

# Obituary: Pier Carlo Masini

Anarchist Communist Federation

1999

The noted historian Pier Carlo Masini has died at the age of 75 in Florence.

Born at Cerbaia in the province of Florence, in 1923, Masini's youth was spent in the antifascist student circles which sprang up in Florence at the end of the 30s. He joined the liberal-socialist movement of Tristano Codignola, and was a driving force in its youth group around the magazine *Argomenti*.

He was arrested for "conspiratorial" activity on 21 June 1942 and condemned to 3 years confinement at Guardia Sanframondi in the Matese mountains in southern Italy. Released on 19<sup>th</sup> May 1943 he returned to Tuscany and there grew close to the Communist Party.

During the last phase of the war and the immediate post-liberation period, Masini moved towards the Anarchist movement, with what he saw as the compromises of Togliatti, the Communist Party leader. Under the influence of the anarchist veterans Alfonso Failla, Umberto Marzocchi (who had fought with the Anarchist militias during the Spanish Civil War) and Mario Mantovani, Pier Carlo became enthused with the ideals of anarchism from August 1945.

Two of the first Anarchist papers to appear in Tuscany in the months following the Liberation were edited by Masini- *Passione Rivoluzionaria*, organ of the Tuscan Anarchist Youth, and *Alba dei Liberi* (Dawn of the Free).

Masini's relationship with the Anarchist movement was not easy. Pier Carlo was full of dynamism and enthusiasm, but he often came up against comrades advanced in years, exhausted by the long struggle against fascism and often isolated and marginalised within the workers movement by the hegemony of Marxism. Masini set out to consciously revive the movement, creating a political and cultural network that reached out far beyond the movement itself.

He put the first stage of this plan into operation with the magazine *Gioventu Anarchica* (Anarchist Youth) which appeared between 1946-1947, jointly edited with Carlo Doglio. Despite its brief life of 14 issues the magazine had a great influence on the renaissance of Italian anarchism, with articles covering many political and cultural issues, including important articles on cinema written by Doglio. Masini, through the magazine, entered into dialogue with other reviews and the tiny Bordigist and Trotskyist organisations.

Within the Italian Anarchist Federation (FAI) Masini was initially occupied with its Antimilitarist Commission, then becoming editor of the FAI weekly paper *Umanita Nova* in 1948. A magnificent and energetic editor, he was also a superb orator.

The internal conflict within the FAI between the youth grouped around Masini and the more traditional elements came to a head with the Livorno congress of 1949 and the Ancona congress of 1950. Masini proposed a Libertarian Party with an anarchist theory and practice adapted to the new economic, political and social reality of post-war Italy, with an internationalist outlook and effective presence in the workplaces. This led to the secession of the group around Masini and the creation of the magazine *L'Impulso* and the Gruppi Anarchici d'Azione Proletaria (GAAP- Anarchist Groups of Proletarian Action) The GAAP allied themselves with a similar development within the French Anarchist movement, the Federation Communiste Libertaire, whose leading light was Georges Fontenis. These 2 groups were the main components of the Libertarian Communist International (ICL) in 1954, along with a small Spanish section and informal links with the British movement via the militant Ken Hawkes.

However, the GAAP's hopes of breaking out of isolation had not taken account of the mystification purveyed by the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and its political and cultural hegemony over the working class. This led on to collaboration with Communist Party dissidents and above all with Azione Comunista, a confederation of small Bordigist, Trotskyist and ex-Communist organisations, among the latter being Giulio Seniga, who had been on the executive committee of the PCI. This grouping had been the result of the Hungarian revolution of 1956 and represented the internationalist and anti-Stalinist section of the Italian extraparliamentary left. The GAAP fused with Azione Comunista. However as Masini wrote in a letter to Fontenis, "nostalgists for paleolithic Leninism and second-hand Leninists" seized control of Azione Comunista and forced out or discouraged the anarchists. Masini made the decision to join the Socialist Party (PSI) at the end of 1958, joining a tendency within it that had internationalist, classist and anti-Togliatti positions. He remained with these social-democratic views for the rest of his life.

However, Masini continued his interest in the historic study of anarchism. He produced a fine pamphlet on the Italian factory councils of post-WW1 Italy. He collaborated with the learned journals *Rivista Storica del Socialismo* and *Movimento Operaio e Socialista*. He produced his first book on the Internationalists and the anarchist insurrections of 1876–78. He followed this up with an edition of 3 volumes of the writings of Bakunin, the great Russian anarchist. In 1963 he produced a collection of the leaflets, manifestos and proclamations of the Italian section of the First International 1871–1880. The importance of Masini as historian of anarchism can be highlighted by the fact that before he started his work in the early 60s, there was no serious studies on Italian anarchism, outside of the small anarchist publishing houses.

Masini continued his work with *The First International in Italy*, still one of the great works of historiography. He followed this up with *History of the Italian Anarchists from Bakunin to Malatesta* in 1969. A cheap edition of this book in 1974 had a great influence on winning many young people over to the ideas of anarchism. Despite their disagreements with Masini's changed political views, many Italian anarchists remain grateful to him for his historic work.

In the last years of his life Masini devoted himself to others of his passions for research, in particular a history of Italian literature between 700–800. This did not stop him throwing himself with youthful enthusiasm into collaborating with the journal *Rivista Storica dell' Anarchismo* (*Historical Review of Anarchism*). He put great efforts into preparatory work for the review, thought up its title, and contributed with it right up to the end of his life. The last article he ever wrote, on the attempt on Mussolini's life by the young anarchist Anteo Zamboni appeared in its second issue.

Masini's strong personality, his modesty and his style of methodic work, his intellectual wisdom, his Toscanita (Tuscanness) endeared him to those who had the good fortune to be his friends.

Pier Carlo Masini, Italian historian. Born 26 March 1923, died 19 October 1998.

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Retrieved on May 13, 2013 from [web.archive.org](http://web.archive.org)  
Published in *Organise!* Issue 50 – Winter 1998/99.

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