

(Mis)Representations of an Italian Anarchist

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A Graduating Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements, in the

Honours Programme.

For the Degree of

Bachelor of Arts

In the

Department

Of

History

The University of Victoria

April 11, 2022

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Introduction

Attilio Bortolotti was an odd person. He was far more anti-religious than the average anarchist, preferred to list the latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates of his birthplace rather than the country, and was a committed anti-fascist and an anarchist who was more than willing to resort to violence.¹ When he was prosecuted by the Canadian government for printing material prejudicial to the war effort and then later for lying to immigration authorities, the reality of who he was came under debate. Only two groups accurately understood his beliefs; the anarchists who supported him and the government who prosecuted him, and even then, the anarchists were willing to promote a false version of Bortolotti for strategic reasons. The Liberal press and members of the public sympathetic to him twisted their interpretation of Bortolotti to better align with their values. To them, he was not an anarchist who had argued against the war and violated immigration law; he was an anti-fascist immigrant who fell victim to fascist influence in the Canadian government. Despite his extreme anti-religious views, multiple Reverends spoke out on his behalf and viewed his case as one which their faith required them to support. Liberal political organizations viewed his case as a violation of civil liberties and did what they could to help him. To members of the Labour movement, he was just another supporter who had helped them purge fascism from their midst. The Liberal press also took up his cause, arguing on his behalf and treating him as a fellow liberal anti-fascist. *The Windsor Daily Star* reported the

¹ Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 187.

comments of his brother, saying, “I can think of no reason why he should be sent back [to Italy], he never harmed anyone.”²

However, Bortolotti was not a harmless immigrant, but a committed anarchist and anti-fascist who accepted and practiced violence in service of those goals. Bortolotti’s own words on his behaviour and beliefs show just how far off these liberal representations are. When recalling his anti-fascist activity in Detroit in 1928, he said the following:

As the fascists closed in on us I grabbed one of them by his long black hair and began punching him. I dragged him by the hair as far as I could. The police moved in on motorcycle and on foot with clubs raised. Someone called my name, a comrade in a fruit store. He shoved me behind four or five barrels of apples just before the police came in, and they didn’t get me... I still had a handful of black hair in the fruit store.³

Bortolotti was committed to combating fascism, and he was willing to use force. The previous quote describes a situation where Bortolotti arrived at a demonstration with the intention of causing violence. Regardless of whether his actions were justified, Bortolotti sought out violence to pursue his political ends. Bortolotti also had this to say when reflecting on his youth “At first I had been a real revolutionary. I was young and like quicksilver, enamoured of Galleani and of Terrorists like Emile Henry.”⁴ Here Bortolotti speaks positively of assassins and terrorists, affirming his belief in the legitimacy of violence as a political tool. Bortolotti cannot be described as harmless, as he viewed and used violence as a tool. This paper will show how the reality of a man became a battleground of interpretations over the course of two trials.

² “Bortolotti Deportation Order brings Storm of Protest.” *Windsor Daily Star*. March 2, 1940. pg 6.

³ Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 183.

⁴ Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 187.

This paper was originally intended to focus on the state persecution of Bortolotti, in particular legal argument and rhetoric. Unfortunately, due to complications with the Library and Archives of Canada stemming from the ongoing pandemic, the author was unable to acquire the existing court documents and legal notes surrounding the trial of Bortolotti. As a result, the paper had to change after a significant amount of research had already been done, meaning that the original methodology is not the current one. The paper is now on the subject of how Bortolotti was portrayed in Canadian discourse. Therefore, the majority of primary sources are newspaper articles. As it is impossible to know the opinion of someone reading the news of this case, based on the information available, this paper employs a speculative lens to come up with multiple profiles of people who represent the average opinion on Bortolotti. The paper also uses government collections of letters between major figures and biographies of Emma Goldman, who was the biggest benefactor and supporter of Bortolotti.

To understand how people approached this case, this paper will cover portrayals of Bortolotti, that emerged within three principal sources: 1. liberal public and press, 2. Anarchist groups, and 3. the government. The press and the liberal public are combined, as the press coverage, with one exception, came from Liberal newspapers. The liberal public includes responses from religious groups and political associations. Joseph Atkinson is included as a member of the public because as well as editing *The Toronto Daily Star*, he privately supported Bortolotti by speaking to the prime minister.⁵ The sources from this section are majority newspaper clippings, as well as government documents responding to letters from members of

⁵ Library and Archives of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King: Primary series correspondence. MG/26/ J1/vol 283/pg 239624. Memorandum to Mr. Heeney. March 16, 1940.

the public. Anarchist voices articulated a view of Bortolotti as they raised funds for and supported his case. Bortolotti's recollection of the case was recorded later but makes up the totality of primary sources consulted for this section. Government perspectives are captured in sources from F. C. Blair, T. A. Crerar, A. D. Heeney, the police, and the Ministry of Immigration and Colonization.

The secondary literature that comes close to covering this topic is vast, but very little actually focuses in on the Canadian anarchist movement, which at the time was almost entirely immigrants. Tomchuk's argument in *Transnational Radicals* is that the anarchist community in Canada was kept alive by a continual stream of immigrants who were already anarchists. Accordingly, the decline of the anarchist movement then came along with the end of the waves of European immigration. By nature of the movement and the major sources he is forced to center the American section of the North American movement. Tomchuk's arguments apply to the broader anarchist community, so while they do not directly apply to Bortolotti, they set the background for the broader movement. Zimmer's argument contradicts Tomchuk's. Zimmer claims that it was the experience of immigration that made immigrants into anarchists; this closely follows Bortolotti's experience. Despite Zimmer's in-depth research he neglects to mention the Canadian movement, using the American movement as a stand in for all of North America. This is a noticeable absence, as despite the name, Zimmer touches on events in Mexico, Russia, and Asia. Overall, his argument around immigrants being made into anarchists when arriving in North America is more persuasive than Tomchuk's, but since both claims are well researched it is likely that the reality is in the middle. Avery's *Dangerous Foreigners* provides a class analysis of immigrants in Canada, wherein the hostility of the Canadian culture

and the willingness of the authorities to treat immigrants as a resource to use and then deport caused immigrants to seek out radical organizations. This is the exact situation of Bortolotti, and as such is very relevant. However, Avery mostly focuses on frontier regions and spends less time comparatively on Italians than those from eastern Europe, which limits its specific usefulness to this paper. *A Nation of Immigrants* contains many useful essays, and the introductions from the editors are just as useful. The most important claim advanced by this title is that the history of immigration to Canada is the history of Canada. One of the focuses of the volume is radical activity within immigrant communities, and how this affected the government's response to immigration. The aforementioned volume also contains the iconic essay "*The Line Must Be Drawn Somewhere.*" This alongside the expanded version in *None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933-1948* provide the basis for understanding F.C. Blair and the Canadian immigration authorities. While not the primary argument of the texts, they demonstrate how the choices of the Canadian government gave extraordinary leeway in decision making for immigration. If there is one criticism to be levied against the existing literature, it is that there seems to be nothing specifically on anarchism in Canadian immigrant communities. The literature either covers other radical affiliations among Canadian immigrants, or Anarchism as a transnational movement. While those histories have their uses, a history of Canadian anarchism should not just be found in the footnotes of other works.

A fair amount of information is gained from sources written or said by Bortolotti himself, some of which were only recorded decades after the events that transpired. This paper notes that there is a level of unreliability to those texts, but Bortolotti repeats these stories almost to the letter for the rest of his life. This accurate repetition indicates that even if it is a fabrication or an

unfair account, it is one that has been present since the end of the original trial. Other secondary sources have largely accepted the validity of Bortolotti's accounts, and it can be assumed that they at least contain the actual events. All other evidence that can be recovered on events Bortolotti describes suggests that his recollection is factual. This paper covers both alleged illegal anarchist activity and supposed collaboration between fascists and the Canadian state. In both of those situations, primary sources that provide a complete account of the events are not forthcoming. The majority of primary sources are fragmented and as a result, provide a fragmented record. In both accounts, what happened can be speculated on but never completely understood.

A basic timeline of the events will serve to help situate the rest of the text. Bortolotti left Italy on June 19th, 1920.⁶ He landed on Ellis Island and then proceeded to Detroit, where he took a ferry to Windsor. He worked for two years in Windsor before getting into an altercation with his boss and quitting. Unable to find other work in Windsor, Bortolotti went to work for Chrysler in Detroit. This would begin a pattern of Bortolotti taking jobs back and forth across the Detroit River. The most notable of these jobs was at the Ford plant in Detroit, which led Bortolotti to live in Detroit from 1927 to 1929.⁷ This would be the infraction that the Immigration case against him was built on. Bortolotti spent his first decade in North America going back and forth across the Canadian border in search of ever-elusive work.

When Bortolotti was not working, he was making a name for himself as a committed anti-fascist. From 1922 onwards, Bortolotti was also involved in anti-fascist activities. In 1926,

⁶ Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 178.

⁷ Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 182.

when the Italian aeronaut Umberto Nobile came to Toronto on a speaking tour, Bortolotti disrupted the event when a picture of Mussolini was displayed and caused the crowd to prevent Nobile from talking positively about Mussolini.⁸ Later in the same year, Bortolotti rushed the stage and ripped fascist imagery from the display triggering a brawl.⁹ When the Italian Vice Consul came to Toronto to drum up recruits for the Italian army, Bortolotti turned the crowd against him and forced the Vice Consul to flee the scene. Bortolotti was so good at combating fascism that his elderly mother was questioned in Italy by Mussolini's police force.¹⁰ In early September 1938, Bortolotti was asked by the Windsor Trade and Labour council to come to give a talk at a meeting. At this meeting, he revealed that the Dante Alighieri Culture Society was using Italian cultural schools to spread fascist propaganda.¹¹ On September 10th, *the Windsor Daily Star* published a glowing report of Bortolotti's speech; and *the Ottawa Journal* along with the *Toronto Daily Star* also published very short accounts. On September 16th, in the editorial section of the *Windsor Star*, a response critical of Bortolotti was published, which in turn, generated further critical response. "Fascism Antagonistic to Democracy" was published on September 26th, which supported Bortolotti's claims.¹² After these articles, Bortolotti's name would be absent from the press for over a year.

The Canadian government was aware of Bortolotti's radicalism, and when the War Measures Act was passed, he came under further scrutiny. At 5 am on October 4th, 1939, the

⁸ Moritz. *The World's Most Dangerous Woman*, 174.

⁹ Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 181.

¹⁰ "The Bortolotti Case." *Toronto Daily Star*. February 26, 1940. pg 6.

¹¹ "Meconi is Denounced as Fascist Aid." *Windsor Daily Star*. September 10, 1938. pg 3

¹² "Fascism Antagonistic to Democracy." *Windsor Daily Star*. September 26, 1938. pg 23.

house Bortolotti was living at was raided. One thousand five hundred volumes were seized along with two broken revolvers, Bortolotti, along with three of his housemates, was arrested. They were charged under section 39a of The Defence of Canada Regulations, with Bortolotti picking up two extra charges for the possession of firearms.¹³ On October 5th, *The Ottawa Citizen* published an article on the arrest, which also ran in *The Sun Times*, and *The Globe*. Emma Goldman contacted the lawyer J. L. Cohen on October 7th in order to secure representation for the four anarchists.¹⁴ Bortolotti and the other three anarchists were held without bail or counsel until October 12th, when they were given a formal list of charges.¹⁵ On October 27th, *The Windsor Star* published a short account of the arrests, which misspells Bortolotti's name; perhaps, for this reason, the paper failed to identify him as the anti-fascist they had previously championed.

The initial offences Bortolotti was charged with would not last, but other infractions continued to hound him. Bortolotti's case began in court on November 2nd; on the trial's opening day the charges under the War Measures Act were dropped, and the charges for the revolvers were dropped on November 6th. J. L. Cohen had proved to be a fantastic lawyer.¹⁶ However, Bortolotti had not even left the courthouse when immigration authorities arrested him. Throughout November and December, anarchists rallied funds and support for Bortolotti, finally paying for his bail on January 10th.¹⁷ Having still not realized who Borolotti was, *The Windsor*

¹³ Travis Tomchuk, *Transnational Radicals: Italian Anarchists in Canada and the U.S.* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015), 159.

¹⁴ Moritz. *The World's Most Dangerous Woman*, 173.

¹⁵ Ibid, 179.

¹⁶ Ibid, 181.

¹⁷ Ibid, 188.

Star published an article on his deportation on January 15th. On January 22nd, 1940, Bortolotti had an immigration hearing and was ordered deported. His lawyer immediately began the appeal process, but this would prove unnecessary. *The Toronto Daily Star* published a summary of the case on February 26th, which was reprinted in *The Kingston Whig-Standard*. On March 1st, *The Toronto Daily Star* published an article about the Prince Edward Lennox Liberal Association's telegraph to the Prime Minister about the case of Bortolotti. On both March 1st and 2nd, the third page of *The Windsor Daily Star* was headlined by articles about Bortolotti, showing they had finally realized that he was the same anti-fascist they had previously supported. The Liberal press had finally become aware of the case and Bortolotti's anti-fascist convictions and began to cover him in glowing terms. Private citizens reached out to the Liberal government on Bortolotti's behalf. On March 5th, F.C. Blair wrote a letter reassuring Reverend Mutchmor that Bortolotti's case would be fair. The same day Secretary to the Prime Minister Mr. Heeney was directed to look into the case of Bortolotti in order to assuage the concerns of Joseph Atkinson.¹⁸ On March 18th, Mr. Heeney wrote to Minister Crerar to advise him of conversations between the Prime Minister and Atkinson as well as conversations between himself and Blair.¹⁹ On April 25th, Blair suggested to Minister Crerar that the appeal be dismissed, and Bortolotti allowed to stay in

¹⁸ Library and Archives of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King: Primary series correspondence. MG/26/ J1/vol 283/pg 239623. Letter from Mr. Blair to Rev. J. R. Mutchmor. March 5, 1940.

¹⁹ Library and Archives of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King: Primary series correspondence. MG/26/ J1/vol 286/pg 242060. Letter from Mr. Heeney to Mr. Crerar. March 1940.

the country if he maintained good behaviour. On April 27th, Minister Crerar took that course of action.²⁰

Liberal Response

Liberal organizations and papers were quick to side with Bortolotti. The papers that championed Bortolotti the most were established Liberal papers that had editors with strong democratic and anti-fascist values. Liberal groups appealed to the Prime Minister about this case. Some members of the Prince Edward-Lennox Liberal association publicly called on the Prime Minister to act on behalf of Bortolotti and advanced the idea that the whole case was part of some fascist attempt to stop Bortolotti, calling his deportation “an *unseemly concession* to foreign power and a denial of refuge to political refugees.”²¹ These liberal groups and newspapers bypassed the multiple departments that had more direct control over Bortolotti's case to appeal to the Prime Minister. Alongside the editor of the *Toronto Daily Star*, J. E. Atkinson, Reverend Salem Bland also supported a stay of deportation for Bortolotti.²² Bland wrote to the government asking for a delay in Bortolotti's deportation until he could make representations on Bortolotti's behalf.

As with the liberal support in general, Bland's support of Bortolotti had less to do with Bortolotti personally than with Bland's political and social views. Bland was a champion of the

²⁰ Library and Archives of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King: Primary series correspondence. MG/26/ J1/vol 286/pg 242074-9. Appeal of Attilio or Athur Bortolotti, alias Albert Berthelot. April 24th, 1940.

²¹ “Telegraph Mr. King about A. Bortolotti.” *Toronto Daily Star*. March 1, 1940. page 29. “Protest Case of Bortolotti.” *Kingston Whig-Standard*. March 2, 1940. pg 1.

²² Moritz. *The World's Most Dangerous Woman*, 190.

working class, had previously been a vocal critic of the treatment of Sacco and Vanzetti and was a close friend of Emma Goldman.²³ He firmly believed in the Social Gospel; as such, while his religious views contradicted the end goals of Anarchism, the result of his ideas led him to support current practices and courses of action that were similar to the anarchist community.

Bland was not the only religious leader to support Bortolotti. Reverend J. R. Mutchmor, secretary of the Board of evangelism and social service of the United Church of Canada, wrote to the government on behalf of Bortolotti. Bortolotti recalled a meeting with the United Church in the following way:

The next day, I was called before the protestant council: they asked me how long I had been an antifascist and I answered that I had been an antifascist since before the March on Rome: whereupon they huddled together and said: "It is our belief that Bortolotti has more right to stay in Canada than we do: he has fought fascism right from the outset whereas we have yet to start."²⁴

The United Church of Canada issued many pro-pacifism statements during this period while still remaining a body committed to anti-fascism. In Bortolotti, they saw a secular reflection of their own beliefs. This source suggests that the churches who supported Bortolotti were not aware of his virulent anti-religious views, and Bortolotti would have no reason to sabotage himself by correcting them.²⁵ Still, it is interesting to note that from a very young age, Bortolotti looked

²³ Moritz. *The World's Most Dangerous Woman*, 93-4.

²⁴ Attilio Bortolotti and Rossella Di Leo. "Between Canada and the USA: A Tale of Immigrants and Anarchists." Kate Sharpley Library.

The document this quote is from does not say which protestant council Bortolotti was brought before. But given the time and Rev. Mutchmor's later participation, all evidence suggests that it was the Board of evangelism and social service of the United Church of Canada

²⁵ Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 176.

down on religion and that he was anti-religious long before he was anti-fascist or anarchist. Despite those beliefs, he was more than willing to accept the support of religious organizations.

Anti-Italian xenophobia oddly did not seem to play a part in this case. This can be partially explained by the fact that Bortolotti did not identify as an Italian; he spoke Romansch before Italian and, when asked, would give the latitude and longitude coordinates for his hometown.²⁶ When pressed further on his roots he would identify as Friulan, the area of Italy he was from had its own culture and spoke different Ladin languages. The articles and government documents critical of Bortolotti make little reference to his Italian heritage nor do the articles that support him.²⁷ Some newspaper articles go further than just distancing him from Mussolini's regime and refer to him as a Canadian, not as an immigrant.²⁸ It seems that his supporters really did not view him as Italian in any way that would cause prejudice. Government documentation suggests a similar view. While it is mentioned that his country of origin is Italy, and he associates with "Italian radicals," there is nothing to suggest prejudice against him on the basis of his Italian heritage. In fact, the government documents reprint a section of a text called *My Credo*, which, while they could not prove was written by Bortolotti, they believed it to be. Part of that text reads, "I was Italian. Today, a man, I feel to be."²⁹ This was used to demonstrate that Bortolotti was completely anti-government and anti-nation, suggesting that Bortolotti's rejection

²⁶ Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 181.

²⁷ Library and Archives of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King: Primary series correspondence. MG/26/ J1/vol 286/pg 242074-9. Appeal of Attilio or Athur Bortolotti, alias Albert Berthelot. April 24th, 1940.

²⁸ "Bortolotti Deportation Order brings Storm of Protest." *Windsor Daily Star*. March 2, 1940. pg 3.

²⁹ Library and Archives of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King: Primary series correspondence. MG/26/ J1/vol 286/pg 242074-9. Appeal of Attilio or Athur Bortolotti, alias Albert Berthelot. April 24th, 1940.

of his Italian homeland was seen as a negative trait indicative of anarchist beliefs. While it is unclear whether any of the officials who managed Bortolotti's case had anti-Italian views, no anti-Italian sentiment was mentioned by those prosecuting him, or by those defending him.

In some cases, Liberal associations were divided to the point of factionalism over Bortolotti's case. The Prince Edward-Lennox Liberal association is one such case. While many secondary sources make a note of their speaking out on Bortolotti's behalf, few seemed to have uncovered an article about them from *The Kingston Whig-Standard*.³⁰ This article reveals that supporting Bortolotti was not actually the will of the majority of the organization and was instead part of a factional dispute between the Liberal Candidate Howard Weese and a faction vocally supportive of Bortolotti headed up by Dr. Burnham Wylie.³¹ To complicate things further, previous articles saying that the Liberals had written the prime minister were disputed by Wylie, who insisted he had phoned a reporter merely to announce his plan before he did so. He also claimed that said reporter had exaggerated some of the details. It is unclear whether he ever did send the telegram to the prime minister, but he did run against Weese for the Liberal nomination in that riding, which he lost.³² According to *The Kingston Whig-Standard* article, it seems that Dr. Wylie took unilateral action in making a public declaration on behalf of the local Liberal association, something he was not authorized to do. In at least one Liberal association the Bortolotti case was prominent enough to cause a factional split amongst its members. Still, only

³⁰ "Wylie says he will run as Candidate." *Kingston Whig-Standard*. March 4, 1940. page 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

the *Kingston Whig-Standard* reported on this controversy, so to the average newspaper reader, a Liberal association had written to the prime minister in support of Bortolotti.

Within the response from the press, there are a couple points of interest.³³ The first is that whether the newspaper was sympathetic to Bortolotti appears entirely contingent on how he was identified. Newspapers that were sympathetic focused on his anti-fascist activities and advanced the idea that his arrest stemmed from a fascist plot. The newspaper that was most favourable to Bortolotti was *The Windsor Daily Star*, which contained the most articles written about Bortolotti. The paper published nine articles and even had the case headline on the 3rd page twice.³⁴ *The Kingston Whig-Standard* published three articles that mention Bortolotti. *The Toronto Daily Star* ran three articles covering Bortolotti, one on his role in exposing fascist propaganda in Italian cultural schools and the other two on the case against him.³⁵ *The Winnipeg Free Press* published only one article on the case, but it is a lengthy and in-depth report. *The Victoria Daily Times* also ran the exact same article as *the Winnipeg Free Press*.³⁶ These would be the only Canadian papers outside of Ontario to cover the case. *The Sun Times* ran one article

³³ Research into the press coverage of Bortolotti was conducted in the following manner. First the secondary literature that had covered Bortolotti was consulted to see what papers had already covered Bortolotti. Then searchable databases of newspapers were consulted by both searching every variation and alias of Bortolotti's name and by checking issues around the most notable cases. In situations where there was no available online database, microfilm collections were consulted.

³⁴ "Bortolotti Deportation Order brings Storm of Protest." *Windsor Daily Star*. March 2, 1940. pg 3.

"Windsor Fascist 'Baiter' is ordered deported to Italy." *Windsor Daily Star*. March 1, 1940. pg 3.

³⁵ "The Bortolotti Case." *Toronto Daily Star*. February 26, 1940. pg 6.

"Telegraph Mr. King about A. Bortolotti." *Toronto Daily Star*. March 1, 1940. page 29.

"Windsor School said Subsidized by Italy." *Toronto Daily Star*. September 10, 1938. Pg 19.

³⁶ "A Sinister Deportation." *Victoria Daily Times*. April 12, 1940. pg 4.

"Sinister Deportation Case." *Winnipeg Free Press*. April 6, 1940. pg 17.

on the case, which was neutral and conveyed the details of the case in a manner so confusing that it was borderline misinformation; the *Ottawa Citizen* reprinted the same article.³⁷ *The Ottawa Journal* printed only one article as well, which is just about his exposé on Italian cultural schools. *The Globe and Mail* ran the sole negative article on Bortolotti, and it focuses on the early charges under the War Measures act and claimed, without naming a source, that the local Italian community expressed no sympathy for the arrested.³⁸ Throughout the press coverage, it is clear that the majority of newspapers that bothered to report on Bortolotti were Liberal and had anti-fascist leanings. The one exception to the liberal coverage, *The Globe and Mail*, also gives the only negative portrayal of Bortolotti. This singular article was focused on the charges of violating the Defence of Canada Regulations Act rather than the deportation charge.

A year before his arrest, Bortolotti had given a speech against fascist demagogues in Canada, which had been reported on in *The Windsor Star*.³⁹ This was the first time Bortolotti generated Canadian news, and he made a significant impression. Bortolotti, in conjunction with the Windsor Trades and Labour Council, investigated the Dante Alighieri Culture Society and revealed that it had been using teaching materials for children that included lines such as “Think of Italy and make a vow to be ready to give her all your blood.”⁴⁰ *The Windsor Star* reported that Bortolotti called out the Dante Alighieri Society and identified Italian fascists in Canada by name, translating Italian sources for a crowd that was primarily Anglophone. This speech and the

³⁷ “Three Held in Toronto Under Defence Act.” *Sun Times*. October 5, 1939. page 14.

“Toronto Trio held Under Defence Act.” *Ottawa Citizen*. October 6, 1939. page 16.

³⁸ “Not Sorry say Local Italians.” *Globe and Mail*. October 6, 1939. pg 7.

³⁹ “Meconi is Denounced as Fascist Aid.” *Windsor Daily Star*. September 10, 1938. pg 3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 8.

following article provoked two articles in response, one contesting Bortolotti's claims and expressing potentially pro-fascist views and one supporting him.

Once Bortolotti was arrested, anarchists assumed that the mainstream press had no interest in Bortolotti. However, the many names and spellings that he used could have easily confused the English-speaking papers. The Liberal press did not publish supportive articles on his case until January 1940.⁴¹ This means there is a four-month gap between when Bortolotti was arrested and when the Liberal newspapers began to champion his cause. This led anarchists, most notably Goldman, to assume that the Canadian public and press had no interest in helping Bortolotti.⁴² However, there could be another reason. Canadian mainstream press probably did not realize at first that Bortolotti was a prominent anti-fascist. *The Windsor Star* definitely seemed to have not put together that the Arthur Bortolotti arrested was the same man they had championed as an anti-fascist earlier. The early mentions of Bortolotti's trial are extremely neutral and not at all like the full-throated defences that would come later. In October 1939, and in January 1940, the articles concerning Bortolotti were less than a paragraph, yet by March 1st, Bortolotti's case was the page three headline for both the Friday and the Saturday editions of *The Windsor Star*.⁴³ This dramatic shift may be explained by confusion over Bortolotti's identity stemming from naming issues. In the 1938 articles where they recounted Bortolotti's speech to the Windsor Labour Council, his name was rendered as Arthur Bortolotti, but in the first articles

⁴¹ Tomchuk 180.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ "Bortolotti Deportation Order brings Storm of Protest." *Windsor Daily Star*. March 2, 1940. pg 3.

"Windsor Fascist 'Baiter' is ordered deported to Italy." *Windsor Daily Star*. March 1, 1940. pg 3

on his arrest, his name was written as Arthur Bartoletti.⁴⁴ Later, when the articles were in his favour, the name reverted to the preferred spelling of Arthur Bortolotti. If *The Windsor Star* had been confused by the spelling of names, it is unlikely that other papers would have realized that he was a prominent anti-fascist.

J. E. Atkinson, the editor of the *Toronto Daily Star*, intervened on Bortolotti's behalf, going so far as to meet with the prime minister to discuss the case.⁴⁵ Despite Atkinson's personal intervention, only three articles were published in *The Toronto Daily Star* about Bortolotti, and only two of them were relevant to his deportation. The articles, identified Bortolotti as an anti-fascist and law-abiding citizen. They emphasize the fact that, while Bortolotti did violate immigration law, he did so by technicality and not with ill intent.⁴⁶ *The Toronto Daily Star* alleges that Bortolotti only had an address in Detroit so that he could have a US address for jobs, not that he was staying there and therefore violating Canadian immigration law. Despite its editor meeting with the prime minister on Bortolotti's behalf, *The Toronto Daily Star's* coverage of the affair is rather sparse. It has one article which outlines the basic details of the case against Bortolotti and explains that he is an active anti-fascist and another that provides an update on the case when the Prince Edward-Lennox Liberal association spoke out on his behalf.⁴⁷ The circumstances of the case were clear enough to elicit the interest of *the Toronto Daily Star*, but there were ultimately very few details for them to continue covering; when in the

⁴⁴ "Three Remanded." *Windsor Daily Star*. October 27, 1939. pg 9.

⁴⁵ Library and Archives of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King: Primary series correspondence. MG/26/ J1/vol 286/pg 242060. Letter from Mr. Heeney to Mr. Crerar. March 1940.

⁴⁶ "The Bortolotti Case." *Toronto Daily Star*. February 26, 1940. pg 6.

⁴⁷ "Telegraph Mr. King about A. Bortolotti." *Toronto Daily Star*. March 1, 1940. page 29.

same situation *the Windsor Star* created articles by contacting his family and friends and getting a statement from immigration authorities.⁴⁸ *The Toronto Daily Star* clearly had an interest in supporting anti-fascist activity and viewed Bortolotti's case as one they had a duty to cover, writing their article in such a way that it gives a clear impression of what they think the verdict should be and how the Minister should do his job.

“The Minister at Ottawa will no doubt go into the merits of the deportation order thoroughly. In doing so, he will naturally consider the whole picture— not merely the technical offence which Bortolotti committed at the border 10 years ago.”⁴⁹

The Toronto Daily Star argued that the whole picture of Bortolotti's time in Canada is that of a model immigrant. While Bortolotti may have committed a technical violation, *The Toronto Daily Star* claims it was unintentional and that his record as a hardworking and virtuous man should be more than enough cause to prevent his deportation. The idea of Bortolotti as a model immigrant is directly contradicted by his radical activities. Not only was he violating immigration law during this period, but he was also secretly smuggling anarchist propaganda across the border. Many of the smaller papers ran stories based on those of the larger papers. This indicates that editors believe this case had enough relevant details to be of note for the average reader. This interest was primarily local; the only Canadian papers to cover Bortolotti's case outside of Ontario were *The Victoria Daily Times* and *The Winnipeg Free Press*.

One of the more surprising elements of the press response is how in favour of Bortolotti the coverage is. Of the many articles consulted for this essay, only one was completely against Bortolotti, and it was less than a paragraph in length. The article from *The Globe and Mail*

⁴⁸ “Bortolotti Deportation Order brings Storm of Protest.” *Windsor Daily Star*. March 2, 1940. pg 3.

⁴⁹ “The Bortolotti Case.” *Toronto Daily Star*. February 26, 1940. pg 6.

focuses on the lack of sympathy among Italians after the initial arrest. *The Globe and Mail* focuses on the War Measures Act charges and barely mentions deportation at all. The closest other articles get to being critical of Bortolotti is, surprisingly, within *The Windsor Star*. The criticism comes in the form of the verbatim report of the government's argument in favour of carrying out the deportation order, but on the page this article is printed the headline reads “BORTOLOTTI DEPORTATION ORDER BRINGS STORM OF PROTEST.”⁵⁰ Additionally, adjacent to the article on the government argument is an article about Bortolotti’s friends’ and families’ response to the charges. The press response is extremely positive, although it does not mention Bortolotti’s political views beyond his anti-fascism, an opinion the paper shares. This shows that while the press was, for the most part, on the side of or ambivalent to Bortolotti, the version of him they constructed was not the real man. Their Bortolotti was a hardworking immigrant and antifascist and was in no way involved in illegal activity or radical politics.

While it is impossible to know for certain, the portrayal of Bortolotti in Liberal organizations and papers can provide an idea of how the average Canadian viewed the case and Bortolotti. First, the newspapers that covered the case in enough detail to be memorable were exclusively liberal to left-wing, so the average person who would even be aware of this case would be someone who reads Liberal papers. The sole conservative paper to cover the War Measures Act did so in three sentences, and there was no non-liberal coverage of the deportation. To them, all sources would have pointed towards the idea that some form of a fascist plot was targeting Bortolotti. The case would have appeared clear-cut, Bortolotti’s only crime being a

⁵⁰ Bortolotti Deportation Order brings Storm of Protest.” *Windsor Daily Star*. March 2, 1940. pg 3.

technical violation that did not compare to 20 years of industrious work within Canada. The only part of Bortolotti's political views mentioned was his anti-fascism, and, while Italy had not yet entered the war, Canada was at war with the other major fascist power in Europe. Deporting an anti-fascist to what the papers assured them was certain imprisonment, if not death, would have been an ugly and unappealing idea. The papers argued that deporting Bortolotti would be undemocratic; although Bortolotti was anti-democratic himself, a person reading the paper would have never been able to tell. The average person aware of this case would either live in Ontario or import newspapers from there, as only two Canadian papers from outside Ontario covered the case. Readers of these papers, in short, would have viewed Bortolotti as a victim of fascist persecution. He would have seemed like a very patriotic Canadian, and a model immigrant.

Anarchist Response

The anarchist community was fully on Bortolotti's side but factional divides and concerns around the public perception of Bortolotti limited how vocally supportive they could be. Emma Goldman spearheaded the anarchist response.⁵¹ Bortolotti had befriended her very quickly after she arrived in Canada and became an integral part of her network in Toronto. When he was arrested, she secured a lawyer for him and convinced him to try to win the case; instead of martyring himself for his ideas.⁵² Goldman reached out to many radical groups for support but found very little help. Goldman did not contact either the Canadian or American Communist parties due to misgivings about their intentions that stemmed from the Sacco and Vanzetti affair.

⁵¹ Moritz. *The World's Most Dangerous Woman*, 173.

⁵² *Ibid.*

Goldman believed that the American communist parties had used Sacco and Vanzetti for propaganda and had not been committed to getting them acquitted.⁵³ This meant that the radical groups supporting Bortolotti were almost uniformly anarchist. Goldman would prove instrumental in securing funding for J. L. Cohen, the lawyer she had hired. This funding came from contributions made by the anarchist community, both in Canada and the United States. The cost for the defence against the charges under the War Measures act was \$1500, the deportation trial required a further \$1500. These costs were not just for the defence of Bortolotti, as other anarchists had been arrested alongside him in the raid and yet another Italian anarchist was set to be deported back to Italy for unrelated immigration infractions, but the cause was portrayed to the anarchist public as the same. This was in addition to a \$4000 bail that Goldman also raised for Bortolotti.⁵⁴ The defence committee Goldman formed ended up spending \$3540 not including the money put up for bail. The money mostly came from the Canadian and American anarchist communities.⁵⁵ In Toronto, the anarchist community was divided culturally between two small groups, Italian and Jewish Anarchists. While both groups were united in purpose, language barriers led to the formation of separate organizations and publications. The Italian anarchist community gave what they could but were generally quite poor. The Jewish anarchist community in Toronto was extremely small, and so could not provide much in terms of funds, raising only \$40. Goldman was part of these Jewish Anarchists and was instrumental in

⁵³ Ibid, 171.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 188.

⁵⁵ Tomchuk, *Transnational Radicals*, 172.

organizing his defence, so while they may have not been able to help with the funding they did help organize.⁵⁶

Through the paper *L'Adunata dei Refrattari*, whose reader-base was made primarily of Italian American Anarchists, Goldman was able to raise \$1,437, which totalled around 40% of the total expenses of the defence committee.⁵⁷ Goldman also contacted the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation party, whose top officials publicly spoke and wrote on Bortolotti's behalf.⁵⁸ It was Goldman who convinced Reverend Bland to speak out in favour of Bortolotti. Spanish Anarchists in New York also contributed to Bortolotti, showing that their commitment to anti-fascism had not dimmed since their loss in the Spanish Civil war. Despite all of Goldman's tremendous work on Bortolotti's behalf, she intentionally ensured that the public would not know she was coordinating his defence. She worried her reputation could damage his cause and lead to her deportation as well.⁵⁹

Members of the wider anarchist community would most likely have heard Bortolotti speak against fascism or read a pamphlet he authored. Depending on where they lived, they could have met and worked with him. If they were Italian, they would know him as a fixture of local events, both cultural and political.⁶⁰ As the case went on, they would see many articles in Anarchist newspapers such as *Il Libertario* asking for money for his defence, the Sacco and Vanzetti case would have been on their minds. Many would have aided Bortolotti themselves, either by sending money or helping at a fundraising event. The widely held belief that Bortolotti

⁵⁶ Ibid, 181.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 185.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 171.

⁵⁹ Moritz. *The World's Most Dangerous Woman*, 177.

⁶⁰ Tomchuk, *Transnational Radicals*, 184.

was being prosecuted as a result of fascist influence would have also captivated minds. Bortolotti's case would have appeared as essentially a test run for the persecution of all radical groups under the War Measures Act. When all charges were dropped, anarchist readers might have been dismayed by his immediate seizure for deportation. This deportation would bring back the notion of Sacco and Vanzetti even more, as in anarchist circles, it was assumed that Bortolotti would face death in Italy for his very public and prolific anti-fascism.⁶¹ The combining factors of a seemingly fascist influence and political persecution of Bortolotti would have been deeply concerning, especially in a community that had less than a year earlier supported open warfare against Fascism in Spain.

Government Response

The Canadian Government's response to Bortolotti was confusing; their reasons for both pursuing deportation and eventually dropping the case are unclear and contradictory. Bortolotti's case appears in the William Lyon Mackenzie King fonds primary correspondence collection, many of them are centred around the Director of Immigration, F. C. Blair.⁶² Blair took on the role of overseer around the Bortolotti case. He proposed the solution of allowing Bortolotti to

⁶¹ Tomchuk, *Transnational Radicals*, 177-8.

⁶² Library and Archives of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King: Primary series correspondence. MG/26/ J1/vol 283/pg 239623. Letter from Mr. Blair to Rev. J. R. Mutchmor. March 5, 1940.

Library and Archives of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King: Primary series correspondence. MG/26/ J1/vol 286/pg 242073. Memorandum from Mr. Blair to Mr. Crerar. April 25, 1940.

Library and Archives of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King: Primary series correspondence. MG/26/ J1/vol 286/pg 242074-9. Appeal of Attilio or Athur Bortolotti, alias Albert Berthelot. April 24th, 1940.

remain in Canada in exchange for Bortolotti maintaining good behaviour.⁶³ Blair's choices and rationale changed depending on who he was communicating with. In March 1940, Blair told other officials that governments concern with Bortolotti stemmed from "the subversive activities of the man."⁶⁴ However, the reason given to the general public and press was the immigration infraction, which Blair alleged was done intentionally. On April 24th of that same year, in a summary of the case against Bortolotti, Blair then says the following: "While there is little doubt that '*My Credo*' sets out the political, religious and social views of Bortolotti, we have completely failed to gain conclusive evidence which would be accepted in court."⁶⁵ These statements given within a month of each other imply that Blair knowingly and willfully conspired to use Immigration law to silence dissent. Now technically, nothing Blair did was against the law. The Defence of Canada Regulations did restrict free speech around criticizing the war effort, and Bortolotti was guilty of violating Canadian immigration law. If there is something conspiratorial happening, more evidence of it can be found in response to Reverend Bland and J. E. Atkinson. It is unclear who wrote these responses; in the fonds, they are bundled next to letters written by Blair but are stamped with the name of Blair's boss.⁶⁶ Regardless of

⁶³ Library and Archives of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King: Primary series correspondence. MG/26/ J1/vol 286/pg 242074-9. Appeal of Attilio or Athur Bortolotti, alias Albert Berthelot. April 24th, 1940.

⁶⁴ Library and Archives of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King: Primary series correspondence. MG/26/ J1/vol 286/pg 242060. Letter from Mr. Heeney to Mr. Crerar. March 1940.

⁶⁵ Library and Archives of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King: Primary series correspondence. MG/26/ J1/vol 286/pg 242074-9. Appeal of Attilio or Athur Bortolotti, alias Albert Berthelot. April 24th, 1940.

⁶⁶ Library and Archives of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King: Primary series correspondence. MG/26/ J1/vol 286/pg 242080-1. Letter to Rev. Salem Bland.

authorship, they repeat sections of Bortolotti's "*My Credo*" which they represent as what they believe to be his political views. They were unable to prove such in court yet used these statements to attempt to dampen the enthusiastic support Bortolotti received from his biggest non-anarchist supporters.⁶⁷

The common practices of the Canadian immigration authorities conflicted with their statements and actions. Blair and Crerar both asserted that it was the common practice of the Canadian government not to send violators of immigration law back to countries where they faced certain death.⁶⁸ However, they also claimed that Bortolotti would most likely not face death; they believed this was just his attempt to drum up support for his cause. These statements contradict each other in light of the decisions to allow Bortolotti to stay. Something about the case of Bortolotti was different from that of many other radical immigrants facing deportation. In the case of Yugoslavian communist Tomo Caic, he was deported to Yugoslavia in 1933, with the Canadian government fully aware he would be arrested on return to his home country.⁶⁹ Historian Dennis G. Molinaro points out that Canada was more than willing to deport radicals to countries where they would experience persecution. One could assume that while Bortolotti's case was over by the time Italy entered the second world war, which must have played some factor in the evaluation, but that would be wrong. Another Italian anarchist was threatened with

Library and Archives of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King: Primary series correspondence. MG/26/ J1/vol 286/pg 242082-4. Letter to Mr. Atkinson.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Library and Archives of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King: Primary series correspondence. MG/26/ J1/vol 286/pg 242074-9. Appeal of Attilio or Athur Bortolotti, alias Albert Berthelot. April 24th, 1940.

⁶⁹ Tomchuk, *Transnational Radicals*, 179.

deportation at the same time as Bortolotti; in fact, the same lawyer represented both of them at the same time. This other anarchist was deported, although anarchists secured permission for him to be deported to be Mexico instead of Italy.⁷⁰ So what was different in the case of Bortolotti? One explanation is that the Liberal press and public had been so successful in creating a symbolic version of Bortolotti that it became politically difficult to deport him. The pressure put upon the Canadian immigration authorities came from more than just the anarchist community, the liberal public was against the deportation and these concerns would end up reaching the ear of the prime minister. In the case of Yugoslavian communist Tomo Caic, there was a tremendous outcry from the Canadian left and labour movement which proved to not be enough. In Bortolotti's case, he had the Liberal press and notable members of the public, including Joseph Atkinson, a close personal friend and ally of the prime minister, on his side.⁷¹ Additionally, the public outcry around Bortolotti framed him exclusively as an anti-fascist; this was at a time when Canada was at war with a Fascist power. There is also the factor of Bortolotti being in North America for longer than he had been in Italy, the other anarchist had been caught when just entering Canada, and so there was less of a feeling that he was Canadian.⁷² The liberal public had essentially convinced themselves that their own version of Bortolotti was entirely accurate, to the point where that interpretation had persuaded some of the most powerful liberal voices in the country.

⁷⁰ Tomchuk, *Transnational Radicals*, 184.

⁷¹ Library and Archives of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King: Primary series correspondence. MG/26/ J1/vol 286/pg 242060. Letter from Mr. Heeney to Mr. Crerar. March 1940.

⁷² Tomchuk, *Transnational Radicals*, 166-7.

However, there is another explanation. Its possible that, despite its posturing, the Canadian immigration authorities genuinely believed that Bortolotti's life would be in danger if deported. It seems that F. C. Blair believed Bortolotti would be killed if sent back to Italy. Blair, at one point, outright says this, but in the same document, he also claims Bortolotti would not be in real danger if deported to Italy.⁷³ In Blair's report to the prime minister, he writes the following.

He and his friends have been very careful to play up the idea that his trouble is due to his fight against Italian fascism and that if he is deported he will be thrown into the hands of Italian authorities who will make short work of him. The circumstances were favourable to the spread of that idea and aroused a great deal of sympathy in some parts of Canada to which I think he was not entitled. What Bortolotti did is an old trick on the part of some undesirables who want to becloud the issues.⁷⁴

This clearly shows that Blair considered the threat to Bortolotti's life to be largely invented. An interpretation of this passage could be that Bortolotti would face consequences in Italy, but not death. However, Canadian authorities had no objection to deportees suffering prison time for things that were not crimes in Canada. In the case of Tomo Caic, he was deported to Yugoslavia in 1933, with the Canadian government fully aware he would be arrested for being a communist on return to his home country.⁷⁵ The only form of persecution the Canadian government was willing to halt deportation to prevent was execution. However, just a few pages later, in the same document, Blair says this.

⁷³ Library and Archives of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King: Primary series correspondence. MG/26/ J1/vol 286/pg 242074-9. Appeal of Attilio or Athur Bortolotti, alias Albert Berthelot. April 24th, 1940.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Tomchuk, *Transnational Radicals*, 179.

No doubt Bortolotti is anti-fascist and if sent back to Italy he would be summarily dealt with. It has been our practice to avoid sending those to their doom when their breach of the Immigration Act is of the character under review. I do not think that Bortolotti should be deported to Italy and that is the only place to which deportation is possible.⁷⁶

These two statements are deeply contradictory, and while the notion that Bortolotti's immigration offence is so minor that there can be some leniency is somewhat implied, it is impossible to truly know which Blair believed. Canada was in the middle of waging war against fascist regimes in Europe, and it is not unreasonable to claim that Bortolotti's death in an Italian concentration camp would have been very damaging to the King regime's public appeal. Blair's stated goal of preventing Bortolotti from becoming a martyr for Canadian radicals supports this narrative. There are two major interpretations of what Blair and, by extension, other government officials believed. The first is that while an opponent of almost everything Bortolotti stood for, Blair genuinely believed that Bortolotti's life was at risk if he were deported, and he, therefore, prevented the deportation. The second is that Blair did not believe Bortolotti's life was in danger if deported, even though he would be arrested in Italy, but that it would be damaging to the public image of the Canadian state and could inflame anarchists. This second explanation better explains many of the details, but it still cannot explain the language Blair used when recommending that Bortolotti be allowed to stay.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Library and Archives of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King: Primary series correspondence. MG/26/ J1/vol 286/pg 242074-9. Appeal of Attilio or Athur Bortolotti, alias Albert Berthelot. April 24th, 1940.

⁷⁷ Library and Archives of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King: Primary series correspondence. MG/26/ J1/vol 286/pg 242074-9. Appeal of Attilio or Athur Bortolotti, alias Albert Berthelot. April 24th, 1940.

Conclusion

Many of the responses to Bortolotti use him as a symbolic figure rather than who he actually was. He was a committed anarchist and anti-fascist and most likely guilty of all the things he was accused of, whether or not the courts could prove it.⁷⁸ Aside from the anarchists who supported him, all the other groups misrepresented him in order to resolve fundamental differences and incompatibilities between their worldviews. The anarchists, for their part, encouraged these misrepresentations. Much of the Liberal press was content to have this be a story about a hardworking immigrant who opposed fascism being unfairly targeted by fascist influences in the Canadian government.⁷⁹ Joseph Atkinson was a champion of civil rights and saw this case as yet another injustice that the liberals had to correct.⁸⁰ Church support came from those who had similar material goals to Bortolotti but wildly different opinions on god and politics in general.⁸¹ The only groups to accurately represent him were his fellow anarchists and the government that prosecuted him. His own family either lied to help sustain these imagined versions of Bortolotti or had been deceived by them as well. Bortolotti was aided by these false notions of who he was and saw no reason to disabuse his supporters of them. While the government accurately saw him as anti-god and anti-religion, their reports are full of contradictions in their view of him and his situation. Truly the anarchists were the only ones who

⁷⁸ Attilio Bortolotti and Rossella Di Leo. "Between Canada and the USA: A Tale of Immigrants and Anarchists." Kate Sharpley Library.

⁷⁹ "The Bortolotti Case." *Toronto Daily Star*. February 26, 1940. pg 6.

⁸⁰ Library and Archives of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King: Primary series correspondence. MG/26/ J1/vol 283/pg 239624. Memorandum to Mr. Heeney. March 16, 1940.

⁸¹ Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 176.

understood who he actually was. In order to support Bortolotti, his supporters had to create a new, less controversial version of the man in their heads.

Bortolotti benefitted from misconceptions about his character. The combined efforts of the press and members of the public convinced the government that deporting him would be a nuisance. Many of those who had come to his defence did so without ever coming close to understanding who Bortolotti was. His fellow anarchists did comprehend him fully, but these anarchists were careful to make sure they did not tarnish his case by association. The only groups to actually understand Bortolotti intentionally engaged in the proliferation of public deception. Bortolotti was both an immigrant and an anarchist, but as his case came before the public, these elements of his identity were stripped down and made more palatable to the liberal anti-fascists that championed his cause. Bortolotti's public portrayal ended in his salvation from fascist persecution, but it did so at the cost of stripping away his ideas and actions and neutering any radical perceptions of the man.

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