

AFD Ep 388 Links and Notes - Sacco & Vanzetti 2nd Conviction Centennial - Releasing July 12

- Intro: On July 14, 1921, one hundred years ago this week and about a year after they were unjustly convicted on lesser charges for a deadly armed robbery in Bridgewater Massachusetts, Nicola Sacco & Bartolomeo Vanzetti of Italy (both around aged 30) were falsely convicted by a Massachusetts jury on first-degree murder charges for the deaths of a security guard and another man during a robbery gone wrong in Braintree, Massachusetts
- Sacco & Vanzetti were suspects because of their associations with Italian anarchists known to authorities (Ferruccio Coacci and Mario Buda). When they were arrested they were carrying loaded pistols and Sacco had anarchist literature. Vanzetti had shotgun shells matching those used at the robbery in Braintree. Sacco had an alibi for the Bridgewater robbery, but not the Braintree robbery.
- The Bridgewater trial came first, lasting from June 22, 1920 to sentencing on August 16, 1920. Vanzetti didn't testify in his own defense. Many witnesses for the defense spoke little English, and the prosecution was easily able to confuse them. On July 1, 1920, the jury found Vanzetti guilty of first degree murder and robbery. However, the jury tampered with the shotgun shells produced as evidence, and the Judge Webster Thayer declared the first degree murder charge a mistrial. Thayer sentenced Vanzetti to the maximum sentence for the robbery charge, 12-15 years. Advocates for Vanzetti later claimed that the Bridgewater trial came first to make the Braintree trial easier for the prosecution.
- The Braintree trial again had Judge Thayer presiding. Vanzetti had different defense lawyers, and Sacco had a lawyer - Fred H. Moore - who previously worked on cases involving the IWW. This was seen as a mistake, as Thayer was enraged by Moore's radicalism and antics in the courtroom, which included taking off his shoes in the courtroom. Both defendants had alibis that covered the times of the robbery. Vanzetti testified that he was selling fish at the time, and Sacco was in Boston applying for a passport at the Italian consulate. Moore tried to get the consulate employee to testify, but he was in Italy and didn't want to make the trip back to the US. He did provide a sworn affidavit, but it was dismissed. Both the prosecution and the defense attempted to use bullet forensics to make their case as to whether or not the bullet that killed the security guard could have come from Sacco's gun. One of the prosecution's experts, Captain Proctor of the Massachusetts State Police, later signed an affidavit stating that he was unable to positively identify the bullets as coming from Sacco's gun. On July 14 or 21, 1921 (there are differing accounts; the official Massachusetts state govt page has July 14) after 3 hours of deliberation by the jury, they found both Sacco & Vanzetti guilty of murder.
- Despite many attempts to appeal, and a confession from another man awaiting a murder trial, Sacco & Vanzetti were executed at midnight between August 22 and 23, 1927.
- <https://www.wickedlocal.com/photogallery/WL/20200415/NEWS/415009999/PH/1> 100 year retrospective of the date of the crime. Not a lot of non-local commemoration, but that may change by Wednesday.
- During our limited Lend Lease series of episodes in 2019, we touched on the Sacco & Vanzetti trial, as part of an episode discussing political violence, specifically the Propaganda of the Deed theory of violence espoused by Luigi Galleani. These acts of violence targeted high profile members of the ruling class, putting the entire class on notice. These attacks included a bombing in Franklin, MA, in 1919.
- The Sacco & Vanzetti trial exposed the prejudices against Italian-American anarchists. The judge, Webster Thayer, was known to be a xenophobe and had made speeches railing against anarchists. There were court interpreters who didn't understand the Italian dialects that some of the witnesses spoke, hampering their testimony. Sacco wasn't

even at the scene of the crime; he was at the Italian consulate in Boston. Witnesses weren't able to accurately describe Vanzetti's appearance, even disagreeing on the length of his mustache. Another robber even confessed to the crime between the time of the first trial and their execution; Thayer refused to reopen the case. The trial spurred worldwide protests, with many well-known socialists and other luminaries defending Sacco & Vanzetti, including Albert Einstein and Dorothy Parker.

- Vanzetti said near the end, "I might have died, unmarked, unknown, a failure. Now we are not a failure. This is our career and our triumph. Never in our full life can we hope to do such work for tolerance, for justice, for man's understanding of man as we now do by dying. Our words, our lives, our pains—nothing! The taking of our lives—lives of a good shoemaker and a poor fish peddler—all! That last moment belongs to us—that agony is our triumph."

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/sacco-and-vanzettis-trial-century-exposed-injustice-1920s-america-180977843/>

- **SEGUE**

- [Clip repurpose from the syndicalists episode in 2019: Sacco & Vanzetti around 18:50 to 34:10 in Lend Lease 11 (ie American Anarchy Part 2)]

<http://arsenalfordemocracy.com/2019/08/13/lend-lease-11-american-anarchy-part-2-the-extremism-debate-and-state-violence/>

- Some reading links: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/sacco-vanzetti-justice-on-trial>
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sacco-and-Vanzetti>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacco_and_Vanzetti

Here is a repeat of the notes from the 2019 episode:

- Italian-Americans heavily influenced anarchism in the United States, especially during the 3 million strong migration from Italy to the US from 1900 to 1915 (WWI)
 - nearly half of Italian migrants from 1905 to 1920 returned to Italy, unlike Irish or Scandinavian migrants to the US
<http://iegego.eu/en/threads/europe-on-the-road/economic-migration/irish-glynn-e-migration-across-the-atlantic-irish-italians-and-swedes-compared-1800-1950#Returnmigration>
 - However it is critical to remember that Italian unification was only completed by the northern monarchy in 1871 and Italy remained heavily regionally fragmented, with different dialects, politics, and rural vs urban industrial backgrounds -- 1880-1900 Italian immigration in particular tended to be from the impoverished former Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in Southern Italy as opposed to industrial northern Italian cities – not all politically active Italians who came to the US shared the views of the anarchist immigrants and as early as the 1890s, large numbers of Italian-Americans had already moved into the public sector roles in places like New York City and Chicago with which they are now stereotypically associated. http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/voices/italian_immigration.cfm
 - Also many rural Italian immigrants opted to remain in American cities in more transient manual labor jobs and avoided settling down to continue to farm. They were overwhelmingly male and usually did not bring the rest of their families with them during this period (although of course the women working during the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire were Italian or Jewish women or girls active in the trade-union movement inside the factory)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triangle_Shirtwaist_Factory_fire

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Ladies%27_Garment_Workers%27_Union. http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/voices/italian_immigration.cfm

- Italian-American political alignment and position began shifting significantly during World War One and with the interwar changes in immigration law
- Eventually in Northampton Massachusetts in September 1939, at the start of World War Two, Italian-American anti-fascists formed the Mazzini Society dedicated to democratic republicanism and the removal of Mussolini, but they were reluctant to invite anti-fascists of the communist and anarchist persuasion
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mazzini_Society
- Sacco & Vanzetti trial (1920-1927) and the wider Italian-American anarcho / trade-union movement (see Russell notes on the importance of immigrants in American radical unionism)
 - Sacco was from Apulia (southern Italy), whereas Vanzetti was from Piedmont (northern Italy)
 - Galleanism (1914-1920) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galleanists> -- they often blew themselves up or random civilian bystanders and never once actually hit an intended high-profile ruling class target. (One was in Franklin MA in 1919.) They attempted a string of retaliatory attacks in the US and Europe after S&V were indicted for the robbery gone wrong
 - 2 trials for separate crimes in separate jurisdictions
 - Judge Webster Thayer was a known xenophobe and had just given an anti-Bolshevik speech.
 - A court interpreter didn't know all the relevant dialects of Italian to relay defense witness testimony correctly to the jury of non-Italians
 - The jury also tampered with physical evidence while deliberating their verdict and part of the first case had to be thrown out
 - In their death penalty case for the murder, they were represented by a radical IWW lawyer who went over even worse with Judge Thayer. When S&V testified in the second case (they did not in the first), they rambled a lot trying to explain their political views instead of avoiding that. (They had skipped the draft in 1917 and hid in Mexico too.)
 - Sacco literally was not present for the murder he was charged with because he was inside the Italian consulate in Boston at the time and consular staff backed that up but were unable to be present for the trial
 - Prosecutors also insisted OJ-trial-style that an article of clothing recovered from the crime scene much later that did not fit the defendant (Sacco's cap) was definitely his and proof of his guilt
 - 60 cities in Italy held protests against the verdicts. Mussolini personally tried to intervene in the case behind the scenes to seek a commutation from the Massachusetts Governor. By contrast, within the US they did not become famous until well after their convictions as the appeals processes dragged on and supporters politicized it more heavily, especially among Italian immigrant communities across the country.

- In 1925, still before they were executed, a different robber confessed to the murder and it turned out he had a close associate who looked a lot like Sacco. That gang had a specific history of knocking over shoe factories for cash. Defense was unable to get a new trial. Even the Boston Herald (unlike every other local paper) called for a new trial at that point.
- In August 1927, an IWW-led protest walkout in a Colorado mining town saw so many miners walk off the job to protest the approaching executions that it triggered organizing a statewide coal mine strike. (Unusually it was an IWW strike not a UMW strike, partly because the UMW presence in Colorado had collapsed after the Ludlow massacre in 1914 when the National Guard machine-gunned down 12 children and 8 adults in a tent camp of striking miners and their families. The IWW presence in Colorado was also more heavily Latino not Italian like some places but was standing in solidarity with Sacco & Vanzetti.) The strike, as a side note, included a lot of interesting tactical experiments including an abortive idea to launch a syndicalist workers cooperative-owned mine in an abandoned mine, though they couldn't work out how to comply with regulations enough not to be shut down immediately if they tried it. The IWW also held firm when machine guns were brought in against them and a massacre occurred again, eventually winning a \$1 pay raise. Unfortunately, because of the IWW's ideological commitment to decentralization and resistance to formalized Union Recognition or Union Contracts, they weren't able to maintain or sustain the level of organizing they reached in the 1927 strike.
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_Workers_of_the_World_philosophy_and_tactics#Colorado_coal_strike_\(a_case_study\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_Workers_of_the_World_philosophy_and_tactics#Colorado_coal_strike_(a_case_study)) (In the Bertrand Russell chapter cited elsewhere in our notes, the IWW secretary in 1918 was quoted as saying "There is but one bargain the I. W. W. will make with the employing class— complete surrender of all control of industry to the organized workers" which sort of sums up their attitude and why they struggled to sustain organization in Colorado despite popular support.
- In 1977, 50 years after their execution, Mike Dukakis proclaimed a memorial day for them and said they had been unjustly convicted. He did not issue posthumous pardons because pardons are for guilt.
- They were considered martyrs in the Soviet Union, not just in Italy.
- Propaganda of the Deed
 - Invented by the Italian socialist Duke Carlo Pisacane - the concept was that acts of violence could draw attention to a cause and educate people on the need for revolutionary change: "ideas result from deeds, not the latter from the former, and the people will not be free when they are educated, but educated when they are free." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlo_Pisacane