the great American urban centers (see for example Korman, 1986, pp. 404-26; Collomp, 1998). Indeed, the presence of diverse ethnic groups, as well as the division of work into almost hermetic and highly hierarchical tasks, had all the more hindered cooperation between workers as the manufacturers of the Clothing industry knew the benefits they could derive from playing «Jew against Italian, Yankee against foreigner» in times of conflict. Such organizations as the ILGWU or the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA) were in fact born out of the necessity to build strong unions «of workers of all crafts» regardless of «color, race or creed» (ILGWU, 1935, p. 8). Yet cooperation was not easy to achieve, not even within the unions which had chosen for their foundations to rely on transnational solidarity (see for instance Fraser, 1986, pp. 280-81). As Edward Fenton has shown, Italians entered the garment industry in the 1880s, and by 1900, they accounted for 15% of the clothing workers in New York City (Fenton, 1975, p. 467). Though often deemed particularly recalcitrant to union organization, Italians progressively joined the Jewish workers in their struggle against abu-

sive manufacturers (Vecoli, 1977, pp. 25-49). Within the ILGWU, the leadership was essentially Jewish and remained so for over a decade. However, as more Italians poured into the industry, they soon brought what was later defined by union officials as «an admixture of crude, stubborn working class militancy with a polished but forceful intellectual idealism» (ILGWU, 1935, p. 28).

### Separate Locals for Italians

Italian female workers had contributed to the famous Uprising of the Twenty-Thousand as early as 1909, but it was their involvement in the 1913 strike of waistmakers which allowed them to be represented more fairly within the organization (ILGWU, 1936, pp. 27-32)<sup>2</sup>. Organized in Locals gathering workers of the same craft, the ILGWU had to make concessions to ethnicity and acknowledge the specific demands emerging from one of its largest nationality groups. It therefore granted the Italian waistmakers of Local 25 the right to create their own branch under Luigi Antonini's leadership and three years later it let pioneer union manager Salvatore Ninfo form a separate local for the Italian cloakmakers: Local 48<sup>3</sup>. Luigi Antonini immediately launched *L'Ope-raia*, a publication meant for the Italian element of both locals, with the purpose of using the newly-born weekly not just as a means of propaganda among his fellow ethnics but also as a way of giving a voice to Italians within the ILGWU. Antonini wanted to prove manufacturers wrong when they held «the vain hope that Italian workers [were] strike-breakers» («Italian Waist and Dressmakers Accept Challenge of M'f'rs», *Justice*, January 18, 1919, p. 7). He dedicated all his energy as an organizer and an editor to showing the ILGWU officials that Italians were trustworthy trade-unionists whose contribution to the labor movement could make a difference. His charisma was such that he was depicted by Benjamin Stolberg (1944, p. 239) in the following terms:

Antonini is an impressive personality. Expansive, colorful and warm, he has the Latin gift of combining the patriarch with the good fellow, genuine dignity with infectious joviality. In Italian he is a superb orator. To his discourses in English I could listen by the hour. His absurdly delightful accent serves as a sort of running emphasis on his satirical wisdom.

Thanks to his oratorical qualities, Antonini succeeded in increasing substantially the number of affiliations to the so-called «ramo italiano» of Local 25. The remarkable participation of his recruits in the 1919 general strike drove the ILGWU General Executive Board to finally accept that the Italian branch of the waistmakers found an independent Local which was christened «Local 89» in reference to the French Revolution. According to Gus Tyler, the establishment of separate Italian locals was essentially due to the «language gap» which led to

communication problems during official union meetings. He thus explained that Jewish and Italian members were said to sit in different parts of the room and to resort to a two-step translation process for any verbal exchange: a first interpreter translated from Yiddish or Italian into English, and then a second one translated from English into the other language (Tyler, 1995, p. 154). In a resolution presented at the fourteenth convention of the ILGWU, the Italian delegates of Local 25 corroborated that observation and attributed «the failure to organize the Italian non-union workers» to the fact that they could not «be understood either in character or in language by the brothers and sisters of other nationality». Nonetheless the difficulties Jewish and Italian workers met in communicating with one another clearly went beyond the mere language barrier, and they only partly explain the splitting of Local 25 or the chartering of Italian, and later even Russian, separate locals. Quite enlightening in that respect is another article of the above-cited resolution in which the same delegates lamented that «a great number of Italian workers in the waist and dress shops» refused to respond to union calls «with the excuse that they [were] not going to belong to a union guided by people of different race and creed» (ILGWU, 1918, p. 111). Class could not yet supersede ethnicity, and separate locals were a way of serving the former while not betraying the latter.

### **The birth of *Giustizia***

A like concept presided over the creation of the new ILGWU press organs in 1919. Until then, the ILGWU had been publishing a monthly magazine entitled *The Ladies' Garment Worker* along with a score of smaller periodicals issued by the different locals. In fact, when the 1914 Cleveland ILGWU convention had approved of the motion recommending the amalgamation of all the existing periodicals into «one big central organ», the project had at first been fiercely opposed by local joint boards (ILGWU, 1918, p. 211). The latter wanted to preserve their own specificities and had not easily been persuaded to give up their papers. Only in 1919, after four years of negotiation, had the opposition eventually been overcome, and had *Justice*, the new ILGWU weekly, finally been issued (Benjamin Schlesinger, «President Schlesinger's Congratulations», *Justice*, January 18, 1919, p. 3). As the managing editor of the ILGWU publications, Samuel Yanofsky explained in the first issue of *Justice*, that union newspapers constituted the cornerstone of labor propaganda («From the Editor's Note Book», *Justice*, January 18, 1919, p. 2):

The paper must be the reader's friend, his chum, his guide, his mouth, eyes and ears. I do not mean that the reader should cease using his own vital organs. I mean that the paper should help the organs to function much better and fuller than heretofore. It should strengthen his power to see, to hear, to talk.

Nevertheless, if the new ILGWU weekly was to be the reader's «ears and mouth», it was obvious that it could not be published only in English. Otherwise both Italians and Eastern European Jews would then have been left deaf and mute. The union thus opted for the simultaneous publication of three versions of its journal, that is to say *Justice*, *Gerechtigkeit* and *Giustizia*, respectively in English, Yiddish and Italian, which reached all together a total readership of one hundred thousand men and women.

When *Giustizia* was born, *L'Operaia* passed away. So should have the spirit which had inspired the first local publications. Originally conceived as a copy of *Justice*, the Italian periodical was but one of the «official organs» of the ILGWU along with *Gerechtigkeit*. All were designed to unite the «union's large membership», and neither of them was meant to represent partisan groups or foster ethnic factionalism (Fannia M. Cohn, «Our Wish fulfilled», *Justice*, January 25, 1919). Even though those weeklies were congratulated after a few months of existence for having «brought a new soul into the International», and «having instilled a new vigor in all the activities» of the union, they were the products of the ILGWU's organizational ambiguities. *Gerechtigkeit* and *Giustizia* were confronted with the arduous and contradictory task of combining unity and ethnic spirit, of supporting the general interest while defending the specific claims of nationality groups which wanted to be acknowledged as such. In the first issue of *Giustizia*, the editor Raffaele Rende, thus reassured those who feared that Antonini's line of thought might be betrayed in the future by stating that «*L'Operaia* was not dead», and that *Giustizia* did not «intend to do anything more or anything better than what [their] beautiful *Operaia* used to do, but had the ambition to be what the *Operaia* used to be» («Ai compagni e alle compagne della Locale 25, ovverosia ai lettori ed alle lettrici del giornale "L'Operaia"», *Giustizia*, 1919).

### ***Giustizia*: a «ladies'» weekly?**

In an interview, Leon Stein, one of the editors of *Justice*, defined the ILGWU as a «ladies' union» (Smith, 1975, p. 42). It is true that women predominated in most trades with the exception of the cloak and suit industry. They accounted for 70% of the membership in 1913 and for nearly 50% in 1923. Women made up the majority of the rank and file yet were little represented among the union managers (Gurowsky, 1977). As to Italian women, who constituted one of the largest groups of female needle workers, it seemed even harder for them to make their way through union leadership. Whereas the ILGWU encompassed a certain number of high ranking female Jewish officials, Italian women were absent from the real decision-making positions. Italian female workers were deemed unorganizable by both Jewish and Italian unionists. Theresa Malkiel's

account of their passivity was supported by many an Italian organizer who regularly complained that they refused to be drawn into union action (Serber Malkiel, 1990). The weight of Southern European patriarchal traditions has often been pinpointed as a justification for the indifference Italian female workers apparently showed toward their own condition. Furio Colombo, and more recently Donna Gabaccia, Franca Iacovetta and other scholars have however argued that Italian female immigrants cannot just be pictured as obedient wives and silent mothers controlled by chauvinistic husbands and fathers (Colombo, 1980, pp. 81-98; Iacovetta and Gabaccia, 2002). In fact, some of them were also strong-minded militants and workers although the way they expressed their rebellion did not necessarily match union standards. After the success of the 1913 strike in which Italian women had actively participated, the Italian male leaders of Local 25 were further persuaded that inviting women to join the union was a key not only to the development of the ILGWU but also – and that was even more important in their eyes – to the future expansion of the Italian Locals.

Organizing women was a challenge that Luigi Antonini was ready to meet and for which he received the full support of the ILGWU. When setting forth his program for *Justice*, Samuel Yanosky had thus stated that his ambition was to «induce the reader to read his own paper» and that the term «reader» included «women readers, just as “workers” covers our women workers» («From the Editor’s Note Book», *Justice*, January 18, 1919, p. 8). A similar concern had been shown by Antonini when he had first launched *L’Operaia (the Female Worker)* the title of which was a clear appeal to Italian women who were supposed to identify with the paper and its content. *Giustizia* was born out of the same awareness that Italian female workers were a driving force that needed to be attracted, used, and possibly controlled, for the benefit of the union. In fact, Alfio Rifici, the Italian Labor Center treasurer, explained in *Giustizia* («Per l’educazione della donna nelle unioni», November 1938, p. 6) that «the labor organizations must educate, enlighten women workers so that they become the true companions of men in their common struggle against capitalism».

To achieve that goal, numerous articles were published in *Giustizia* which considered the «woman question», raised the issue of feminism, and assessed women’s role in the labor movement. Antonini himself often praised the Italian female workers for their active support in the various strikes which contributed to the ILGWU asserting its power in the garment industry. Yet even though the leader of Local 89 proudly declared in *Giustizia* that the time was over when bosses could use «the Italian woman as a tool of exploitation», he still believed his «sisters» needed to be tutored (Luigi Antonini, «Se non ci fosse l’unione», *Giustizia*, October 2, 1920, p. 5). The views expressed in

*Giustizia* reflected that of the socialist party. The fact that women had to work was seen as one of the numerous evil corollaries of a perverse capitalistic system which pushed the unfortunate wives and daughters of underpaid laborers to find a job to make up for the low income of their husbands and fathers. In that process, women, who accepted even lower wages than male workers, were depicted by *Giustizia* as a real danger to the labor movement unless they joined the unions (Anonymous, «Alla donna lavoratrice», *Giustizia*, February 10, 1923, pp. 4-5). The Italian American journal (Anonymous, «La donna e la borghesia», *Giustizia*, April 7, 1923, p. 3)<sup>4</sup> claimed that

women, by the will of her majesty Bourgeoisie became an accessory to the machine, a passive instrument to be used for the sole interest of the capitalists, a means of profit meant only to increase men's unemployment.

Equal rights for men and women in the workplace had therefore to be secured in the name of labor solidarity rather than for strictly feminist purposes. The principle according to which women should earn the same wages for the same job was to be supported not just because it was fair but because it helped ease the tensions raised by capitalism between husbands and wives, and prevented «competition between sexes within the same working family» (Anonymous, «Il lavoro della donna», *Giustizia*, June 28, 1924, p. 3). Antonini and his friends did not much differ from the other socialist leaders of the time and proved often paternalistic and condescending in the way they defended their female counterparts<sup>5</sup>. Even when they encouraged emancipation, they hardly ever cared to challenge the traditional approach to womanhood. As was argued in an article *Giustizia* dedicated to «women and socialism» in 1920 (Anonymous, «Le donne e il socialismo», *Giustizia*, May 8, 1920, p. 6):

We must not forget that women are not just workers, that they achieve, through motherhood, the highest and most delicate social task, that apart from giving life and blood to the future combatants of the proletarian militia, they also shape their minds and souls.

In *Giustizia*, female suffrage was therefore justified on the ground that women were the breeders of potential sons of the revolution, rather than because they should be seen as actual equal partners. Yet, before they could be given the privilege of voting, women were advised to «change their psychology». According to P. Prestianni, women's only interest in life consisted in a vain and perpetual quest for pleasure and happiness. «Dancing is their favourite activity. Love is their ideal», he explained in *Giustizia* («Per l'emancipazione della donna», *Giustizia*, October 23, 1920, p. 6).

When they read a newspaper they look for the novel on page four. When they read the news, they look for articles dealing with love, kidnapping and jealousy. When they go to the theater to watch historical or philosophical plays or movies, they never do it twice because they get bored.

Such convictions drove the editors of *Giustizia* to publish serialized novels specifically tailored for women workers. Combining enough romance to satisfy the female alleged thirst for love and enough Marxist references to be useful tools of propaganda, that kind of popular literature appeared as the best way to awaken women's class consciousness<sup>6</sup>. Only through a complete metamorphosis of their thinking habits could women hope to become real socialists and achieve emancipation. Against this backdrop, it was not deemed inappropriate for a magazine addressing female unionists to publish offensive cartoons mocking women's alleged careless driving, nor did it seem out of place to deride women's desire to practice a sport by recommending «sweeping», «dusting», «waxing», «doing the laundry», and «cooking», as adequate feminine athletic activities unfortunately «fallen into disuse» yet «the abuse of which was not the least dangerous» (Anonymous cartoon, «Le donne che guidano», *Giustizia*, May 1936, p. 11; Anonymous, «Sports femminili», *Giustizia*, March 1934, pp. 23-24). In spite of their obvious efforts to communicate with their female readers, the editors of *Giustizia* did not succeed in overcoming their own prejudices and contradictions and thus failed to fully acknowledge women as their equals. Ironically, although *Giustizia* was a journal meant for a female readership, it was written essentially by men, in the same way as the ILGWU was a «ladies' union» whose leaders were essentially men.

### ***Giustizia*, an instrument of education and recreation**

In his history of the ILGWU, Louis Levine contends that the International played a pioneer part in the field of education and recreation in the labor movement (Levine, 1969, p. 482). It was indeed one of the ILGWU leaders' main preoccupations to offer garment workers access to knowledge and culture. For that purpose, the union created a specific department which dedicated in the early 1920s as much as 15,000 dollars a year to educational activities which ranged from special lectures covering the various phases of the labor movement to classes in psychology, English, art, literature and economics (ILGWU, 1922, p. 81; ILGWU, 1920, p. 60). The educational work carried out by the ILGWU was based on a conviction that «while organization gives [workers] power, true education will give them the ability to use their power intelligently and effectively» (ILGWU, 1924, p. 114). The programs established by the union were so successful that they attracted wide attention

from other American and European labor organizations which used the International's experience to develop similar activities. The female Jewish union members in particular demanded that the ILGWU «be more than a mere business organization, that it have a “soul” as well as a “body”, that it provide for the “intellectual” and “emotional” life of its members» (Levine, 1969, p. 485). At the head of the Educational Department, Juliet S. Poyntz and Fannia M. Cohen were quite innovative in their initiatives, not limiting the concept of education to classes but including other forms of learning. For example, recreation was seen as an important aspect of their educational strategy. They believed that in times of rest or leisure, instruction could be dispensed through other channels such as social meetings or musical events. The ILGWU even opened Unity Houses located in beautiful settings outside the city where workers could, in the summer, combine swimming, dancing, and relaxation with cultural activities. Salvatore Ninfo and later Luigi Antonini were both part of the educational committee and were at the center of every project elaborated for the Italian unionists. They obviously used *Giustizia* to back Poyntz's campaign for education. Indeed, Italian laborers did not necessarily support the idea that attending after-work classes was a key to the liberation of the proletariat. Recognizing that instruction had been a privilege the bourgeoisie had acquired through wealth, *Giustizia's* editors concluded that «knowledge was a necessary condition to meet before one could become worthy of power and keep it». However they insisted that what they intended by instruction was in no way limited to the mere ability to read and write. The latter was decried as a «semi-analphabetism» which was seen as even «more harmful than alphabetism itself». In fact, Antonini favored a wider comprehension of the concept of education. English classes were certainly deemed useful «in a country where [English] is spoken and where in such language are human relationships established», but workers were also encouraged to study economics to «better understand the society in which they lived» and to «grasp some of the problems that affected production and labor, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie» (Anonymous, «L'internazionale e l'educazione delle masse organizzate», *Giustizia*, October 13, 1923). The Italian locals thus sponsored classes to be held in the New York based ILGWU unity centers, and raised enough money to purchase their own summer Unity House: Villa Anita Garibaldi. It was up to *Giustizia* to praise the virtues of spending a vacation at the Villa. The journal thus devoted much space to describing the «summer colony of Italian dressmakers» as a place of recreation and education where workers could indulge in the «dolce farniente», enjoy good Italian food, practice swimming or hiking, and attend stimulating conferences (Luigi Antonini, «Colonia estiva delle sartine», *Giustizia*, May 31, 1924, p. 6). Historian Alain Corbin recalls that in the beginning of the



twentieth century, the United States was indeed an extraordinary «laboratory for contemporary mass recreation» (Corbin, 1996, p. 7). Unions saw the spare time gained by workers through strikes and harsh negotiations with the garment industry bosses not as time that was wasted but as time saved over the working hours. As such it was a victory of progress over the dark age of early industrialization. By claiming their rights to rest and leisure, workers challenged the very idea that the proletariat was a mere *working* force. «Female dressmakers too, are human beings of flesh and blood», professed William Feingenbaum in *Giustizia* («L'inaugurazione della terza stagione della colonia estiva», *Giustizia*, June 30, 1923, p. 7). The Villa Garibaldi was precisely the place where the «sartine» were finally invited to trade their working clothes for bathing suits, and be women rather than dressmakers. In fact, the Italian unity house was meant to allow the Italian workers to use their hard-won leisure time in a way that was beneficial, and thus prove that there was an alternative to sterile and dangerous idleness for resting workers. It is interesting to note how every activity at the Villa was depicted in *Giustizia* as a source of healthy personal improvement. Dancing, «rather than entertainment and movement, is also choreography and esthetics», explained for example the Italian weekly in 1923, «if the person who dances knows how to do it well, and has the good taste to quarantine certain dances which, under the pretext of being modern copy that of the Zulus or change dance into... something indecent» (Minimus, «Otto Giorni a Villa Anita», *Giustizia*, August 25, 1923). What is underlined in this quote is also a rather conservative approach to the concept of recreation, which matched the ILGWU leaders' vision of unity houses. The latter's very objective was to encourage «the elevation of spirit and intellect» (Anonymous, «C'è solamente una "Unity House"», *Giustizia*, August 1936, pp. 6-7). Although economic problems led Locals 89 and 48 to close the Villa Garibaldi in 1925, *Giustizia* continued thereafter to advertise for the other ILGWU unity houses where Italian workers were encouraged to register for their vacation.

### **Neither for Stalin nor for Mussolini: *Giustizia* and politics**

The history of the International was marked by a fierce struggle between the pro-communist and the anti-communist factions of the union. As Gus Tyler recalls, the conflict was affected by international politics. When the Russian communists tried to influence the leaders of the American labor movement so that they would break from the Socialists, the ILGWU president, Benjamin Schlesinger resisted (Tyler, 1995, pp. 155-68). Under the initiative of Treasurer Morris Sigman, the «shop delegates' leagues», which the communist members had created within each local in order to challenge the authority of

the executive boards, were finally outlawed in 1921. Sigman, who became president two years later, continued his merciless combat against the «Left wing» of the union and evicted a number of communist activists (*The Lefting in the Garment Unions*, 1927). In what was labelled as a «civil war» within the ILGWU, Italians did not remain impartial or inactive. Historian Charles Zappia has shown how both Ninfo and Antonini pushed their Locals to adopt resolutions branding communists as «opportunists», and how the Italian leaders sided with Sigman, not just for ideological reasons but also because they wanted «to protect the growing power of Local 48 and 89 against any challenges, regardless of the ideologies of the challengers» (Zappia, 1986, p. 85). Ironically, while *Giustizia* was depicted by the Italian police reports as a «communist periodical», the weekly really backed Antonini's efforts to keep the Italian element under Socialist control<sup>7</sup>. Such unconditional support to Sigman's cause could not but provoke internecine conflict within the various components of Italian American radicalism, if anything because the freshly anti-communist Antonini was known to have been for some time a member of the Worker's Party which he had left only in July 1923. In 1924, the Communist daily «Il Lavoratore» harshly denounced the «rather unscrupulous methods of Antonini, Ninfo and company who had seized control of the union at the expense of male and female garment workers» (Anonymous, «Fra i sarti da donna a New York» in «Il Lavoratore», December 6, 1924). Evidently, «Il Lavoratore» was affiliated with the Workers' Party, and therefore its editors expressed here an opinion that was partly influenced by their political leanings. Yet the communist daily did stress a fundamental aspect of Antonini's approach to leadership. The International, explained *Giustizia* in 1925 «is now a powerful force; it is an army with its officers, its troops, its chiefs» (Anonymous, «Il grottesco delle menzogne comuniste», *Giustizia*, July 4, 1925, p. 2). The admitted comparison with the military sheds in fact a new light on how Antonini envisioned his role in the organization, at a time when the ILGWU battles were fought not only against the garment industry bosses but also within the union's very ranks. The leader of Local 89 did hold an iron grip over the members of the Italian sections, and he was hardly ever favorable to contradictory debates over important political issues.

Along with sustaining Sigman's anticommunist drive, *Giustizia* led a parallel struggle against fascism. The fascist March on Rome, in October 1922, and the subsequent takeover of Italy by Benito Mussolini, marked the beginning of a raging and long-lasting confrontation between the Italian-American profascist forces and the exponents of the various radical and left-wing groups. In 1923, the Italian-American socialist, syndicalist, anarchist and even communist organizations tried to overcome their differences of opinion in order to form a common front against Mussolini's propaganda in the United States.

Supported by the Italian Chamber of Labor and conducted by the Italian leaders of the ILGWU and of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA), this initiative resulted in the creation of the Anti-Fascist Worker Alliance of North America – which was to be known later as the Anti-Fascist Alliance of North America (AFANA) (Cannistraro, 1999, pp. 36-38)<sup>8</sup>. While the American as well as the Italian-American commercial periodicals had gradually been persuaded, through seduction or economic pressure, to praise the Italian regime and its alleged achievements, the AFANA had assigned itself the duty of countering the dissemination of fascist ideology in America. Ninfo, Antonini, and their ACWA friends, Frank and August Bellanca, orchestrated a vigorous antifascist campaign in the labor press. The Italian organ of the ACWA, *Il Lavoro*, joined *Giustizia*, «Il Lavoratore», and the well-known anarchist paper edited by Carlo Tresca *Il Martello*, in an uneven battle against the propaganda machinery which the Italian Ministry of Popular Culture had elaborated to create, in Italy and abroad, a wide consensus in favor of the leader of the «New Italy»<sup>9</sup>. The part played by the New York City based daily «Il progresso italo-americano» in trying to transform Italian-Americans into faithful followers of the Duce has been repeatedly discussed by historians John Diggins, Philip Cannistraro and Stefano Luconi (cf. Diggins, 1972; Cannistraro, 1999). Owned successively by Carlo Barsotti and millionaire entrepreneur Generoso Pope, «Il progresso» was the most influential Italian-American newspaper, and it could boast a nationwide circulation of 90.770 copies in 1925 (*Ayer and Sons Newspaper Annual Directory*, 1925). As such it had become the prey of the Italian embassy's endeavors to control a community which, if properly guided, could be used to weigh on the United States' foreign policy and favor the Duce's imperialistic projects. Quite receptive to Mussolini's charisma and to the directives of the Italian consulate in New York City, «Il progresso» had become, by the mid-1920s, the Italian Labor press editors' worst enemy. The antifascist papers, including the newly born daily «Il Nuovo Mondo», were – to use Fraser Ottanelli's words – «outnumbered and outsold by their foes», but they «provided a spirited and forceful alternative voice to pro-fascist forces in Italian communities across the country» (Ottanelli, 2001, pp. 184-85). Indeed, even before the March on Rome, Antonini and Frank Bellanca organized protest meetings to express their solidarity with the Italian workers and demand that action be taken against the escalation of fascist violence in Italy. *Giustizia* claimed that the fascists were but «assassins and vandals», a band of «ferocious animals that capitalism [had managed] to unleash on the working class (Anonymous, «Basta coi fascisti», *Giustizia*, August 12, 1922, p. 1). *Giustizia's* participation in the antifascist struggle proved constant in the years that followed and intensified in the 1930s, as Mussolini grew more powerful. Antonini used the United States

as a model and wanted Italian-American workers to understand that «fascism is contrary to any American ideal and to anything that is cherished by American citizens» (Anonymous, «Socialismo o fascismo», *Giustizia*, October 1932, p. 7). The ILGWU backed Antonini and sponsored any event proposed by the Italian Locals, favoring joint action with other representatives of the progressive forces such as Fiorello La Guardia<sup>10</sup>. With the advent of Nazism in Germany, it appeared to the ILGWU that the European working class was threatened with the rise of a plurality of fascisms which was plaguing the continent and represented an even greater menace than had been foreseen until then. In 1934, the union thus called for an alliance of all the democratic forces against «the fascist tyrannies that enslaved the noble populations of Italy, Germany, and Austria» (Anonymous, «È contro il fascismo assassino», *Giustizia*, July 1934, p. 5). At the same time, it raised 50.000 dollars for the antifascist campaigns launched by its members and obtained the support of the American Federation of Labor (Anonymous, «Il fondo di 50 mila dollari per le campagne antifasciste», *Giustizia*, August 1934, p. 3; ILGWU, *Fight Nazism and Fascism*, undated flyer). The then president of the ILGWU, David Dubinsky, also endorsed the Italian Locals' policy to invite antifascist exiles residing in Europe so that they might give firsthand information on the fascist regime during meetings organized all over the United States. One of those exiles was socialist Giuseppe Modigliani, who became a regular contributor to *Giustizia*, in which he offered his analysis of the European political situation. Such activities could not go unnoticed by the Italian embassy. When reporting to the Roman authorities, the Italian consul general in New York City, Antonio Grossardi, expressed his concern that «the Jewish Pole David Dubinsky» entertained dangerously close relationships with the «exponents of the Italian Socialist Party and the General Confederation of Labor» and he further lamented that American funds were directly sent to Italy to subsidize the local socialists<sup>11</sup>. He was all the more determined to curb the ILGWU's influence among Italian-American workers as it was a crucial time when the Duce relied on the Italian immigrants' money to help him finance his future invasion of Ethiopia. In that context, the tacit alliance Antonini established in 1934 with Pope in order to get the ILGWU meeting reports published regularly in the columns of «Il progresso» was resented both by Grossardi and the Italian representatives of the ACWA<sup>12</sup>. Pope's attempt to seduce the leader of Local 89 so as to create a breach within the antifascist «united front» did not satisfy Grossardi because, although it did generate fatal dissensions between the ACWA and the ILGWU, it also contributed to the strengthening of Antonini's position in the community. On the other hand, the fact that *Giustizia* kept a suspicious silence on Pope's pro-fascist activities, while the rest of the labor press attacked «Il progresso» almost on a daily basis, did infuriate the most

radical part of Italian-American antifascists. Yet Antonini preferred to combat fascism in his own way, even if that implied making ambiguous compromises with rather controversial figures such as Pope. From 1934, *Giustizia* started publicizing the *Voice of Local 89*, a weekly radio program which featured talks by Antonini on stations WHOM and WFAB in New York City. Antonini's radio broadcast, which was dutifully reported in the Italian monthly, provided the ILGWU with a new weapon against fascism and contributed to increasing the notoriety of the newly elected ILGWU vice-president.

The influence of the Italian ILGWU leaders did not derive merely from their involvement in the American labor movement. The ILGWU indeed saw itself as more than just a union, and it had the ambition to participate in the political and civil activities of the nation. The association of the International with the Socialist Party and the progressive politicians proved an essential component of the union's identity and gave *Justice*, *Gerechtigkeit*, and *Giustizia* their political color. In July 1922, the ILGWU Italians were instrumental in forming the American Labor Party (ALP), a New York City organization which included socialist, farm and labor groups. The fact that Salvatore Ninno – who then was the vice-president of the ILGWU – became the union's representative in the ALP Executive committee, further evidenced the increasing importance of the Italian element in city, state and national politics. *Giustizia* echoed the progress of the new political force, and sought supporters among its readers. In its editorial columns, the Italian journal hoped that the ALP, «which had been extending in the State and had been consolidated in all the other states would become a real national party» (Anonymous, «Il congresso dell' American Labor Party», *Giustizia*, March 3, 1923, p. 3). Such expectation was never met, and it was not until 1936 that a new American Labor Party was born thanks to the efforts of the ILGWU and the ACWA<sup>13</sup>. Yet the first ALP allowed the formation of a coalition of progressive groups which endorsed such candidacies as Fiorello La Guardia's for Congress and Robert La Follette's for the 1924 presidential election<sup>14</sup>. *Giustizia* never failed to stick up for Fiorello La Guardia, whose rebellious attitude in the Republican Party and active support of the progressives, justified that the garment industry unions could identify with the cause he championed. His election as mayor of New York City in 1933 was partly due to the campaign led by the Italian-American press and more specifically to the labor newspapers. *Giustizia*, *Il Lavoro* and others insisted on the value of a candidate that had worked for the International as a lawyer and had a full understanding of New York City's ethnic complexity without letting his own Italian background prevent him from considering the larger picture. «The fact that La Guardia bears an Italian name must probably have influenced some people», emphasized *Giustizia* in November 1933, «but not the majority of us because in the union schools we

are taught that being of the same nationality is not a sufficient title to deserve the support of the organized worker» (Anonymous, «Le locali italiane per Fiorello La Guardia», *Giustizia*, November 1933, p. 8).

The ILGWU papers did pay attention to the validity of the parties' platforms and kept backing the most progressive candidates. As is well-known, Franklin Delano Roosevelt benefited from the indefectible support of the ILGWU leaders with whom he entertained personal contacts. During the Depression, *Giustizia*, which had then evolved into a monthly for lack of financial funding, encouraged its readers to endure the necessary sacrifices inflicted upon them by the economic crisis and defended the National Recovery Act as well as all the legislation proposed by the president. In 1934, ILGWU President David Dubinsky admitted that Local 89 had become «the largest organized body of Italian-speaking workers», that it was «playing an important role in our general community» and that it had grown into «the most articulate and influential group in Italian life in our metropolis» (Dubinsky, in ILGWU [1934?], p. 7). Julius Hochman, the manager of the New York Dressmakers' Joint Board, also commented with satisfaction that «if the 40,000 women and men who now comprise the Local 89 were all to meet in one place, no auditorium in the city would be large enough to accommodate them» (Hochman, in ILGWU [1934?], p. 19). The Italian workers' ballot therefore could make a difference and constituted an essential asset for Roosevelt, whose pro-union stand did secure the votes of the radicals.

## Conclusion

Reading *Giustizia's* issues of the 1920s and thirties, one can see the evolution of the ladies garment industry, picture the struggles of the ILGWU against the sweatshops and against the exploitation of workers by the «jobbers», follow the episodes of the ILGWU's so called «civil war», observe the ILGWU's splitting from the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the active part Antonini took in getting his union back into the AFL. Perusing the Italian weekly (then monthly), one can also envision the rise of an Italian labor leadership thanks to the formation of an alliance between unions and political parties and the creation of the ALP. Even though the General Executive Board had appointed Raffaele Rende, a less powerful personality than Luigi Antonini as the editor of *Giustizia*, the Italian version of *Justice* still reflected on all those issues the positions adopted by the leader of Local 89. Lauded by poet Arturo Giovannitti, Antonini definitely left his indelible imprint on the journal and left no margin for contestation. He believed he was the true architect of the Italians' rise within the ILGWU hierarchy and was recognized as such by his peers who celebrated his «blessed leadership» (Anonymous, «Il nostro segre-

tario ha compiuto 50 anni», *Giustizia*, November 1933, p. 5). In much the same way as Local 89 strove to «be an organization in which culture of the ancestral land of its members was preserved and the duty of citizenship to the land of their adoption inculcated», *Giustizia* became at the same time the official organ of the ILGWU and a personal tribune for the Italian-American rising leadership (Anonymous, «Transatlantic Hook-Up Marks Local 89 20th Anniversary», *Justice*, November 15, 1939).

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The research for this article was made possible thanks to the research grant program of the John F. Kennedy Library (Freie Universität, Berlin).
- <sup>2</sup> For a reassessment of the Italian female workers' participation in union action, see Guglielmo, 2002.
- <sup>3</sup> «Genesi ed attività della Locale 89 delle sartine italiane», *La Parola del Popolo*, 9, Special issue, 1958-59, pp. 200-5; Federal Writers' Project, 1939, pp. 147-67. For more details on the Italian locals and their structure within the ILGWU, see Pardi Corbella, 1972, pp. 365-81.
- <sup>4</sup> The same article was published again in the issue of September 1932, p. 7.
- <sup>5</sup> On the rather ambiguous position of socialist leaders toward the «woman question», see: Miller, 1983, pp. 84-102; Miller, 1984, pp. 291-317, and Vezzosi, 1990.
- <sup>6</sup> See for example the serialized novels written by Italian Socialist activist Valeria Vampa.
- <sup>7</sup> Report of the Italian Police Chief, August 22, 1936, Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), Rome, Casellario Politico Centrale (CPC), Busta 4276, fasc. 46921, «Raffaele Rende».
- <sup>8</sup> For more details on the AFANA, also see: Nazzaro, 1974, pp. 171-85.
- <sup>9</sup> On Mussolini's control over the Italian press, see Cannistraro, 1975. For more details on *Il Lavoro*, see Deschamps, 2001, pp. 85-120.
- <sup>10</sup> For more details on Antonini's fight against fascism, see Crawford and Antonini, 1950.
- <sup>11</sup> Consul general Grossardi, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, August 9, 1934, ACS, Ministero dell'interno, Direzione Generale, PS- Div. AA. GG. RR. Cat. G1, f. 1014, «555 New York, Unione Internazionale Lavoratori Sarti (Ilgwu), 1934-1937».
- <sup>12</sup> On the alliance between Pope and Antonini, see Cannistraro and Aga Rossi, 1986, pp. 235-36.
- <sup>13</sup> For more details on the American Labor Party formed in 1936, see: Meyer, 2000, pp. 132-44.
- <sup>14</sup> As regards the early ALP support to Fiorello La Guardia, see: Mann, 1959, 1, pp. 172-73.

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