

Society and  
Politics in  
the Age  
of the  
Risorgimento

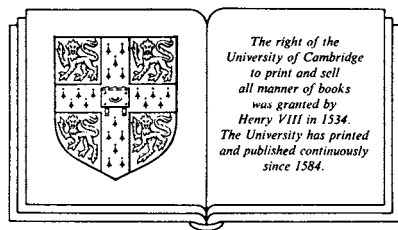
*Essays in honour of Denis Mack Smith*

*Edited by*

JOHN A. DAVIS

*and*

PAUL GINSBORG



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## CHAPTER I

### *1799: The 'Santafede' and the crisis of the 'ancien régime' in southern Italy*

JOHN A. DAVIS

In the spring and summer of 1799 the Italian peninsula seemed to become the promised land of the counter-revolution. When the armies of the French Directory were defeated in the Po valley in April, the recently founded Italian Republics were at once thrown into crisis and popular counter-revolutionary risings erupted virtually throughout the length of Italy. In Tuscany, the peasants of Arezzo rallied to the banners of the Blessed Virgin and to chants of *Viva Maria!* marched to destroy the Jacobins in Florence and Siena. In Lombardy, Viora Branda dreamed that he had been summoned by Christ to punish the infidel invaders; calling themselves the *Massa Cristiana* he and his peasant followers joined the Austrians to drive the French and the Jacobins out of Piedmont. In many parts of central Italy, in Lazio, in Umbria, and in the Marche, similar popular risings took place.<sup>1</sup>

Yet nowhere was the scale or violence of the counter-revolution greater than in the south. Here the Neapolitan Republic had only been established in January 1799. In the previous autumn the king of Naples, Ferdinand IV, had launched an ill-judged offensive against the French forces occupying Rome. But the offensive was a disaster. The Neapolitan army was routed and in January 1799 Ferdinand and Maria Carolina abandoned their capital and fled on Nelson's warships to Palermo. The French armies swept south and, as they drew closer, tensions and fears of betrayal provoked a violent anti-republican rising in Naples. But even before General Championnet's troops entered the city, the Neapolitan *Patriotti* had declared the Republic and on 23

<sup>1</sup> See C. Capra, 'L'età napoleonica', in *Storia d'Italia*, ed. G. Levi, U. Levra, and N. Tranfaglia (Florence 1978), pp. 364–70; on Piedmont and Lombardy, M. Ruggiero, *Briganti del Piemonte napoleonico* (Turin 1969), pp. 69–70; for Tuscany, I. Tognarini (ed.), *La Toscana nell'età rivoluzionaria e napoleonica* (Naples 1985) and G. Turi, *Viva Maria!; le reazioni contro le riforme leopoldine 1790–1799* (Naples 1969); for Umbria, C. M. Tsoukas, *I 'torbimenti' del Trasimeno del 1798* (Milan 1988).

January a provisional Republican government was formally established.<sup>2</sup>

Initially the Republic found strong support, but this proved short-lived. In the long run its fate, like that of the other Italian Republics, was sealed by the French defeat and their withdrawal. But well before April the Neapolitan Jacobins were faced with mounting opposition from within. In the northern provinces of the Terra di Lavoro, Molise, and Abruzzi the first royalist risings began as the French armies crossed the frontiers in December 1798. The most spectacular successes of the counter-revolution were to come in February and March, however, when Cardinal Fabrizio Ruffo landed in Calabria and brought into being the Most Christian Armada of the Holy Faith – the *Santafede*.

Ruffo crossed from Sicily to Calabria in February. He had with him only four followers, scant resources and virtually no support from the Bourbon Court in Palermo. None the less, he quickly found himself at the head of a counter-revolution that by the end of March had driven the republicans out of Calabria. Royalist insurrections then spread to other parts of the Mezzogiorno, leaving the republicans with control only in Naples and a few strongholds in Apulia. By the end of May the capital was surrounded: Ruffo's Sanfedists approached from the east; to the north the city's communications were cut by Fra Diavolo and other irregulars who harried the retreating French armies; to the south, royalist insurrections swept through the Salernitano and the Cilento, while Nelson's warships were blockading the city by sea.

On 13 June, the feast day of St Anthony of Padua, the Sanfedists entered the city and provoked a second savage outburst of popular violence. Ruffo tried to halt the blood-letting, but was left watching helplessly from the Maddalena Bridge as the massacre spread. This was to prove only the prelude to what one contemporary described as the 'third phase of the anarchy', as a more systematic, cold-blooded Royal Terror developed that for over a year gripped the capital and the provinces in a pitiless vendetta against all who had supported the former Republic.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> P. Colletta, *Storia del reame di Napoli*, ed. G. Capponi, 2 vols. (Florence 1848); the classical account is B. Croce, *La rivoluzione napoletana del 1799. Biografie, racconti, ricerche* (Naples 1899) and other studies by the same author. There is an excellent modern analysis by A. M. Rao, 'La Repubblica Napoletana del 1799', in *Storia del Mezzogiorno*, vol. IV (Rome 1986), pp. 471–539.

<sup>3</sup> See B. Croce, *La riconquista del regno di Napoli nel 1799* (Bari 1943), Ruffo's letter to John Acton, 21 June, p. 227; Baron H. Von Helfert, *Fabrizio Ruffo: rivoluzione e controrivoluzione di Napoli dal novembre 1798 all' agosto 1799* (Florence 1885), pp. 255–65; H. C. Gutteridge, *Nelson and the Neapolitan Jacobins* (Navy Record Society, vol. XXV, London 1903).

The enemies of the Revolution throughout Europe were not slow to spot the broader significance of what had occurred in southern Italy. For the first time the armies of the Revolution had been defeated by popular resistance and the counter-revolution that had failed in France was now triumphant in Italy. To many, these new-found forces of popular patriotism, royalism, and religiosity seemed to offer potent new weapons in the struggle against the Revolution and its principles.<sup>4</sup>

For those who sympathized with the republican cause, however, the popular enthusiasm for the *Santafede* carried a terrible warning. No-one gave clearer voice to this than Vincenzo Cuoco, a member of the republican government in Naples and in exile afterwards its first historian. In an unsparing account of the errors that had contributed to the downfall of the Republic, Cuoco argued that the counter-revolutionary instincts of the masses were shocking evidence of the abyss that separated the common people from the educated classes. Ignorance, barbarism, and superstition, he claimed, had made the masses facile tools in the hands of the enemies of progress and hence one of the greatest obstacles to political change in Italy. The fear of the counter-revolutionary instincts of the masses would thereafter weigh heavily on successive generations of reformers: indeed, Italian historians of very different persuasions have seen in the fears that lingered after the events of 1799 one of the most fundamental constraints on the political actions of the Risorgimento Liberals and Radicals alike.<sup>5</sup>

While the political impact of the myths and memories of the *Santafede* has long been recognized, only more recently have historians begun to examine the events of 1799 more closely. Most nineteenth-century historians were content to accept that the *Santafede* was a product of the brutish superstition of the southern masses, the work of 'the dregs of society'. A new generation of nationalist historians in the early twentieth century attempted to create an alternative myth, depicting the Sanfedists as precocious patriots, whose spontaneous resistance to the foreign invaders they contrasted with what they considered to be the effete cosmopolitanism of the pro-French Jacobins.<sup>6</sup> But after the fall of Fascism it was the Jacobins who once again returned to centre stage.

Italian historians have more recently begun to show a new interest

<sup>4</sup> E.g. William Wyndham's reports to Lord Grenville from Procida before his return to Tuscany: see Public Record Office (PRO) FO, 79/17 (82), 4 July 1799.

<sup>5</sup> V. Cuoco, *Saggio storico sulla rivoluzione napoletana del 1799*, ed. P. Villani (Bari 1980).

<sup>6</sup> E.g. N. Rodolico, *Il popolo agli inizi del Risorgimento nell'Italia meridionale* (Florence 1926).



in exploring the popular grievances that were expressed in the upheavals of 1799. Gabriele Turi's pioneering study of the *Viva Maria!* risings in Tuscany linked peasant unrest to the earlier reforms introduced by the government of Pietro Leopoldo, especially the expansion of commercial farming, the removal of restrictions on grain prices and the sales of church lands. In the case of the Mezzogiorno, recent studies have tended to stress the highly disruptive impact of new commercial forces on prevailing patterns of customary and collective organization in an agrarian economy in which transhumant grazing and agriculture were still in many areas very closely interdependent.<sup>7</sup>

Specific causes of popular unrest in the south have also been studied, and especially the aftermath of the terrible earthquake that devastated Calabria in 1783. Many contemporaries argued that the measures taken to remedy the disaster unwittingly proved scarcely less catastrophic than the earthquake itself. In an attempt to revive the economy of the stricken provinces, the Bourbon government in the 1780s had made a bold attempt to put Enlightenment theory into practice. The Calabrian religious houses were dissolved and under the administration of the Cassa Sacra their lands were sold. The aim was to create a new stratum of small peasant properties, which, it was hoped, would provide a basis for the economic recovery of the province. But the project misfired sadly. The dissolution of the religious houses caused many peasant farmers to be evicted, yet when the land was sold it was bought not by peasants but by wealthy landowners and speculators. It was calculated that the number of landowners in Calabria actually fell as a result of these operations. These deprivations were compounded by the loss of the charitable services previously provided by the monasteries, and so contributed – it is argued – to the explosion of fierce popular resentment in Calabria in 1799.<sup>8</sup>

But the events of 1799 cannot be explained in terms of popular discontent alone, nor was the violence confined solely to Calabria. Indeed, one of the most striking features was that the conflicts spread to virtually every part of the mainland Mezzogiorno (but not Sicily), involving the capital as well as the provinces, the cities and towns as well as the countryside, the clergy as well as the laity. The feudal aristocracy, parts of the regular and secular clergy, as well as

<sup>7</sup> Turi, *Viva Maria!*; Rao, 'La Repubblica napoletana'; G. Cingari, *Giacobini e Sanfedisti in Calabria nel 1799* (2nd edn, Catanzaro 1978); U. Dante, *Insorgenza ed anarchia: il regno di Napoli e l'invasione francese* (Salerno 1980).

<sup>8</sup> See especially A. Placanica, *Alle origini dell'egemonia borghese in Calabria: la privatizzazione delle terre ecclesiastiche* (Catanzaro 1979) and Cingari, *Giacobini*, pp. 28–36.

members of the landed classes more generally, were to be found on both sides so that the strong and influential were divided no less than the weak and the oppressed.

Rather than following the neat demarcations of social war, the alignments between Jacobins and Sanfedists in 1799 showed all the confusions and untidiness of civil war. The reason was that the roots of conflict were as much political as social, and were ultimately inseparable from the crisis of the *ancien régime* monarchy. The crisis of the monarchy posed fundamental questions about the organization and distribution of power, the nature of the State and its relations with the elites and notables, as well as those between social classes in the south. But if these issues were posed in 1799, they were not resolved. Indeed, thereafter they continued to fuel the political instability and social tensions that were to be the distinctive features of the Mezzogiorno in the age of the Risorgimento and beyond. For that reason the events of 1799 reveal in an often stark and brutal fashion the nature of the tensions that came to permeate southern society.

This is not to suggest that popular discontent was unimportant in 1799, and contemporary accounts reveal how strong were the fears of an imminent breakdown in public order when news arrived of the defeat of the royal army. The Neapolitan clerk Carlo De Nicola, whose diary is one of the principal sources for the events that followed, recorded with growing apprehension the attempts that were made to establish urban militias to keep order while the city awaited the arrival of the French: 'Thank God, the people remain quiet...the urban militia is now in being.' His relief when Championnet finally entered the city was unconstrained: 'Had it not been for the arrival of the French army on the 22nd Naples would have been completely destroyed.'<sup>9</sup>

The abbé Pietrabondo Drusco voiced similar fears when he wrote two days before Championnet entered the city that:

the state of anarchy has now reached its full fury and the whole city is in revolt against the Jacobins and given over to sack and pillage. Since the plebs are by nature insane, now that they hold power it takes little imagination to conceive the state of dissolution that has been reached. No citizen can be sure of his life or goods.<sup>10</sup>

Accounts from the provinces tell a similar story. In the Abruzzi town

<sup>9</sup> Carlo De Nicola, *Diario napoletano: dicembre 1798–dicembre 1800*, ed. P. Ricci (Milan 1963), 6 January 1799, p. 37.

<sup>10</sup> *Anarchia popolare di Napoli dal 21 dicembre 1796 al 23 gennaio 1799: manoscritto inedito dell'abate Pietrabondo Drusco*, ed. M. Ascella (Naples 1884), 19 January, p. 23.

of Teramo, Angelo De Jacobis described the first revolt against the new republican administration with horror:

Oh what a spectacle to see the people grow wild, breaking and smashing down timbers, doors, balconies, burning linen, mattresses, bed-covers, cooking utensils, books, papers, and everything that they could find in the houses of these persons, as well as destroying stores, grain, and oil. How many important legal documents and how many fine pieces of furniture must have been destroyed, because these were all lawyers and gentlemen! What an unbridled mob, that under the pretence of defending the Crown in truth looks only to profit from the rich whom they call Jacobins. Had it not been for the Bishop, who understood their true intentions, they would have gone on to rob all the other wealthy houses.<sup>11</sup>

Uombuono delle Boccache painted a similar picture when he lamented that in neighbouring Lanciano the masses were inspired solely by the 'their determination to oppress the rich under the false pretext of defending God, the King, the State and the Fatherland'.<sup>12</sup> The famous cry of the Neapolitan *lazzaroni* conveys the same message even more concisely:

Chi tenne pane e vino  
Ha da esser Giacobino.

Such accounts vividly reflect the pitch of social tension in the Mezzogiorno, but the forms in which they were expressed varied greatly. Uombuono delle Boccache, for example, claimed that when the royal appeal for a *levée en masse* was proclaimed in the Abruzzi in November 1798:

the people's enthusiasm to take up arms was incredible, inspired as they were by the appeals from their ruler, from the officers of the crown and the agents of the nobles, as well as from the secular and the regular clergy, many of the latter exaggerating the danger and awakening in the minds of the boldest the prospect of becoming captains of armed bands [*capi-masse*], generals of their provinces, and leaders of men; some went so far as to make reference to the sovereignty of the people, to God's chosen people and other such excesses whose fruits would soon be tasted.<sup>13</sup>

But Angelo De Jacobis told a different tale. When conscription was

<sup>11</sup> L. Coppa Zuccari, *L'invasione francese negli Abruzzi 1798-1810* (L'Aquila 1926), vol. III, 'La cronaca degli avvenimenti in Teramo (1796-1823) di Angelo de Jacobis', 19 December 1798, p. 61a.

<sup>12</sup> Coppa Zuccari, *L'invasione francese*, vol. I, 'Saggio storico-critico della città di Lanciano di Uombuono delle Boccache', p. 148: according to Coppa Zuccari, 'Like all educated priests Uombuono took the part of the French' (Introduction p. xxviii), whereas the almost illiterate Angelo De Jacobis was hostile to the Francophiles in Teramo.

<sup>13</sup> Coppa Zuccari, 'Uombuono delle Boccache', pp. 30-1.

introduced in 1798, he claimed that this 'had ruined many families, especially those of peasants and labourers' since unlike the wealthy classes they were unable to pay for substitutes. Further east in Apulia the situation was similar. Here too the emergency war taxes of 1798 and conscription provoked widespread rioting and the king's appeal for a rising against the French was ignored. In 1799, taxation and conscription contributed to the initial republican sympathies of many of the Calabrian towns as well.<sup>14</sup>

The royalist insurrections began first in the frontier provinces of the Terra di Lavoro and the Abruzzi, which Rodolico called the 'Italian Vendée'. But these were the regions that bore the full brunt of the French invasion, and the royalist insurrections took the form of an institutional rather than a spontaneous response since the royal appeal for the *levée en masse* mobilized a well-established system of village militias. These served to keep order in time of peace and as a reserve to the regular army in time of war. The *miliziotti* were recruited from the larger peasant families, their equipment and officers being provided by the local landowners. After the collapse of the royal army in December 1798, however, the *masse* – as these irregular bands were known – had no effective command structure and so began to live off the land: or, more accurately, off those communities and towns that had supported the French. They became increasingly autonomous and their leaders adopted exotic *noms de guerre* like Fra Diavolo and Sciabolone. Engaging the French troops in a merciless guerilla war throughout the frontier regions, the irregular leaders established alliances between one another as well as with royalist groups in other towns and villages in ways that quickly widened local conflicts.<sup>15</sup>

The presence of the invading French armies made the situation particularly dramatic, but even in the frontier provinces the conflicts were rarely as shapeless and anarchic as might appear at first sight. In the region of Teramo and Sulmona in the Abruzzi, for example, earlier attempts to enclose and privatize land had threatened the prevailing pastoral economy and caused bitter conflicts within and between communities over access to grazing lands, rights of enclosure, and so forth. In 1799 these conflicts quickly surfaced, although in a variety of

<sup>14</sup> Coppa Zuccari, 'Angelo De Jacobis', 2 September 1798, pp. 37–8; A. Lucarelli, *La Puglia nel Risorgimento*, vol II (Bari, 1934), p. 27; Cingari, *Giacobini*, pp. 112–15.

<sup>15</sup> Coppa Zuccari, 'Uombuono delle Boccache', pp. 43–56; Dante, *Anarchia*, pp. 26–34; Rodolico, *Il popolo*, pp. 56–7; G. Cingari, *Brigantaggio. Proprietari e contadini nel sud (1799–1900)* (Reggio Calabria 1976), pp. 38–59.

different forms. In some cases it was the shepherds of the mountain villages whose livelihood was threatened by a neighbouring landowner or village who adopted the royalist cause. In others, the divisions and quarrels over right to grazing and pasture set village against village, as when the peasant farmers of Orsogna took the opportunity to wipe out the neighbouring pastoral community of Guardiagrele. Elsewhere, town dwellers found themselves threatened by peasants from outlying districts, as occurred at Teramo where Angelo De Jacobis described the royalists' supporters as *cafoni* (yokels) and *banditi*.<sup>16</sup>

Violence was rarely undirected and often sprang from rivalries between neighbouring communities. But internal divisions were not slow to follow and quickly split individual communities into rival interest groups, clans, and factions. The violence often began with the poorer sections of the community, but divisions rarely followed horizontal patterns. In the Adriatic towns of Trani and Molfetta, for example, the first royalist revolts were started by unemployed sailors and carters whose livelihood had been destroyed by the war and the collapse of trade. But they had not acted alone, and other sections of the community – notably the employees of the former royal administration – soon took the lead.<sup>17</sup>

Even in Naples, popular opposition to the Republic was strong only amongst certain groups and occupations, especially in the *quartieri* around the Mercato which were heavily dependent on shipping, on the port and its ancillary activities – all of which were at a standstill owing to the collapse of trade. But this was only a fraction of the working population of a city which had nearly half a million inhabitants and was divided into numerous but distinctive and even quite separate communities and *quartieri*. Contemporary accounts suggest that, even in moments of the greatest upheaval, only relatively small areas of the city were directly affected by the violence.

If popular support for the royalist revolts rarely seems to have been spontaneous, this is not surprising. The complex social stratification of even small rural settlements meant that internal divisions tended to run from top to bottom. Between the relatively well-to-do and the destitute there existed endless intermediary categories of peasant and tenant farmers, craftsmen and artisans, as well as secular and regular churchmen of differing rank and status, administrators, and public employees. The co-existence of different sources of authority and

<sup>16</sup> R. Colapietra, 'Le insorgenze di massa nell'Abruzzo in età moderna', in *Storia e Politica*, 20 (1981); Rodolico, *Il popolo*, pp. 59–81.

<sup>17</sup> Lucarelli, *Puglia*, pp. 55–79.

patronage – the retinues of feudal and royal administration, the parish and diocesan clergy, the religious orders, lay confraternities, and kin-groups – offered alternative and competing patronage networks around which individual communities easily fragmented into rival groupings and factions.

Uombuono delle Boccache's description of the events in his native town of Lanciano in the Abruzzi shows particularly clearly how factional and kin-group rivalries shaped local conflicts. When the first French armies drew close to Lanciano in January, the *galantuomini* quickly surrendered and when the French troops entered the town the citizens donned the 'tricolour cockade'. The following day a new town council was elected, which included a nobleman, Citizen Felice dei baroni Gigliani, and a wealthy merchant, Francesco Paolo de' Bucachi (Uombuono's kinsman). To win popular support the new administration reduced taxes and abolished the 'levy imposed on every head and pair of arms which used to be paid by artisans and labourers in this city'.

Discontent amongst a section of the people grew, however, and was encouraged by the most powerful opponents of the new ruling group, Vincenzo Giordano and his son Fioravante. 'who were deeply attached to the king and wealthy public merchants'.<sup>18</sup> Giordano and his son do not appear to have had adequate support within Lanciano despite their popular following and so they made contact with a royalist *capo-massa* named Pronio. Pronio's men, together with royalists from round and about, attacked Lanciano in early February. In the fighting, Uombuono's brother was killed and the houses of all those who supported the republican administration were sacked. Giordano took control of the town and appointed himself commander of the local *masse*.

The tables were soon turned when the French troops returned. The town was forced to pay an indemnity and the royalists were arrested. Giordano was sentenced to death, but spared following an appeal from a prominent republican family, the Carabba. Lanciano was rewarded by the republican authorities and elevated to the status of administrative centre of the province – a typical form of patronage, and one that conferred the right to raise taxes. Felice Gigliani became president of the provincial government.<sup>19</sup>

The final round in the struggle between the republican Gigliani and the royalist Giordano factions came in June when the fall of the

<sup>18</sup> Coppa Zuccari, 'Uombuono delle Boccache', p. 62.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.

Republic in Naples set the scene for the final reckoning. According to Uombuono, word spread that the lands and goods of the Jacobins would now be divided amongst the people. Republicans were arrested and once again the people took the law into their own hands. Giordano fled and, although they had been responsible for sparing the life of the royalist leader, Carabba and his wife were slaughtered and their mutilated bodies paraded naked through the streets of Lanciano on pikes.

The victory of the royalist faction was consolidated when the Royal Visitor, Ferranti, arrived in September to investigate all those accused of supporting the Republic. Uombuono recounts that the names of the Jacobins were supplied by 'the opposing faction' and that the Visitor was 'overwhelmed with memorials, pleas, and denunciations from men and women who were bent on pursuing their vendetta and claims for compensation against the *galantuomini* for the injuries they had suffered under the republican municipality'.<sup>20</sup>

Similar events were repeated throughout the Mezzogiorno in 1799. Leading families divided along faction lines, each seeking to gain control over local administration and establish a popular following, sometimes providing sections of the people with the opportunity to exploit the situation to their own advantage. On gaining power, each group used ritual procedures and collective violence to legitimize their actions and take vengeance on their opponents. The significance and symbolism of the atrocities inflicted on defeated opponents deserve closer study, but it is noticeable that a relatively high level of toleration was shown between the leading families in contrast to the more brutal treatment handed out to those who are described contemptuously as 'yokels'. When it came to the final reckoning, however, many of the leading families also fell victim, perhaps because the uncertainties that had surrounded earlier phases of the struggles were now dispelled.

Lanciano also illustrates the close interplay between internal and external conflicts. The Giordano family's inability to establish a royalist following within the town led them to look for outside support. This added elements to what had begun as an internal struggle, in particular the antagonisms between town and countryside.

Hierarchies of administrative and municipal privilege were another potent source of antagonism and throughout the Mezzogiorno small villages and townships took the opportunity to rebel against neighbours

<sup>20</sup> Coppa Zuccari, 'Uombuono delle Boccache', p. 396.

to whom they were juridically and fiscally subordinated. The first to do so were the Albanian settlements, which were amongst the most impoverished and oppressed in the Mezzogiorno. In December 1798 the Albanians in Molise took up the royalist cause with wild enthusiasm the moment their more powerful and wealthy neighbours and oppressors declared for the Republic. In Calabria, on the other hand, the Albanians were equally volatile but generally staunchly republican.<sup>21</sup>

The hamlets or *casali* that surrounded the principal administrative centres in each province also rose in revolt against their oppressors. When Bari opted for the Republic, its *casali* became royalist, and the revolts of the *casali* of Monteleone, Catanzaro, and Cosenza marked the start of the counter-revolution in Calabria.<sup>22</sup> Long-standing rivalries between neighbouring towns or cities – like those between Altamura and Matera – were also crucial in determining allegiances.

A French royalist officer who joined Cardinal Ruffo's expedition went so far as to claim that these local and municipal rivalries were the real key to his success:

He began his expedition at a time when the only enemy was Jacobinism, itself little more than an excuse for plunder. Then he found two small villages that accused a wealthy neighbour of supporting the Jacobins: the Cardinal authorized them to band together and destroy their neighbour. In this manner the Cardinal moved from province to province without ever meeting a French soldier.<sup>23</sup>

Vincenzo Cuoco in his analysis of the failure of the Republic also emphasized the disruptive force of these local conflicts, noting in particular: 'there is nothing more delicate in the course of a revolution than the way you change local government'.<sup>24</sup>

Yet despite the strength and prevalence of these localized conflicts, they were more often symptoms than causes of the crisis that gripped the Mezzogiorno. This was something that emerges with particular force from Cardinal Ruffo's correspondence and reports as his expedition gradually took shape and progressed.

Contrary to accepted mythology, the initial response to Ruffo's appeal for a royalist insurrection was slow and uncertain. On the day

<sup>21</sup> Cingari, *Giacobini*, pp. 123–7.

<sup>22</sup> Croce, *La riconquista*, Ruffo to Acton 3 March, p. 45; Cingari, *Giacobini*, pp. 123–7, 205; Lucarelli, *Puglia*, p. 58.

<sup>23</sup> *Mémoires du Comte de Damas*, ed. J. Rambaud (Paris 1912), vol. 1, p. 446.

<sup>24</sup> Cuoco, *Saggio*, p. 153.



after he landed (9 February), Ruffo told Acton: 'I do not have the men to resist the torrent that has engulfed these provinces.' Although he had landed on the estates belonging to his brother, the duke of Baronello, he was able to raise only eighty volunteers, whom he described as 'former guards from feudal estates and criminals – all people of no good intent or reliability'.<sup>25</sup>

By the end of February Ruffo had 1,500 men, but as the numbers grew so did his suspicions of his followers and he refused to advance further:

Were I at the head of a regular force I would not hesitate: but with these people I cannot take the risk because they do not understand me, they will not follow me, and I run the risk of losing everything that has so far been gained.<sup>26</sup>

Most of Ruffo's time was spent trying to discipline and organize his followers. Once the first towns were taken he was able to raise taxes, pay his men, and organize them into three separate commands, each with a nucleus of regular soldiers. Ruffo was keen to increase the size of this disciplined force and get rid of the growing numbers of volunteers that flocked to him as one republican town after another fell to the royalists, but the bulk of his 'army' continued to reconstitute itself at each new town as it moved forward. As he advanced on the republican stronghold of Cotrone in mid March, he reported to Acton in Palermo that he now had 4,000 men:

This I still consider to be a miracle of Providence, since those who follow me are not the same from one place to the next but come from the neighbourhood of the towns we wish to besiege: they are perfectly free to join us or not as they choose, but thank God that so far we have never been short of them.<sup>27</sup>

Even when Calabria had been 'reconquered', Ruffo was very wary about proceeding against the capital without proper military support from the Russian or Turkish forces that were by then in the Adriatic. He warned Acton as he approached Basilicata in mid April that:

The people of Basilicata, if you leave out the Albanians who are false royalists, are not like the Calabrians, and they have neither weapons nor courage. The harvest is approaching and they have no intention of abandoning it.<sup>28</sup>

Although Ruffo was aware of the need to identify the broader issues that lay behind the apparently localized and unrelated conflicts that

<sup>25</sup> Croce, *La riconquista*, Ruffo to Acton, 9 February, pp. 14–15.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, Ruffo to Acton, 26 February, p. 29.      <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, Ruffo to Acton, 14 March, p. 67.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, Ruffo to Acton, 21 April, p. 132.

confronted him, he could not at first see any clear patterns. Unlike the frontier provinces, Calabria had not suffered foreign invasion, but most of the leading Calabrian towns, feudatories, and prelates had spontaneously supported the Republic. The supporters of the Republic did not seem to have much in common, however. In Cosenza, for example, Ruffo noted that 'the nobility and the lower sorts are royalists while the middling people and the lawyers are republicans'; at Catanzaro, in contrast, the republicans were 'the worst sort of nobles who through their wealth and arrogance pretend to lord it over the others'.<sup>29</sup> And while he claimed that few *paglietti* (lawyers) had joined him, Ruffo did receive support from men like the wealthy landowner Pasquale Versace, who acted as his treasurer.

A recent study of the Jacobins in Molise and the Abruzzi concludes quite accurately that they were all 'bourgeois, that is to say landowners'.<sup>30</sup> But so too – in large part – were the royalists, and Gaetano Cingari's detailed analysis of the events in Calabria shows how difficult it is to draw meaningful social distinctions between the Jacobin and the royalist elites. The same was true elsewhere and in Naples the supporters of the Republic included members of most of the great noble families of the Kingdom. The Serra Cassano, Gerace, Pignatelli, Montemiletto, Canzano, Auletta, Marsico, and Roccaromana families all owned extensive feudal estates in Calabria and provided prominent supporters of the Republic in the capital.<sup>31</sup>

There were, of course, archetypal counter-revolutionaries, most obviously the employees of disbanded Bourbon tribunals and those of the feudal nobility who risked losing both their jobs and their power when the Republic came forward with its much-publicized plans to abolish feudalism. One of the most striking and frequent contrasts was between the absentee feudatory who was often a republican in Naples, and his or her agents in the provinces who were enthusiastic royalists. When, to give one example, a new administrator from Naples had the misfortune to arrive in February 1799 in Calabria on the estates of the prince of Montemiletto, who was a prominent supporter of the Republic, he was immediately arrested by the prince's retainers as a suspected Jacobin.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., Ruffo to Acton, 3 March, p. 45.

<sup>30</sup> See C. Petraccone, 'Rivoluzione e proprietà: i repubblicani abruzzesi e molisani nel 1799', *Archivio Storico per le Province Napoletane*, 21 (1982), p. 201.

<sup>31</sup> These were the families listed by Maria Carolina who instructed Ruffo to sequester their lands: see Helfert, *Ruffo*, p. 120.

<sup>32</sup> Archivio di Stato di Napoli (ASN), *Archivio di Toccò di Montemiletto*, busta 123.