

If mothers are still slaves to the prejudices of religion, of authority, of submission to the laws, etc., their offspring will necessarily raise the cult of such prejudices; and the work of the innovators of the future, of the revolutionaries, will be no less tiring and difficult than it is now.

-Ersilia Cavedgani, 1899



The Unstoppable Anarchist Ersilia Cavedagni



&

Her Selected Writings



Tipografia
Cronaca



della
Sovversiva

to *Mother Earth* 5.00
to *Cronaca Sovversiva* 5.00
to the *Temps Nouveaux* 5.00
for Masetti 5.00
to the *Libertario* 2.00
to *La Libertà* 2.00
to *Volontà* 1.00

Total \$25.00



We are grateful to the entire Italian working-class colony for the outcome, which has a large and lively sympathy for us. And we do everything in our power to make it wider, more unanimous, starting a series of performances of social dramas for the coming winter. A first work is being studied and will be brought to the fore as soon as possible preceded by a conference on scabs intended to illuminate the ignoble figure of recklessness and cowardice which is so much of the anxieties of the present mining agitation.

On the contrary, **all those who for our very generous purpose** intend to cooperate are requested to be seen at **1219 Venables street for the appropriate agreements for an effective and lasting understanding.**

And in the hope of soon giving you news of success, I greet you fraternally.

Ersilia

-*Cronaca Sovversiva*, January 3, 1914



1217 Venables St., Vancouver, B.C.

-Cronaca Soversivva, April 26, 1913

Vancouver, BC -- The great strike in the Nanaimo coalfield had the virtue of shaking all the comrades and sympathizers of these neighborhoods a little, who boldly flanked the agitation with the most sympathetic enthusiasm and lively energy. Against the arrest of one hundred and eighty miners who were later sentenced by the complicit judiciary to the maximum sentence, we organized a grandiose protest meeting which was attended by over four thousand people. We then had five hundred billboards printed to be displayed in the windows of the main shops of the city, with this simple wording, **this store is for the immediate release of the Nanaimo strikers**, thus provoking a large current of public sympathy in favor of the strikers and simultaneously collecting a good stack of money for the agitation having exacted a dollar from each store for the issued poster.

The agitation for the inmates is vigorous, impressive and will certainly lead to good results. As for the strike, it continues, the masses are close-knit and well-disposed, only, you know what the unionist method is, and with their arms crossed, the scabs, supported by the police and the militia, who have the professional horror of crossed arms, they have managed to infiltrate almost everywhere, making the struggle difficult and the victory that everyone wishes the strikers fully and completely remote.

Our last evening of propaganda had a flattering outcome from both a moral and a material point of view. When comrades meet, they exchange impressions, ideas, initiatives, and always good work. Then, when from this useful meeting congruous means are drawn to come to the aid of our targeted press and our generous agitations, our work is all the more commendable the more practical and current it is.

We had an entry of \$102.00
an expense of 77.00

with a net surplus of \$25.00
which we divided as follows:



The Unstoppable Anarchist Ersilia Cavedagni

Unlike most anarchist women, we know a lot about Ersilia Cavedagni, although only her early history. It's in the US that her path begins to blur into fragments, eventually dissolving into a mystery shared by many other anarchist women. No one knows when she died, just like her friend Frankie Moore, nor where she might have died, and the latest record of her existence is from 1941, when she had already left her mark on the west coast of the US.

Anarchismo Bolognese

Ersilia was born Ersilia Amedei on April 2, 1864 in the city of Bologna, Italy, home to the oldest university in Europe. She only completed her first level of education in this scholarly city, given her parents weren't rich, and at an early age she became a housekeeper for the wealthy. Clearly this situation didn't sit right with Ersilia, for soon enough she married an Italian anarchist named Giulio Grandi, with whom she had a daughter, Edvige, and their family apartment became a meeting spot for the anarchists of Bologna.

Ersilia was close friends with Pietro Gori, the anarchist musician and songwriter, even offering him shelter when the authorities wanted to imprison him. Some other close friends were Luigia Minguzzi and Teresa Fabbrini, two anarchists from Firenze, and together they helped form a solid network of Italian anarchy-feminists in the 1890s, one they would soon stretch to the farthest corners of the world.

In September of 1894, at the height of the European anti-anarchist panic, Ersilia was arrested for her subversive activities and sent into internal exile in Bassano Veneto, a form of house-arrest. She was released in April of 1895, just after her thirty-first birthday. Unperturbed, she immediately resumed her activities and helped form the anarchist group *Circolo Giordano Bruno*, named after the scientist burned at the stake by the Inquisition in the year 1600. This *anti-clerical* group was just a cover for their anarchist meetings, and it was eventually denounced to the police by a snitch in July of 1897, leading to the forcible closure of their meeting hall.

Vancouver, B.C. -- All to the **O'Brien** (Harting and Homer St.) on Wednesday March 4th!

Everyone, of course, in Vancouver and the surrounding area, whose hearts are open and grateful to good and noble initiatives; all those who assign a vibration of beauty, kindness, goodness to joy, and to rebellious meetings, who do not ask for oblivion, but for a more intense and more vigorous hour of life.

Everyone will come to see Nellie Rousselle's subjective performance of **Rebellion**. Hearing and repeating the most vibrant, the densest of our battle hymns After, after it will be the turn of the layabouts and they will be able to joke and laugh and dance, above all dance until daybreak, and all those who have good hocks will rest assuredly tomorrow.

There all the workers of Vancouver, all the sympathizers, comrades, friends of the neighborhood who know how to devote the net profit of our evenings to propaganda, education, education of the masses, over which the most scrupulous administrative rigor presides, and over which, after all, anyone who wants to exercise their control over it can freely do so.

And Tuesday 4 March at 8 p.m. at **O'Brien Hall** (Harting and Homer Street) there will be a crowd of all those whose minds and hearts are turned to the noblest of tasks and ends, redemption, resurrection!

-March 1, 1913

Vancouver, B.C.--The comrades in the mining basins, in the large collective works, who found themselves in the midst of a discrete contingent, in terms of numbers and for....good disposition, for Italian launderers who want to risk a provident distribution of the pamphlet recently published by the comrades of Vancouver: **The anarchists and what they want**, all they have to do is send us their address together with the postage only, and we will have them sent a package of pamphlets corresponding to the need.

Ersilia Cavedagni.

of the deficit of the *Cronaca Sovversiva*.

If the other comrades from the more active centers did the same, the deficit will vanish, never to reappear if our assistance is vigilant and the administration of the newspaper shrewd, diligent, active.

All for the “*Cronaca*” on the upcoming May 1!

ERSILIA CAVEDAGNI

Cronacca Sovversiva, Seattle, Wash., 17 April 1912



In these years, Ersilia was in contact with anarchists across Italy, from Napoli in the south to Genoa in the north, just as she worked with the anarchists in Alexandria, Egypt and Paterson, New Jersey, printing their words and spreading their propaganda. It was in September of 1897, among the Bologna comrades, that Ersilia met an anarchist named Giuseppe Ciancabilla, who she quickly fell in love with, having left her husband. Giuseppe was eight years younger than Ersilia, and to this day, it is still uncommon for Italian women to be with younger men, making her choice even more radical.

When Ersilia first met Giuseppe, he was in the Italian Socialist Party, not an anarchist. Likely under Ersilia's influence, Giuseppe decided to interview Errico Malatesta for the Party's paper *Avanti!* in October 1897. This candid interview about the values of anarchism thoroughly enraged the Party, who tried to spin it as *anarchism's evolving in the direction of Marxist socialism*. To top it all off, that issue was suppressed by the state, with all copies physically impounded for the crime of speaking honestly about anarchism. In disgust at the Party, Giuseppe wrote a long declaration in which he not only resigned, but publicly proclaimed himself an anarchist. With this published declaration, Giuseppe became a wanted fugitive, and as he fled across the border to Switzerland, at his side was Ersilia Cavedagni, who soon followed him to Belgium.

The Wandering Italian

Eventually settling in Paris with her lover, Ersilia helped him and Jean Grave publish articles in *Les Temps Nouveaux*, one of the most important anarchist newspapers in France. The issue for June, 17, 1898 featured Giuseppe on the front page with an article titled “*The Italian Uprising*,” detailing the massive insurrection spurred by hyper-inflated wheat prices, all caused by a single Chicago speculator named Joseph Leiter, who bought up and stored nearly all of the world's surplus, hoping to increase the price in order to make an exorbitant profit, as famously chronicled in *The Pit* by Frank Norris. This didn't work out for Leiter when the wheat price finally collapsed and he lost millions, but it did ignite an insurrection across Italy.

It began in the south at the beginning of 1898, spreading across cities like Napoli and Bari, even hitting Firenze in the north, where rioters controlled the city for an entire day. Starting in early May, strikes and riots escalated, especially in Milano, where a massive demonstration of 60,000 paralyzed the city on May 7, and in the battle that followed, hundreds of rebels were massacred, with thousands left injured from police bullets and artillery. This all became known as the *Fatti di Maggio*, or The Events of May, and the exile Giuseppe Ciancabilla wrote about this uprising in the pages of *Les Temps Nouveaux*, published out of 140 Rue Mouffetard, Paris.

For this article, Giuseppe Ciancabilla was expelled from France and he returned to Switzerland with Ersilia, although he was again expelled for applauding the assassination of Empress Elizabeth of Austria at the hands of the anarchist Luigi Luccheni, who stabbed her in Geneva on September 10, 1898. No longer welcome in Switzerland, Giuseppe and Ersilia got on a boat to New York City and passed through Ellis Island sometime towards the end of 1898. This was not a pleasant trip for Ersilia, who was subjected to racist insults for being Italian, and as she reflected, *how wicked is a society which arouses in the minds of its children this stupid aversion to other beings similar to them, who have no other fault than not speaking their language, of being born under another heaven, where chance placed their relatives, and of having different habits.*

After arriving in New York, Ersilia and Giuseppe made their way to the anarchist stronghold of Paterson, New Jersey, and it was here that Ersilia helped define the schism between the *organizzatori* and the *antiorganizzatori*. As a trusted comrade of both Pietro Gori and Errico Malatesta, Giuseppe became the editor of *La Questione Sociale*, the main anarchist newspaper in the United States, and he helped publish every issue through 1899, all while his lover Ersilia was engaging with *Il Gruppo Emancipazione della Donna*, or the Women's Emancipation Group, a circle of anarchist women who had been active since 1897, all of whom had read her dispatches in *La Questione Sociale* written from European exile. Now that she was in Paterson with these women, Ersilia got right to work, forming the *Teatro Sociale*, a popular theater group that put on plays like *Emancipata*, focusing solely on the struggle of women.

For the life of the “Cronaca” ON THE 1st OF MAY

To comrades from Seattle, Wash. it seems shameful that the workers of America are not able to ensure a less uncertain and less anemic life to the only anarchist newspaper in the United States, the *Cronaca Sovversiva*.

And as on another occasion, apparently with success, they proposed to the groups of the various localities to acquire a good number of copies of the *Cronaca Sovversiva* weekly and to increase its diffusion, thus multiplying the ranks of readers for the benefit of propaganda and that of subscribers to the journal, incrementally; I propose today, through me, that, on the anniversary of May 1st, in all the localities where the comrades are, *feste*, meetings, subscriptions be organized for the benefit of the *Cronaca Sovversiva* so that with everyone's help it can free herself from the deficit by which she is oppressed and resume the vigorous impetus with which she waged her most beautiful battles and still fights today--almost alone, pursued, persecuted, cursed, but serene and courageous--against the Tripolian madness that also spreads here across the Atlantic in all the colonies of our immigrants.

The newspapers of our exploiters, who have the shameful duty of keeping us slaves of prejudice, find help beyond any need, and they double in number and double in impudence.

We are now reduced to a single newspaper that is truly anarchist and truly revolutionary, and we leave it to languish as if all the libertarians of the United States had neither nerves, nor gratitude, nor will.

On May 1st let's give our thoughts, our day's work to the “Cronaca Sovversiva” which pays no attention to sacrifices, which challenges all hatreds, which mocks all persecutions, just to tell us the ungrateful but redemptive truth, and we will have spent well our proletarian May 1st.

We in Seattle have put out the call a week ago for a May 1 *festa* at which we hope to see all the comrades and sympathizers of the city and the surrounding area, and thus collect the largest contribution for the extinction

Now they're starting over with Galleani, not out of love for the organization, the federation that he opposes, not for propaganda or tactics that he might otherwise intuit, but out of the lust of shopkeepers who want to be the only ones on the market.

Galleani and the *Cronaca* acted conscientiously in keeping silent until things were cleared up. Provoked, they told the heartfelt and inexorable truth that baffles scammers and tooth-pullers.

They must not cease; on until the last shred of the infamous mask is torn from the usurers and *camorristi* encamped among the comrades.

Seattle, Wash., 26 January 1912

Ersilia

-*Cronaca Soversivva*, March 9, 1912



Della Donna

In her own words, Ersilia told the readers of *La Questione Soiciale* that *we must imitate the priests who know how to mobilize those of our sex. If we were to have many anarchist women, oh, believe me, the movement would grow substantially.* She would go on to write, *O young woman that suffers, I believe that if you knew the cause of this you would rebel. Look at the well dressed, well fed, well educated, well instructed woman, that spends her life happy and joyful; why do you think she has the privilege to live happily while you suffer? It is nothing else but money that her parents make with exploitation, rape, violence, and force. Don't let the word anarchy scare you. It is an idea, a remedy in the struggle for liberty and the suppression of every system of authority.*

Many have speculated on how the conflict between Giuseppe Ciancabilla and Errico Malatesta played out, with some suggesting that Giuseppe was jealous of Errico's affection and friendship with Ersilia, but what is known for certain is that Giuseppe resigned from the editorial staff of *La Questione Sociale* in the summer of 1899, no longer believing that static anarchist organizations were the way forward and advocating an anti-organizational approach of *coming together spontaneously, and not with permanent criteria, according to momentary affinities for a specific purpose.* The one thing about the *anarchist organizations* being advocated by Errico Malatesta was that nearly all of them were dedicated to the labor movement, and many mothers and young wives didn't work, being forced to replicate everything needed for their husband and children's day at the factory.

This brings us to the heart of the matter, for the circle of anarchist women that Ersilia associated with in Paterson were doing things outside the workplace, such as theater and singing groups, just as they held public *feste* on the plazas and streets, bringing in strangers outside their factories and job sites. Given that Ersilia was Giuseppe's partner, it's not hard to imagine that he was highly influenced by his lover in regards to organization, what with her comrades organizing multiple groups outside of the workplace, all of them for women.

As the Jewish anarchist Emma Goldman famously noted, *all Latin men still treat their wives, or their daughters, as inferiors and consider them as mere*

breeding machines as the caveman did. In a similar vein, the one-time Irish anarchist Elizabeth Gurley Flynn erroneously noted, *there were practically no women in the Italian movement—anarchist or socialist. Whatever homes I went into with Carlo [Tresca], the women were always in the background, cooking in the kitchen, and seldom even sitting down to eat with the men.* Elizabeth simply couldn't speak Italian, and she also didn't bother looking too hard, because there were plenty of Italian women who weren't content to be always in the background.

One of these women was Maria Roda, a writer for *La Questione Sociale* and one of Ersilia's close friends. As she famously declared, *men say we are frivolous, that we are weak, that we are incapable of supporting the struggle against this intolerable society, that we cannot understand the ideal of anarchism. But they are the cause of our weakness, our undeveloped intellects, because they restrict our instruction and ignore us.* She would also say, *let our men—who suppress our will, who do not allow us to think and act freely, who consider us inferior to them, who impose on us their authority, as father, brothers and husbands, and, believing to be stronger than us, trample us, oppress us, and sometimes even hit us—let our men know: we want freedom and equality too.*

Ersilia remained by Giuseppe's side when he left *La Questione Sociale* in the hands of Errico Malatesta, who became the editor during his time in Paterson. Meanwhile, Giuseppe and Ersilia started a new paper, *L'Aurora*, based out of West Hoboken, just across the river from Greenwich Village. Before they printed the first issue, an anarchist meeting took place at the Tivola and Zucca Saloon in West Hoboken on September 3, 1899, and it was here that Errico Malatesta was shot in the leg by a likely police informant while propounding his pro-organization beliefs. At the end of the day, these Italian anarchists were all comrades, and the person who disarmed the would-be assassin was an anti-organization anarchist named Gaetano Bresci, who will soon feature prominently in this narrative.

A few months later, Ersilia would publish an article in *L'Aurora* entitled "*La Donna*" in which she rips apart what she calls the *majority* of anarchist men. She asks the reader, *frankly, isn't it true that anarchists who care about educating and, above all, forming an anarchist conscience in the woman who is their wife or companion are very rare?* She then amps it up by asking *how*

an equivocal publication.

As for the coward, I remember that when in late December several comrades wrote from here to Galleani who was in Pittsburg, asking him about the advisability of forming an expeditionary force for Mexico, he replied that he was ready to leave with the others should the possibility appear to make a good contribution to the affirmation of our ideas there, but he saw no way of doing so in current events. The situation seemed very intricate and in doubt that comrades might go down there and find themselves unwittingly serving the ambitious calculation of some political tinkerer, he advised them to wait. Those who didn't want to wait had to bite their fingers.

Galleani acted like the best, like the most vigilant of companions in this circumstance, it was therefore the Jesuits of the *Era Nuova* with their spree of Spring Valley who dragged him by the hair into an ungrateful polemic because of those who believe in the opportunity of an action over there, the first ones shout: **let's arm ourselves with matches!** while the latter offer the journey to heretics who want to approach their confessional.

Fools! From the barricades of Mexico the dying cowards have the right to cry out to those who believe in the Mexican revolution only on gossip and the courage of others, to those who have money to offer for the unbelievers of the Mexican revolution and won't buy a Winchester and won't become a captain across the border.

Above all cowards are those who, amid differences of ideas or tactics between comrades, plant the stakes in the vineyard, poisoning the discords with their murderous perfidy and their police slanders.

I will never forget the infamies that these *maramaldi* of Paterson concocted against my poor Ciancabilla, who may have had his faults but had so much devotion to the idea and so much love and so much activity for propaganda that he cannot be described by anyone but an agitator without equal.

He had an unforgivable sin: he had not submitted to Paterson's *annurata sucieta*.

Down, without regard!

Some comrades write to me deploring the Mexican controversies that threaten to absorb most of our newspapers and drown them, and they would especially like that the *Cronaca* ceases to deal with the matter especially since after the full publication of Zapata's appeal there's nothing more to add even if the cronies of the EN pretend to ignore this document that unmask and reveals their lie.

Those comrades should reflect on the origins of the controversy: the *Cronaca* did not want to talk about the Mexican question, the revolution started by Madero appeared suspicious both for its aims and for its allies; those who then removed the so-called revolutionary succession from Madero gave no confidence in either seriousness or courage, and waiting for things to clear up was a duty, a moral obligation of conscience for anyone who works in the editorial office of a newspaper.

At the *Era Nuova* that silence and expectation were a concern, they became the pretext for the disloyal war that the Spring Valley regulars (always them when it comes to reproaching, torturing a companion, always them, when there is a sad task to be done) wage now against Galleani as they did twelve years ago against my poor Ciancabilla, as they have always done against all those who did not want to place themselves at their orders, marry their rages, and take their revenge.

The *Cronaca* did not hasten judgment; they provoked him with all sorts of insults, they forced him with the most cowardly insinuations to express his thoughts, and when he did they shouted thief, coward at Galleani, who was of no use to their speculations.

As for the thief, the companions who knew Paterson's *camarilla* must have had a good laugh; they've never been able to live down there except for prevarication and the *Camorra*, even on the most sacred deposits, for the source and for the end, and if they now have the impudence to call others thief no one will be surprised, least of all those who know that fraud and falsehood are sisters and it is only thanks to them that Paterson has been able to maintain the manger for half a dozen *lazzaroni* under the pretext of

many times do gentlemen comrades respond with an annoyed expression, with a grimace of carelessness and almost disdain because they consider themselves superior beings, quasi worthy of only taking care of certain things, while women have only to take care of the kitchen and other household chores!

Ersilia didn't stop there, telling the reader that it seemed to her that *men do not fully realize the social mission that women carry out in today's society, and are destined to carry out more in the society of the future. The woman is and will always be the educator of the family, the one who has and will always have the most direct and most important influence on her children, the one who will communicate to them the first impressions, the first suggestions, the first criteria of social life, the one who, finally, above all, will be able to decide on the entire formation of a new society.*

Speaking to anarchist men married to women who weren't anarchists, she wrote, *before spreading propaganda to strangers, do it at home, comrades. And then you will see that the woman, instead of forbidding you to go to conferences, to meetings, and finally to participate in the anarchist movement, will herself be sorry when, due to domestic duties, she too will not be able to participate actively.* Ersilia ends this article by telling her women readers, *true emancipation can only be her own work. As long as she waits with supine resignation for man to emancipate her and make her free, she will always remain submissive to him.* All of this article could have been written in the 1970s, or in 2023, and it would still be just as relevant as it was on October 28, 1899.

Meanwhile, four months after Malatesta was shot in Hoboken, in the January 6, 1900 issue, we find Ersilia publishing an article titled simply "To My Comrades," in which she claims *the basest insinuations, slanders, and vilest lies are hurled against my companion of faith and affection [Giuseppe Ciancabilla] by Malatesta and his cronies.* It remains unclear what exactly this is in reference to, but *L'Aurora* was still based in West Hoboken, and the schism between organization and anti-organization was raging on in the background.

About a year later, in the October 13, 1900 issue when *L'Aurora* was temporarily based out of Yohoghany, Pennsylvania, we find another article by Ersilia entitled "The Maternal Mission" which tears into all those mothers

who fill their children's head with garbage. As she described, *the mother instills in the tender minds of her children the prejudice of servility, of religion, of submission to corrupt customs, of obedience to the laws, to everything that is authority, and to the fatality, finally, of resigning ourselves to the miserable fate to which destiny damns us.*

In the most riveting section, Ersilia instructed all mothers to *make the child understand: 1. that all people are born equal and therefore have equal rights; 2. that the existence of a god who regulates the universe is absurd, useless, criminal, because religious belief serves precisely the masters, the rulers, the priests to obtain paradise on earth for themselves, leaving their neighbors to work in the hell of total suffering; 3. that the boss, necessary today for the poor to live, will not be necessary tomorrow, when workers want to work and produce for themselves and not for others, when it will be understood that labor is necessary for capital and not capital for labor; therefore, inspire constant rebellion against the masters and against all exploitation; 4. that laws are made by rulers to defend today's system of oppression, that is, to defend capitalists and exploiters: therefore, to excite hatred against every law in the child, and make them understand that law is synonymous with violence, because the law is always imposed by force; 5. that, having been named, the son must refuse to wear the ignoble soldier's uniform, since the army, with the pretext of defending the homeland (another prejudice) in reality serves only to defend the rich against the poor who they starve.*

In addition to Ersilia's articles, their paper soon featured many articles by Jean Grave and Pyotr Kropotkin, odd choices given that both were pro-organization anarchists. In 1900, Ersilia and Giuseppe eventually moved *L'Aurora* to Spring Valley, Illinois, a small coal town that was becoming an anarchist sanctuary, given its proximity to Chicago. During its brief run, *L'Aurora* became the genesis of what would later be dubbed insurrectionary anarchism, although it also was individualist in nature and advocated for what we now call *affinity groups* over trade or craft union formations.

The year they moved to Spring Valley, an anarchist from Paterson named Gaetano Bresci traveled across the sea to Italy. Months earlier, he had resolved to kill the King of Italy in revenge for the massacre in Milano in 1898, and with money given to him by the pro-organization *La Questione*



Seattle, Wash. -- It is fortunate among us that comrade Galleani has served to move from inertia and to push into the struggle for the ideal many who had been disinterested for a long time, and it has had an effective influence in giving the slumbering proletarian mass a little of that vigor and self-confidence from which alone she can hope for her redemption.

At the two conferences held by Galleani, "Towards Freedom" and "Justice," we noted an unusual confluence of workers; new faces that had never before been seen appearing in similar circumstances. The longing to listen to our companion's word was evident in one and all, they attended the two conferences very satisfied to finally be able to hear the truth ringing loud and clear, that truth barely glimpsed in the sadness and darkness of their own consciences.

In both conferences the speaker was very effective, and despite the chosen form of his speech and the seriousness of the arguments, he managed to chain the audience, forcing it to an unusual attention, and finally receiving thunderous and sincere applause.

In the second of the conferences, "Justice," the speaker, among other things, pointed out all the defects and harmfulness of the socialist party in its relations with the proletariat, showing, with the stock of facts, all the evil it has done, especially since it abandoned them to the murky wave of politicking.

None of the socialists present dared to protest and contradict Galleani, which gives us hope that they have understood that they are on a false path and that they want to move towards brighter goals, those that the anarchist ideal points to.

To comrade Galleani, whom we hope to see again soon, our affectionate greetings and our gratitude.

Ersilia Cavedagni.

-Cronaca Soversivva, September 7, 1910

Sociale (which he helped found) this fervent *antiorganizzatori* bought a .38 caliber pistol, a steamer ticket across the Atlantic, and on July 29, 1900, he assassinated King Umberto I of Italy in the city of Monza, shooting him four times.

Without question, Ersilia and Giuseppe had been close comrades with Gaetano, and his act cast a giant spotlight on his adopted hometown of Paterson. Luckily for them, Ersilia and Giuseppe were in Spring Valley, although another conflict would soon emerge in this violent coal-mining town.

Months after setting up their print shop, on Sunday, December 16, 1900, Ersilia and Giuseppe tried to pass an amendment at the local Prosperity Club where women would be allowed entrance. Giuseppe introduced the ammendment and *explained the reasons why, from the point of view of workers' emancipation, it is necessary, indeed urgent, to worry, first of all, about the emancipation of women.*

As Ersilia went on to describe, *our companion had not spoken for five minutes before a tumult of wild beasts arose from all parts of the assembly. Screams, uproar, invectives, protests, etc. And in the midst of the chorus of shouters one could distinguish the charming jokes of certain--what should we call them?-- who shouted: -- "What? Women must be relegated to South America... Women are worse than dogs, because they are bitches... Women have long hair and short brains..." And so on with these graceful apostrophes which indicated all the kindness of sentiment and education in these gentlemen.*

With heavy sarcasm, Ersilia continued: *the super-great thing was that even some self-styled anarchists joined the chorus of protests against our comrade's proposal, and one of these people, with an equivocal and creeping phrase, admitted that our comrade was right, but...it wasn't appropriate, because it offended the sentiment of the masses, and therefore if the women wanted, they should have created a club on their own. If necessary, he and other orchestra directors would have put themselves at the head of this new female institution. As you can see, a proposal from a truly self-styled anarchist, who, depending on how the wind blows, instead of propagandizing and attracting the masses for themselves, adapts for convenient opportunism to the level of ignorance and*

brutalization of the unconscious masses.

According to this article, published a week later on December 22, 1899, brave Giuseppe tried to push for a vote on the ammendment to allow women into the Prosperity Club, only to be *met with a new explosion of shouts, protests and threats, and even someone spoke of lynching our comrade and his friends, accused of being disturbers of public peace, just for having spoken in favor of women's emancipation.* After narrating everything that happened that previous Sunday, the article then launched into territory which is fresh even today in 2023, almost 125 years after it was written.

Suddenly shifting into the male point of view, the writers declared, *if women today occupy a lower place in society, it is because we condemn them, not because they are destined for it by nature. We are the ones who force women to only take care of the kitchen, the laundry, the mending of socks, the sweeping of the house; we are the ones who pretend to be solely capable of associations, social relationships, even higher professions...for the sole and stupid reason that we are men, that is, because we animalistically have some degree of muscular strength to impose ourselves like brutes and dictate the law.*

Hammering home a point which still resonates today, the writers continued, *those same people who shout so much against women and pretend to despise them are the first to feel up their skirts with admiration as soon as a woman appears to them who has the great virtue...of reasoning and dealing with things it seemed only men had monopolized up until now. People's narrow brains immediately think that those women - propagandists, orators, writers - are djinn, beyond all common intelligence; and instead they are unable to understand that those women, generally no more intelligent than the others, have no other merit than that of having left the narrow circle of the domestic hearth, to which society wanted them condemned, and of participating in public life.*

Taking things to an entirely different level, the writers stated that, *like all beings and races held in a state of violent subjection by the strongest and most overbearing, women try to take their revenge indirectly. Because they are considered to be exclusive instruments of love and pleasure, women use love and pleasure to dominate over the sex which is very mistakenly called **strong**. From courts and palaces to humble workers' hovels, women generally reign supreme.*

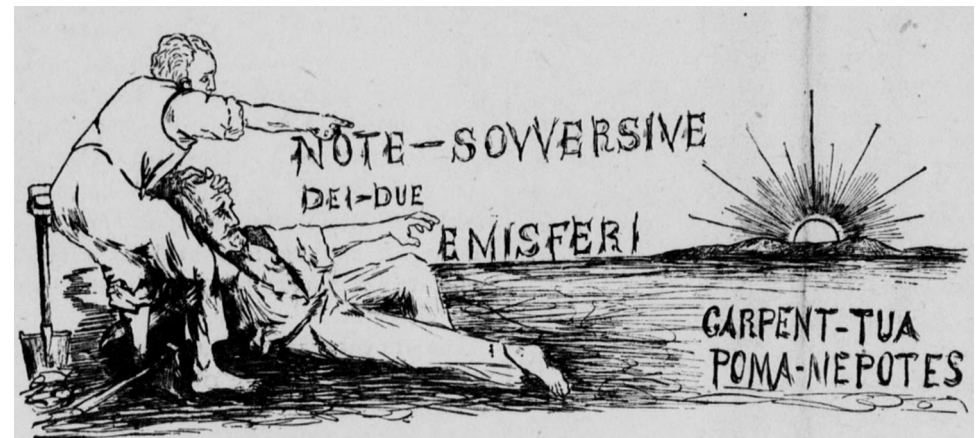
of brokers, not humans.

After understanding this, women need to throw aside any consideration of prejudices and social conventionalisms, persuading themselves once and for all that the real public opinion that should concern us is that of ourselves, and not that of others.

Thus, by all contributing, little by little, to the formation of new social relationships based on morals and sensations, the nucleus of healthy energies and fertilizing elements will be formed within this same corrupt society, which will give life to the new future society, worthy of free and civilized beings, such as we want to become.

ERSILIA CAVEDAGNI

-Cronaca Soversivva, December 23, 1905



trary to the idea of a free union. Woman fears more than anything else, more than the reproach and aversion of her own conscience, the opinion and backbiting of the world, the criticisms and gossip of her friends, her neighbors, her acquaintances. With how many women have I not spoken, and almost all of them have had to agree in the logic of free union, in the uselessness of marriage, in the injustice of every civil and religious bond that claims to regulate the natural relationships of love, and also finally they opposed me, with blind obstinacy, the only and invincible obstacle in their consideration of the world!

And even others I have known who not only in theory but in practice were partisans of free union, being freely accompanied by being loved; but they didn't have the courage of their own opinion, and they didn't know how to challenge the world, making believe instead that they were **married**, to be **married**, so as not to offend the susceptibilities of the honest moralistic bourgeois, who may be scandalized by an openly declared free union, and in the privacy of their home they clandestinely profess not one, but several...free unions!

Furthermore, women do not consider that if for men the fact of changing loves, and freely uniting with whomever they please, does not constitute what is called scandal, and they do not lose their so-called reputation for this, the same should happen for women.

And so women should succeed and establish this true social equality, if they don't want to condemn themselves to remain slaves and inferiors to men, not because they are, but because they want to be.

Now if we do not know how to take these rights of ours, it is useless to wait for man to accord them to us spontaneously, because, given the bad social organization from which we suffer, he has every interest in keeping us subject to him.

It is therefore necessary for women (and men too, of course) to persuade themselves that in order to regulate the relationships of affection between the two sexes, there is no need for sanctions and laws, no witnesses, no mayors, no priests, no brokers, because only beasts are brought to a market

Using wiles, meditated with a harsh satisfaction of revenge, using coaxing, intrigues, caresses, seductions, and, if necessary, impositions, the woman, the weaker sex, instead delights in being in reality the mistress of life, the arbiter of human destinies, the skilled director of human puppets in social existence.

As if this could not get any crazier, the authors direct the following question to anarchist men in their community: *how many of you are not in your family the slaves--yes, the slaves--of your companions; and you don't dare challenge their wrath, and you abstain from attending meetings, from participating in party or association movements, and you hurry home, because you are afraid of female fury, because it bothers you in bed if then the woman abruptly turns her back on you! And those same among you who are not married to women and seem stronger and more independent, poor things, how many times would they not fall at the feet of some woman, ready for all her whims, as long as she deigned to give them a benign look!*

The authors conclude that *this revenge that women take is, ultimately, logical and right* before stating quite simply that if men were to *remove women from this state of apparent inferiority in which you forcefully keep her, give her rights and a way to express the activity of her spirit for her own good and that of everyone, make her equal to you, socially, and the woman will no longer consider that a man is like a brute beast to be tamed with coaxing and caresses, to be made his own laughing stock, but an equal being.*

Once again, this was written in 1899, and in an eerie passage, after reiterating the importance of mothers in the shaping of a child's development, Ersilia explained that *if mothers are still slaves to the prejudices of religion, of authority, of submission to the laws, etc., their offspring will necessarily raise the cult of such prejudices; and the work of the innovators of the future, of the revolutionaries, will be no less tiring and difficult than it is now.*

All of this was in an article titled "The Question Of The Woman" and was signed by two groups, *Il Grupo I Nuovi Viventi* (The New Living Group) and the *Grupo Femminile Luisa Michel* (Louis Michel Women's Group). The so-called Prosperity Club, which they claimed should be called the *Brutalization Club*, had been co-founded by some of their anarchist comrades as a place to gather and drink without having to pay a corrupt, grafty

saloon keeper, which Spring Valley was full of. Despite not letting women into the club, after two members were arrested by the saloon keeper mayor, the front page of *L'Aurora* for the February 23, 1901 issue ran the bold English headline: **A PROTEST: To the People of Spring Valley, Ill.** Below this were two articles, in English and Italian, explaining what had happened to the club as well as pledging the solidarity of the collective signature **A Group of Italian and French Anarchists**. From what it seems, Ersilia and Giuseppe had a lot of what people call *good faith*.

This issue of *L'Aurora* is the last that's publically available, and for now it's unclear if the remaining issues from 1901 exist in one or several academic institutions. There is potentially a lot more of Ersilia's work in there, and it's clear she was busy the whole time she was in Spring Valley, but as the year 1901 progressed, her attention soon turned towards Chicago.

Secolo Nuovo

A lot of anarchists were converging in Chicago in 1901 people like Emma Goldman, the Isaak family, Hippolyte Havel, and Enrico Travaglio. The Isaak's paper *Free Society* had recently moved to Chicago from San Francisco, bringing a lot of this crew with them. Spring Valley was around four hours away from Chicago, at least by train, and Ersilia was quite caught up in the flow between the two locations, all the while editing and writing for *L'Aurora* with her young lover Giuseppe. 1901 was a good year for Ersilia, the beginning of the great *novocento*, a century filled with nothing but promise.

The new century truly got off to an explosive start when a strange Polish anarchist walked into the house of the Isaak family at 515 Carroll Avenue in Chicago, the building where *Free Society* was printed. This strange man asked to see Emma Goldman, who briefly struck up an acquaintance with him, although soon enough *Free Society* was warning its readers of this stranger who was constantly advocating lethal violence against the rulers of capitalist society. A week later, on September 6, 1901, this Polish anarchist named Leon Czolgosz shot and killed President William McKinley, the man who initiated the invasion of the Philippines on behalf of Wall Street.

Free Union

This expression, which also frightens the majority of women and even men who have not yet been stripped of the prejudices of current society, should instead be for everyone synonymous with freedom and sincerity, meaning by it the spontaneous union of two beings who love each other, and who do not feel the need, to sanction their natural love, to resort to the intervention of the mayor and the priest.

In fact, for what purpose and for what necessity must one have recourse to the civil and religious bond in order to unite, if the union of two lovers is only imposed, desired by the reciprocal love that they bear?

And what good is the civil and religious bond, if love does not exist or is missing later? Can marriage restore peace of mind to two beings who no longer love each other and must, by virtue of a prejudice, remain united because they are married?

The most basic common sense replies that the bond of marriage has nothing to do with love, and that only love is the true bond that can unite two beings, and since love does not give rise to it nor make it the legal sanction of the mayor nor the priest's eternal blessing, so it should be logical and natural that for two beings to unite together, when they love each other, the ridiculous antics of marriage are not needed, and the consent of the matchmaker witnesses who preside over the marriage.

The concept of free union should not only be accepted by individuals and anarchist societies, but could and should be the civil result of a modern society, however little emancipated and free from the conventional prejudices that hinder human progress.

Conversely, we see instead with how much difficulty this concept of free union makes its way, and how much resistance it encounters, in the great majority of individuals, whether they are educated or ignorant, and more especially in women.

Above all, women are victims of prejudice rather than of a conviction con-



Another tyrant was dead, although the police arrested Emma Goldman, everyone at 515 Carroll Street, as well as dozens of others, all for allegedly conspiring to kill the president. Giuseppe soon wrote an article praising the assassination in *L'Aurora*, and for this he was promptly arrested. While he was in jail, Ersilia continued to write for, edit, publish and print *L'Aurora*, as unstoppable an anarchist as ever, now just over thirty-seven years old.

One of her comrades would later remember how *at the [post office] more and more money was accumulating from Italy and America - especially through the work of Ciancabilla and Ersilia Cavedagni - generously flowing for us, to support our battle, to encourage our resistance, to comfort our sacrifices*. It was this same unstoppable spirit which allowed Ersilia to weather the storm that followed her lover Giuseppe's release from jail.

In December of 1901, the authorities raided and evicted the home in which they published *L'Aurora*, forcibly suppressing the paper, and Ersilia and Giuseppe soon fled to Chicago. All of their comrades were now out of jail, but the repression only intensified, and sometime in late 1902, Ersilia and Giuseppe moved across the country to San Francisco, where the repression continued, not just from the US government and police, but from the Italian consulate. It's in this time period that US authorities referred to her as *a very dangerous anarchist and of limited formal instruction but much audaciousness*, and to prove them right, she and Giuseppe immediately began printing their latest paper, *La Protesta Humana*, or *The Human Protest*, published from San Francisco, California.

This paper ran through 1903 and into 1904, and all the while Ersilia began spreading her ways through the Latin Quarter of San Francisco, staging open air anarchist *feste* in Washington Square Park and emboldening the women just as she had in Paterson. As she would write, *it is now common opinion accepted among the Italians of San Francisco that the only feste where one can have a good time with the family and also receive teaching as well as a political education, are the anarchist feste*. For this, Ersilia became quickly beloved by the entire San Francisco anarchist community, but unfortunately Giuseppe's health was worsening from years of physical trauma and repression, dimming the brightness of what she brought to the Latin Quarter.

The printing press for *L'Aurora* which they'd abandoned in Spring Valley was soon bought and transported to an anarchist commune in Barre, Vermont where the latest editor of *La Questione Sociale* was now hiding from the police. Luigi Galleani, who replaced Errico Malatesta as main editor of the paper, was now going to publish a new one, *Cronaca Sovversiva*, or the Subversive Chronicle. As Luigi and his comrades began to use Ersilia and Giuseppe's old printing press, tragedy struck.

On September 17, 1904, the great Giuseppe Ciancabilla died at the age of thirty-two, and when a final tri-lingual issue of *La Protesta Humana* was released on October 1, Ersilia didn't sign her name in the long list of comrades who wished to honor Giuseppe, although that's probably because she wrote the full text below the signatures, an article in Italian titled simply "In Memory of Giuseppe Ciancabilla." As is revealed in this article, his nickname was *Cianca*, and perhaps Ersilia called him that when they were together, alone, writing articles for their many anarchist newspapers.

Does The Pope Shit In The Woods?

Once this memorial article was published and printed, Ersilia effectively vanished, at least in the eyes of the authorities. The US state, the Italian state, the private detective agencies, all of them managed to lose track of a *very dangerous anarchist*, a woman who brought rebellion wherever she went. For a variety of reasons, this article will be the first time history records that Ersilia Cavedagni soon became lovers with Leon Morel, an anarchist metal-worker from France, and together they moved north to the anarchist commune of Home, Washington State. Leon Morel was one of the comrades who signed his name to the memorial article for Giuseppe, and in the spirit of *free love*, there is no record of any anarchist raising questions of this union, for any reason.

In truth, there is a record of Ersilia in this time period, although she is identified only as an *Italian woman*. This record is a court transcript from a Red Scare case in 1923, known to lawyers as *Ex parte Morel*, 292 F. 423 (W.D. Wash. 1923). The Morel in question is Leon Morel, husband of Ersilia Cavedagni, and he was fighting deportation when he told the court about

Now, it is an undeniable fact that all hopes of conquest towards the future, more than on the present generation, must rest on the future generation which, rising in an area freer and freer of prejudices, will free herself more without prejudices, she will more easily get rid of the obstacles that hinder her path towards emancipation. But it is precisely the education of this new generation that is entrusted in a large extent to women who, more than men, and everyone knows it, have the power to impress the tender minds of children, and leave indelible traces throughout their lives. Therefore, if mothers are still slaves to the prejudices of religion, of authority, of submission to the laws, etc., their offspring will necessarily raise the cult of such prejudices; and the work of the innovators of the future, of the revolutionaries, will be no less tiring and difficult than it is now.

It is always the woman who, as a fiancée or as a wife, still exerts a great influence on men as youths and as adults. How many forces of young people who are active and enthusiastic about our propaganda have we not seen get lost and destroyed when the contact of a selfish loving being and enemy of progress bound them with the chain of love! And instead, although more rarely, how many feeble and indecisive temperaments have not been strengthened and tempered for the fight by the example of women dear to us who consecrated themselves to the ideal, over love!

Yes--whether you like it or not--it is the woman who occupies a great place and a great influence in the individual and collective life of humanity. As long as we believe we can compress and destroy this influence with tyranny, contempt and oppression, woman, instead of being our intelligent companion and sister, will be our cunning and irreconcilable enemy.

Instead, by returning woman to her true place of being free and equal to us, we will be able to use her sweetened and beneficial influences for the benefit of all, to grow a new generation of conscious workers free from prejudices, and to have ourselves a support and a comfort in the struggle for human emancipation, and not an obstacle and hindrance in all our actions.

Il Gruppo I Nuovi Viventi

Il Gruppo Femminile Luisa Michel

-*L'Aurora*, Saturday, December 22, 1900

generally reign supreme. Using wiles, meditated in a harsh satisfaction of revenge, using coaxing, intrigues, caresses, seductions, and, if necessary, impositions, the woman, *the weaker sex*, instead delights in being in reality the mistress of life, the arbiter of human destinies, the skilled director of human puppets in social life. Those who on Sunday threw out their silly phrases about women, believing them to be witty, because they forget so many other truer and wiser proverbs, the one, for example, which is a little brutal, if you like, but [illegible] absent, how many of you are not in your family the slaves--yes, the slaves--of your companions; and you don't dare challenge their wrath, and you abstain from attending meetings, from participating in party or association movements, and you hurry home, because you are afraid of female fury, because it bothers you in bed if then the woman abruptly turns her back on you! And those same among you who are not married to women and seem stronger and more independent, poor things, how many times would they not fall at the feet of some woman, ready for all her whims, as long as she deigned to give them a benign look!

And this revenge that women take is, ultimately, logical and right. What greater pleasure is there in being vilified and trampled upon than that of being able to impose oneself on those who, by gossip, boast so much of being their masters? Do you want the woman, however, to no longer deal exclusively, as now, with coquetry, gossip, domination over the male, but instead be a reasonable being who shares the truly human task of life with the male? Well, take her away from this state of *apparent* inferiority in which you forcefully keep her, give her rights and a way to express the activity of her spirit for her own good and that of everyone, make her equal to you, socially, and the woman will no longer consider that a man is like a brute beast to be tamed with coaxing and caresses, to be made his own laughing stock, but an equal being with whom we can understand in a fraternal way for civility and common emancipation.

* * *

But we suppose that we are also speaking to a large part of you who intend or, at least, say that you want to fight for your emancipation. We are not even talking about anarchy, but about an indeterminate and vast ideal of progress and emancipation, of which many of you claim to be lovers.

the *Italian woman* he married in San Francisco in 1904. As he described, *we had about 14 or 15 friends on each side one night in the home, and we just made ceremony between us and got married like that.* Later in the court transcript, it's revealed that Ersilia and Leon left San Francisco in 1905, although for whatever reason, the authorities were led to believe they went straight to Seattle, not the anarchist commune of Home, Washington.

When they were married, Ersilia was forty, while Leon was twenty-two, and the next year they moved north to Home. As is recorded in the November 15, 1905 issue of *The Demonstrator*, the commune's local paper, this new couple *bought land across the bay at Home*, meaning it happened sometime that previous week. According to Radium Lavene, one the commune's residents, Morel and Ersilia soon established the Morel Brass Factory, which *was first located at the head of the bay and that later it was moved to property directly across the bay from Home dock.*

The first location was just across the Home bridge, which had been built with collective funds and communal, voluntary labor. As one Home local remembered, *it was here, on the other side of the road from the Kranz family chicken farm and orchard, that Morel built his boxes for casting sand, made his moulds, melted and poured brass fittings.* This same local believed that Morel learned his skills in the *midwest*, meaning either this local didn't remember, or that Morel simply lied, given he learned his trade as a teenage indentured servant at the French foundry which poured all of Rodin's artwork. According to this same local, within a few years, *the Morels moved their operation to a new location between Sandy Point and Rocky Point in Home.*

This is quoted from a text titled *Early Business in Home* which has never been duplicated outside of a small museum near Home, a text which confirms that Ersilia and Leon ran the foundry together, and according to contemporary historians, their first material came from beached ships which were torn apart for their iron, copper, and lead, which was melted apart to make useful tools and objects. In a display case of the Key Peninsula Historical Society, we find a brass key, figurines, type-face for printing, and according to the text in the display, *Morel fabricated his utensils, a stove, steam kettle, door hinges, lamps, and even copper trellises for his climbing roses. Many of his metal creations were ornamented with intricate scroll work.*

It's unclear how long Ersilia and Leon lived in Home, but it appears to have been some years, at least until 1913. During her first months at Home, we find Ersilia republishing her article "Free Union" for the December 23, 1905 issue of *Cronaca Sovversiva*, the newspaper printed on the press once used for her *L'Aurora*, the same paper that first printed "Free Union." In that issue, one could read: *what good is the civil and religious bond, if love does not exist or is missing later? Can marriage restore peace of mind to two beings who no longer love each other and must, by virtue of a prejudice, remain united because they are married?*

She went on, *if we do not know how to take these rights of ours, it is useless to wait for man to accord them to us spontaneously, because, given the bad social organization from which we suffer, he has every interest in keeping us subject to him.* In her conclusion, she told the reader *by all contributing, little by little, to the formation of new social relationships based on morals and sensations, the nucleus of healthy energies and fertilizing elements will be formed within this same corrupt society, which will give life to the new future society, worthy of free and civilized beings, such as we want to become.*

This short article advocating for free unions, a simple relationship outside of the law or church, was printed in Barre, Vermont by a crew of insurrectionary anarchists, among them Luigi Galleani. *L'Aurora* had a limited circulation between 1899 and 1901, and the initial publication of "Free Union" perhaps reached a few hundred people, based on the subscriptions listed in the back columns. With the new *Cronaca Sovversiva*, her old words could now reach thousands, and it wouldn't be the last time her words were published in this subversive newspaper. The next entry is possibly the most clever.

In the January 20, 1906 issue of *Cronaca Sovversiva*, a small item in the backpage columns reads as follows: *Comrade Ersilia Cavedagni begs her companions in correspondence to take note of her new address which is currently at 1343 Sedgley Avenue, Philadelphia, Pa.* By all accounts, Ersilia wasn't living in Philadelphia, although she wanted the authorities to think she was, just as she wanted to be able to read the letters in response to her Free Union article. In the March 10 issue, we find this in the *Little Post* sec-

ignobly, always due to the barbaric prejudice of physical superiority--have been able to put them to good use in the warehouses, in jobs and private companies, in the liberal professions, and finally in all branches of the civil activity of a people.

But those same people who shout so much against women and pretend to despise them are the first to feel up their skirts with admiration as soon as a woman appears to them who has the great virtue...of reasoning and dealing with things it seemed only men had monopolized up until now. People's narrow brains immediately think that those women - propagandists, orators, writers - are **djinn**, beyond all common intelligence; and instead they are unable to understand that those women, generally no more intelligent than the others, have no other merit than that of having left the narrow circle of the domestic hearth, to which society wanted them condemned, and of participating in public life.

By now the experience, we will not say of a secular past, but of the most modern and civilized life has demonstrated to us in the most complete way how women can very well participate in all branches of social life with intelligence, ability, doctrine, and practicality equal--if not, sometimes, superior--to those of man. Therefore, those who denigrate women and would like them to be relegated only to the restricted environment of the family are wrong and are victims of serious prejudice.

But there is more. Is it true, after all, that the woman, this being that *superior* men hold in such little account, limits herself to occupying that *inferior* place in society that most people would like her to be assigned? Well, even if you think about it for a little while, you will have to agree that precisely the opposite is true.

The weak, short-brained, mean being, the being so apparently despised, is in reality the one that most dominates in human life. Like all beings and races held in a state of violent subjection by the strongest and most overbearing, women try to take their revenge indirectly. Because they are considered to be exclusive instruments of love and pleasure, women use love and pleasure to dominate over the sex which is very mistakenly called *strong*. From courts and palaces to humble workers' hovels, women

express their ideas, whatever they were, on an article of the regulation that was being discussed. You would have been right to rise up and protest if a single unseemly or insulting word had passed our companion's lips. But you know that this was not the case, far from it; our companion had only one desire: that of bringing a word of freedom, civility and education for your benefit. Some of you say that the club is not supposed to be a propaganda school, but is just meant to consume good glasses of beer. In that case, you shouldn't have called it the *Prosperity Club*, but the *Brutalization Club*. If this is the case now, the intentions of our comrades who contributed to its foundation were very different: the [illegible] to shouting, to protests, and to those phrases that were intended to appear witty that we reported above, and which were simply stupid.

In fact, what argument can be presented against the statement that women, because they are equal to men, must have the same rights as men in social life? You say that woman is inferior to man. Based on what reason? What shows you that a woman is less intelligent than a man? Nothing. No scientist, no anthropologist has been able to demonstrate that women are inferior to men: facts have always demonstrated that there are women who are intellectually superior to men and women who are inferior. Just as there are men who have brains much shorter than their hair...even when they have cut it.

In any case, if women today occupy a lower place in society, it is because we condemn them, not because they are destined for it by nature. We are the ones who force women to only take care of the kitchen, the laundry, the mending of socks, the sweeping of the house; we are the ones who pretend to be solely capable of associations, social relationships, even higher professions... for the sole and stupid reason that we are men, that is, because we animalistically have some degree of muscular strength to impose ourselves like brutes and dictate the law.

But why do these detractors of women forget to observe our partner, when chance takes her out of the domestic environment and gives her the opportunity to demonstrate intelligence, activity, and common sense? Look at how people a bit more advanced than ours have been able to utilize so many precious qualities that are in women, and--despite exploiting her

tion: *Phila, Pa.--Ersilia Cavedagni--Comrade V. Riolo of Sacramento cannot answer you because you have not sent him your address. Write: V. Riolo, 721 E. St. Sacramento.*

In the August 10, 1907 issue, we find an instance of Ersilia donating from where she lived, the Lake Bay, Washington post office, just down the way from Home. From here, Ersilia sent \$1.00 to the comrades in Barre, Vermont. Later, in the February 15, 1908 issue, we find this in the donation column, sent from Home, Washington: *Ersilia protesting against the slanders*, followed by a \$2.00 donation. It is unclear what these slanders were.

In 1908, the *Cronaca* makes it appear that she is living in Seattle with a small item about money in the November 7 issue. The next year an article featured her name in the May 29, 1909 issue where she signed alongside the entire Seattle group affiliated with the *Cronaca* in donating just over \$15.00. That same issue also featured an advertisement for a pamphlet titled *La Salute e' in Voi!*, or *Health is Within You!*, described as *an indispensable booklet for all those comrades who like to educate themselves. Also on sale in our library at 25c a copy.* This humble, innocuous sounding pamphlet was actually a bomb-making manual, printed with a red card-stock cover and featuring a woodcut of Ravachol, the French anarchist bomber executed by the state.

La Salute e' in Voi! first appeared in the *Biblioteca dei Circolo Studi Sociali* distro column of the February 3, 1906 issue of the *Cronaca*, listed without description, only the title and price. After that, it was semi-regularly listed in both the *Biblioteca* column and the *Pubblicazioni di Propaganda* section alongside titles like *Tolstoismo e Anarchismo* and *Verso il Comunismo*, both 5 cents. Of all the titles, *La Salute e' in Voi!* was the most expensive, nearly half a day's wage, but apparently it contained much of value to the common worker, as it was sold year after year. It is highly likely that Ersilia knew exactly what *La Salute e' in Voi!* was and not only did she approve, she regularly donated to the publishers.

In the September 4, 1909, issue, Ersilia donated \$2.00 dollars from Youngstown, recently annexed into what is now West Seattle. The next year, in the September 17, 1910 issue, she gave a glowing revue of Luigi

Galleani's recent lecture in Seattle, an event where she noted *an unusual confluence of workers; new faces that had never before been seen appearing in similar circumstances. The longing to listen to our companion's word was evident in one and all, they attended the two conferences very satisfied to finally be able to hear the truth ringing loud and clear, that truth barely glimpsed in the sadness and darkness of their own consciences.*

In the September 10, 1910 issue of the *Cronaca*, we find this: ***E. Cavendaggi—Seattle, Wash.***—*We have received your letter with the amount of subscriptions made during the Galleani conferences. We are now waiting for the names of the subscribers to publish them in the administrative report and to send them the newspaper. In the next issue we will also give space to your correspondence. Thanks and fraternal greetings.*

From all of this, it appears that Ersilia might have been living in Seattle, although getting there from Home was easy enough by ferry, especially in 1910, and residents of Home remember *the Morels* being there long enough to build two foundries. By November of 1910, it would seem to any reader of *Cronaca Sovversiva* that Ersilia lived in Seattle, not some remote backwater in the Salish Sea. It's likely that Ersilia commuted much like her friend Anna Falkoff, the anarchist school teacher of Home who helped found the Seattle Modern School in 1910, and it's more than possible that Ersilia and Anna traveled together by ferry across the Salish Sea.

Anna and Ersilia both lived on the south-eastern shore of Von Geldern Cove, below what is now Hoff Road. They lived about a ten minutes walk apart, and everyone on that bank of the cove utilized the same road to the communal bridge. While the founders and early residents of Home lived on the north-western bank along what is now A Street, the new residents like Ersilia and Anna inhabited the wild shoreline that faced the sunset, a place where the commune's most subversive residents hid from the spotlight. Far away from the communal pier that served the ferry, this cluster of houses took some effort to get to, and it was just below Anna Falkoff's house that Ersilia and Leon built their second foundry at Home, utilizing their skills to fabricate parts for printing presses, pile drivers, agricultural equipment, pulleys, and everything else a rural anarchist commune might need.

chorus of protests against our comrade's proposal, and one of these people, with an equivocal and creeping phrase, admitted that our comrade was right, but...it wasn't appropriate, because it offended the sentiment of the masses, and therefore if the women wanted, they should have created a *club* on their own. If necessary, he and other orchestra directors would have put themselves at the head of this new female institution. As you can see, a proposal from a truly self-styled anarchist, who, depending on how the wind blows, instead of propagandizing and attracting the masses for themselves, adapts with convenient opportunism to the level of ignorance and brutalization of the unconscious masses.

Seeing this, our comrade, curious to count the true anarchists present, and to get to know the self-styled anarchists once and for all, insists that at least his proposal be put to the vote. It is the right of every member, in any assembly in the world, who proposes a motion, to have it put to the vote, whether it is approved or not, it matters little. But here new wild shouts rise from the tumultuous assembly. The president, also opposed to our comrade's proposal, instead of putting the motion presented to the vote, as was his duty, showed himself to be absolutely incompetent and partisan, and after also joining the chorus of shouts, took his hat and left, immediately dissolving the assembly.

From there a new explosion of shouts, protests and threats, and even someone spoke of lynching our comrade and his friends, accused of being disturbers of public peace, just for having spoken in favor of women's emancipation. We don't know what consequences the matter will have. We wait with serenity, because we are convinced that we have done nothing more than our duty. For every good purpose, we have made a will, and every day we raise a fervent prayer to the good god to save us from the anti-feminist fury of certain members of the Prosperity Club.

* * *

Let's leave the jokes aside and talk a little seriously, friend of the workers.

We do not want to insist too much on the inconvenience, unworthy of kind workers, of not even wanting to listen to those who had every right to

The Question Of The Woman

Last Sunday, in the members' meeting of the *Prosperity Club* of Spring Valley there was, among other things, a discussion on an internal regulation scheme presented by a committee elected for this purpose by the previous meeting.

Without dwelling for now on the ineffectiveness that many articles of this regulation had, because they were authoritarian and imposing, rather than persuasive, we will examine only one article here, [illegible] called *club*, upon application (request) and paying the admission fee of 50 cents." As can be seen, the way this article is conceived leaves a misunderstanding regarding establishing the sex of those who can be members, because *anyone* can refer to both a man and a woman. But it was known that, both in the minds of the committee drafting this article and in the thoughts of the majority of the members, anyone admitted means anyone who is a man. Women, according to these people, must be excluded...because they are women.

It was then that one of our comrades (despite knowing in advance that he would not succeed in his aim) but with the intention of doing a little propaganda, as is the duty of those who feel anarchist, took the opportunity to present a modification to said article, thus: "Anyone, man or woman, can become a member, etc." And he explained the reasons why, from the point of view of workers' emancipation, it is necessary, indeed urgent, to worry, first of all, about the emancipation of women.

Our companion had not spoken for five minutes before a tumult of wild beasts arose from all parts of the assembly. Screams, uproar, invectives, protests, etc. And in the midst of the chorus of shouters one could distinguish the charming jokes of certain--what should we call them?--who shouted: -- "What? Women must be relegated to South America...Women are worse than dogs, because 'they are bitches...Women have long hair and short brains..." And so on with these graceful apostrophes which indicated all the kindness of sentiment and education in these gentlemen.

The super-great thing was that even some self-styled anarchists joined the

It was amid all of this that a tremendous explosion destroyed the *Los Angeles Times* building on October 1, 1910, killing multiple employees and instantly triggering a wave of repression. One of the anarchists involved in this attack, David Caplan, had supplied the dynamite from San Francisco and was quickly sent north to Home to hide out. Home was much too hot, so Ersilia and Leon used their real names to help Caplan purchase five acres of farmland further north on Bainbridge Island, with the transaction recorded on January 10, 1911. In total, Ersilia, Leon, and Caplan paid \$1,200 for these five acres.

Ersilia appears to have resumed her normal activities after this, entrusting the safety of Caplan to her friend Frankie Moore, who seems to have either pretended to be or to really have been Caplan's lover in this time period. One thing that is certain is Flora Caplan's abortion of David's child, something which occurred while David was in hiding and Flora was in San Francisco. Meanwhile, on February 25, 1911, in the donations column of *Cronaca Sovversiva*, we find a fifty cent donation from one P. Elena, given with salutations to Galleani and Ersilia Cavedagni. If it's not clear by now, Ersilia was viewed as an equal to Luigi Galleani back then, a towering figure in the world of insurrectionary anarchism, and her circle of women from Home were powerful beyond belief.

When the Seattle Modern School run by Anna Falkoff needed funds, Ersilia and Leon cast busts of Francisco Ferrer and Eugene V. Debs to be sold at benefits and through Home's new *Agitator* newspaper. When the *Cronaca* needed funds to potentially leave Barre, Vermont (due to mafioso threats), Ersilia and Leon donated five bronzes to be raffled off. All of these pieces were being fabricated at Home amid the repression following the *Los Angeles Times* bombing, adding more validity to the assertion that Ersilia and Leon were often at Home rather than in Seattle with the rest of the *Cronaca* group.

The funny games continued regarding Ersilia's whereabouts, with the August 5, 1911 donations column of *Cronaca* claiming she was in the remote town of Cle Elum, just over the Cascade Mountains. Maybe she was really there, giving a lecture, but who can say? All that's clear is that her next ma-

her appearance in the *Cronaca* is on March, 26, 1912 when she intervened in a conflict that was ripping apart the Italian anarchist network, one that revolved around the questions of whether the Mexican Revolution had any anarchist character and if anarchists across the globe should join in the battle.

The Mexican Storm

Unfortunately, in the August 19, 1911 issue of *Cronaca*, an article ran on the front page titled “The Mexican Storm,” written by Luigi Galleani himself. For two whole pages, he explains why the Mexican Revolution has no revolutionary character, and in the middle of all this, he dropped an insanely racist reason to back up his argument: *if for a population that reaches in all probability fourteen million, seven million are pure Indians, four mestizos, two Creoles, half a million Negroes, Zambos, mulattoes, it is clear that for Mexico there is no possibility of a movement with an openly social revolutionary character, if the most lively, most numerous and most diligent of the population are not interested.* While he does call these ethnic groups *the most lively, most numerous and most diligent*, his logic is undeniably racist and false, given the indigenous helped initiate the revolution and were the primary actors in the war against Diaz.

The discourse only grew worse after that, although that was the most racist it became. Some anarchists, like the *L’Era Nuova* group in Paterson, wanted people to go fight in Mexico with Generals Madero, Villa, or Zapata, but others, like the editorial staff of *Cronaca*, questioned whether any of those men were actually anarchists and discouraged people from joining their armies, given many Italian anarchists had already done so. After many months of this back and forth, the *Cronaca* ran an article in the January 13, 1912 issue titled “The ‘comrade’ Emiliano Zapata,” in which they also printed the full *Plan de Ayala*, or the *Plan de Mapaztlan* [sic], the political program of Zapata’s army in which he breaks from Madero, makes clear his intention to hold elections, and reveals a liberal democratic platform nearly identical to the 1906 constitution of the *Partido Liberal Mexicano*, the anarchist front group started by the Magon brothers.

Publishing this *Plan* was a way of showing *L’Era Nuova* and the other an-



therefore, to excite hatred against every law in the child, and make them understand that law is synonymous with violence, because the law is always imposed by force; 5. that, having been named, the son must refuse to wear the ignoble soldier's uniform, since the army, with the pretext of defending the homeland (another prejudice) in reality serves only to defend the rich against the poor who they starve.

[Illegible] of rights, and therefore, in addition to being rebels against today's entire social system, they must be rebels especially against the oppression of men, who want to hold women at a lower moral and material level than men.

The new generation will thus be educated to rebel and to claim human rights, which are trampled on today. Our propaganda work will therefore find the right terrain, and will no longer clash in vain against the gigantic and sometimes invincible wall of those hateful prejudices which make the great majority of beings voluntary slaves of their masters, priests, and rulers.

It is only in this way that the mother's mission will be able to bear the fruit of true freedom and emancipation.

Ersilia

-*L'Aurora*, October 13, 1900



archists that, regardless of how they might feel about Zapata, his Plan was not anarchist in nature, on paper, but this only made the conflict worse. Two weeks later, Ersilia felt the need to intervene, and in a letter written from Seattle, she explained, *some comrades write to me deploring the Mexican controversies that threaten to absorb most of our newspapers and drown them, and they would especially like that the Cronaca ceases to deal with the matter especially since after the full publication of Zapata's appeal there's nothing more to add even if the cronies of the EN pretend to ignore this document that un-masks and reveals their lie.*

For whatever reason, Ersilia took the side of Galleani, claiming he was goaded into writing his racist, erroneous bullshit, that he had preferred to remain silent until *L'Era Nuova* demanded his opinion, and when his opinion was bullshit, it was met with even more bullshit. This conflict makes no one look good, not even Ersilia, who at least had the decency to say nothing about a revolution she didn't understand, although she did call *L'Era Nuova* a bunch of *lazzaroni*, a gang of *comorra*, a pack of *maramaldi*, and basically just inflamed the situation. Despite her cussing, everyone seems to have listened to her advice of shutting the fuck up.

This conflict reveals much about the speed of information in 1912, given that the *Plan de Ayala* of Emiliano Zapata was finally obtained by the *Cronaca* over a month after it was published in Mexico. Beyond this, while Ersilia wrote her response on January 26, it wasn't published in the *Cronaca* until March 9, when it appeared on the back page. In the weeks that followed, references to Mexico turned into a trickle, and eventually the *Between Books, Magazines, and Newspapers* section featured an ad for the latest issue of *Mother Earth*, the newspaper run by Emma Goldman, and not only was Goldman a known supporter of the Mexican Revolution, this latest issue ran an article championing it.

What's even more baffling is that much of the *Cronaca* staff would eventually flee to Mexico in 1917, among them Umberto Postiglione (or *Hobo*), Emilio Coda, Umberto Colarossi, Carlo Valdinoci (or *Carluccio*), Mario Buda, Nicola Sacco, and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. By the time they all crossed over to Mexico and hid out in Monterrey, the conflict among the Italians was over, at least in regards to Mexico, and *L'Era Nuova* and the *Cronaca*

soon healed their differences.

Northern Exposure

As far as the pages of the *Cronaca* are concerned, Ersilia was in Seattle writing a call for May 1, 1912 in support of the paper. As she put it, *we are now reduced to a single newspaper that is truly anarchist and truly revolutionary, and we leave it to languish as if all the libertarians of the United States had neither nerves, nor gratitude, nor will.* This means that Ersilia wasn't overly fond of *The Agitator*, Home's local newspaper, which had been drifting into anarcho-syndicalism.

Ersilia called for people to have anarchist festas, meetings, and fundraisers in support of the *Cronaca*, and in response a flood of letters arrived in Barre, Vermont, bearing funds and letters to Ersilia, written from places like Chelsea, Massachusetts to the Potosi Mine, Nevada. At a raffle in New York, an anarchist group raised \$21.60, while one respondent sent \$5.00.

Her initial call for all this fundraising was signed from Seattle and dated April 17, 1912. Behind the scenes, later that June, David Caplan sold his share of the land he was hiding on back to Leon and Ersilia, for whatever reason. After that, the next big news from Ersilia came from the *Cronaca* donation column, where it appears she donated \$1.00 on January 4, 1913 from the port town of Vancouver, BC. Unlike all of the other entries in this column, her appearance in Canada seems to have been real.

In the above mentioned 1923 court case *Ex parte Morel*, we find the following narration from the authorities: *[Leon and Ersilia] came to Seattle, where they lived together as husband and wife until 1913, when they went to Vancouver, B.C., where Morel was engaged to do some work in his line of business, and there lived as husband and wife. At the conclusion of the work, after some 13 months, they returned to Seattle in February, 1914; Morel preceding the woman a few days. He left funds with her to provide for her transportation, and on entering at the port of Blaine she represented herself as the wife of the petitioner, and they lived together as husband and wife in Seattle until they separated.*

This simple border crossing would have many grave repercussions, mostly

image, it is the mother who has the greatest responsibility for the education of her children, because it is she who first and more than any other person (except in exceptional cases) has affectionate contact and exerts influence on the heart and mind of the child.

Now, it happens, ordinarily, most of the time, if not always, that the mother instills in the tender minds of her children the prejudice of servility, of religion, of submission to corrupt customs, of obedience to the laws, to everything that is authority, and to the fatality, finally, of resigning ourselves to the miserable fate to which destiny damns us.

The mother makes the child believe that God exists: therefore it is God who wishes everything and against his supreme will there is no use in human rebellion. The mother educates the child to respect people who exercise authority: therefore the child's brain is convinced that without laws and orders one cannot live. The mother teaches the child obedience and submission to the master, because those who are rich have the privilege of commanding and imposing: and she teaches him that he must go as a soldier to serve the king, the country, the institutions, the government and -- above all -- to shoot the people when they rise up.

Now, if mothers want to finally see the day dawn in which their children finally ensure the right to life and well-being, they must convince themselves that they must undertake an educational labor that is completely the opposite of what they are doing now.

And that is to make the child understand: 1. that all people are born equal and therefore have equal rights; 2. that the existence of a god who regulates the universe is absurd, useless, criminal, because religious belief serves precisely the masters, the rulers, the priests to obtain paradise on earth for themselves, leaving their neighbors to work in the hell of total suffering; 3. that the boss, necessary today for the poor to live, will not be necessary tomorrow, when workers want to work and produce for themselves and not for others, when it will be understood that labor is necessary for capital and not capital for labor; therefore, inspire constant rebellion against the masters and against all exploitation; 4. that laws are made by rulers to defend today's system of oppression, that is, to defend capitalists and exploiters:

The Maternal Mission

The mother's concern for the future of her children begins, we can say, before they see the light, when, feeling the stirring in her womb...[illegible]... less squalid.

If her child is a girl, she imagines and hopes that, when she's reached the critical age of youth, she will find a good match, which will make her life less unpleasant, and save her from boredom or, at the very least, from becoming anemic in the workshop or warehouse. If it is a boy, the mother hopes that, despite the difficult struggle of work and competition, her son will find a way to open a path to distinguish himself, to rise to a more comfortable and secure position, so as to also benefit his relatives.

Generally the opposite happens. As the brutal realities of life grip her creature, dreamed illusions fade. And the children instead grow up malnourished, poorly dressed, brutalized by forced ignorance and premature subservience under bestial masters. The son, who the mother hoped could one day rise to that coveted goal of respect and consideration which forms the first step of the privileged class, is instead forced to remain ever lower, immersed in the vileness of his condition in which, a man equal to other men, he is made into a beggar, an outcast, the proletarian of society.

And the mother who has wasted her entire life raising her offspring amidst hardship and nameless pain, the mother who has cherished the sweetest and most flattering hopes for her children, instead sees all her hopes fading one by one, all of them illusions, and now a tired, exhausted, desperate, truly sorrowful mother in the Calvary of life, she finally goes away cursing her destiny, truly the rest of nothingness.

However, the greatest blame for this unfair and unjust situation lies with the mothers themselves, and they, more than anyone else, must curse themselves if things go this way.

It is the mother who instills the first ideas, the first feelings, the first impressions in the tender mind of the child, which, despite everything, remain for their whole life. It is the mother who shapes, molds the child's soul in her

for Leon Morel, but that will come a bit later. For now, it appears that Ersilia was really in Vancouver, routinely donating to the *Cronaca*, as well as writing for it. One reason that Ersilia was actually in Vancouver is a photo of her and Leon's house in Home, dated from 1913, in which it is identified as the house of the anarchist Gaston Lance and his family, who purchased the property from *the Morels*. Given all the facts, it seems that Ersilia and Leon left home in 1913, eight years after they first arrived. Ersilia was forty-nine, Leon was thirty-one, and life was doing anything but slowing down.

During her time in Vancouver, Ersilia got busy raising funds. In the winter of 1913 she staged *Wallet* by Octave Mirbeau and *Rebellion* by Nellie Rousselle, both performances followed by a *festa*, and as she advertised in the *Cronaca*, once the drama was over, *it will be the turn of the layabouts and they will be able to joke and laugh and dance, above all dance until daybreak, and all those who have good hocks will rest assuredly tomorrow.*

In the April 26, 1913 issue of *Cronaca*, we find she helped raise \$58.50 at one of these *feste*. \$10 went to *Cronaca*, while *Les Temps Nouveaux* in France got \$5. The rest was distributed to other Italian anarchist papers like *Rivolta* and *Libertario*, with another \$10 going to the defense of the fourteen IWW prisoners arrested during the Little Falls Textile Strike of 1912. The remaining balance of \$28.50 went to the fund for Luigi Galleani's next lecture tour.

In that same issue, Ersilia wrote to the anarchists in the coal mines of Vancouver, telling them that if they want to distribute Maria Roda's pamphlet *The Anarchists And What They Want* among the striking miners, all they have to do is send her *a letter with enclosed postage to be sent a package of pamphlets corresponding to the need.* She even provided an address to write her, possibly where she lived: 1217 Venables Street, Vancouver, BC, right in the seedy post-Victorian East Side built along the waterfront.

After this, there is a request in the December 27, 1913 issue, taken on her behalf, for issues of *Volontà*, for which she paid \$6 *via international postal money order N. 58172*. The anarchist newspaper *Volontà* was published in Acona, Italy by none other than Errico Malatesta, who had snuck back into

Kingdom and was now planning an uprising in that port city, one which would soon be known as the *Settimana Rossa*, or the Red Week.

In the next issue, published on January 3, 1914, Ersilia published an account of a different uprising, one that happened months earlier. It's unclear how much her group participated in the uprising, but on August 12, 1913, armed riots broke out in the Vancouver Island coal-mining towns of Nanaimo, Extension, Ladysmith, and South Wellington.

In response, the state sent in the militia, who arrested many strikers, and as Ersilia described, *against the arrest of one hundred and eighty miners who were later sentenced by the complicit judiciary to the maximum sentence, we organized a grandiose protest meeting which was attended by over four thousand people. We then had five hundred billboards printed to be displayed in the windows of the main shops of the city, with this simple wording, **this store is for the immediate release of the Nanaimo strikers**, thus provoking a large current of public sympathy in favor of the strikers and simultaneously collecting a good stack of money for the agitation, having exacted a dollar from each store for the issued poster.*

She later explained how her group was *grateful to the entire Italian working-class colony for the outcome, which has a large and lively sympathy for us. And we do everything in our power to make it wider, more unanimous, starting a series of performances of social dramas for the coming winter.* In the same article, she broke down their latest *fiesta* proceeds, with money split between *Mother Earth*, *Cronaca Sovversiva*, *Les Temps Nouveaux*, and other papers like *Volontà*. She concludes with the following words: *and in the hope of soon giving you news of success, I greet you fraternally.*

Within two months, the comrades in Vancouver wrote to the *Cronaca* in Vermont, printing a short item in the back which asked Ersilia if she wanted a newspaper which was mailed to her Venables address, and where she could be contacted. In other words, her comrades in Vancouver didn't know where she was. For the rest of 1914, Ersilia was absent from the pages of the *Cronaca*. The only mention of her name was in the donations column, where she saluted Luigi Galleni along with fifty cents. According to this entry, she was back in Seattle.

To My Comrades

At this moment, in which all the basest insinuations, slanders, and vilest lies are hurled against my companion of faith and affection by Malatesta and his cronies, I whose testimony as a companion cannot be suspect, I for whom no comrade could ever or can ever criticize my work as an anarchist, I who have lived an intimate life with Ciancabilla since before he joined the anarchist ranks, I who have shared all his actions as an anarchist and revolutionary, I who know all the life and spirit of self-sacrifice that has always determined all his actions, I who know how much he is a lover of the Idea and how he has sacrificed everything to the Idea, I feel the duty to declare that Ciancabilla has nothing to reproach himself for, nor as an anarchist, nor as a revolutionary, and that all those who accuse him are cowards in bad faith, driven by interest and envious anger.

Never have I felt, as in this sad moment in which my companion is cowardly struck and excommunicated, so much solidarity with him

Ersilia Cavedagni

-*L'Aurora*, January 6, 1900



Put It Down For The West Side

At the beginning of 1915, in the January 23 issue, we find a description of one of Ersilia's *feste* in Seattle where a drama was acted out by amateurs, who staged an anarchist play called *Reduce di Tripoli*, mocking the Kingdom's invasion of Libya. Copies of this play were advertised in the *Cronaca* in the *Between Books, Magazines, and Newspapers* column, a recurring section which featured the etching of a woman who may or may not be Ersilia, the organizer of this dramatic production.



As the *Cronaca* writer explained, her production was a magnificent Sunday evening. And it could not have been otherwise, if one thinks that the soul of the party was comrade Ersilia, who never fails in enthusiastic fervor when there is way to make propaganda without saving effort and time. After this, there isn't any mention of Ersilia in the *Cronaca* for a year until she made a dollar donation from San Francisco, no longer in Vancouver, apparently.

A month later, still from Frisco, she used the back columns to apologize to some comrades for not writing, but they didn't enclose their addresses. One explanation for this gap was the sudden arrest of David Caplan on February 18, 1915, nabbed on the same Bainbridge Island farm that Ersilia had helped him buy. While she was mostly absent from the *Cronaca* from 1915-1917, there is one reference to her whereabouts in *Tomorrow is Beautiful*, the autobiography of the anarchist Lucy Robins Lang, who also lived at Home.

Sometime in 1915, after the arrest of David Caplan, Lucy and her partner Bob moved into a two-story house on Collingwood Street in San Francisco, located in the Eureka Valley. It became a center for visiting radicals, and one day a kid from Home name Donald Vose came knocking on the door. He wanted a place to crash for a few days, so being the son of the anarchist Gertie Vose, he was let inside and given shelter. It was here, on Collingwood Street, that Lucy rifled through Donald's bag when he was out, and it was Lucy who first outed this snitch to the wider anarchist network. Lucy even went along with a kidnapping plan, hoping to keep Donald tied up and hidden until his handlers at the Burns Detective Agency admitted

their lies. However, this kidnapping plot was abandoned at the insistence of the prisoners, and Lucy had to physically restrain Alexander Berkman from shooting the little snitch.

Once he was officially outed, Lucy moved out of the Eureka Valley, and as she explained, *we couldn't bear to stay in a house that had been polluted by the presence of Donald Vose, and we moved in with four Italian Anarchists who had a home on Telegraph Hill.* As she went on to describe, there were three men, Victor, Nick, Bambino, and a woman identified only as Cilia, *the fourth member of the quartet who the male comrades behaved in the most chivalrous way toward.* As Lucy describes, *all of them wrote pamphlets in Italian commenting on current events from the Anarchist point of view, and paid for their publication out of their meager earnings.* The person identified as *Bambino* is very likely Michele Bombino, member of the *Volontà* group and the IWW, as well as being a contributor to *Cronaca* in the donations columns, often giving \$1.00.

For whatever reason, the last time *La Salute e' in Voi!* was listed for sale in the *Cronaca* was in the May 20, 1916 issue, listed in the distro with just a title and a price, still just 25 cents. In this same issue, we find a strange letter written by the anarchist Adolfo Antonelli from San Francisco: *Nothing else is needed: I did better. I searched and found. We will talk during the week and I hope that the good way to the honest and desired solution will be found.* Antonelli was an individualist anarchist stonemason who once published a newspaper called *Nihil*, just as he was one of the anarchists who joined the PLM and IWW in their invasion of Tijuana in 1910. He was on one side of the debate on the Mexican revolution, and it's unclear who he's writing to with his semi-sweaty appeal in the *Cronaca*.

Over a year later, in 1917, Ersilia donated two dollars from Frisco, then again, but in the May 26 issue, Ersilia wrote the following to a guy named Rocco from Chicago: *want your contact details. Are you dead or alive? Greetings.* It's possible this is Rocco Montesano, an anarchist who corresponded about her article "*La Donna*" in *L'Aurora* back in 1899. Hoping to contact him, she provided her address in Frisco: 258 Eureka Street, in the Eureka Valley below Twin Peaks. It's unclear if she moved there from Telegraph Hill, or if it was simply a mailing address, and while the Italian fascist au-

the common table, in the long hours of yawning vigils between boredom and annoyance, this would prove much more consistent with their ideals than by trying to evangelize only to others...who are not of their family.

It's just swell that many comrades expect their women to become anarchists just because they live together and have contact with other anarchists, without the need for propaganda, explanations, or persuasion. This seems ridiculous: but who can honestly deny that it doesn't happen very often?

I would like comrades who live with a woman to reflect a little on this wrong and this injustice of which they are most often guilty towards their partners.

Before spreading propaganda to strangers, do it at home, comrades. And then you will see that the woman, instead of forbidding you to go to conferences, to meetings, and finally to participate in the anarchist movement, will herself be sorry when, due to domestic duties, she too will not be able to participate actively.

Educate and convince your women first of all, o comrades, because it is they who can educate and raise a new generation free of prejudices, superstitions, and errors, the new generation that, more than this old one, corrupted by the evil influence of the past, will be suitable to form the propitious and fertile soil from which the beautiful society of the future will flourish.

And then the woman, as soon as a glimmer of conscience clears her mind, can reflect and persuade herself that her true emancipation can only be her own work. As long as she waits with supine resignation for man to emancipate her and make her free, she will always remain submissive to him.

To raise your forehead, don't wait for anyone to tell you: rise up and be free. And let her rise up resolved to no longer be a slave.

Ersilia

-*L'Aurora*, October 28, 1899

This is one of the most serious faults of many of our comrades, in my opinion. Those among our comrades who, living together with a woman, act like this - and they are the majority, unfortunately! I have to admit - it seems to me that they do not fully realize the social mission that women carry out in today's society, and are destined to carry out more in the society of the future.

The woman is and will always be the educator of the family, the one who has and will always have the most direct and most important influence on her children, the one who will communicate to them the first impressions, the first suggestions, the first criteria of social life, the one who, finally, above all, will be able to decide on the entire formation of a new society, if she is able to instill feelings and ideas of progress, freedom, and emancipation in the tender and virgin minds and hearts of children.

I am not talking about the cases in which the woman, not convinced, but rather a natural opponent of anarchist propaganda due to their lack of consciousness, tries to prevent her husband or partner from dedicating themselves to it. Many times we hear the complaints of these comrades who feel sorry for themselves because they have the misfortune of having a tyrannical companion who opposes their free action, who prevents them, for the sake of a quiet life, from giving themselves to the cause with that enthusiasm that burns in their spirit. But if this happens, whose fault is it, dear comrades, if not mainly yourselves? Whose fault is it if not you who are willing to carry out propaganda for anyone, so long as it's not your partner? Whose fault is it, if not you, who are unable to respond to your partner's recriminations, objections, tears, or anger with anything other than the unconvincing compliments of being stupid, ignorant, and... so on, and don't try in the least to use towards her calm and sweet words of persuasion and reasoning? Why say that it would all be a waste of breath? Why don't you even try?

If instead of getting lost in useless complaints and disputes, which embitter tempers and cause bad blood, our comrades who aren't fortunate enough to live with a woman who professes the same principles as them, began to make their first propaganda in the family, at the family table, or perhaps on

thorities believed she lived at this address up until the 1930s, all that's truly known is that Ersilia lived in San Francisco after leaving Seattle.

The only explanation of why Ersilia left Seattle lies in the previously mentioned *Ex parte Morel*, where the authorities narrate Ersilia and Leon's lives in the spring of 1914: *a business venture in which Morel had engaged proved unprofitable, and his judgment was criticized by the woman. At about this time the parties learned through some newspaper report that their marriage was not in accordance with the laws of California, where they had lived, nor of the state of Washington. Morel offered to marry the woman, but she declined, and they separated; he paying and delivering to her all of the funds and property which had been left after the business venture. They have not lived together since.*

So it was that at the age of fifty, Ersilia left her lover Leon Morel, then thirty-two. Leon went on to start his own foundry in Seattle, and his work still stands across the city. When the authorities were trying to deport him, Leon was accused of smuggling Ersilia into the US from Canada for *immoral purposes*, given they were never legally married. He didn't identify Ersilia by name in his deportation case, which he beat, and his descendants still run Morel Industries.

The mysterious *Italian woman* of the deportation case moved to San Francisco in 1915, and she was in the city when the Preparedness Day Bombing occurred on July 22, 1916, planned by the same Italian anarchists of the *Volontà* Group who Ersilia knew quite well, like her friend Michele Bombino. The bombing against a parade of soldiers killed 10 people, wounded dozens more, and triggered a wave of repression against the local radical movement, with four militants jailed and threatened with death sentences despite not being involved.

IWW halls in the Bay Area started to get raided in 1917, just as Ersilia's friends started to be arrested and threatened with deportation, and the *Cronaca* was eventually banned by the US Postal Service, although Luigi kept printing and distributing the paper until 1920

In the September 8, 1917 issue of *Cronaca*, we find Ersilia donating fifty

cents from Inglewood, California. She appears to be back in Frisco a few weeks later, donating \$2.00 from there, and perhaps she went to Inglewood to raise funds, as the donations from that city show. Her name doesn't appear in *Cronaca Sovversiva* after 1917, likely due to the mounting repression that would consume the US anarchist network for the next years.

From all the available evidence, it seems Ersilia lived the rest of her life in San Francisco, remaining active in the movement through the 1920s, the 1930s, and into the 1940s, when the Italian fascist authorities were still looking for this *acerrima nemica dell'ordine*, or **bitter enemy of order**. The last document concerning Ersilia is from 1941, when she was 77 years old. While the date and place of her death remain a mystery, what's clear is she remained a committed anarchist for her entire life, something all of us should aspire to. May the story of Ersilia Cavedagni give you strength, and while her deeds are many and great, she was still just a person like any of us.

There is no known picture of Ersilia Cavedagni, but we would like to think this is her, on the cover of this pamphlet, printed in *Cronaca Sovversiva* for the recurring column *Between Books, Magazines, and Newspapers*.

Long Live Anarchy!

Long Live Ersilia Cavedagni!

Long Live The Black International!



The Woman

Generally men, rightly or wrongly, claim to have an intellectual and moral superiority over women, in addition to physical superiority. So be it! I want to grant it.

Strangely enough, in the vast majority of cases the man who considers himself superior to the woman takes little or no effort to reduce her inferiority and to raise the woman to his level.

This happens more especially among men who have a wife or partner. It would be logical that, if only out of a feeling of pride, the husband or partner should strive to improve, develop, and perfect the intellectual conditions of the woman with whom they share their existence. And instead the opposite occurs. If a man is sometimes interested in educating a woman, it is in completely different conditions than when the woman is his companion in life.

This also happens many times (not to say most of the time) among anarchists themselves who should also give an example of better civil and human relations even in today's social life, which should be their preparation for the society of the future, longed for by them. And I talk about it precisely so that our companions might reflect on this fact and note the many injustices that they also commit towards their companions, no less than the others, and indeed with greater guilt than the others, because they are more conscious.

Frankly, isn't it true that anarchists who care about educating and, above all, forming an anarchist conscience in the woman who is their wife or companion are very rare? Instead, how many times, even when the woman has the desire, and, if nothing else, the curiosity to educate herself, to learn, to penetrate the reason of the doctrine and the movement of anarchism, how many times do gentlemen comrades respond with an annoyed expression, with a grimace of carelessness and almost disdain because they consider themselves superior beings, *quasi* worthy of only taking care of certain things, while women have only to take care of the kitchen and other household chores!

And never as in those sad days of crossing the ocean, did I understand how great is the guilt, and how much greater the expiation of an infamous society which, against every natural and human law, has created, on an evil whim, the crime of being a foreigner.

-*La Questione Sociale*, December, 31 1898



Ai caduti della Comune

*Gettate fiori, o Amici, sulle fosse dei caduti nel
Maggio del 1871!*

*Gettate fiori rossi e fiori neri: fiori d'amore e fiori
di morte.*

*Fiori d'amore, che dicono l'affetto ineffabile, cui
d'avea il cuore dei caduti; fiori di morte, sempre vivi,
che perpetuano il sacrificio loro cresuto.*

*Gettate fiori, o Amici; e ricordate che a questo
morte — a questo eroico morte sopra tutto — dobbiamo
il sorgere di parte nostra in Italia; e che così si "socia-
rono la loro gran"opera da compiere.*

Non lo dimenticate! di cadono voi tutti... 1)

Gettate fiori, o Amici, sulle tombe dei caduti!

Gettate fiori rossi e fiori neri!

ANDREA COSTA.

1) Andrea Costa è infatti caduto: ma lontano dal Piero-La-
cchia e dal Ruffini di de Salsola, e non per la Comune: è ca-
duto in guerra contro il potere di Stato che aveva dis-
tinto nell'anni anteriori, per nome del quale vivea e della
malaghetta.



The Selected Writings Of Ersilia Cavedagni



Foreigner

I have crossed the ocean; and moving away from the land where beings are separated by the foolish divisions of frontiers, of states, of rivalries, of traditions, of hatred, I had for an instant the illusion that there, in the middle of the sea, on that ship lost in the immensity of the ocean, among the few beings, nearly all gathered there by a common destiny, those accursed vibrations of that nefarious sentiment called patriotism had ceased. My poor illusion! And I soon experienced it to my detriment.

When the need for rapprochement made it known to those emigrant men and women, mostly Scandinavian, Irish, English, that I was a foreigner, and my language was different from theirs, and my dress too, and finally, when they learned I was a daughter of the wretched land of Italy, I painfully saw a great circle of distrust and isolation widen around me. Nor was it enough. Some creatures, in their poor ignorance which made me pity them, sometimes added, during the sad days of the journey, the malice of mockery and derision. My heart ached aroused in my soul from the pain that the disposition those beings had towards me, more for them than myself. And surges of rage and indignation assailed me, not against those reckless people, but against the society that makes them such.

And I thought: How wicked is a society which arouses in the minds of its children this stupid aversion to other beings similar to them, who have no other fault than not speaking their language, of being born under another heaven, where chance placed their relatives, and to have different habits.

And these unfortunates, in whose small brain the idea of being uber-religious to the fatherland cult will perhaps seem generous, who despise all beings who are children of another soil, these unfortunates are condemned to carry, wandering through the world, the poison of this hatred that tradition and education bestially accumulate in their hearts; and who knows how many times they will arouse the conflict of these hatreds in other beings, and they will be victims of their baleful patriotic illusion. Ah, cursed this petty concept of homeland, which lines up beings, by nature destined to be *comrades*, one in front of the other, stupidly, uselessly, ferociously.

