

Italy from Within

by

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New York

The Macmillan Company

1943

XXVI

After Mussolini . . . ?

If Italians are disillusioned with Fascism, are tired of war, hungry and oppressed, if they hate Mussolini, a friend asked me, why do they not rise and overthrow their detested regime in a popular revolt and sue for a separate peace?

Under ordinary circumstances the Italians would have been ripe for rebellion when we left Italy. But the circumstances were extraordinary. The Germans controlled the country.

There are more complications to Italy's situation than that alone. I have tried to be an unbiased observer, reporting the actual situation as I saw it. I have no personal interest in what happens to Italy, in the form of government it may eventually adopt. With that in mind I shall try to analyze the situation and leave the solution to others. There are too many non-experts already, not all of them selfish, who are giving the leaders of the world their gratuitous advice.

I believe that the majority of Italians would like a restoration of parliamentary self-government, as in the democracies, as the only system capable of giving them decent leadership and economic well-being. How to attain that desire is their problem.

Mussolini, as a Socialist, wrote in 1911, "The masses will not fight." By that he meant the easygoing Italians possess little civic courage. That is one factor in the situation.

Another factor is the force that Fascism has employed from its very birth.

"I want to govern with the full consent of the people," Mussolini once said, "but until this consent declares itself,

I keep the maximum force at my disposal. Perhaps it may happen that force may make this consent come and in any case there is force if consent fails."

It is hard to conceive of a government with less consent than Mussolini's. So there is still force. It lies in the Fascist militia, whose motto is, "Believe, Obey, Fight."⁴ The Grand Council said, "The militia is a great political police. Its task, with or without the co-operation of the ordinary police forces, is that of rendering impossible any disturbance of the public order, any gesture or attempt at sedition against the Fascist government."

The militia is composed of the most carefully selected party members, recruited from volunteers coming from the Young Fascists at the age of 20. They are chosen because they are reliable fighters, physically fit, unquestioning, hero-worshipping enthusiasts. Some of the older militiamen, of tested political and combative reliability, veterans of Ethiopia and Spain, have been organized into M battalions, the symbol representing the first letter in Mussolini's name. Mussolini might possibly be able to muster 300,000 men with rifles and machine guns to defend his regime. The unarmed populace, if it rebelled, would have to overpower this militia.

With the tide of anti-Fascism rising as it has risen it is not inconceivable that the public, given the right circumstances, could override the militia.

But the Italians have subsided into apathy and pessimism. They are defeatists in the war. They do not believe they can do anything about it, so they go on praying for peace and grumbling.

They were defeatists before the war, defeatists toward Fascism. For twenty years they suffered and supported Fascism. Mussolini said they were imbued with faith. If that was true the Italian people have lost faith in Mussolini, faith in their king, and as Allen Raymond said, "sometimes it seems as though they have lost faith in themselves, except in the

capacity to work hard, breed, endure hard standards of living, and survive."

One needs only to see the Italians standing at attention in the bars, while the daily war communiqué comes over the radio in solemn, measured, liturgical tones, to appreciate how they have been intimidated by Fascism. They stand because that is the Fascist order. I know a bar where the proprietor turned off the radio just before the war bulletin was read, so that we Americans who were present would not be embarrassed by the regulation. He did that until word reached the party headquarters near by, and then a Fascist officer in uniform took to visiting the bar at the moment of the broadcast to see that the rule was observed.

Furthermore, the anti-Fascist movement in Italy lacks leadership. So long has Mussolini made all the decisions that others have lost the habit of leadership. Italy was in the hands of the Fascist party, which is to say in the hands of Mussolini, before it fell into those of Hitler. And a Roman senator recorded the effect several years ago when he said that as the Duce grew big, the people of Italy grew small.

The regime has done everything to discredit potential leaders, men like Badoglio, who now is old and therefore lacks the fire to kindle the opposition.

Mussolini's dictatorship condemned the masses to twenty years of absenteeism from politics. As a result, maybe the people have been trained to follow any de facto government. If so, where are the leaders for such a government?

We heard of three distinct revolutionary nuclei forming in Italy. There may have been more.

One was supposed to center among the university students. Another was said to exist among the lower ranks of labor, the former Socialists and Communists who for the sake of livelihood crowded into the syndicates and took the name of Fascists, but who felt as they did before, if not more strongly. This was perhaps the real opposition, but it was inarticulate.

There were rumors of a third movement among the Liberals and the Intellectuals. Because each was a whispered opposition, nobody knew how strong it was.

I heard, but could not confirm, of course, that the British Intelligence Service tried to organize a revolutionary movement in Italy when it was certain that Mussolini was going to declare war against Great Britain. The report I heard was one of failure, because reliable, capable leadership could not be found for one movement that would group all the malcontents.

Perhaps the individuality of the Italian was at fault. A French writer, Jean Hussar, attributed the lack of a strong spirit of solidarity among Italians to the individualism which is the outstanding trait in their character, the tendency of each Italian to assert his own personality and escape discipline; to the many parties before Fascism, the domination of Italy by various foreign despots before 1870; the different social conditions, interests, and even dialects of the different provinces. Would the peasant of the South, under democracy, now follow the same leadership as the factory worker of the North?

There is no denying that some organized opposition, even armed opposition, to Fascism exists in Italy. Plots on Mussolini's life as recent as 1939 confirm it. But it has been manifested thus far in sabotage and abortive attempts at terrorism, particularly in the region of the large Slovene population around Trieste.

A series of railroad wrecks and explosions in the munitions factories of Turin, Vulcania, Lecco, Piacenza, and Bologna give rise to a demonstration trial of sixty persons at Trieste in December 1941. Usually such trials before the Special Tribunal for the Defense of the State were held without publicity. But in this case the government apparently intended to make a warning of justice, for the trial was public and the reporting of it filled the columns of the newspapers. Only one

version was reported, that issued by the government, which convicted the men before the court pronounced sentence.

The testimony disclosed what, if true, was the biggest plot in the history of Fascism. The conspirators were charged with a plan to seize power and establish a Soviet regime embracing Yugoslavia. The story that unfolded was one of clandestine newspapers, an insurrectional student movement, a buried store of dynamite, hand grenades, bombs, machine guns, pistols, rifles, and ammunition. One of the defendants, Kaus, confessed that he planned to assassinate Mussolini on his visit to Caporetto in 1938.

While we were interned at Siena, 140 persons, including eighteen women, were tried at Fiume on charges of membership in an armed subversive "Communist" band which had attacked Italian troops. Some of the defendants were shot, others were sentenced to various prison terms. The prefect of Trieste on April 25 ordered a curfew from 9 P.M. to 5 A.M. in more than six townships of his province. The reason was not announced, except that the measure was taken for "the public security." Presumably disorders had occurred, and one report said the prefect had been booed by the audience in a Trieste theater.

But the organized opposition lacks not only the ruthless drive of revolutionary leadership. It lacks organs of opinion, the means to come together in strong numbers. There is no center of agitation, no parliament, no free institutions.

There is no escape for those under suspicion. Doctor Carmine Senise, the chief of the police, has an assistant, Doctor Epifanio Pennetta, whose duty it is to watch for "subversive movements, associations, assemblies, agitation, strikes," to quote from the official Fascist Year Book. Then there is the ever-secret police, the OVRA, and the Gestapo.

The ruffianism of the Fascist bands had nearly disappeared before the war. The war revived it, but up to our departure in May, with little effect. Some defeatists were beaten up at

Trieste and elsewhere. But even the thugs lacked enthusiasm.

The revived persecution of the government's opponents began at Trieste, perhaps, because that city had the largest Jewish population of any in Italy, and the hand of the Gestapo was in control.

Italy's anti-Jewish campaign lagged far behind that of Germany, despite the efforts of the Nazi ally to co-ordinate repressive measures. In almost every country of Nazi-dominated Europe, Jews were treated worse than in Italy. One reason was the small percentage of the population that was Jewish.

The government, in October, 1941, issued some figures on the expulsion of Jews from Italy which were statistical gibberish, as *La Vita Italiana*, the organ of the Jew-baiting Farinacci, promptly complained. As nearly as I could determine, of the 70,000 Jews reported in the government census at the start of the anti-Semitic campaign in 1938, including 57,425 Italian Jews, 17,981 Italian Jews and more than 8,000 of foreign origin had left Italy. That would leave some 44,000 Jews in Italy.

Some Jews were said to be in Italian concentration camps, but they were few compared to those interned in Germany. The suffering of the Jews in Italy had been mainly economic. In the spring of 1942, with the Jews excluded from military service, Mussolini ordered that those between the ages of 18 and 55 be drafted for labor tasks in connection with the war effort. It only meant the inclusion of Jews among the Italians generally whose conscription for work in the factories had been authorized and we assumed it was done at the Germans' suggestion.

Despite the arrests of suspected defeatists, grumblers, and anti-Fascists that filled the jails and confinement areas, Mussolini moved with more caution than Hitler because he knew the tide of opposition might become dangerous under pressure. Since we left Italy there have been reports of a purge of the Fascist party itself in a drive to strengthen the home front,

with thirty thousand members or more removed from the rolls. There were perhaps six million Italians inscribed in the party and its various auxiliary organizations.

The Fascists take an oath which reads, "In the name of God and of Italy, I swear that I will follow the order of the Leader without questioning, that I will serve the cause of the Fascist Revolution with all my powers and if necessary with my blood." For most Italians it is an empty oath, spoken with mental reservations.

The supporters of Fascism form a small minority of the population. They fall into three categories. First are those who are getting rich from high office in the party or from contracts obtained through party membership. They are the most loyal and presumably would defend Mussolini and his regime to the end. Then come the fanatical members, still imbued with the Fascist dream of Empire. The bitter weed of disillusionment may take root eventually among them. Finally are the few who believed the Fascist propaganda that was fed to them for twenty years and whose ranks thin more and more as the months go by.

The Fascist ranks themselves have long been rent by bitter feuds. Every observer in Rome knew that the party had its left and right wings tugging at the center in which Mussolini stood. How strong are the differences, how deep the divisions, I do not know. But the rifts probably would widen at any sign of collapse.

To topple Fascism, one must first remove Mussolini. Many have long believed that Fascism is so built around one man that if the keystone should be removed the whole edifice would crumble, that the regime would crash if Mussolini went.

One often hears that Hitler in the end would commit suicide. In Catholic Italy there are few suicides and Mussolini is not of the suicidal type. He is not yet 60 years old. If his health remains as it is, lamentably good in the eyes of his enemies, if he escapes the assassin's bullet or bomb, will he go

down fighting or, with the wave of defeat lapping at his heels, accept exile as Napoleon did, or flee to it as did the Kaiser in the other World War?

The Italian people hold Mussolini personally responsible for Italy's tragedy. They hate him, and they loathe the Germans, as much as an amiable, industrious, easygoing, peace-loving people are capable of hatred. But that loathing has not yet reached the frenzy of armed revolution.

Nor has hunger yet reached the stage where the gnawing despair of empty stomachs breeds armed defiance. Italy's food resources and faltering economy will probably last out another year, and possibly the next, at the rate of slow decline. The stark famine of Greece is unlikely in Italy and the whole of Italy may never actually starve. But suffering from cold and malnutrition may increase. Perhaps the coming winter will begin to take a toll of death from that cause.

And there is still the military might of modern Germany, which has overawed most Italians and stands ready to crush any rebellion among them.

Without aggressive anti-Fascist leadership among them, without the strength or spirit to rise against Mussolini, the Italians are waiting for the United Nations to depose their despot. Few Italians want to fight the Germans, although some do, some high-ranking officers of the armed forces. This is not to say that the Italians lack physical courage to help eventually in the fight against Fascism. They stood against the Greeks in Albania, although, to borrow the phrase of Wavell, their hearts were in their ersatz boots. They are only waiting for the armed forces of the United Nations to overcome the German forces in Europe.

The generals of the United Nations would probably agree that an Italian revolution now, with all Europe under Nazi domination, direct or indirect, would fail, so strong are the odds against it. And such a premature revolt might be catastrophic for their plans.

Few doubt that with the Italian love for Americans and respect for the British a successful landing of British and American troops on the Continent would hasten the revolution. When they saw a beating administered to a German army weakened by long and costly campaigns, then the Italians could be expected to react.

And that raises the question of an invasion of Italy. With no pretence to the qualifications of a military expert I should think that would be impossible until the Americans and the British had securely occupied North Africa.

As this is written, Lieutenant General Dwight Eisenhower's American troops are landing in Morocco and Algiers. Lieutenant General Bernard L. Montgomery's British Eighth Army has Rommel's *Afrika Korps* on the run back into Libya from Egypt's western desert. It is obvious that this new second front, so long talked about, is intended to squeeze the Axis forces out of North Africa.

It may not be many months before the southern sands of the Mediterranean become the base for invasion of the European continent, the springboard for an offensive on Italy. The American troops may land first in Greece. But the eventual occupation of Italy is a logical expectation. No doubt the Italian army will resist any incursion on Italian soil. But for the Italian people it will be a great deliverance.

As for Mussolini, some believe he is holding in Italy many of the some three million men under arms in order to meet any invasion threat. From the windows of our repatriation special we saw new, half-hidden pillbox fortifications along the Ligurian coast. We could not determine whether they were a defense against invasion there, but since an invasion would come presumably through Sicily and Southern Italy. I should think the fortifications in the North were against commando raids.

The British have made a few such raids on the shores of Sicily and the mainland, none of which has been publicized

except the parachute landing in Catania. I did hear, however, that small, portable radio-transmitting sets of low power were landed for agents to use in communicating with Malta.

The Italians found one such set in a cemetery at Leghorn, near which oil refinery town we saw the fortifications. A Swedish widow, long resident in Italy, visited the tomb of her husband so frequently that the Fascist spies watching her became suspicious. They investigated the tomb one day, and found under its stone covering a radio-transmitting apparatus. The woman was, of course, arrested.

It would seem, therefore, that Americans should first prepare for an invasion by making the Italians believe we are going into the Italian peninsula to help them and to free them from Fascism.

After the armistice where can the Italians look for their leadership?

Mussolini has ruled Italy alone. A law of 1925 exalted him as prime minister to a position high above the other ministers as Head of the Government (*Capo del Governo*). He is responsible to the king alone, not to any parliament. The Head of the Government, by this law, is to be appointed by the king from a list of names submitted to him by the Grand Council of Fascism.

Mussolini is believed to have prepared for his succession by writing a list of names, with Ciano's among them, and locking it away in his safe against the day when he would be no more. But Mussolini, in his one-man rule, has failed to train an elite, even of Fascism.

And if there is no longer any Grand Council of Fascism to provide the king with nominations, what agency could do it? The army officers who detest the Germans and are hostile to Fascism say they could do it.

The army in Italy has always been loyal and still is loyal to the Crown, rather than to any other power. It is not a long tradition, it is true.

"King of Italy by the Grace of God and the will of the Nation," to quote the Italian almanac, Vittorio Emanuele III inherited his title from his grandfather Vittorio Emanuele II, who was declared King of Italy by the first joint Italian parliament which met in Turin, the capital of Piedmont, in March, 1861.

The royal family itself dates back to the Middle Ages. Its origin was French, and French, not Italian, is the language spoken by the king when he, his tall Montenegrin queen, Crown Prince Umberto, and the Belgian Crown Princess Marie José, dine in family intimacy.

In 1418 the House of Savoy acquired the principality of Piedmont. In 1713 it obtained the island of Sicily, with the title of king. In 1720, Sicily was exchanged for Sardinia. The territory of Genoa was added in 1815. In 1860 annexation to Sardinia and Piedmont was voted by plebiscites in Parma, Modena, Romagna, and Tuscany, by Sicily and Naples and part of the Papal States, which had been conquered by Garibaldi, and by the Marches and Umbria. In 1866, Mantua and Venezia were added to the kingdom. Finally, in 1870, Rome and the rest of the papal states were occupied by an Italian army and annexed to the kingdom by plebiscite, to complete the unification of Italy.

The king and queen live a simple, abstemious life. Since the sanctions of the Ethiopian war they have even dispensed with the customary New Year's Day reception of the Court and the diplomatic corps. The king passes his days with his coin collection and writing in his diary, which some day may explain his role under Fascism and what he thought of it.

The Quirinale, the Royal Palace, has not been violated by the Germans, who leave the king alone except for occasional social activities. But Vittorio Emanuele III is sovereign only by the grace of Adolf Hitler, which means in name alone.

The royal family has taken pains to identify itself with the German alliance. The Japanese ambassador, Zempo Horikiri,

who was educated at Harvard, told John Whitaker and me, with much chuckling, of his embarrassment in conversation with the queen. She spoke with equal fluency English, Italian, and French, but she insisted on speaking German to him, although he told her that he was only able to read a few words of that language, did not speak it, and preferred to talk in English.

Although the king is nearly 73 years old—his birthday is November 11—and he suffers intermittently from rheumatism, he and the queen have done what they consider their duty in the war. This consists of visiting hospitals, charitable organizations, and campaign meetings to raise food, clothing and other things for the soldiers. The king has been unable to visit any active front, as he did in World War I, but only those of the French frontier and Albania after the fighting was over. Only on his birthday and in the Fascist press is he still referred to as the Soldier King. After a reign of more than forty years he and the queen are a quiet, simple, old couple.

It is Umberto, the Prince of Piedmont, and the princess who play the role in this war that their parents played in the First World War. The prince is commander of the armies in Central and Southern Italy and the islands. He busies himself with inspections, reviews, and similar military ceremonies.

Princess Marie José is the most popular of the royal family, the most photographed, usually with her three small children. She is the busiest of all the royal family and, like her husband, is constantly seen in public. There is no hospital in or near Rome and Naples which she has not visited, most of them a number of times. She is inspectress general of the Italian Red Cross, patroness of innumerable organizations and associations connected with the war, including that of the Italo-German Association—though her brother, King Leopold III of the Belgians, was a virtual prisoner of the Germans when she paid a secret visit to Laeken Castle, near Brussels, for his marriage to a commoner in December, 1941.

When we left Rome the Crown was in contempt among many Italians. For one thing, the reverence of the British people for their Crown finds no corresponding sentiment in the Italian mind. The Italian king lost the respect of many of his subjects when he fell so thoroughly under the influence of Mussolini that he was quoted as saying to a gentleman of his court, "Be careful what you say to me, for I must tell everything to Mussolini." And again when he visited the birthplace of Mussolini in 1938 and laid wreaths on the tombs of the Duce's parents.

The Prince of Piedmont, whom I last saw as a tall, handsome, baldish young man in civilian clothes about to board a train for Naples where he has his palace, is a more impressive figure than his father, but has little personality. He once had a quarrel with Fascism, but Mussolini won by amending the Constitution to make the succession to the throne subject to the ratification of the Grand Council. The Fascists also caused a rumor to circulate that the prince was effeminate. Since that time the prince, after sowing the wild oats of youth, has settled down to the role of a respectable husband and father. Like his father he has refrained from joining the Fascist Party, for a king must hold aloof from partisan politics. But in an order of the day to the armies under his command last spring, Umberto concluded with the words, "Hail to the King! Hail to the Duce!"

Have the king's weakness, his subservience to Fascism, and Umberto's conformist attitude, weakened the monarchy to a point where the end of Fascism will mean the beginning of Republicanism? Must the Crown, powerless to resent its own humiliation, passively await its fate?

Although the civil list, or annual grant to the king, is a drain of about one million dollars on the annual budget, I heard no talk of republicanism inside Italy as I have heard of it outside.

There is one school of thought that the monarchy is the

chief bulwark of Italy after Fascism. I heard this expressed by an anti-Fascist who was confined, for a time, for his opposition to the regime. As this man expressed it, the Crown is a symbol of Italy's unity. During normal times the king's political duties are nominal. He merely signs decrees. But in a crisis the king may have important personal power. Mussolini, who acknowledged Republican leanings as late as 1921, recognized this when he endorsed the monarchy before the March on Rome. It was the king's refusal to sign a decree of martial law that made the march so easy.

That, my anti-Fascist acquaintance said, was a demonstration, too, of the army's loyalty to the Crown. It bowed to the king's will. The army and the House of Savoy might still be the salvation of Italy. The king remains as the only symbol of respectability and patriotism in the government. With no Grand Council of Fascism to nominate a prime minister, why could not the army present one to the king? A military dictator, perhaps, but one who would end the reign of Fascism. Furthermore, in the chaos that comes with the collapse of a country in wartime, the army could assume the policing power. How long would it be, he wondered, before the Italians would be politically prepared to elect a president.

That may be a minority view. And would the United Nations accept a military dictatorship?

There are many Italians, even outside of Italy, who hold that the liberation and future system of government of the Italian people is primarily the business of the Italians in Italy. In more than three years among Italians in Italy, I never heard once mentioned the name of a single emigré as a likely deliverer of the people from Fascism. It seemed as though the pre-Fascist parties had been buried so profoundly that not even their ghosts were abroad in the land. The Italians seemed to be searching for new leaders among those who had stayed in Italy and endured the persecution of Fascism. But, as I

have already remarked, I had no contact with the underground, at least so far as I was aware.

In the future of Italy the questions are many. All the country seems to ask is a fair deal, peace, and the opportunity for its sons to work at home and abroad. In the meantime the Italians await a new leader. Will the liberating armies of the United Nations bring him, or will they find him among those they liberate? That, at the moment, is a secondary question. The primary question is how long will the Italians have to wait for the defeat of the German army by those of the United Nations.

A friend, who left Italy after we did, brought this story as the last out of Rome:

Said the Italian optimist, "I think we are going to lose this war."

Replied the Italian pessimist, "Yes, but when?"

That is the question the Americans and the British must answer.