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The Trial

Sante Caserio

1894

Avenging the executions of the anarchists Emile Henry and August Vaillant, on June 24, 1894 Sante Caserio stabbed the president of France, Sadi Carnot, killing him. He was executed on August 16, 1894. This was the last striking event of the wave of anarchist attacks that swept France in the 1890s.

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Retrieved on 24th September 2020 from <https://www.marxists.org/subject/anarchism/caserio/trial.htm>
Originally published in Alexandre Lacassagne's *L'Assassinat de Président Carnot*, Lyon, 1894. Translated by Mitchell Abidor.

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Recalling the childhood of Caserio, the president said to him, "You attended school but you never received any prizes." Caserio answered, "I regret not having had more education. I would have been stronger."

Q: And what would you have done with that strength?

A: I would have used it for the ideal.

Questioned about his relations with the lawyer Gori, he answered: "I didn't frequent Gori's conferences in 1891, but I read pamphlets and I paid closer attention to what was in them than to those he signed. In any case, I will lay out my doctrines."¹

¹ Pietro Gori (1865–1911) was a key figure of Italian anarchism. Twice exiled from Italy for his activities, he founded the anarchist review *Il Pensiero*.

The president then asked him about his relations with the Italian anarchists, but Caserio remained silent on this point. "I am a baker," he said, "not a policeman ..."

Q: Recount your crime, Caserio.

A: At the moment when the last cavalymen of the escort passed in front of me, I opened my jacket. The dagger was in the inside right-hand pocket, against my chest, with the handle up. I grabbed it with my left hand and with one movement shoved the two young people standing in front of me, took the handle with my right hand, and with my left pushed off the sheath, which fell to the ground. I quickly, but without leaping, headed straight for the president, following an oblique line in the direction opposite that of the carriage's movement. I put my left hand on the edge of the carriage and, with a slightly downward blow, my palm backward and my fingers pointed down, I plunged my dagger into the president's breast up to the hilt. (*And Caserio, with an unspeakable cynicism, demonstrated the way he used the dagger against the president.*) My hand touched his jacket. I left the dagger in the president's chest and a piece of newspaper remained on the handle. In delivering the blow I shouted-loudly or not, I don't know-"Vive la Révolution!" When I struck him M. Carnot looked me in the face. I then retreated, shouting "Vive la Révolution."

Q: You said that the president's look produced a strong sensation in you.

A: I felt no emotion.

Q: You wanted to strike him in the heart but your blow was delivered lower than you'd thought. Once the blow was delivered you fled. Seeing that you weren't immediately arrested and that no one seemed to have understood what you'd done you started running, shouting "Vive l'Anarchie." You were going to disappear in the crowd. They refused to let you pass. Someone behind you shouted, "Arrest him!" Twenty policemen grabbed you and locked you up in a sure place. (*M. Breuillac then told of M. Carnot's final moments. The best doctors of our*

city did all they could to save so precious a life.) The result of your dagger blow, Caserio, was M. Carnot's death. You know this?

A: (*In a weak voice*) Yes, I know.

Q: And it's because you are an anarchist that you killed M. Carnot. You hate all heads of state?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: You premeditated your crime. You admit this.

A: I'll answer in my declaration.

Ending his questioning the president of the tribunal said to Caserio, "Outside your political crime you killed a mother and father." Caserio then expounded at length in Italian. "No one had pity for the wives and children of the anarchists guillotined in France, hung in America, shot by firing squads in Spain." The interpreter was hardly able to translate the accused's words, which he mangled, giving rise to protests from the journalists.