

Antonella Braga - Mimmo Franzinelli

ERNESTO ROSSI (1897-1967)
Biographical note



Rossi teenager

THE YOUTH AND THE EXPERIENCE OF WAR

"I remember that, when I was a high school student and I lived at Aida's house, in the evening I walked along the Lungarni until late at night, turning over in my mind the essential ideas about my relationships with other men and about what it was possible to do to decrease the injustice and misery in the world. And even then I did not understand how many people could have fun and make a career, without worrying about the lives of other men, without even thinking about the problems that tormented me"

(Letter to the mother, «Regina Coeli» prison, 2 December 1930)

Ernesto Rossi was born in Caserta on 25 August 1897, the fourth of seven children, to Antonio, a Piedmontese, army officer, and to Elide Verardi (1870-1957), of Bolognese origin, whose strong moral and anti-conformist temperament had a decisive weight in the education of the child. Shortly after his birth, the family moved to Florence, the city he loved most and regarded as his true "homeland". In the particular atmosphere of this city - which he learned to "understand in all its monuments, in its countryside, in its sky" - Rossi lived his childhood and early youth, graduating in

1915 at the classical high school "Galileo Galilei". The family life of the young Rossi was painfully marked by the separation of his parents, which occurred dramatically in 1913, by the death of his brother Mario in the war and by the suicide of two sisters, Maria and Serenella, just twenty years old.



The seven Rossi brothers, Florence 1913-1914. From left: Ernesto, Mario, Serenella, Aida, Maria; in the front row: Paolo and Clara, holding their grandson Maurizio Ferrero in their arms, son of Aida



Ernesto Rossi soldier in the First World War

At the outbreak of the First World War, the eighteen year old Rossi first showed himself close to neutralist tendencies, by virtue of an ideal of international solidarity fueled by that "Risorgimento yeast", still alive and active in the culture of his generation, which, shunning the "gloomy" national fanaticism ", he referred to Mazzini "advocate of the sister republics", to Garibaldi "soldier of every homeland that asserted himself", and to that "utopian"socialism (as it was "later called for ridicule by the followers of Marxism") to whom the "International appeared as a higher expression of the same idea of homeland". In August 1915 - after months of uncertainty during which in his mind the same conflict that troubled the conscience of the whole country between the opposite reasons of

neutralists and interventionists - Rossi made the final decision to enlist as a volunteer. His choice was influenced by the suggestions of the Florentine interventionist environment and the family military tradition, but above all by the emotional pressure exerted by his brother Mario and his friends who had already left for the front. This contributed to stimulating "that dramatic sense of duty" which, as Riccardo Bauer wrote, "did not allow him to remain a light-hearted spectator of the scene, but forced him to become an actor", an active protagonist present on the stage of history. The dominant sentiment in him, however, always remained. The yearning for peace and international brotherhood, even if, to restore a just and lasting peace, now seemed necessary to intervene alongside the free nations of Europe against the hegemonic attempt of the central Empires. Although there were not many illusions about the myth of the "last war" for the definitive liberation of all oppressed nationalities propagandized by democratic interventionism, Rossi therefore accepted the war as "a tragic necessity that could not be avoided" and fought, like many young people of his generation, in the profound conviction (albeit illusory) of serving in this way the causes of freedom and democracy. After unsuccessfully attempting to reach the front, first as a volunteer in the Red Cross and then as a bridegroom in military health - an evident sign that the refusal of violence remained an obstacle not easily overcome - Rossi left as a volunteer, a simple soldier attached to the fortieth regiment of infantry, on March 12, 1916, when he was not yet nineteen years old. His somewhat fragile health and physical deterioration, following the strains of military training, forced him, however, to reconsider the possibility of enrolling in the officers' course, as his father and brother Mario would have desired. On 20 June 1916 he thus became an official student of complement in the Military Academy of Modena. Promoted to an "aspiring" official on October 12 of the same year, he was immediately sent to the war zone, where he remained in service without interruption to the 127th Infantry Regiment until May 13, 1917, the day when, during the tenth battle of the Isonzo, he was seriously injured in the abdomen and ear in an action on Monte Cucco. At the front, Rossi lost, in addition to his older brother, two of his best friends, Onofrio Molea and Piero Ugolini. The pain of these losses and the experience of the war were decisive for its formation. In his correspondence from the front, essentially devoid of nationalist rhetoric, the war is told in its bare tragedy: the fatigue of life in the trenches, where everything is a "confusion of beams, filaments, window frames and holes"; the constant wear and tear of the war of position; the "degradation of rains, mud, insects"; the unpreparedness and inadequacy of the Italian war effort; the "patriotic filofesserie [nonsense]" spread by nationalist propaganda; the distortions of militarism, with the arrogance of the officers and the poor conditions of the simple soldiers.

In the face of the harsh fate of the "poor little boys", Rossi felt the responsibility deriving from belonging to a privileged class. This had allowed him to study and participate in the war in a leading position, urgently needed. He then devoted himself to the education of his soldiers, teaching them to read and write and commenting, during the hour of "military morale", Mazzini's *The duties of man*. Just Mazzini – with Vilfredo Pareto, after the discovery of the *Treaty of general sociology*, "by combination in his hands" while he was on leave in Bologna in the winter of 1918 - remained the constant reference of the Rossi soldier, who also recalled him later to unite, in "one inspiration", his adhesion to the war and the fight against fascism.

THE DIFFICULT POST-WAR PERIOD AND THE MEETING WITH SALVEMINI

«I go to Salvemini every few times I go down to the city. He's a man that the more I know the more I admire. His conversation is one of those that continually donate, increasingly expanding the field of vision of the listener. And I also admire him for his imperturbability in the face of accusations, falsifications and denigrations of enemies [...]. I consider Salvemini as a true Master and I'm only sorry I didn't know him before, that he would have done me so much good»

(Letter to the godmother of war, Giuseppina Molea, February 1920)



Ernesto Rossi in the 1920's

On returning from the front, the hostility of the socialists towards the veterans of war and the disgust for a political class closed to every ideal breath and turned in on itself brought Rossi closer to the ex-servicemen and nationalist movements. In the difficult post-war years, he experienced a period of uncertainty and confusion. In the spring of 1919, even if he never joined the movement or the Fascist Party, he undertook a journalistic collaboration with the newspaper "Il Popolo d'Italia" directed by Benito Mussolini. This the request of his friend Enrico Rocca, who proposed him to the editor of the newspaper as "correspondent from Florence" and expert in "economic and agricultural matters". His articles - mainly of an economic nature and proposing liberal solutions - should therefore be read as "the expression of a technical commitment, not tied to the political aspects of the Fasci movement". There is no shortage of positions in his articles which are distant and divergent from those advocated by the fascist movement, in which it is already possible to grasp elements of continuity with the anti-fascist choice that is not far away. The collaboration with the Mussolini newspaper lasted until 1922 - his last article, however, was written before the march on Rome - while Rossi already collaborated on Gaetano Salvemini's "L'Unità" and Piero Gobetti's "Rivoluzione Liberale". At the same time he enrolled at the University of Siena, where he graduated in law on 9 December 1920 with a thesis on *The social evolution in the thought of Vilfredo Pareto*. Due to the clarity of his analyses and the "precise reasoning", Pareto - with whom he entered epistolary contact for the completion of his degree thesis - remained one of Rossi's favorite authors (together with Mosca, Cattaneo, Tocqueville and Machiavelli, who reasoned about "concrete facts without getting lost in the clouds of philosophy"), even when he would have condemned his anti-democratic and pro-fascist involution, giving a severe judgment on his human figure.



Ernesto Rossi with his mother Elide Verardi

The decisive encounter for Rossi's training, however, was that with the historian Gaetano Salvemini, of whom he became a friend and disciple, appreciating his qualities as a man of science, an educator, a sower of ideas and a politician. Started in 1919, his friendship with Salvemini helped him clarify himself: «If I had not met on my way - he wrote - at the right time Salvemini, who cleaned up my brain from all the by-products of the passion aroused by the bestiality of the socialists and from the lie of government propaganda, I too would have easily slipped in the Fasci di Combattimento ». Rossi's esteem and affection were reciprocated: "If I had ever been able to make a child to measure - Salvemini wrote to him - I would have made him equal you."



Gaetano Salvemini



From left: Nello and Carlo Rosselli

Through Salvemini - affectionately called "uncle" - Rossi came into contact with the best exponents of the Florentine youth (such as the brothers Carlo and Nello Rosselli, to whom he joined with deep friendship) and the southern tradition, such as Giustino Fortunato and Umberto Zanotti Bianco. Between 1920 and 1921, on behalf of Zanotti Bianco, Rossi worked in Basilicata under the authority of the National Association for the Interests of Southern Italy (ANIMI), which carried out works of various assistance to the southern populations with the foundation of kindergartens, evening schools, popular libraries and the promotion of cooperatives. During the winter of 1921, he traveled to Basilicata, with the task of inspecting the evening schools for adults that ANIMI had opened in numerous centers in the region, learning about the poor living conditions of southern peasants and emigrants. The reports sent by him to Zanotti Bianco, which often reach the level of

the best southern current affairs press, already reveal the qualities of the future Rossi: the seriousness of the documentation, the clarity and the dry style, sometimes ironic and sarcastic, but always rich in human sympathy. In 1922, with the worsening of the political crisis, Rossi left ANIMI to return to Florence and become secretary of the Tuscan Agrarian Association, with the hope of working against the alliance between fascists and agrarians. He also directed the weekly "Il giornale degli agricoltori toscani", on which he published critical writings on monopolist and protectionist tendencies. In 1924, after leaving the Agricultural Association, Rossi undertook the teaching of juridical and economic disciplines in technical and commercial institutes. Meanwhile, he collaborated with Salvemini and the Rosselli brothers in the organization of the "Circolo di Cultura", of which he soon became one of the main animators. Founded in December 1920 by a group of Florentine friends, professionals and students, and transformed in 1923 into a real association, the "Circolo di Cultura" was an important gym of ideas, open to the living currents of Italian and European culture, until the fascists imposed its closure in January 1925.

After the Matteotti assassination, Rossi was among the leaders of "L'Italia Libera", secret association of ex-anti-fascist fighters and joined the "Alleanza Nazionale" directed by Giovanni Amendola. In 1925, together with Salvemini, the Rosselli brothers, Dino Vannucci, Nello Traquandi and some other friends, he printed and distributed one of the first illegal anti-fascist sheets, the "Non Mollare".



A number of «Non Mollare»



The group of promoters of «Non Mollare», Florence, spring 1925. From left: Nello Traquandi, Tommaso Ramorino, Carlo Rosselli, Ernesto Rossi, Luigi Emery and Nello Rosselli

Reported for the deletion of the typographer Pinzi and wanted by the “squadristi” and the police, on May 31, 1925 he escaped capture and passed clandestinely to France. In October 1925, taking advantage of an amnesty, he chose to return to Italy to continue the anti-fascist battle from within. Escaping the police searches, thanks also to his very common surname, he participated in the national competition for teaching in the class of juridical-economic disciplines, being first classified among 53 competitors. He chose Bergamo, a provincial town, where he could more easily carry out clandestine activities against the regime. Here he taught for five years at the "Vittorio Emanuele II" technical institute, where he met Ada Rossi (1899-1993), a mathematics teacher, she also of anti-fascist feelings, with whom he became engaged.



Ernesto Rossi with his colleagues at the "Vittorio Emanuele II" technical institute in the twenties



Ernesto Rossi with his students at the "Vittorio Emanuele II" Technical Institute during a trip

On January 27, 1930 Rossi sent a letter from his prison in Rome to thank his students for the greetings sent to him by Ada. To this letter the students replied with words of esteem and affection, signing all and naively addressing the letter to the prison of "Regina Coeli":

"Exceptionally appreciated there was the letter that you were pleased to send us by courteous intercession of Miss Rossi. It moved us, in that it came to try again those feelings of mutual understanding and affection that had come about through so many beautiful lessons; moreover, it is known that students, even if apparently they do not demonstrate it, love very few of their teachers who teach with admirable passion and deep knowledge of the subject. [...] We await with confidence the day that you, having clarified every possible misunderstanding, will return to us very nice Professor to instruct us with your clear word. See you soon! ».

The letter was followed by two very severe investigations, carried out by the fascist hierarchs Renato Ricci and Carlo Scorza. The students were cautioned; the principal Marengi was transferred to Ravenna; the professor, Alberti, during whose lesson the letter seems to have been written, died suddenly of fright. The science teacher was cautioned for saying that "Ernesto Rossi was not dead".

Between 1925 and 1929, he collaborated with the Milanese anti-fascists Riccardo Bauer, Umberto Ceva and Ferruccio Parri, who together with Vincenzo Calace had formed a political group of republican orientation, in connection with the Parisian exiles. In Milan, Rossi went almost daily also to continue his economics studies at the library of the Bocconi University, where Luigi Einaudi was a teacher. With him he soon made a deep friendship destined to last over time.



Ernesto Rossi in the years of the clandestine anti-fascist struggle

3-THE ANTI-FASCIST CHOICE AND THE PARTICIPATION IN «GIUSTIZIA E LIBERTÀ [GL]»

«The modern totalitarian state has the means to condition the brains, and to impose obedience on dissenters, who are enormously more effective than those available to the absolute regimes of the past. [...] Who has seen the endless parades of black shirts, young people, farmers, workers, athletes, priests, nuns, prolific mothers, who attended the ceremonies in which the highest offices in the State made an act of devotion to the regime, and to the ocean demonstrations in the major squares of Italy, to the crowds delirious for the leader, can understand what feelings had to win who continued the struggle even after the crisis for the Matteotti assassination: he really had the impression of moving on the assault of Mont Blanc armed only with a toothpick ».

(E. Rossi, Introduction to No to fascism, Torino, Einaudi, 1957, pp. 10-11)

In 1929, he was one of the founders of "Giustizia e Libertà (GL)" - the anti-fascist movement that arose in Paris on the impetus of Carlo Rosselli and Gaetano Salvemini - and remained on the management committee of the organization until his arrest. From 1925 to 1930, he collaborated in "Riforma sociale", the magazine directed by Luigi Einaudi, in the "Rivista bancaria" and the underground press of "Giustizia e Libertà". In recent years, he also made a series of adventurous journeys through Italy and abroad to transport clandestine press and forge a network of contacts between anti-fascists at home and in exile.



Photo by Luigi Einaudi with dedication for Ernesto Rossi

The clandestine activity, which became particularly intense in 1930, was stopped by the betrayal of the lawyer Carlo Del Re, who denounced the conspirators of the group of "Justice and Freedom" to the police, in exchange for a large sum with which he covered a financial shortfall determined by him as a bankruptcy trustee at the court. Arrested on 30 October 1930 in Bergamo and put on a train that, under escort, would have led him to Rome (destination «Regina Coeli»), Rossi managed to throw himself out of the window during the night and for a few hours he travelled through Versilia, near Viareggio, without receiving any help from the people he had addressed. Returning the next morning, he was taken to the Roman prison of "Regina Coeli", where he lived for five months in conditions of maximum isolation.



A photo of Rossi shortly before his arrest

THE ARREST, THE PROCESS, THE CONDEMNATION

"Anyone who really intends to exercise that 'right of resistance' against the ruling class, which they also taught in constitutional law books when I went to university, in certain situations must also prevent jail. Just a few days before my arrest, I said to a friend: "It is impossible to last for a long time: either you go outside or you go inside". Outside, abroad, I didn't want to go, as long as I still had the chance to do something in Italy. So the other horn of the dilemma remained ... and, in fact, here I am ».

(Letter to the mother, Reclusorio of Piacenza, 22 January 1933)

At the end of May 1931 he was tried with his companions by the Special Court. An appeal was promoted by Salvemini abroad and signed by numerous European personalities. This influenced Mussolini and saved the GL's from the death penalty that seemed reserved for them. Rossi was thus sentenced with Riccardo Bauer to twenty years in prison.



Riccardo Bauer soldier (left) and in the years of confinement of Ventotene (right)



The appeal of the Parisian organ of anti-fascism in exile, *La Libertà*, in support of Rossi and the other GL's betrayed by Carlo Del Re



Umberto Ceva shortly before arrest and suicide in prison

During the entire preliminary phase of the trial, attempts were made to attribute to Bauer and Rossi the responsibility for the bomb attack carried out against the king in Piazzale Giulio Cesare in Milan on April 12, 1928. In fact, Rossi and Bauer - who was on that date temporarily in confinement - had nothing to do with the attack. The public opinion had always attributed it "to an intimidating fascist initiative against Vittorio Emanuele III, who prevaricated in approving the electoral reform, voted by the Fascist Chamber on March 16 of that year". However, a compliant lieutenant general of artillery was found in a short time, certainly Alfredo Torretta, who declared that the devices, prepared with the help of the chemist Umberto Ceva and found in the possession of the *giellista* group, were similar to those used for the attack on Piazzale Giulio Cesare. Ceva, sensed the plan of the inspector Nudi (chief of the Ovla in Lombardia) to use him in the machination against his companions, not being able to defend himself without accusing Del Re, "from whom he does not know he had been sold", took his prison life with poison, prepared by mixing the solid fuel "Meta" and the fragments of the lenses of his prescription glasses.



Christmas in prison. Drawing by Ernesto Rossi to «Regina Coeli», for the Christmas greetings to his family (1935). The drawing reproduces, from right to left, Riccardo Bauer, who is also the author of the poem in Milanese dialect, the anarchist Giobatta Domaschi and Ernesto Rossi in prison uniform

THE YEARS OF PRISON

«The more we work effectively, the more it seems that our action is cancelled. It is how I now think of me and which gives me more serenity. From the moment I recognized my path was compared to the situation that had formed in Italy, I devoted myself completely to the affirmation of my idea. I thought I had lost a day if, making the budget before falling asleep, I did not remember having done something concrete. When they put me to "rest", I really needed it, because there were too many things I wanted to get into a day. In conscience, twenty years have really earned them, much more than those who gave them to me would have thought. Yet now that I live the life of the "draft-

dodger", with almost no relationship with the outside, I am convinced that I serve my idea more than I could out of prison. This is the important thing; because there is no need to believe that he must reap the same person who sowed.

(Letter to the mother, Reclusorio of Piacenza, 22 January 1932)

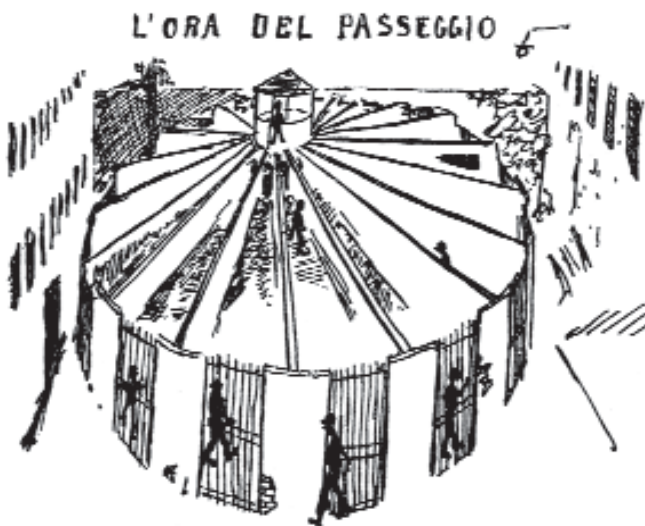


Rossi's self-portrait while eating the "sbobba" in his cell, lying on the cot like an ancient Roman on the triclinium

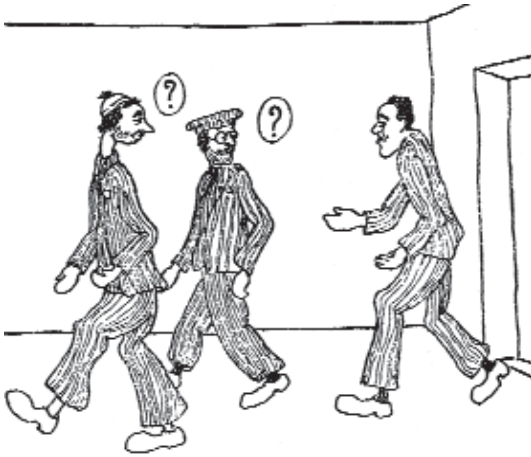
The imprisonment, served until November 1938, in the prisons of Rome, Pallanza, Piacenza, was endured with a fighting spirit, in fierce opposition to the censorship that canceled the most significant passages of the letters written to the family. On October 24, 1931, in the Pallanza prison, Rossi married his girlfriend Ada Rossi, a courageous and faithful lifelong companion, who underwent serious retaliation and harassment by the fascist regime for his choice. The escape attempts planned in Pallanza and Piacenza were unsuccessful; in 1934, after the failure of yet another escape attempt, Rossi was transferred and imprisoned, under strict control, in the IV arm of "Regina Coeli", where the anarchist Gianbattista Domaschi and the other giellisti Riccardo Bauer, Vincenzo Calace were also held, Francesco Fancello, Dino Roberto and Nello Traquandi on charges of attempted collective evasion. At «Regina Coeli», Rossi and Bauer were able to spend a few hours a day in a common cell - well guarded with special spy microphones by the prison police - with the other GL fellow, to which later Vindice Cavallera, Vittorio Foa, Michele Giua, Massimo Mila, Augusto Monti, Giannotto and Alfredo Perelli were added.



Rossi's self-portrait, with the illustration of the ingenious stratagems designed for reading at night in the cell



Rossi's drawing: the time of the walk in the Roman prison of "Regina Coeli"



Rossi's design: the arrival of Vittorio Foa in prison in 1936 and the initial distrust of the "old" convicts Bauer and Rossi

During the hours in company, Rossi discussed political, historical, economic issues and studied the English language, also weaving lively philosophical controversies with his idealist and Crocian companions. The other hours of the day were devoted to reading and individual study. The time of imprisonment was thus transformed into an occasion to complete one's intellectual formation. It was not possible, however, to follow an organic study plan, as there was a strict censorship by the fascist authorities on the readings of political prisoners. Furthermore, because of the prohibition on taking notes in writing - it was forbidden to write not only with a pencil, but also with chalk on the concrete floor or with soap on the glass of the windows and even to «mark with a wood match, on the margin, what seemed particularly interesting about the book that was being read» - the only tool to keep memory of what was studied and to stop one's reflections on paper were the letters that, on a weekly basis, could be written to family members. The correspondence from Rossi's prison therefore constitutes an irreplaceable source for knowing more closely the evolution of his thought. Through his studies in prison, Rossi went deeper into his liberalism in the direction of greater social justice, discovering new authors destined to have a profound influence on his thinking, including Philip H. Wicksteed, Arthur C. Pigou and Lionel Robbins. In particular, he was fascinated by the reforming perspective contained in Wicksteed's *Common Sense of Political Economy* and in the two texts of Robbins that he managed to obtain in prison: *Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* and *Economic Planning and International Order*, in which it already appeared, albeit in a less explicit form than other writings, the federalist approach to Robbins' thought. At the same time, through a close criticism of nationalism and a long meditation on the problems of peace and war, Rossi elaborated in prison a study project on the United States of Europe, summarized in a letter to his mother of 1937, which reveals surprising analogies with the contents and setting of the future Ventotene *Manifesto* of 1941.



Rossi confined to Ventotene in 1940

THE CONFINEMENT AND THE *MANIFESTO DI VENTOTENE*

"The dividing line between progressive parties and reactionary parties therefore falls now not along the formal line of the greater or lesser democracy, of the greater or lesser socialism to be established, but along the substantial new line which separates those who conceive as an essential aim of the political struggle the ancient one, that is the conquest of national political power - and which will play, albeit involuntarily, the game of reactionary forces, leaving the incandescent lava of popular passions to solidify in the old mold, and revive the old absurdities - and those who will see as central task the creation of a solid international state, will direct popular forces towards this goal and, even after conquering national power, will use it mainly to achieve international unity". (A. Spinelli - E. Rossi, Ventotene Manifesto, 1941)

Reduced the period of detention to eight years as a result of some amnesties, in November 1938 Rossi was assigned to confinement on the island of Ventotene for another five years. Here, he entered into an intense collaboration with the former communist Altiero Spinelli and with the socialist Eugenio Colorni, leading to the development of the *Manifesto for a free and united Europe*, better known as the *Ventotene Manifesto*, the pioneering platform of European federalism. Ursula Hirschmann, wife of Colorni and future companion of Spinelli, the GL's Dino Roberto, the federalist catholic Enrico Giussani, the two republicans Giorgio Braccialarghe (from Pallanza) and Arturo Buleghin, the albanians Stavro Skendi and Lazar Fundo and the young yugoslavian Milos Lokar also participated in the discussions that led to the development of the *Manifesto*



Ventotene, via degli Olivi



Eugenio Colorni e Ursula Hirschmann con la primogenita Silvia a Ventotene

The *Manifesto* stated that the great social, political and economic problems of the contemporary age could not be solved except within the framework of a European federal state. The novelty of the document consisted in establishing a new "dividing line" between conservatives and progressives, based on greater or lesser adherence to the project of European unity on a federal basis. For the first time in history, European federalism was therefore not conceived as "a generic wish", but as a concrete political project, placed on the agenda by an unprecedented crisis and therefore becoming a priority over any other political initiative or Social: "A free and united Europe - reads the *Manifesto* - is a necessary premise for the strengthening of modern civilization, of which the totalitarian era represents an arrest. The end of this era will immediately resume in full the historical process against inequality and privileges ". For this "break" with previous models, the *Ventotene Manifesto* was judged to be one of the most original contributions in the panorama of the militant Resistance literature, as well as a "theoretical turning point in federalist and pro-European thought".



Il vassoio dipinto da Ernesto Rossi nel 1940 con immagini dell'isola di Ventotene e dei confinati



Particolare del vassoio: la mensa di «Giustizia e Libertà». In piedi con il bicchiere in mano e la maglia rossa, autoritratto di Ernesto Rossi





Altiero Spinelli's signage form, filled in at the time of assignment to confinement



Altiero Spinelli confined to Ventotene with his sisters Gigliola and Fiorella, July 1942



The republican Giorgio Braccialarghe, born in Pallanza, was confined to Ventotene where he met Rossi and joined the Federalist Manifesto. Here he is portrayed during his participation in the Spanish war in the international "Garibaldi" brigades

THE BIRTH OF THE EUROPEAN FEDERALIST MOVEMENT AND MEMBERSHIP TO THE ACTION PARTY (Pd'A)

«During the 40 days before the armistice it was for me a whirlwind of travel, new acquaintances, speeches, meetings. [...] Before Pd'A meeting in Florence, we had held another one in Milan among federalists (about twenty, all of whom had come from prisons or internements). For two days we worked seriously, clarifying the character of the movement (analogous to the english Leagues that have been so successful permeating the different parties for the resolution of particular problems: free trade, slavery, universal suffrage, etc.) and laying the foundations for what we set out to do in the future. Ginzburg also participated very actively in the federalist conference. (The news, which I had a few weeks ago of his death in Regina Coeli, made me very sad. He was one of the best among us in terms of character, intelligence, preparation. [...]) ».

(Letter to Gaetano Salvemini, Geneva, March 26, 1944)

On 9 July 1943, Rossi was arrested with Vincenzo Calace and Riccardo Bauer and again translated to «Regina Coeli», pending a new trial before the Special Court (a process which, as it was later learned, was to end with three death sentences) . After Mussolini's deposition, he was released but only on July 30. At first the police officers had opposed his release, still considering him to be of maximum danger. Arrested again on the same day, with some friends, among whom Cerilo Spinelli and Guglielmo Usellini, for the dissemination of a manifesto of the federalist group, which proclaimed the necessity of the war against the Germans. He was immediately released, having been able to demonstrate his extraneousness to the elaboration of the manifesto having recently left prison. So he was able to go to Florence with his family.



Federalist meeting of Monte Oriolo, August 1943: in the foreground, starting from the right: Elide Verardi, Ernesto Rossi, Enrico Giussani, Carlo Pucci, Guglielmo Ferrero, Clara Pucci, Bruno Pucci, Mario Alberto Rollier, Ada Rossi, Eugenio Colorni, Lorenzo Ferrero , Aida Ferrero (Rossi private archive, Florence)

In August 1943 - after a first organizational meeting held in Monte Oriolo, at his family's home - Rossi promoted the foundation of the European Federalist Movement with Spinelli and Colorni. In addition to the Ventotene group, Arialdo and Giangio Banfi, Lisli Carini Basso, Ludovico Belgioioso, Vindice Cavallera, Ugo Cristofoletti, Alberto Damiani Vittorio Foa, Giovanni Gallo Granchielli, Don Ernesto Gilardi, Leone Ginzburg, Rita Isenburg, Willy Jervis, Elena Moncalvi Banfi, Alberto Mortara, Guido Morpurgo Tagliabue, Bruno Quarti, Ada Rossi, Manlio Rossi Doria, Fiorella and Gigliola Spinelli, Franco Venturi and Luisa Villani Usellini were present at the meeting that took place in the home of Mario Alberto Rollier in Milan in Via Poerio 37. The appeal was missing Cerilo Spinelli and Guglielmo Usellini, who, in those days, were still in prison in Rome, accused of spreading the illegal press. The Milanese conference marked the birth of a new political formation, the "European Federalist Movement" (MFE), determining the character, aims, organizational form and composition of the first leading cadres. The leading structure of the new movement was made up as follows: Spinelli and Rossi in the role of political secretaries, flanked by a central committee formed by Venturi and Banfi for Turin, Giussani and Rollier for Milan, Colorni, Usellini and Ginzburg for Rome. At the conference in Milan, it was also established that the two secretaries of the movement would try, as soon as possible, to go to Switzerland, the neutral country where they were "the semi-free derivations of the various clandestine movements" of the European Resistance, to probe the actual possibility of political action outside Italy.



First clandestine issue of "European Unity" of May 1943, in which Rossi exposes the main theses contained in the Ventotene Manifesto, in the article Social premises of federalism

After leaving Milan in September 1943, Rossi took part in the first congress of the newly formed Action Party in Florence, to which he gave his support. On September 8 he led a popular demonstration in Bergamo, which signaled the attention of the neo-fascists and the Germans. Wanted, he sought contacts with the nascent resistance in Milan, without result. In poor health, due to the privations suffered in the long years of prison and confinement, he was forced to seek refuge in Switzerland. As Emilio Lussu wrote, it is probable that a "healthy Rossi would never have left Italy during the Resistance". However, Rossi did not leave Italy only for personal security reasons. The decision to go to Switzerland was also motivated by the desire to carry out the mandate that the Milan conference had entrusted to him, jointly with Spinelli, in order to make "the proposal of European reconstruction on federal bases reach all the defendants". His intention was to return as soon as possible to Italy, in the ranks of the partisan movement, after having done the work he considered the most important. He counted on two or three months of absence, but the operation took much longer, keeping him away from Italy until April 1945.



Frontispiece of the first edition of the Ventotene Manifesto published by Eugenio Colorni in Rome in 1944



Ernesto Rossi in Geneva, 1944. The face and body are visibly marked by long years of imprisonment and confinement

EXILE IN SWITZERLAND AND INTERNATIONAL FEDERALIST ACTION

"Our federalist publications in Italian have had great success among refugees and we can say that the federalist idea is the one that has most affected young people, even those who do not yet intend to take a position in the various political parties. Don't believe it deludes me. I am also extremely pessimistic. But even if our ideas had only two out of a thousand chances of success, I think we

should focus all our efforts on their realization, because I don't see possible alternative ways for a reconstruction work in a progressive sense, neither in Italy nor in the others European countries". (Letter from Rossi to Gaetano Salvemini, Geneva, April 7, 1945)

On September 14, 1943, Rossi crossed the Swiss border to Arogno, after a strenuous night march under rain and hail. With him were Alberto Damiani, Enrico Giussani, Dino Roberto and the republican Cipriano Facchinetti. The following day, the group was joined by Altiero Spinelli, who entered the Cantine di Gandria in the company of his sister Fiorella and Ursula Hirschmann. After passing the network, Rossi was welcomed by the border guards, as a "civilian refugee for political reasons" and hosted in Lugano-Besso by the socialist adviser of the Ticino government, Guglielmo Canevascini, whom he indicated as guarantor on entering Switzerland. Rossi was one of the few Italian refugees who did not spend even one day in the internment camp, as he was able to carry out the mandatory "quarantine" with his brother Paolo who - emigrated to Switzerland in 1925 to escape capture for anti-fascist activity - lived with his family in Losone, near Ascona, where he ran a small Italian-Swiss school, the "Casa del Frate". Here his wife Ada joined him, expatriate with the help of a smuggler on the night of September 29, 1943. After the arrival of his wife, not wanting to weigh on his brother's family, Rossi accelerated the practices for the residence permit in Lugano. Thanks to the help of Dionisio Maffioletti from Ticino, who made himself the guarantor of his maintenance, the request was granted and, on October 5, the Rossi spouses obtained authorization to move to Lugano. At first guests of the same Maffioletti in Castagnola, they subsequently changed residence several times between Lugano and surroundings until March 1, 1944, when they were authorized to move to Geneva, where Rossi intended to establish international relations and continue his federalist studies.



Ernesto and Ada Rossi in Geneva, 1944

As soon as he arrived in Switzerland, Rossi became a regular visitor to Swiss libraries. Thanks to his studies in the Cantonal Library of Lugano (with the precious help of the director Adriana Ramelli) and, subsequently, in the Geneva libraries of the League of Nations and the Institute of High International Studies, he was finally able to access much of European literature (especially of a federalist nature) which had been barred from him during the long years of prison and confinement, drawing material for propaganda and in-depth writings. On the political level, together with Altiero Spinelli, Rossi committed all his energies to launch the password of the United States of Europe on the international level. He then made contact with the Swiss federalist movements and with the representatives of the movements of the European Resistance, initiating an intense organizational and propaganda work and numerous publicity initiatives, including the "European Federalist Movement Notebooks" and the published federalist brochures at the New Editions of Capolago. Among the latter, it was also *Gli Stati Uniti d'Europa*, which, appeared under the pseudonym of Storeno, represents Rossi's most organic work dedicated to the federalist theme, also

published in French with the title *L'Europe de demain*. The Swiss period proved to be very productive from the point of view of theoretical elaboration and federalist perspectives, with a rich activity of cultural meetings, public and private. The most significant initiative was the *Federalist Declaration of Movements of the European Resistance* (Geneva, 1944), which spread widely in Switzerland and in some countries occupied by the Nazis. Between 1944 and 1945, his small house, in rue Chantepoulet 19 in Geneva, became a meeting point for young Italian refugees and a center for the elaboration and diffusion of federalist and shareholder propaganda.



Ernesto and Ada Rossi in Geneva with two young friends: Guido Majno and Carlo Donati ("Donatino»)

Among the interlocutors of the exile were Luigi Einaudi, Egidio Reale, Ignazio Silone, Umberto Terracini and Adriano Olivetti, together with personalities from the Swiss intellectual and political world (such as Guglielmo Canevascini and François Bondy), and Italian and other nationality refugees, including numerous young people (such as Luciano Bolis, Gilberto Rossa, Carlo and Guido Majno, Carlo Donati, Giandomenico Sertoli). An effective portrait of Rossi and his tireless activity in the years of exile was outlined by Piero Della Giusta in his private diary, which reads: « *December 20* [1944]. Ernesto Rossi is the living mimeograph and is improving himself towards the rotary press. Its average production is two brochures of 40-60 pages per month. The printed paper is now coming out in no. 19 on rue Chantepoulet. [...] The article becomes a pamphlet and the pamphlets become series, the series volumes and the volumes collections, the conversation conference and the lectures courses, the lecturers traveling lessons, operating in the breath of this Aeolus wind-raiser that is Ernesto Rossi "

During the Swiss stay, contacts with Gaetano Salvemini, who had been in exile for years in the United States, were resumed , and continued after the war through a close correspondence on the most important political and cultural topics.



Frontispiece of L'Europe de demain (Neuchâtel, 1945)



Frontispiece of The United States of Europe published at the New Editions of Capolago (Lugano, 1944)

THE COMMITMENT TO EUROPE COMBINED FROM THE MARSHALL PLAN TO THE FALL OF THE CED

«Precisely because we had to give up this hope [that of establishing a real European federation] with great pain, at least we federalists would wish. That our politicians would no longer mute our ears with the "European revival". [...] We do not want to be treated like suckers that the barker convinces to enter the hut of wonders to admire the sirens of the Caribbean Sea. Nationalistic politics can, in comparison to its particular objectives, turn out to be good or bad, but it must be judged for what it really is; we cannot admit that it is camouflaged as a start to the realization of the ideals for which we fought during the Resistance and for which men like Guglielmo Jervis, Leone Ginzburg and Eugenio Colorni died ».

(E. Rossi, Aria fritta, Bari, Laterza, 1956, pp. XVIII-XIX)

On April 19, 1945, Rossi returned to Italy to promote the federalist organization and the propaganda of the Action Party in Milan, with the imminent prospect of restoring democracy. Despite the fervor of activity, in the immediate post-war period, he fell into a serious exhaustion, the result of long years of detention, of the excessive work of the years of exile and - above all - of the scorching disappointment for the results of the federalist battle and for the failure " democratic revolution »in Italy. On May 19, 1946, he wrote to Salvemini: «I no longer have any confidence that we can do fruitful work to achieve our political ideals. I gave up the game when I recognized the impossibility of reaching a federal union of Europe with the conclusion of peace. Under current conditions, Italian democracy cannot be born. After twenty years of fascism and autarky it is not possible to build free orders without relying on those who have a tradition of free life and without putting our economy into a continental economy



Three pioneers of federalism. From left: Ernesto Rossi, Altiero Spinelli and Luigi Einaudi near Rome, 1948

Although disheartened, Rossi did not fail to commit himself on several fronts. In June 1945, he allowed himself to be involved nationally in the experience of the Parri government, first as an under-secretary for reconstruction and then as president of ARAR (Company for the relief and alienation of war residues) - a primary public body importance in the immediate post-war economy - which he managed in an exemplary way until his liquidation in 1956, resisting pressures of all kinds and also producing substantial profits for the finances of the state. In this position, which he received from Ferruccio Parri and in which he was confirmed by Alcide De Gasperi, Rossi asked and obtained that his indemnity as president was not higher than his salary as a teacher of economic subjects in higher institutions, with the consequence that he received a quarter of the remuneration of the general manager of the same company.



Ernesto Rossi at his work desk at ARAR



European Federalist Movement card made out to Ernesto Rossi, 1956



Membership card of the National Council

Simultaneously with the start of his presidency at ARAR, between 1945 and 1947, Rossi reworked several writings from the last period of imprisonment and confinement in Ventotene, published in Milan for the Fiaccola editions. Among these, of particular interest is the essay *Abolire la miseria*, which contains an original reforming proposal to guarantee to all citizens a minimum of civilian life and the satisfaction of essential needs through the establishment of a compulsory civil service, made up of young people of both sexes. In 1947, foreseeing a new possibility of federalist action with the launch of the Marshall Plan, Rossi resumed the activity within the European Federalist Movement with Spinelli, promoting the relaunch of federalist action at national and international level and the start of intense stimulus activity towards the Italian political leaders (such as Alcide De Gasperi and Luigi Einaudi), especially during the battle for the European Defense Community, which should have led, thanks to art. 38, to the political community project.

In 1954, after the fall of the treaty establishing the EDC, Rossi however lost confidence in the possibility of realizing the European federation in the short term. He thought that the European states had now taken the road of preserving national sovereignties, without any possibility of going back, if not coinciding with a new and very serious international crisis, which, however, in the presence of the possible nuclear holocaust, did not seem desirable. He gradually detached himself from the European Federalist Movement, choosing to engage himself in national battles of a radical kind, conducted with an accent of dramatic intransigence and, sometimes, almost of desperation, which is understood only if the collapse of the hopes related to the federalist project.



Federalism lessons: Rossi with some young federalists, 1950s

THE COMMITMENT TO A MORE CIVILIAN ITALY

"For the power they had respectively in the spiritual, economic and military fields, the Vatican, Confindustria and the monarchy had the greatest responsibility for the advent of fascism in power and for the consolidation of the regime which, in twenty years, suffocated - with the terror of the "squadracce", with the OVRA and the processes of the Special Court - every breath of freedom, leading us to the ignominious alliance with Hitler's Germany and to defeat. While the monarchy was overwhelmed with the fall of fascism, Confindustria still holds the main strands of our politics and our economy. And the Vatican - after having consolidated, in article 7 of our Constitution, the positions reached during the "regime" - today overflows on all our public and private life [...] ».
(E. Rossi, *The nightstick and the sprinkler*, Bari, Laterza, 1958, pp. 11-12)

Among the most acute critics of the interpenetration between private interests and public management of the state, Rossi was the champion of a secular, liberal, more civilized Italy, concentrating his analysis against the protectionist and business line of the oligopolies, administrative corruption, fascist inheritances, union corporatism and clerical interference in the state. His journalistic inquiries became famous in the Roman weekly "Il Mondo", directed by Mario Pannunzio, to whom he collaborated continuously for thirteen years from 1949 to 1962. Numerous articles, published by him in "Il Mondo", were then collected, according to thematic criteria, in volumes at the Laterza publisher. A good sales success was obtained, the proceeds of which went largely to finance the conferences promoted by the Friends of "Il Mondo" on the major problems of politics, economy and culture of the country, from monopolies to school, from relations between the State and the Church to freedom of information.



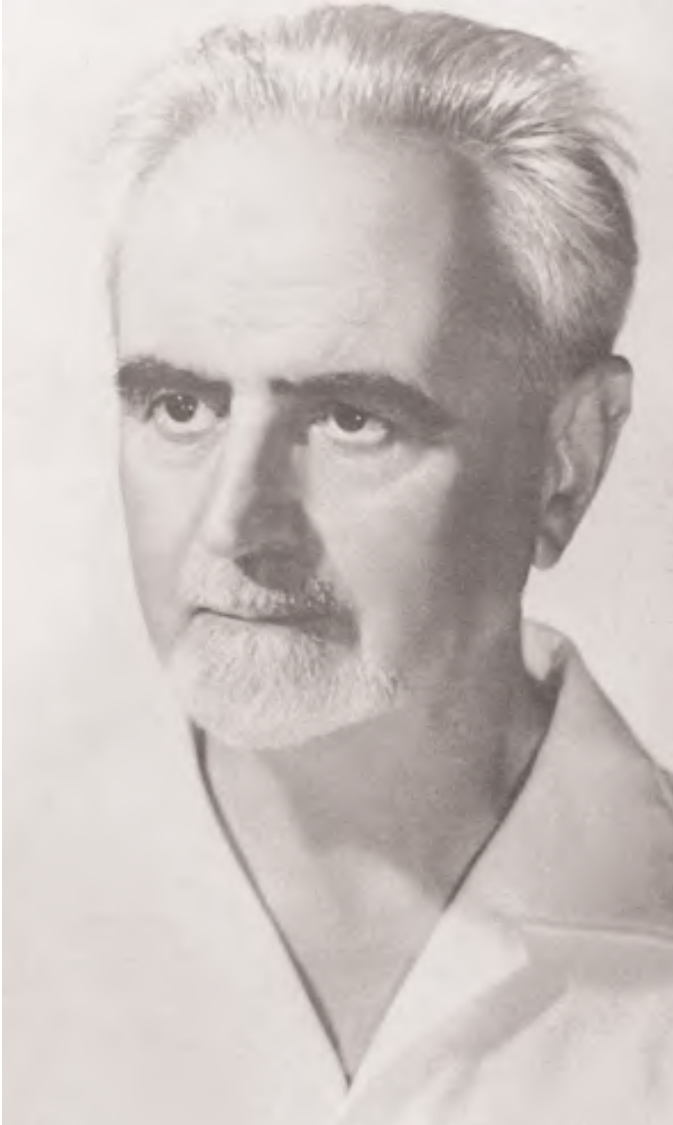
Ernesto Rossi and Ferruccio Parri at the socialist conference on state holdings a Rome, May 1959

A lot of sensation aroused, in November 1955, a public debate between Rossi and the president of Confindustria, Angelo Costa, partly broadcast on radio and television. The occasion of the meeting was a close discussion on the alliance between industrialists and fascism, a topic raised by Rossi in the book *The Masters of Steam*. In 1955, Rossi was with Leo Valiani among the founders of the Radical Party, in which he served for seven years. In 1962, a harsh controversy over the "Piccardi case" - relating to the participation of Leopoldo Piccardi, in 1938, in two conferences of Italian-German legal studies on the subject of race - led to the termination of Rossi's collaboration in "Il Mondo" and his exit from the Radical Party. Rossi believed, in fact, Piccardi to be the victim of a scandal campaign, fueled by the editor of "Il Mondo", Pannunzio, for internal struggles with the Radical Party. In the following years, however, Rossi continued to look with sympathy at the group

of young radicals, led by Marco Pannella, Angiolo Bandinelli and Gianfranco Spadaccia, sharing their anti-clerical and civil rights battles, so much so that, a few days before his death, he agreed to to preside over the demonstration called by the Radical Party for the opening of the «Anti-clerical Year».



Rossi and Pannunzio at the first national congress of the Radical Party (1956)



One of the last photos of Rossi

On the anti-clerical front, Rossi directed, from 1957 to 1960, the series «State and Church» for the publisher Parenti, in which fourteen volumes dedicated to an educating mission of public opinion regarding relations between the State and the Catholic Church appeared. "The series I direct - wrote Rossi - is dedicated exclusively to examining the problems that the Church poses as a political force in our country today". Conducted in the name of a secular and liberal state, Rossi's anticlerical battle was linked to the anti-clericalism of the Risorgimento in the resumption of the theme of the separation of state and church, in the denunciation of the invasion of ecclesiastical institutions in Italian public life, in defense of the secularism of the teaching, in criticism of Jesuit morality and in distrust of the Church's modernization projects. In this sense, its anti-clericalism presented itself as a logical continuation of its anti-fascism (see, for example, the severe denunciation of the Vatican's support for the fascist regime in the book *The truncheon and the sprinkler*) and developed in parallel with the fight against protectionism and monopolies and for the dismantling of all privileges. The decisive anti-clericalism did not prevent Rossi from recognizing the sincere commitment made by many Catholics, such as Luigi Sturzo, in the anti-fascist battle, nor did it prevent him from collaborating in the pro-European battle with Alcide De Gasperi, of whom he appreciated the qualities of statesman, faith and honesty, so much so that his disappearance seemed to cast a heavy shadow on the European integration process. As Altiero Spinelli wrote, "This relationship of ours with a Catholic like De Gasperi shows that, when it came to acting, Rossi knew how to rank important things". After the break with Pannunzio, Rossi worked out, together with

Ferruccio Parri, the project for a new weekly, "L'Astrolabio", which began to come out in March 1963 and to which he collaborated until his death. Another important collaboration with magazines concerned the Florentine periodical "Il Ponte" directed by Piero Calamandrei, on which several significant essays appeared. After the death of Gaetano Salvemini, which occurred in 1957, Rossi promoted the edition of Salvemini's works and was among the founders of the movement named after him. In 1966, despite not having been given - for the hostility of a certain academic world still compromised with the regime and "touched" by his journalistic investigations - the university chair he would have deserved, Rossi was awarded the "Francesco Saverio Nitti" award by Accademia dei Lincei for its economic policy and finance science studies. As Paolo Sylos Labini wrote, Rossi was, in the economic field, a "race scholar, rightly esteemed by some of our major economists, who aspired to the rigor of reasoning and to the precise and scrupulous documentation of the observed facts ». Also in 1966, the disease manifested itself which, after two surgical operations, led him quickly to his death, which took place in Rome on February 9, 1967. As Rossi himself wrote, commemorating Antonio De Viti De Marco, even though forty years have passed by now since his death, *«we feel we are still walking by his side; we still have him close, our traveling companion."*. Rossi *«is not an absent for us: because his thought is alive in us, it works through us. And it is the only thought that has value in the world»*.