

CHAPTER II

HOW THE DICTATORSHIP AROSE

§ 1: *The 'Anti-Bolshevist' Reaction*

A REVOLUTION which everybody talks about and which many fear, but which never materializes, ends by being looked upon as a failure. A revolution that fails leads to reaction.

During 1920, among the upper and middle classes a new state of mind was slowly maturing, which, combined with the slump in revolutionary excitement, was to lead to a complete reversal of the political situation.

The industrialists, who during the war had manufactured munitions, or army cloth, had not until now actually suffered as a result of the disorders and strikes. The fear of the disorders which might result from unemployment prevented the government from stopping the production of war material. Then the industrialists protested that they could not go on paying the wages demanded by the workers unless the government raised the price of goods. Then the government, in order to pay its way, increased the circulation of paper money. As a result prices soared, there were new strikes, a renewed fear of disorder, and new orders for war material.

But the government could not continue indefinitely to order useless war material. The industrialists, in their turn, could not pass from uneconomic to economic prices without lowering wages, and they could not lower their wages without a fierce struggle against the economic organization and the political influence of the working classes.

The industrialists, moreover, felt crushed by the relentless taxation of the past two years. If such taxes were to be abolished, the government would have to obtain its revenue from other sources by means of indirect taxation. But an increase in indirect taxes affecting the workers was opposed by the 156 Socialist deputies, and an increase in indirect taxes affecting the peasants was opposed by the 100 Christian-Democratic deputies. This problem, too, could be solved only by a reversal of the parliamentary situation.

At the same time life had become very difficult for the land-

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owners and farmers, especially in Lower Lombardy, Emilia, Tuscany and Apulia, where the pressure of the Socialist and Christian-Democrat Trade Unions was at its height. Strikes, threats and violence forced them to employ unnecessary numbers of labourers, and kept them in a state of constant uneasiness for themselves and their families, often isolated in the open country and without means of defence. In the first year after the war they had put up with these trials, hoping they would soon blow over; the peasants were nearly all demobilized soldiers, and it was necessary to look with forbearance on the extravagances of the 'saviours of the country.' But as time passed, the honeymoon with the 'saviours of the country' waned and irritation grew. The hail of new taxation made it increasingly difficult for the landowners to bear the burden of high wages and of the unessential or even wasteful work they were obliged to provide for the unemployed. Those who were most exasperated were not the big landowners, who did not come into contact with the labourers and metayers, but the farmers, the stewards, the owners of medium-sized estates and the small holders. Bitterest of all were the new owners and small speculators who had bought land with what they had saved during the war, and who had now to defend their property.

Besides the 'anti-Bolshevism' of the industrialists and landowners there was that of the shop-keepers and tradesmen. Many of these had been opposed to the war, and in 1919 had sympathized with the 'Bolshevist' protests against those responsible for the war. But as soon as this 'Bolshevism' began to fix prices, to loot shops, to break shop-windows, they too became fiercely 'anti-Bolshevist.' Moreover, the Retail Co-operative Stores of the Socialists and Christian-Democrats competed with the small shop-keepers. For these people 'anti-Bolshevism' meant putting an end (a) to street disorder, (b) to regulation of food prices, (c) to the competition of the Socialist and Christian-Democratic Co-operatives.

The public servants also had their 'anti-Bolshevism.' The workers, the landless peasants and those public servants who could strike—such as railwaymen, post office and telegraph employees—had up till then defended themselves against the inflation and the consequent rise in prices, by exacting higher

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wages and higher salaries. In contrast, the magistrates, army officers, teachers, retired officials and others with fixed incomes were living a life of great hardship. A great many of these too had been 'Bolshevists' in 1919. During 1920, comparing their increasing poverty with the increasing wages of the manual workers, they too became 'anti-Bolshevists.' They attributed their troubles solely to the secondary, but more obtrusive, fact of the strikes, instead of tracing it to its primary, but less obvious cause - inflation.

A sub-section of this bureaucratic 'anti-Bolshevism' was the 'anti-Bolshevism' of the Carabinciers, of the Royal Guards and of the police, who were forced to rush hither and thither to stop disorders; were insulted in the papers and at revolutionary meetings; were exposed to continual danger of wounds or death; and were exasperated by the very necessity of the frequent use of arms against tumultuous crowds.

Finally, there was the 'anti-Bolshevism' of the patriots. The Anarchists and Communists, under the illusion that they could live indefinitely on their anti-war protests, in 1920 redoubled their efforts in a stupid and malicious campaign of hatred and contempt against those who had been decorated in the war. In certain districts where Anarchist and Communist propaganda were most prevalent, a man found that to have done his duty with honour in the war, or to have returned home disabled, was regarded as a crime which had to be concealed lest punishment should follow. Many ex-service men, who would willingly have joined with the most hot-headed 'war socialists,' became 'anti-Bolshevists' as a result of this stupid brutality which did more harm to the revolutionary parties than any violence or disorders. The main appeal of the 'anti-Bolshevist' offensive lay precisely in the vindication of the rights and dignity of the disabled ex-soldiers and of those decorated in the war.

All these forces of opposition to 'Bolshevism' were slowly accumulating in 1919-20.¹ After the failure of the occupation of

¹ For this slow growth of the 'anti-Bolshevist' mentality in the different classes before the autumn of 1920, see the remarks of Guglielmo Ferrero, *Da Fiume a Roma*, pp. 91-92. See also in the volume *Il fascismo visto dai partiti politici italiani*, the studies of Luigi Fabbri, *Controrivoluzione*

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the factories, they became active. During the municipal elections which took place in October and November all over the country, the Socialists only won 2,022 communes (24.3 per cent.); the Christian-Democrats won 1,613 (19.4 per cent.); the other anti-'Bolshevik' parties won 4,692 (56.3 per cent.).¹ The Socialists were beaten in almost all the most important cities: Rome, Venice, Turin, Genoa, Florence, Naples, Palermo; at Milan they won with barely a 3,000 majority, on a poll of 144,000 votes. The only overwhelming Socialist victory in a big town was at Bologna. Whilst these electioneering struggles were taking place, the anniversary of the armistice was solemnized with much ceremony. In November, 1919, it had been necessary to suppress all commemorations to avoid disorders. In November, 1920, no Anarchist, or Communist, or Socialist thought of disturbing the ceremony. The wave of anti-patriotism, that for nearly two years seemed to have submerged the country, was now clearly subsiding. A new frame of mind became evident.

At this point a horrible massacre which occurred in Bologna, on November 21, 1920, precipitated the anti-'Bolshevik' reaction.

The communal elections in Bologna, October 31, had, as we have said, given the Socialists a sweeping victory. A group of Fascists, exasperated by this victory, on November 4 attacked the Chamber of Workers. The Secretary of the latter, a Communist named Bucco, who had wearied and irritated the city by his overbearingness, showed himself on this occasion a coward unable to organize resistance. After having abused the police for two years, he telephoned them for help against the Fascist assault. The police arrived and confiscated a store of arms and explosives which Bucco, as far as can be seen, had collected with the sole object of

preventiva, pp. 21 ff.; Mario Missiroli, *Il fascismo e la crisi italiana*, pp. 14 ff.; Zibordi, *Critica socialista del fascismo*, pp. 16-42. The studies collected in this volume are the work of men of the most widely divergent political views. They were written in the second half of 1921 and first half of 1922. Thus, taken as a whole, they form a first-rate source of information on the origins of the Fascist movement.

¹ Giusti, *Le correnti politiche italiane attraverso le due riforme elettorali dal 1919 al 1921*, Florence, 1922, pp. 32, 33.

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having them discovered. Whilst the police were searching the premises, the Fascists sacked them.¹

To retrieve this moral disaster, the Socialists decided to celebrate the opening meeting of the new town council, by a grand demonstration to take place on November 21. An anti-Bolshevist paper of the city, *Il Progresso*, started a campaign to prevent the Socialists from waving red flags in their demonstration. The police induced the Socialists and Fascists to come to a compromise on November 18: the Socialists renounced their procession, and confined themselves to holding a meeting in front of the town-hall (Palazzo d'Accursio); the red flags were to appear on the balcony of the town-hall only while the new mayor and the other official speakers were making their speeches; as soon as the speeches were over the flags would be taken away and the meeting would dissolve.

Notwithstanding this agreement, the population remained suspicious and excited. Dark rumours of assaults and counter-assaults were circulated. On the one hand Socialists, on the other Fascists, summoned their comrades from the neighbouring towns.

In the afternoon of Saturday, November 20, the Directorate of the Fascio circulated the following typewritten manifesto which annulled the agreement of the two days earlier:

'Citizens, the Reds, beaten and disbanded in all the squares and streets of our city, call up their hordes from the country-side, to take their revenge and hoist their red rag on the town-hall. We shall not endure this insult! It is an insult to every Italian citizen, and to our country, which will have nothing to do with Lenin and with Bolshevism. On Sunday the women and all those who love peace and quiet, are requested to stay at home, and, if they wish to deserve well of their country, to hang out of their windows the Italian flag. On Sunday in the streets of Bologna there shall be only Fascists and anti-Fascists. It will be the test! The great test in the name of Italy.'

On Sunday, November 21, at 2 p.m., i.e. an hour before the ceremony was to begin, a red flag was hoisted on one of the two

¹ See *Fascismo: Inchiesta socialista sulle gesta dei Fascisti in Italia*, Milano, Casa editrice Avanti, 1922, pp. 238-239.

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famous towers of Bologna. There were evidently, among the 'Bolshevists' as among the Fascists, fanatics determined to provoke a conflict. After half an hour had elapsed, the police had the flag taken down. At 3 p.m., when the new municipal councillors met to nominate the new mayor, the hall was full of people, and in the square outside thousands were gathered. Cordons of troops on foot and on horseback, carabinieri and royal guards closed all the streets leading to the square, to prevent the Fascists from entering it and coming into contact with the crowd gathered there.

At 3.30 p.m. a group of about 500 Fascists, starting from their headquarters, flung themselves against one barrier of soldiers and broke through. They reached the entrance to the square, and tried to break through the second barrier, just as the new mayor came to the window, accompanied by the red flags, to speak to the crowd. Three revolver shots rang out from the Fascists. These in the general nervousness produced a wave of panic. Many soldiers threw themselves on the ground or left their ranks. Some Carabinieri and Royal Guards opened fire on the town-hall. The crowd in the square rushed for shelter to the inner courtyard of the town-hall. On the terrified mass bombs fell from a window of the town-hall. A Communist named Martelli, a member of the committee which had made the arrangements for the ceremony, had laid in a store not only of refreshments for the councillors if all went well, but also of bombs, in case the town-hall was stormed by the Fascists. When the crowd surged confusedly against the gateway, Martelli seems to have thought it was the Fascists, and dropped the bombs on his own friends. Among the crowd ten were killed and fifty-eight wounded. Some were victims of the firing of the Carabinieri and Royal Guards. The greater number were struck by the fragments of the bombs.

Meanwhile, in the council-chamber, shouting and disorder reigned. Some struggled to the doors to escape, some threw themselves on the floor to avoid bullets coming in at the window. Suddenly two men armed with revolvers (or perhaps only one who changed places as he shot) came forward towards the bench occupied by members of the anti-Socialist minority, and began

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to shoot at them. One of the minority, Signior Giordani, a distinguished officer in the war, was killed, two others were wounded.

These are the facts, as they can be reconstructed to-day, in cold blood, from the records of the public trial, which took place in Milan from January 30 to March 14, 1923.¹ In November, 1920, under the immediate impression of the tragedy, it was not possible to distribute the responsibility dispassionately. Political bias had free play. The anti-'Bolshevist' parties and papers shifted the responsibilities from the actual authors of the crime to their party as a whole. The Socialists, whether 'Communists,' 'Maximalists' or 'Reformists,' were all, without distinction, involved in a storm of moral indignation.

Under the pressure of this storm the rupture between Communists and Socialists, which had been preparing for a year, became complete. At the Socialist Congress at Leghorn in January, 1921, the Communists left the Socialist Party, and formed a new Party. This division increased the bewilderment and confusion of the working classes.

From that time onwards, the latent forces of the 'anti-Bolshevist' reaction were unchained. In war an army begins to win when its opponents cease to believe in victory and begin to retreat. Then those who might have fled, had the enemy resisted ten minutes longer, feel themselves as strong as lions and charge in pursuit.

The 'Fasci di Combattimento' formed 'the White Guard,' and became the rallying points of all the 'anti-Bolshevist' forces seeking to organize themselves. The industrialists, landowners and shop-keepers who had already, here and there, given them money, had now only to generalize the method of subsidies and to enrol their own sons and followers in the Fascist bands. Truth to tell, the Fascists also made a great display of revolutionary phraseology. But revolutionary phraseology was useful to incite the 'squads' ('squadristi') who had to fight the 'Bolshevist'; the true function of the Fascists was in reality conservative – and this was important.

¹ They were published in full by the Press of the time. I have used the account in the *Corriere della Sera*.

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'After a few months' - wrote a careful observer in the summer of 1921 - 'nearly everywhere in the country districts, in Emilia, in Venetia, in Apulia, the greater part of the Fasci were formed by prot'és of the agrarians. Fascismo changed markedly from what it was before October, 1920. The undergraduate element was no longer its main strength. Even the leadership of the Fascists here and there changed hands. Not even in the towns were their adherents the same as they used to be. The earlier Fascists were for the most part more disinterested and were moved by the patriotic spirit which had been fanned and exaggerated by the war - a patriotism undoubtedly ill-understood and vague, but sincere. They were reduced to a minority by the influx of new elements.'¹

• Such a vast and rapid influx of wealthy and conservative people into an organization of impecunious youths who believed themselves revolutionaries, bewildered and scandalized many 'Fascists of the first hour.' One may see in Umberto Banchelli's book, *Memorie di un Fascista*,² the protests against the 'sons and hangers-on of the big-wigs,' who, if they came in great numbers to the meetings of the Fascists, were never in the dangerous expeditions:

'They had come into the Fascio for their own ends, one of which was to exercise class justice, that is to carry out reprisals, not as Fascists, but as sons of the lawyer, of the doctor, of the war profiteer. If they met men in working clothes, they fell on them and began beating them. Their mentality was on a par with that of the Communists, who had beaten and murdered anybody who was decently dressed. One saw on arriving at the Fascist headquarters the well-known surly and rapacious faces of war profiteers; these were shabbily clothed and shod, but all had the inevitable diamond on their finger, - and we were obliged to

¹ Fabbri, *Controrivoluzione preventiva*, p. 37.

² Florence, ed. Sassaiola Fiorentina, 1922, p. 12. This book is a typical document showing the incredible mental and moral confusion created in many intelligent and generous young men by the chaotic propaganda of such men as D'Annunzio and Mussolini.

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accept their money because we needed it to stifle an evil worse than they.'¹

This 'anti-Bolshevist' counter-offensive was natural, and might have been helpful to the workers and peasants themselves. For two years they had faced nothing but the fear and cowardice of the upper classes and had lost all sense of proportion. They had become like spoiled children, and their own leaders were often unable to keep control of them. A virile resistance on the part of the Conservatives would have forced them to take a juster view of their capacities and responsibilities.

In subsidizing the Fascists, the industrialists, landowners and bankers were not going beyond their rights. Capital is a social force like labour, and it was as natural that the capitalists should assist their 'White Guard' with funds as that the workers and peasants should contribute to the support of their propagandists and organizers.

Even the acts of violence committed by the Fascists during the first few months of their counter-offensive can be viewed with a certain indulgence. Since the police and magistrates were powerless to defend private citizens from the capricious and overbearing power of the Trade Unions, such citizens might well seek to defend themselves by illegal methods.

In this first period, a Fascist had to possess a certain amount of courage, physical and moral. He had to face unpopularity, he was exposed to physical violence on the part of the crowd, he ran

¹ Cp., the following words from a speech made in March, 1925, by Signor Cuzzi, a prominent personality in Fascist Trade Unionism: 'The industrialists are greatly mistaken if they think that having accepted their subsidies in 1919, 1920, and 1921, Fascism has given up protecting the workers' (quoted in Hautecoeur, *Le Fascisme*, in *L'Année politique française et étrangère*, October-December, 1925, p. 145). Signor Villari wrote in the *Manchester Guardian*, March 27, 1926, as follows: 'Nor did many of the capitalists sympathize with Fascism; at all events, they were certainly not the organizers of the movement.' The equivocation consists precisely in the use of the word *many*. It is quite true that not *all* the capitalists, without exception, subsidized Fascism. As to the 'organizers of the movement,' we shall see in the course of the next few pages who they are.

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a risk of wounds or death – a risk not as widespread as Fascist ‘propaganda’ would have us believe, but real enough to damp the ardour of the ordinary man. The Anarchist, Luigi Fabbri, whom we have quoted already, wrote in the summer of 1921:

‘The assistance, moral, material and financial, of industrial and landed capitalism, the connivance of the public forces, and the adhesion of all the supine worshippers of success, would not alone have sufficed to give strength to Fascism. Rather, all these co-efficients would have been absent if there had not been from the beginning a nucleus of men endowed with strength of will and the spirit of sacrifice, who at their own risk broke the ice of indifference and hostility, urged on into the struggle by inward strength and careless of their own safety. Some of them met their deaths. These few, the most obscure, urging on the many, set in motion the whole machinery, which now appears so strong.’ (*Controrivoluzione preventiva*, pp. 96–97.)

§ 2: *The ‘Authorized Lawlessness’*

Towards the beginning of 1921, the moment was ripe for the government to take advantage of the Fascist counter-offensive and the Socialist discouragement, disarm all factions and restore public peace. In December, 1920, a single cannonade against D’Annunzio’s palace had sufficed to put an end to the occupation of Fiume; the Carabineers had been re-organized and were loyal; the Royal Guards were always ready to shoot, even when there was no absolute necessity to do so. There were more than sufficient forces available for the repression of disorders, whether coming from the Right or from the Left. Once the respect for law and order had been restored, it would have only been necessary to wait patiently until the healing process had done its work, and the people little by little had found their way back to the path of common sense.

It is true that the gate could not all at once be put back upon its hinges. Time is the only healer of certain diseases. And it would have been a great and precious lesson to our people, if they could have rid themselves of Communist dreams and revolu-

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tionary illusions, by free experience and spontaneous conviction. Some credit was due to them, for they had shown much firmness and spirit of sacrifice after Caporetto. Patience and calm was the obvious duty, especially for those politicians who had known neither how to make war nor how to make peace, and who were mainly and directly responsible for the post-war neurasthenia with which the Italian people were afflicted.

If there was one man who had no right to treat that disease with a cudgel and a revolver, that man was Mussolini. Before the war none had contributed more than he to the spread of revolutionary and anti-national Socialism in Italy. He had launched among the masses the slogan of revolutionary neutrality in the face of the World War. During the war none had made more lavish promises of peasant ownership and workers' control, as a result of the 'revolutionary war.' None, in 1919-20, had contributed more to the revolutionary frenzy which led to the occupation of the factories.

But if the danger of revolution had never been great, the fear of it had been great. And that fear lasted well after 1920 and in many minds it is still alive. In politics what people fear is of more importance than what actually happens. And fear is a bad counsellor.

The Italian industrialist class is of recent formation. It owes its wealth primarily to protective duties and government contracts, and has not yet acquired by a long political and economic experience a consciousness of its social dignity, of its rights and obligations. In particular the 'new rich' of the war - the *pescicani* or 'sharks' as we call them in Italy - are people of scant intellectual or moral refinement. Having achieved wealth and power more often by luck than merit, they are incapable of holding their ground in a system of free competition and political liberty. These profiteers, who form the bulk of the capitalist classes in Italy to-day, when their terror of 'Bolshevism' had turned to anger, were not content to lead the workers back to a more reasonable frame of mind. On the contrary they purposed to exploit their victory to the uttermost and to destroy the workers' organization. Even more savage than the industrialists were the land-

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owners, accustomed by secular tradition to consider themselves absolute masters of their lands and to treat the peasants as beasts of burden with no civil rights and no sense of human dignity. They, too, were not content to defend their own liberty and property: what they wanted was revenge on the serfs who had dreamed of becoming masters. 'We will put you to draw the plough with the oxen!' said the farmers of Cremona to their labourers, and they set off to enrol themselves among the Fascists.

• At the end of 1920, Giolitti, a 'Liberal,' was Prime Minister; Bonomi, a 'Reformist Socialist,' Minister for War; and Fera, a 'Democrat,' was Minister of Justice. These are the men who are chiefly responsible for the situation in Italy to-day. Seeing that the Communists and Socialists were everywhere yielding before the Fascists' onslaught, they thought that Communists and Socialists were having the lesson they deserved. Instead of satisfying the wish for peace and order that had arisen all over the country, they thought that the Fascist offensive might be utilized to break the strength not only of the Socialists and Communists, but also of the Christian-Democrats. The proper way would have been to restore order and then dissolve the Chamber and ask the country for a fresh mandate. They preferred to allow the civil war to continue, hoping with its help to manipulate new elections so as to have a Chamber in which a 'liberal' majority need no longer reckon either with Socialists or with Christian-Democrats. They therefore allowed the chiefs of the Army to equip the Fascists with rifles and lorries and authorized retired officers and officers-on-leave to command them.¹ The Carabineers, the Royal

¹ Already in 1919 the plan of organizing a 'White Guard' against the 'Bolshevists' existed amongst the highest officials of the Army. In fact, two friends of mine, who had returned from the war and were exercising their professions, one in Florence and the other in Genoa, were simultaneously summoned by their former commanding officers, in December, 1919, and requested to gather round them groups of White Guards, to whom the military authorities would supply arms and money. Both refused. It is more than probable that in 1919 and 1920 a certain number of Fascist groups were organized in this way. But during the time Signor Nitti was Prime Minister (July, 1919-July, 1920), the military officials had no such orders from the Minister of War, and therefore not

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Guard, the police, and the magistrates received hints to take no notice of disturbances started by the Fascists, and to intervene only when it was a question of disarming, trying and sentencing people who attempted to resist.

Italy thus entered upon a new phase of political life that of 'authorized lawlessness.'¹

The Fascists, armed and officered, provided with funds and sure of impunity, rapidly increased in numbers and in strength during the first half of 1921.²

In this new phase of their activity, they no longer confined themselves to fighting the 'Bolshevists' in elections, in the Press and at public meetings. Having been up to this time purely *political* 'anti-Bolshevism,' Fascism now became also *economic* 'anti-Bolshevism.' The Fascists began to assail the Trade Unions in town and country. The Co-operatives were attacked in the same way.

Soon their offensive was directed even against the Christian-Democrats. In Venetia and Lower Lombardy, where the Christian-Democratic organizations were far stronger than those of the Socialists, this tendency of the Fascists revealed itself as early as the end of 1920. During 1921, the offensive spread little by little to other regions. Certainly in 1921 there was no comparison between the extreme violence with which the Socialist organizations were broken up, and the more attenuated violence under which the Christian-Democratic organizations were begin-

many officials acted on their own initiative. Only when Signor Giolitti succeeded Signor Nitti, and after the occupation of the factories, the high military authorities were given a free hand to execute the plan they had had in readiness for a year.

¹ Carlo Avarna di Gualtieri, *Il Fascismo*, p. 69.

² Mussolini, *La nuova politica dell'Italia*, p. 18: 'In 1920 our membership totalled 20,615; in 1921, it had risen to 248,936.' I give these figures for what they are worth. They must be taken with caution. Mussolini himself, in an interview given to the *Giornale d'Italia*, May 22, 1921, declared the Fascist membership to be no less than half a million. But in November, 1921, the Fascist General Secretary, at the Conference of Rome, gave the figure of membership as 320,000. (*Corriere della Sera*, November 8, 1921.) Statistics of the 'New Era' are as a rule somewhat erratic

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ning to give way. But in 1922, the 'White Bolshevism' of the Christian-Democrats 'suffered from Fascist attacks hardly less than did 'Red Bolshevism.'

It was the landowners who brought into Fascism their hatred of the Christian-Democrats, while the shop-keepers brought with them their aversion for the Co-operatives, whether red or white.

The Fascists, in lorries or with free passes on the railways, swarmed into the towns, sacked houses, looted the Chambers of Workers¹ and other Trade Union quarters, beat and maltreated, banished or murdered the organizers. The country was terrorized by 'punitive expeditions' which set out openly from Fascist offices in the town. The Town Councils in the hands of the 'Bolshevists' or the Christian-Democrats, were forced to resign under threats that the Mayor and Councillors would be murdered. For two years a terrible man-hunt was carried on, organized by the military authorities with the connivance of the magistrates and of the police. It was a 'pitiless counter-revolution to a *révolution manquée*.'² Some of the 'War Socialists' of 1919-20 finding that the Socialist organizations had now become 'unhealthy' for them, began to pass over, one by one, to the Fascist Party.³ Many who had been cowards in 1920, became apostles of terrorism in 1921.

Luigi Fabbri, who lived in Bologna, one of the most lively centres of the Fascist movement, writes, in the summer of 1921, the following description of the Fascist offensive:

¹ In many towns the Unions of all the trades in the town, when under Socialist control, formed a single local confederation, with a permanent secretary and headquarters. This was the 'Chamber of Workers' (*Camera del Lavoro*), an institution unknown in England, but which had great importance in Italy. The Chamber was for the workers the centre of all economic and political initiatives in local life. It was like a new municipal administrative body in contrast with the traditional town council.

² Odon Por, *Fascism*, London Labour Publishing Co., 1926, p. 106.

³ Odon Por, *Fascism*, p. 107: 'They joined the Fascists, not only because they were without political training but also because they wanted to have a hand in what was going on, and saw the prospect of realizing their Communist hopes.'

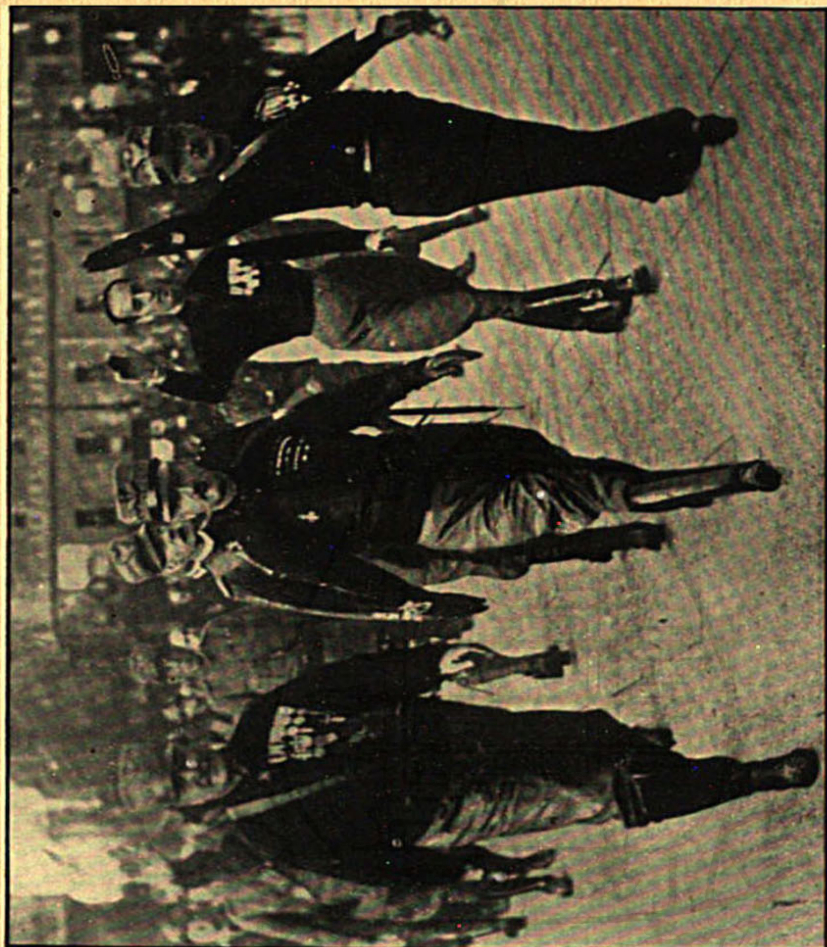
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'Where, as in Reggio-Emilia and Modena, the Reformist organizations prevailed, these were the ones attacked; at Bologna and Ferrara, those of the Maximalists and Reformists; at Treviso, the Republican; in the province of Bergamo, the Christian-Democratic; at Carrara and in Valdarno, the Anarchist; at Piacenza, Sestri and Parma, the Syndicalist organizations, not excepting those that had taken part in the war and favoured D'Annunzio; at Turin, it was the Communist organizations; in some places, Padua for instance, even the totally non-political Co-operative associations, directed by Conservatives, were not spared. The fury of destruction made no distinction between the various institutions; it was enough that they were run by working men, whether they were Unions or Federations, libraries or newspapers, retailers' or producers' Co-operatives, working-men's clubs or recreation halls, cafés and taverns or private houses. The pretexts vary from place to place. At Bologna or round Reggio they tell you that they had to scatter the Socialists, the cowards who could not or would not make a revolution; at Carrara and in the Valdarno they proclaim that it is time to have done with the Anarchists who threaten fresh upheavals; at Turin or Florence they declaim against the Russian Communist myth; at Rome or Milan against the Reformist Socialists and against Nitti. And so they go on, in every district, sparing only the minority groups, who, because they are minorities - whether Socialists, Anarchists, Republicans or Christian-Democrats - have nothing to defend but ideas, and do not represent any concrete interests to be destroyed.'¹

Here are two fundamental points, which must be borne in mind if the Fascist movement is to be understood.

The first point is that the Fascist movement - not the badly organized, inefficient, ultra-revolutionary movement of 1919-20, but the well-organized and thoroughly efficient anti-revolutionary movement of the following years - began to develop as the post-war neurasthenia in the country began to die

¹ Fabbri, *Controrivoluzione preventiva*, p. 55; Mowrer, *Immortal Italy*, pp. 357-60.



THE GENERALS WHO TOOK PART IN THE 'MARCH ON ROME'
(From a post-card circulated in November, 1922)
(see pages 83 and 153)

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down.¹ As little by little the shock of the war grew less acute, the Italian people recovered from the 'post-war neurasthenia.' The military authorities, by arming the Fascists, and the police and the magistrates, by assuring them impunity, prevented the Italian people from freely working out its own salvation. It was not pacified by reason; it was coerced by fire and sword. Fascism was no cure for the malady of Bolshevism. It was a new and more appalling disease – civil war – which took the place of the revolutionary excitement, which was already on the wane; or rather, it was a new and more appalling phase of the same disease from which all countries were suffering, some more, some less: the post-war neurasthenia.

The second point is that when the question is raised whether a Fascist movement would be possible or desirable in other countries, Fascism is continually confused with a conservative or 'Die-Hard' movement. For a Die-Hard movement to become a Fascist movement, two conditions are necessary. In the first place the Die-Hards would have to plunge into lawlessness and bloodshed. Secondly, they would then have to find a sufficient number of high military authorities, police and magistrates lost to all sense of law and honour and willing to employ the impartial power entrusted to them by law, in the service of the wealthy against the working classes. Unless these two conditions exist, there is no sense in applying the name of Fascism to a conservative movement.

¹ Prezzolini, *Le Fascisme*, Paris, Bossard, 1925, p. 236: 'Fascismo has been rather the effect than the cause of the decay of Communism; only, in politics, to be is less important than to seem.' Prezzolini is rather in favour of Fascism and lightens its shadows. Also the English writer, Pelham H. Box, to whom we owe a most penetrating study on the origins of Fascism, clearly saw that 'revolutionary Communism was already defeated by the good sense of the Italian people before the triumphant Fascists fell on its disordered forces' (*Three Master Builders*, London, Jarrolds, 1925, preface and pp. 18-9). In support of this statement, which is essential to a true understanding of Fascism, see also Mowrer, *Immortal Italy*, pp. 343-7, and Mario Missiroli, *Il Fascismo e la crisi italiana*, p. 14; Luigi Fabbri, *Controrivoluzione preventiva*, p. 19; Cesare Degli Occhi, *Che cosa ho pensato del Fascismo*, p. 21 (in the same volume as that containing the studies of Missiroli and Fabbri).

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§ 3: *The Secret of the Fascist Victory*

If we overlook the connivance of the police, the magistrature and above all of the military authorities in the Fascist activities, the whole history of Fascism becomes incomprehensible, and its victory a sheer miracle. As the point is a crucial one, it is essential for the reader to have before him the evidence of this connivance.

Umberto F. Bianchelli, *Le Memorie di un Fascista*, 1922, p. 14, wrote:

'Fascism, it is well to acknowledge, could develop with an almost free hand, because among many police agents and officers of the Carabineers and of other branches of the service' – (he alludes to the Royal Guard and the Army) – 'it found Italian hearts and ideals. Among the rank and file and N.C.O.'s of the Carabineers all did their best to help Fascism.'

The Pro-Fascist Adolfo Zerboglio, *Il Fascismo: dati, impressioni appunti*, 1922, p. 5 (in the volume *Il Fascismo e i partiti politici italiani*), frankly acknowledged that 'the Government, *more or less openly*, made use of Fascism to remedy the results of its own past weakness.'

'The Socialist Press' – he wrote – 'are piling up proofs of Government tolerance towards the Fascists and it *cannot honestly be disputed that some of this evidence appears convincing*. And even more than the Government they accuse the Royal Guards and Carabineers. *This too seems impossible to deny*, even though the Socialists often exaggerate in their systematic abuse of the police.'

Zerboglio reproduced the following assertions of the Socialist Deputy, Mario Cavallari, with reservations as to details, but not denying the general facts:

'The Fascists in their punitive expeditions are followed by lorries of Carabineers who join in singing Fascist songs. In Portomaggiore, after a painful episode in which a Fascist was killed, an expedition of more than a thousand Fascists spread terror in the night with woundings, burnings, bomb-throwing, invasions of

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houses, brutal beatings: all this under the very eyes of the police. As the lorries arrived full of Fascists, the Carabinieri, who blocked the entrance to the village, furnished them with arms and ammunition when needed. At Pontelagoscuro for two days bands of Fascists perpetrated every kind of violence, compelling members of Socialist Trades Unions to join the Fascist Trades Unions. A mixed picket formed of Carabinieri and Fascisti searched all who arrived by train, allowing only those to pass whom they found to be Fascists, and turning back all others. At Argenta, without any pretext whatsoever, a large expedition arrived by night and spread panic among the people, firing rifles and revolvers and throwing three hundred bombs. The expedition was even supplied with a machine gun which told its beads the whole night long. The police looked on and sang the Fascist song.'

Zerboglio explained and justified this attitude on the part of the police as follows:

'It is clear that the police who for years had been insulted at meetings and in the Press and who were the victims of the blind violence of the Reds, could not resist a certain impulse for revenge the day they felt some one behind them.'

The American journalist Mowrer, in *Immortal Italy*, p. 361, clearly notices this fact, over which Fascist propaganda spreads a veil of silence:

'In the presence of murder, violence and arson, the police remained "neutral." With their full knowledge and consent, these bands scurried along the white roads in their camions, bent on assault and armed to the teeth. The police captains refused to heed warnings of intended excursions, and where they could not refuse a summons to defend unarmed workmen and peasants, deliberately arrived too late. When armed bands compelled the Socialists to resign from office under pain of death, or regularly tried and condemned their enemies to blows, banishment, or execution, the functionaries merely shrugged their shoulders, or like the Prefect of Reggio Emilia, answered: "That's the way the wind is blowing." Sometimes Carabinieri and Royal Guards

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openly made common cause with the Fascists, and paralysed the resistance of the peasants. Against the Fascists alone the latter might have held their own. Against the Fascists and police together, they were helpless, and their complaints merely caused the authorities to arrest . . . them, as guilty of attempting to defend themselves. Socialists were condemned for alleged crimes committed months, years, before. Fascists taken red-handed were released for want of evidence.'

Mowrer quotes a speech of the Nationalist leader, Signor Corradini, on the burning of the Chamber of Workers of Bologna by the Fascists on January 24, 1921:

'Cheering citizens assisted at the spectacle, while policemen, Carabineers, guards and soldiers watched the flames devouring the building, with their arms at rest.'

Another American journalist who also was living in Italy in 1921, John Carter, writes in *The New York Times Book Review* of June 12, 1927:

'The writer once attended in Rome a meeting of the Arditi del Popolo, a radical parallel to the unpunished organizations headed by Mussolini. The radical meeting-place was surrounded by plain-clothes men, and a cordon of troops – infantry, cavalry and machine-guns – were ready to attack the workers if they had ventured out of their meeting-place to bastinado the Fascist murderers of some working men. This was at a time when the Fascisti had carte blanche to beat up their opponents throughout Italy, while the Government pretended to be neutral.'

With regard to the attitude of the military authorities, Giuseppe De Falco, *Il Fascismo milizia di classe*, p. 26 (in the volume *Il Fascismo e i partiti italiani*), revealed in 1921 that a circular emanating from the General Staff, dated October 20, 1920, urged the Divisional Commanders to show active favour to the Fascist organizations.

Signor Bonomi (Secretary for War in 1920) explained the fact in 1924 as follows:

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'In October, 1920, one of the many departments of the General Staff, without asking either the Chief of the General Staff or the War Office, requested information about the first Fasci di combattimento, in terms which might have been construed as favourable towards those first Fasci, which were then rather followers of D'Annunzio than Mussolini. A commandant in Central Italy – or rather, as was subsequently ascertained, one of his subordinates – interpreting this request for information as an intimation to join the Fascists, drew up and sent out a circular eulogizing the Fascists, and directed it to the dependent Military Commands and to the three Prefects of the region.

'The Cabinet gave me, then Minister for War, due notice of the circular; and in agreement with General Badoglio, Chief of the General Staff, I sent out a clearly-worded circular, signed by him, to all the military commands in Italy, pointing out the serious mistake which some one had committed, and reaffirming that the Army was and must remain outside any party competition.'¹

In the newspaper *La Rivoluzione liberale* of Turin, March 18, 1924, Piero Gobetti replied:

'Bonomi expects us to be extraordinarily idiotic. Anyone living in Venetia Giulia, in Emilia or in Tuscany, between the end of 1920 and the beginning of 1921, while Bonomi was Secretary for War in Giolitti's Cabinet, knows perfectly well that the Fasci were then organized in many places by officers on leave or on active service, and that, in all their punitive expeditions, the Fascists openly received from the military authorities bombs, guns, helmets, lorries and petrol. Did the military authorities, who armed the Fascists, act against the will of the Secretary for War, or were they not rather perfectly sure that they were meeting his wishes? What tangible measures did Signor Bonomi, Secretary for War, take to hinder the pro-Fascist activities of the military authorities? The disavowal of the Circular of October, 1920, to which Signor Bonomi refers, proves nothing, until Signor

¹ *L'Azione*, a review of political, social and literary culture, Rome, March 9, 1924.

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Bonomi tells us what tangible measures he took to have his orders respected. Moreover we should also like to know the text of the disavowal, so as to ascertain how far it was explicit in enjoining on the military authorities neutrality in party strife. Still further we should like to know what disciplinary measures were taken against the general, who composed and distributed the circular. While waiting for such explanations, we will remind Signor Bonomi that the electioneering campaign of 1921, in the constituency of Cremona (where Signor Bonomi was a candidate in the Fascist list), was marked by most violent, inhuman and sanguinary incidents. Signor Farinacci has testified and Signor Bonomi has not dared deny the following: "Among the many episodes, let us recall one. We were at Mantua one evening, when news reached us of the acts of violence committed by the Socialists at Poggio Rusco. It was the Minister Bonomi — our candidate — who placed his motor-car at the disposal of the Fascists, who that very same night were to destroy the Co-operative stores of Poggio Rusco. And in the marvellous days of the electioneering struggle of 1921, we saw him marching under our standards and we attended his meetings and guarded him with our bold 'Black-Shirts.' "

My personal information gave me the following facts:

(1) A circular urging the Divisional Commander to favour Fascist activities was signed not by a subordinate official, but by the Chief of Staff, Badoglio; a Divisional Commander communicated this order in type-script to all Commands under him, and was warned by Badoglio to use greater caution. (The said Divisional Commander told this incident to a friend, from whom I have received the information.)

(2) At the end of 1920 the Italian Military Mission in Vienna imported into Italy from an Austrian factory two truck loads of bludgeons. (The letter containing the invoice was seen by an official of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, who informed me of the incident.)

(3) At Milan, in October, 1920, the Anarchists threatened to go and disturb a religious ceremony. A high personality in the Christian-Democratic Party went to the police to demand pro-

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tection. The police official to whom he spoke replied that the Christian-Democrats must fend for themselves: if they wanted hand-grenades, they could obtain them at the Army Divisional Command and from the Arditi; a police official would put him in touch with those in charge of the bombs. (The above-mentioned personality told a friend of mine of the incident.)

(4) In Florence, where I was living in 1921, officers in uniform were always to be seen among the civilian-clad occupants of lorries bound on punitive expeditions.

One of the generals who most contributed towards the activities of the Fascists in 1921-2, was General Capello, who was condemned in April, 1927, to 30 years' imprisonment under the charge of having participated in the Zaniboni plot. During his trial, a witness, Colonel Orazio Bartoli, who had served under General Capello during the war and in the early days of the Fascist movement, deposed that he had been admitted to the Roman Fascio precisely by his superior officer (*Corriere della Sera*, April 20, 1927).

The connivance of the magistrature is plain from the fact that the notorious crimes committed by the Fascists in 1921-2 were hardly ever followed by trial and sentence, while workers guilty of acts of violence received savage sentences even when they had acted in self-defence against the Fascist violence.

Giuseppe Prezzolini, who is certainly not unfavourable to Fascism, recognizes that the Fascists 'had full liberty of action':

'They could organize themselves in armed corps and kill right and left, with the certainty of impunity and with the complicity of the police. It is thus no over-statement to recognize that the Fascists fought with 99 chances out of 100 of gaining the victory' (*Le Fascisme*, p. 97).

The American journalist, Mowrer, already quoted above, wrote in his book, *Immortal Italy*, p. 144:

'Raids were organized into the country, strongly supported by officers of the regular army burning to requite the insults of which they had been the targets. Bourgeois elements organized into

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groups, often under the skilful direction of professional soldiers. . . . From the Army the Fascists received sympathy, assistance and war material. Officers in uniform took part in the punitive expeditions. The Fascists were allowed to turn national barracks into their private arsenals. The facts are proven. Thus the army revenged itself on the anti-patriots.'

The fact is also mentioned by a Hungarian observer, Odon Por, in *Fascism*, p. 111:

'The Fascists had been equipped largely on the quiet, from the regular army, trusting to the precedent of Fiume.'

Signor Villari, *The Awakening of Italy*, repeatedly accuses the Ministers of 1919-20 of unwillingness to repress the 'Bolshevist' disorders. He never points out that it would have been risky to use the Army for this purpose, because discipline had been wrecked, less by 'Bolshevist' propaganda, than by that of the Nationalists, by D'Annunzio's proclamations and by the seditious example of generals and admirals.

While he is thus severe on the 'connivance' of the governments of 1919-20 with the revolutionaries, our propagandist skates gracefully over the 'connivance' of the military and judicial authorities and the police in the Fascist doings during 1921-2. All that he knows of this matter is:

'Just as Giolitti had allowed the forces of revolution a free hand in the autumn of 1920, when he believed them to be the strongest, so now he refused to interfere with the repressive actions of the Fascists, illegal though they were' (p. 123).

Once I had emphasized in England this point, Signor Villari published a letter in the *Manchester Guardian* of March 27, 1926, affirming that 'the Army did *not* give arms to the Fascists, and indeed the leading generals and field officers were by no means favourable to the Fascist movement.' The propagandist, when writing these words, forgot that he himself had written two years before in *The Awakening of Italy* (p. 122) as follows:

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'Soldiers and Fascists, returning from punitive expeditions, were cheered enthusiastically and covered with flowers.'

Did the soldiers (it would be more exact to say 'officers') who took part along with the Fascists in the punitive expeditions, act *with or against* superior orders? Were their exploits punished or rewarded?

As regards the high military authorities, the propagandist himself wrote in *The Awakening of Italy*, pp. 175, 180:

'General De Bono had organized the Fascist forces. Mussolini had provided that to each of the columns marching on Rome should be attached a distinguished *General who had joined the Fascists*: De Bono, Fara, Ceccherini, Zamboni and others.'

• And in his recent book, *The Fascist Experiment*, p. 162, he writes:

'The March on Rome was the work of the squadre, who had been organized in military formation by General De Bono, assisted by numerous officers, both regular and temporary.'

In order to explain the arming of the Fascists in 1921-2, Signor Villari affirmed, in his letter to the *Manchester Guardian*:

'At that time a large part of the population was armed with weapons brought back from the war - Socialists, Communists and Fascists alike - and there was no need for the Fascists to apply to the army for arms.'

This explanation is in direct contradiction with the following facts:

(1) During 1921 and 1922, the Italian papers were continually announcing house searches carried out by the police in the houses and offices of the Communists, Anarchists, etc., to discover arms, and when the results were positive the culprits were tried and sentenced. But such searches were never carried out in the houses and offices of the Fascists, nor were any Fascists sentenced for such offences.

(2) Among the *weapons* used by the Fascists in their expeditions in 1921-2, there were frequently military lorries. Did they

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bring these military lorries back from the front, and keep them hidden under their beds for two years, till the hour for the counter-offensive struck?

§ 4: *The Civil War*

In order that the non-Italian reader may form a picture of what Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, calls 'a silent and bloodless revolution,'¹ I must place before him some of the episodes of that atrocious civil war.²

At Florence,³ on the morning of Sunday, February 27, 1921, a group of about 100 university and secondary school students of both sexes, flanked by about 60 Carabineers, were passing through the streets of the city singing patriotic songs after having attended the ceremonies of the inauguration of a flag. At the top of Via Tornabuoni, two men were awaiting the procession in a narrow side street. One fired his revolver five or six times at the procession; the other threw a bomb into the middle of the group. One Carabineer was killed on the spot and 16 people were wounded more or less seriously, one of whom, a university student, died some days later. The dead Carabineer and his wounded companions were put into a carriage and taken to a hospital, citizens who met the vehicle being asked to raise their hats. In the Piazza del Duomo, a railwayman who was walking along, reading a newspaper, ignorant of what had happened, and therefore not lifting his hat,

¹ In his preface to the speech of Signor Rocco on *The Political Doctrine of Fascism*, New York, Carnegie Endowment, 1926.

² A somewhat compressed, but objective, description of life in Italy during 1921-2, containing many valuable particulars, is to be found in Beals, *Rome or Death*, pp. 45-60, 105-8, 131-41.

³ I have reconstructed these facts with the help of the *Corriere della Sera*, February 28, March 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 1921. The *Corriere della Sera*, in 1921, was in favour of the Fascists, only deploring their more scandalous excesses and calling on the government to awaken from its inertia and restore public peace. The correspondent in Florence was frankly pro-Fascist and coloured his reports of the civil war in such a way as to put the anti-Fascists always in an unfavourable light. We can, therefore, be sure that, in basing our account on the reports given in the *Corriere*, we shall not unduly weight any charges against the Fascists.

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was shot with a musket by one of the Carabineers who was escorting his dead companion and was 'in a state of great excitement.'¹

Shortly after these unforeseen episodes, the Fascists entered the scene, while armoured-cars, Carabineers, Royal Guards and soldiers patrolled the streets and occupied the Headquarters of the local Trade-Unions Council ('Chamber of Workers') to prevent any gathering of the working masses. In the afternoon, a squad of Fascists appeared at the offices of the Communist Union of Disabled Soldiers, where the secretary of the Union, Spartaco Lavagnini, a Communist railwayman and a City Councillor, was alone. Part of the squad posted themselves in the street, while four of their number entered the premises and shot Lavagnini dead. Thereupon they wrecked the premises without any interference on the part of the police, whose activity was limited to arresting 'revolutionaries' *en masse*.

As a protest against the murder of Lavagnini and against the authorities who were systematically leaving crimes of this sort unpunished, the railwaymen, that same evening, called a lightning strike in all the district round. The tramwaymen, newspaper printers and the electricians followed suit. In the city and suburbs, numerous conflicts took place between Fascists and workers. During the night telephone and telegraph lines were cut.

On Monday, February 28, the strike spread to all categories of workers. On their side, the Fascists issued proclamations inviting the population to rise against the red terror. The Prefect forbade all gatherings and processions as well as the circulation of motor-cars; but, in actual fact, the Fascists had a completely free hand

¹ The correspondent of the *Corriere della Sera*, March 1, 1921, while mentioning this 'state of great excitement' of the Carabineer, added that the man who had not lifted his hat had said: 'If a Carabineer is dead, there is one less of them,' and that the Carabineer fired on hearing these words. I can deny this detail on the authority of a teacher, a friend of mine, who was standing close beside the man who was killed. Though at that time very favourable to the Fascist movement, my friend, as an honourable man, told me later in the same day that the railwayman never said these words. One can, however, understand and even excuse the Carabineer for losing self-control on the death of his companion and thinking that one who failed to lift his hat, showed contempt.

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to hunt the workmen, especially the railwaymen, through the streets.

• Their first offensive against the popular quarter of San Frediano was unsuccessful. The workmen and the women had torn up the roadway and barricaded the streets to prevent the entrance of the armed lorries. They fired and threw down tiles and furniture from the windows at those who tried to enter these narrow streets. In the afternoon, the Fascists returned, accompanied by a large patrol of Royal Guards, a battalion of infantry, numerous Carabinieri and two armoured cars. Every outlet of the quarter was blocked. The armoured cars forced an entry across the barricades into the streets, firing up at the windows and forcing the population to shut themselves up in the houses. As in each street the resistance was beaten down, the Fascists and police invaded the houses, venting their fury. Hundreds of men and women were wounded at haphazard. The official report speaks of three workmen killed and fifty wounded.

Here and there in other parts of the city numerous other isolated collisions took place.

'At the entrance to Via Lamarmora' - writes the pro-Fascist correspondent of the *Corriere della Sera*, March 1, 1921 - 'a group of Fascists were hooted by some individuals, who, when the Fascists turned round, took to their heels, running towards Piazza Cavour. It seemed to the Fascists that one of them had taken refuge in the shop of a certain Angelico Bonini. They entered and fired their revolvers, killing Bonini. A man named Donatello Sanesi, who, frightened by the firing, was running under the colonnade of the square, was struck by a bullet and killed on the spot.'

Towards evening, a lad of sixteen, named Giovanni Berta, the son of a well-known manufacturer, 'wearing the Fascist badge in his button-hole' (*Corriere della Sera*, March 1, 1921), tried to make his way on his bicycle through a crowd of workmen, gathered on a bridge over the Arno.¹ The crowd, maddened by

¹ These details came to light in the course of the trial at the Florence Assizes in the autumn of 1922.

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the happenings of those days, irritated by the Fascist badge and believing the lad to be a cyclist in the service of the Fascists' Party, surrounded him and stabbed and threw him into the river. In a suburb of the city a Royal Guard was, during the night, brutally murdered by a crowd.

The strike lasted on into the following day, March 1. Police operations were transferred from the quarter of San Frediano to the other popular quarter, Santa Croce. In the afternoon, a squad of Fascists wrecked the premises of the Chamber of Workers, left at their mercy by the police, who had occupied them during the two preceding days. Another squad invaded and sacked the offices of the Engineers' Union. In the suburb the police repressed, with the help of artillery, every sign of protest and revolt, while everywhere the Fascists continued their work of sacking and burning the premises of the workmen's organizations. By the afternoon comparative calm was restored in Florence.

During those days, according to the official report, 16 people were killed, 100 wounded. Among the dead were two Fascists and four members of the police services. The actual number of dead and wounded among the workers was probably much higher than was stated in the official report.

That same afternoon of March 1, at an hour's distance by rail from Florence, a horrible massacre took place. To replace the strikers, the Government had dispatched from Leghorn to Florence two lorries with 45 marines and 14 Carabineers. The marines were not in uniform in order not to draw attention on the roads. But the lorries were noticed by a man, who thinking they were carrying Fascists and Carabineers, telephoned to Empoli (half-way between Leghorn and Florence) that a 'punitive expedition' was on the way. As the fascists of Florence, Leghorn and Pisa had repeatedly threatened a 'punitive expedition' against the Empoli Chamber of Workers, the news caused the assembly of a great crowd already excited by the news from Florence.¹ When the two lorries arrived in the market-place, they were surrounded

¹ These details came to light in the course of the trial at the Florence Assizes.

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on every side: nine of the men were killed and ten more or less seriously wounded. Several corpses were thrown into the river.

In the following days, the town and district of Empoli were subjected to atrocious reprisals. The Fascists concentrated at Empoli from all the district round, wrecked the Chamber of Workers and numerous shops, while the police made 218 arrests. Three lorries full of Fascists, followed by an armoured car, scoured the district, wrecking Trade Union premises and the houses of well-known Socialists. Wherever resistance was encountered, the armoured car was brought into action. At Siena the Fascists and police attacked the Chamber of Workers. For an hour the workers put up a resistance, but when the artillery fired eight shells against the door, the besieged surrendered. There were among them ten injured more or less seriously, of whom two were mortally wounded. The Chamber of Workers was sacked and burnt down.

In Florence, on March 2, the men began to trickle back to work. In Scandicci, a neighbouring village, the peasants attacked with bombs a lorry of Carabineers and barricaded the bridge at the entrance to the village. A column of artillery with armoured cars and field-pieces stamped out the revolt. As usual, after order had been restored, a punitive expedition of Fascists from Florence arrived and destroyed the premises of the Workers' Organization in the village.

'This evening' - writes the correspondent of the *Corriere della Sera*, the night of March 2, 1921 - 'about 6 p.m. there passed through the principal streets of Florence some field-pieces, which had been in action at Scandicci. Amid the applause of the citizens, a most imposing procession then formed, in which were three lorries laden with soldiers and Fascists. They were all singing patriotic songs and waving large tri-colour flags, while flowers were thrown down on the procession from the windows. The soldiers and Fascists were carrying as trophies the red flags and other subversive emblems carried off from the premises of the Mutual Benefit Society of Scandicci. The demonstration, which

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was not disturbed by any incident, broke up at the seat of the Fascist Headquarters.'

Those guilty of bomb-throwing and other outrages received pitiless sentences; three were sentenced to thirty years, two to twenty-one, one to seventeen, seven to sentences ranging from two to twelve years. Two who had escaped were sentenced to penal servitude for life (*Corriere della Sera*, July 1, 1922). The murderers of Berta were sentenced to periods of imprisonment varying from ten to eighteen years. For the outrages at Empoli eighteen persons were sentenced to imprisonment for periods of from twenty to thirty years; thirty-two of from fourteen to seventeen years; thirty of from five to twelve. Similar sentences were given for all the other crimes. But no Fascists were ever sentenced for the murder of Lavagnini, of Bonini, of Sanesi nor for the wreckings, reprisals or innumerable other acts of violence committed by them in those days.

The happenings at Florence and in the surrounding district give some idea of the civil war which went on throughout 1921 in some of the more important towns of central Italy. In the country districts the man-hunt was even more pitiless than in the towns. I will give two instances only: Foiano della Chiana (in the province of Arezzo) and Roccastrada (in the province of Grosseto).

In the municipal elections of 1920, the municipal administration had been won by the Socialists at Foiano della Chiana, as it had been in many other Communes. At the beginning of April, 1921, the Socialist Mayor received a letter from Marchese Perrone Compagni, General Secretary of the Fasci for Tuscany, in which the Mayor and his councillors were invited to resign within the week if they did not wish to expose themselves and their families to Fascist reprisals.¹ The Mayor and the Councillors did not obey.

On April 12, 1921, more than 200 Fascists collected in lorries from Arezzo, Florence and the intermediate towns, and made an 'expedition of propaganda' to the little town, i.e., they looted the town hall, the Chamber of Workers and the premises of the

¹ Examination of Galliano Gervasi during the trial at Arezzo, *Corriere della Sera*, October 17, 1924.

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Peasants' Union, throwing the furniture into the street and burning it. They seized the Co-operative stores, distributing the goods to all and sundry and setting fire to what remained. On April 17, a second 'expedition of propaganda' was carried out. This time there were barely 20 Fascists in a single lorry. They confiscated the red flag which the 'Communists' usually ran up over the town-hall instead of the national flag, burnt it together with the records of the Socialist club and then proceeded to the neighbouring village of Marciano on another 'propagandist trip.' On their return several Fascists stayed at Foiano to form a local 'Fascio' while the rest in the lorry took the road back to Arezzo.

A short distance out of Foiano a group of about fifty peasants armed with guns, scythes, hatchets and pistols were lying in wait behind a hedge. The lorry was received with a hail of bullets. The driver fell wounded, the lorry swerved and ran against a tree. While the Fascists were thrown to the ground, the peasants in hiding leaped forward upon them. They cut off the head of the driver with a hatchet-blow. Two Fascists were killed and another had three fingers severed by an axe. The remainder managed to escape.

At the sound of the shots, the Carabineers, who till then had remained inactive, woke up and rushed out from Foiano together with those Fascists who had remained in the town. The peasants, seeing the Carabineers approaching, took to flight in their turn.

Now began the reprisals.

The farm-houses near the place of the ambush were set on fire. A peasant, Burri, who was discovered in an attic, was shot through the head with a revolver.

The next day reprisals continued on a larger scale. Five lorry-loads of Fascists left Florence in the early morning. Other lorries left Arezzo and the neighbouring towns and all concentrated in Foiano. The authorities, as usual, left the Fascists a free hand. The best-known 'Communists' of Foiano had already left their homes. The Fascists gave themselves up to ransacking, wrecking and burning private houses. A workman, Cino Milani, who had not bethought himself to escape, was dragged into the square: he was required to promise to resign from membership of the Socialist Party; he refused. He was required to declare that

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he-deplored the ambush of the day before: he again refused. He was shot. A peasant, one Gherardi, guilty of being the brother of a 'Communist,' was shot at and killed while he was trying to escape. The Fascists of Arezzo had brought with them as prisoner to Foiano the Socialist ex-Member of Parliament, Bernardini, editor of the Socialist paper of Arezzo. The prisoner was forced, under threat of death, to pronounce from the window of a house a speech against the 'violence of the Socialists,' while the mass of Fascists howled and hooted in the street below. Thanks to this act of cowardice which dishonours his jailers no less than himself, his life was spared.

When they wearied of tormenting the people of Foiano, the Fascists repaired to the place of the 'ambush' of the day before. The peasant Cacioli was seriously wounded. Two other peasants, who were wounded as they fled, were not found; probably their injuries were not serious and they managed to hide. But this was not enough. In the night, towards one o'clock, the Fascists returned to this place; they ransacked the farm-houses, one by one, terrifying women, children and old people, and reduced other houses to smoking ruins. A woman, Luisa Bracciali, who was accused of having wounded a Fascist in the 'ambush' with a pitchfork, was found in her home and shot dead with revolvers. The peasant Nocciolini was killed whilst trying to flee. Another peasant, Alfredo Rampi, hearing that the Fascists were on his track, killed himself.

Operations continued throughout the next day also, April 19. The house of the Mayor Nucci, who had fled, was invaded and set on fire. The Communist club of Bettole was sacked and burnt. Finally the Fascists collected a 'spontaneous' meeting of peasants, took down their names and declared the Fascio of Foiano founded. After having thus converted the 'Communists' of Foiano to the 'National faith,' the Fascists, glorious and triumphant, abandoned the scene of their victory.

Needless to say the civil and military authorities were conspicuous by their absence. They were engaged in 'rounding up the Communists' who had hidden themselves in the country round Foiano. Of those guilty of the 'ambuscade' who had not

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been killed in the reprisals, four were sentenced to thirty years' imprisonment, three to twenty-five years, two to twenty years, six to ten years, and three to from seven to ten years.¹ None of the Fascists who took part in the operations described suffered in any way whatsoever.²

The facts of Roccastrada are the repetition of those of Foiano della Chiana. Of these repetitions a hundred others could be cited; and I say a hundred not speaking rhetorically but having that concrete number in mind, and knowing that even a hundred is less than the truth. I will present one only of these repetitions, so that the reader may understand that the word 'repetition' also is no figure of speech, and that the Fascists followed in their operations a definite 'method.'

Roccastrada is a small agricultural town, like Foiano della Chiana. In the communal elections of November, 1920, the administration had been won by the Socialists. On April 6, 1921, the Mayor received the following letter:

ITALIAN FIGHTING FASCI OF TUSCANY.
POLITICAL SECRETARIAT.
FLORENCE, 6th April, 1921.

To the Mayor of the Commune of Roccastrada,
Prov. of Grosseto.

Seeing that Italy must belong to Italians and cannot therefore be administered by individuals such as you, I, voicing the feelings of the citizens of your town, advise you to resign by Sunday, the 17th. Otherwise you will be responsible for anything that may happen to persons and to property. If you appeal to the authorities against this kind and humane advice of mine, the above date will be changed to Wednesday, the 13th, a lucky number indeed.

(Signed) FERRONE COMPAGNI.

¹ *Corriere della Sera*, December 13, 1924.

² In my account I have followed the version of *Corriere della Sera* of April 13, 19 and 20, 1921. I have not made use of anti-Fascist papers because the atrocious details they give could be suspected of exaggeration.

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The Mayor did not take this hint. For a couple of months the threats were not followed up. But on July 1, 1921, about 4 p.m. two lorries of Fascists arrived. According to the correspondent of the *Corriere della Sera*, July 26, 1921, they 'confined themselves to bludgeoning several people and throwing out of the windows the furniture of several houses of subversive peasants.' The Socialist paper *Avanti* states that the Fascists, shouting and letting off their revolvers into the air, to frighten the women and children – the men being still out at work in the fields – set fire to the premises of the Peasants' club and Woodcutters' Union and of the Co-operative stores. Furthermore, they wrecked the Mayor's house and that of the secretary of one of the Unions, departing before the men came home from the fields.

Some days later, the Mayor, while speaking with the Prefect at Grosseto, was seized by the Fascists, taken to the Fascio and obliged to sign a letter of resignation and to promise never to return to the town.

On July 24, 1921, about dawn, nearly 70 Fascists started from Grosseto in lorries, passing before the police headquarters unopposed. They reached Roccastrada at 4.30 a.m. The little town was wrapped in sleep. They set up a fusillade, shouting that the inhabitants must hang out the national flag, stopping the peasants who came out of their houses and bludgeoning them.

The inhabitants, wakened suddenly out of sleep, could offer no resistance. There was a general stampede. Several houses were wrecked and burned. Vandalism raged for three hours. About eight o'clock, the Fascists got into their lorries once more and left for Sassofortino, where they intended to continue their 'national propaganda.'

A short distance outside the town, three peasants, hidden behind a hedge, fired on the lorries and ran off. One Fascist was killed on the spot. The others, not being able to capture the fugitives, went back to the town.

'Along the road' – writes the pro-Fascist correspondent of the *Secolo*, July 18, 1921 – 'they met a peasant and his son and shot them dead. Then they ran into the town shouting: "Who fired

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that shot?" They broke into several houses, shouting and stabbing four men. One of these, an old man of 68, was killed at his daughter's side. Three others were mortally injured in the streets, fifty others more or less seriously injured, and seventeen houses were reduced to a heap of smouldering ruins.'

The nine dead were not members of any organization. Only one was known to have anarchist leanings.

The thirteen Carabineers stationed in the little town remained absolutely inactive, shut up in their quarters: they only telephoned to Grosseto what was happening. Needless to say no arrest was made among the Fascists, although the name of their leader, Castellani, General Secretary of the Fasci for the province of Grosseto, was on everybody's lips, while the three men guilty of the ambush were arrested and severely sentenced. Many other inhabitants of the town were arrested without reason and detained in prison for a considerable time.

§ 5: *Legend and History*

A Fascist, describing in the *Popolo d'Italia* of January 5, 1926, the 'heroic pages of Fascism in Polesine' (province of Rovigo), wrote as follows:

'Who shall sing your deeds, great-hearted youths, who by night were to be found on every road, a target for treachery, and by day on every piazza, beset by the red torrent which still foamed menacingly? We assailed the Communes and the Communes fell. We invaded the offices of the Unions, and the Unions surrendered. The nights of Polesine were lit by strange flares. The Fascists lighted the funerals of their fallen by firing Bolshevik houses, and burning the last emblems of revolution.'

A special correspondent of the *Daily Mail* has done what this Fascist desired, and has described the Fascist exploits as if he were a mediæval poet chanting the deeds of knights-errant in a *chanson de geste*:

'A writer of the Middle Ages would relate the story of this awakening with fine imagery, for it contains all the elements of a

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great romance. You have a valiant knight going out single-handed, jeered at by enemies and despaired of by faint-hearted friends, to fight a red dragon which is steadily increasing in size and strength. The entire country is in danger. The struggle is long and painful, and at times the dragon is well-nigh victorious. Gradually the knight's band of followers increases, and when the people see that their rescue is possible, they flock to his banner. And so the dragon is slain, and the valiant knight—who was no more than the son of the village blacksmith—becomes the King's first minister. . . . The new crusade was fought with as fiery zeal as their forefathers showed in their struggle for the Holy Sepulchre. It is a wonderful epic, this story of a long, weary struggle against heavy odds; of night raids and of long days of heavy toil to free a starving community from a political strike; of other towns fed and policed and even lit by Fascist volunteers who would not see their deluded countrymen die under the yoke of Communism; of successes and defeats; of grim little processions to a burying-ground with their uncovered dead, and the grimmer aftermath when Red culprits paid their debt.¹

Signor Villari is less poetical but more profound:

'Over a thousand Fascists were murdered by their opponents, treacherously sheltered behind closed windows or on lonely roads' (*Manchester Guardian*, March 27, 1926). 'No less than 2,000 Fascists have been killed by their opponents, almost invariably as the result of ambushes against isolated individuals' (*The Awakening of Italy*, p. 165). 'What struck all observers was the manly bearing of these youths, their cleanliness and good manners' (*Ibid.*, p. 115).

These statements, put forward without details and without proofs, should be discussed case by case and in the light of the evidence for and against. Such investigation would lead anyone not blinded by fanaticism to the conclusion that on both sides there were attackers and attacked, assassins and victims, ambushes and open assaults, acts of courage and of treachery.

¹ Sir Percival Phillips, *The Red Dragon and the Black Shirts*, pp. 11-13.

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Mussolini himself was obliged, in a speech of April 3, 1922, to mark his disapproval of the ambushes of which his own followers were guilty:

'We must have the courage to say that if there is a Fascist violence which is lawful and sacrosanct, lying in ambush behind hedges and breaking into houses is not Fascism.' (*Popolo d'Italia*, April 5, 1922.)

The examples of Foiano della Chiana and Roccastrada show what in many cases led up to the 'ambushes' of 'Bolshevists' against Fascists. Luigi Fabbri, in the summer of 1922, wrote:

'The hatred which the Fascists are sowing by their daily bludgeonings, by destroying the offices of Labour organizations, by violating all freedom of assembly, of speech, of the press, by rendering the working of political parties in certain districts difficult or impossible, by preventing even the normal evening amusements of working men, attacking them in cafés or in taverns, and forcing them to go home, by breaking into their homes, etc. — this daily growing hatred can find no vent in the light of day. Open reprisals would require that relative impunity, that freedom of movement, for defence or offence, which the Fascists enjoy by the connivance or tolerance of the police. Moreover the workers realize that they run the risk of death whether they use the cudgel or revolver, because the Fascists go to extremes at the smallest resistance. The workers know that if they make use of force in self-defence, they will inevitably be arrested. They lack means of communication, transport, rapid mobilization; for the most part they are taken by surprise. They cannot leave permanent guards to defend their villages while they are at work. The sackings are carried out either by day, when all the workers are away from the village at their work, or in the dead of night, when all are asleep. The workers, driven by passion and despair, act as best they can, whenever they find themselves in equal or superior numbers and wherever there is no probability of the intervention of the police. Since open fighting is forbidden and practically impossible, hatred

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finds a vent in the so-called "ambushes." Let it be noted, moreover, that the partisan press very often gives the name of "ambush" to fair fights on open ground, to acts of legitimate and spontaneous defence on the part of the workers who are attacked and have no choice but to kill or be killed. The word "ambush" has been used even in the case of a Fascist who, having forced his way into a private house by breaking the door, was killed by the inmates in their desperate attempt to defend themselves.' (*Contro Rivoluzione preventiva*, pp. 59-61.)

Fabbri is an Anarchist, and therefore colours events so as to throw all the blame on the Fascists and exonerate the anti-Fascists. But an American eye-witness, who is not an Anarchist, wrote in 1921:

'The Italian common people are ignorant, long-suffering and easily bullied, but they are not cowards. After the first surprise they would have held their own with the Fascists, had not the latter been aided by the police. It was only against the Carabinieri and Royal Guards that they proved, once they awakened to the situation, entirely helpless. Then they began to use the universal weapon of the hopelessly oppressed, assassination.'¹

Signor Villari in *The Awakening of Italy*, p. 113, describes the Fascist exploits as follows:

'The Fascists, armed with bludgeons or revolvers, would enter the town or village where the crime had been committed, arrest the murderers when they could find them, kill them if they resisted, and if not, hand them over to the Carabinieri. If the actual authors of the deed were not discovered, the leading Socialists or Communists of the place would be seized, and soundly thrashed, and sometimes the *Camera del Lavoro*, or other red institutions burnt down, or at all events, the records and furniture thrown into the street and set on fire.'

The examples of Florence, Foiano della Chiana, and Roccastrada show that not only were those who resisted murdered,

¹ Mowrer, *Immortal Italy*, p. 369.

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but also persons who had had no part in the original conflict; the Fascists followed the plan of taking hostages, like armies of occupation in enemy countries. The Chambers of Workers, and the other institutions of the working people, were burnt, not *sometimes*, but *always*: the whole aim of the offensive, whether or not provoked by previous incidents between Fascists and anti-Fascists, was nothing but to destroy the workers' organizations, by burning their records, looting the co-operative shops, and killing or banishing their organizers. Nor were the offices of the organizations the only places sacked; frequently the private houses of the leading Socialists, Communists, or Christian-Democrats were burnt, and their owners murdered, even when 'the actual authors of the deed,' used as a pretext for reprisals, were discovered.

• Let some examples be given of the way in which the Fascist legend is concocted.

(A) Narrating the events of Bologna of November 21, 1920 (see above, p. 63ff.), Signor Villari, *Awakening of Italy*, pp. 110-111, ignores the Fascist attack on the Chamber of Workers of November 4, 1920; ignores the type-written manifesto circulated by the Fascists on the eve of November 21; attributes the responsibility of the first revolver shots in the square to the Socialists, whereas in the trial it was conclusively proved that they came from the Fascists;¹ and repeats the legend which was exposed as false at the trials in Milan, of a plot to 'gain possession of the town and proceed to a general massacre of the bourgeoisie.'

(B) Signor Villari, *The Awakening of Italy*, p. 123, gives the following version of the facts of Florence :

'On February 27 a group of Communists hidden in a side street, threw a bomb at a cortège of schoolboys on their way to a patriotic celebration, killing and wounding several people. The Fascists retaliated by attacking and wrecking the offices of various

¹ The Fascists attempted to invade the square, breaking through the line of soldiers who were posted near the café 'Grande Italia.' Nine witnesses agreed that the shots came from people who were near the café. Three of these witnesses, including two members of the police force, deposed explicitly that the shots were fired by the Fascists.

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Red organizations and killed a certain Lavagnini, a notorious railway agent and editor of a communist paper: he was known to have been the instigator of various similar outbreaks and had been warned that if another communist crime were committed in Florence he would pay for it with his life. A series of affrays took place between Fascists and Communists, and the latter erected barricades in the popular San Frediano quarter. They also committed a number of exceptionally brutal murders, including that of a small boy, named Berta, whose only crime was that he was the son of a manufacturer: he was thrown into the Arno as he was crossing a bridge on his bicycle. The troops and police acted with commendable energy, and on one occasion had to resort to artillery. . . . At Empoli a band of armed Communists lay in wait for two lorries conveying some unarmed seamen on their way to Florence to replace the striking railwaymen, seized some of them, and murdered them in circumstances of the most atrocious cruelty. The local Fascists and others from Florence, on hearing of this outrage, concentrated at the place where it had occurred, and murdered several Communists strongly suspected of complicity and burnt their houses.'

In this report the following incorrect statements and omissions occur:

(1) The two persons, who threw the bombs against the procession, were Anarchists (*Corriere della Sera*, July 1, 1922). Every one knows that outrages, such as those at Florence of February 27, are characteristic of Anarchists and not of Communists, and that the Communists and the Anarchists act quite independently of one another. The propagandist attributes arbitrarily the crimes to the Communists, because he seeks to suggest a justification for the murder of the Communist Lavagnini.

(2) It is untrue that Lavagnini had ever instigated 'various similar outbreaks,' viz. the throwing of bombs at a procession. When the affair was discussed in the Lower House (March 8, 1921) no one raised this calumny against the memory of the unfortunate man. As the propagandist has the prudent custom of never giving his sources of information, thus preventing all control on his

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statements, it is impossible to determine whether the calumny springs from his own fantasy, or is drawn from a tainted source.

(3) It is not fair to lump together as 'Communists' all those who were in revolt in those days against the police and Fascists. Most of them were simply exasperated by the one-sided attitude of the authorities.

(4) A youth of 16 cannot be called 'a small boy.' The propagandist uses this formula to aggravate the responsibility of Berta's assassins, while he has made two incorrect statements to lighten the responsibility of the Fascists who killed Lavagnini.

(5) The propagandist conceals some essential details, which show that the murder of Berta was a typical instance of mob violence, brutal but unpremeditated, therefore less responsible than the crime against Lavagnini, perpetrated in cold blood by four adherents of the party of the propagandist.

(6) In his account of the events at Empoli, the propagandist suppresses all the particulars, which explain these other acts of mob violence and attenuate the responsibility for them.

(7) Be it noted that even this propagandist account makes it clear that the police energies were directed only towards suppressing the acts of violence of the 'Bolshevists,' while never interfering to keep the Fascists in order.

(C) On page 122 of *The Awakening of Italy*, Signor Villari writes:

'At Milan a dastardly outrage was committed by the Communists on the evening of March 23, at the Diana Theatre, where an "infernal machine" exploded, causing the death of twenty persons and the wounding of 200, including women and children. Other bomb outrages were committed in trains, restaurants, etc., in various parts of Italy: the authors of these attempts claimed that their actions were protests against the detention of the anarchists Malatesta and Borghi.'

From the trial, which was held from May 9 to June 2, it emerged that the Diana outrage was the work of three Anarchists and not of Communists. The propagandist here repeats the trick already

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used by him in connexion with the happenings at Florence (see above, p. 99); he attributes anarchist crimes to Communists, including under the term Communist all parties and persons for whom he has no liking. Moreover, the propagandist ignores that at the moment of the outrage against the Diana Theatre, another group of Anarchists approached the premises of the Socialist paper *Avanti*, intending to throw bombs on them, but were caught by the police. Half an hour later, the Fascists burned the premises of the Anarchist paper *Umanità Nuova*, looted the headquarters of the Syndicalist Union run by Anarchists, the home of the anarchist Molinari, and the Socialist club in Via Verziere, and twice attacked the premises of *Avanti*, with hand grenades, being driven off by the police. Thus the *Avanti* was nearly wrecked twice in the same night: first by Anarchists and then by Fascists. To include these particulars would have made it difficult for the propagandist to render the Communists responsible for everything.

(D) On page 101 of *The Awakening of Italy*, the Fascist propagandist writes:

'In the Puglie not a few landlords and farmers were murdered, while their colleagues retaliated by similar acts of violence on the peasantry. The Socialist Deputy Di Vagno, who had instigated the peasants to revolt, was murdered.'

The facts are that the Deputy Di Vagno was killed on the evening of September 25, 1921, at Mola di Bari, by a band of sixteen Fascists, who attacked him with revolver shots outside the city while he was going for a walk, unarmed, with friends (*Corriere della Sera*, September 27, 1921). A little earlier he had made a public speech to the peasants, but it is an invention to say that he had incited them to revolt. Any incitement to revolt, in September, 1921, would have been madness. On the occasion of the speech there had been no disorder, and no violence which could have provoked reprisals. The ambush was premeditated and carried out in cold blood. *Not one of the murderers was arrested.* The propagandist has suppressed these most characteristic elements in the case with the object of making his readers believe

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that here was a Socialist Deputy who mischievously incited peasants to revolt at a time when the country was terrorized by a civil war between landlords and peasants, and who therefore richly deserved his fate.

(E) On page 140 of *The Awakening of Italy*, we read:

'Attilio Boldori, the Socialist Vice-President of the Provincial Council (of Cremona), was shot dead in a conflict with the Fascisti.'

The facts are as follows. On December 11, 1921, Boldori and three other members of the Provincial Council were carrying out a repair to their car, on a country road. Seeing a car of Fascists approaching, and fearing an attack, they fled across the fields. The Fascists gave chase, seriously wounding two of the fugitives, and killing Boldori by blows on the head.¹ The *Corriere della Sera* (December 14, 1921), in those days favourable to the Fascists and only desirous of limiting their violence, wrote as follows:

'The deliberate brutality of the assault has no excuse. There was neither dispute nor quarrel to rouse hot blood. There was only the peaceable presence of adversaries. That was enough; the Fascists hurled themselves on the escaping Socialists, paid no heed to the entreaties of the peasants who had taken in the fugitives, and threw themselves savagely on these unfortunates.'

Our propagandist has suppressed all these characteristic details, and has tried to make out that Boldori was shot in a conflict.

Signor Villari in *The Awakening of Italy*, published in the spring of 1924, stated that the number of Fascists killed by 'Bolshevists,' up to the date of writing, was 'no less than 2,000' and 'about 2,000' (pp. 165, 255). Two years later, in the *Manchester Guardian* of March 27, 1926, he reduced the number to 'over a thousand.' In the autumn of 1924 the Fascists gave the number of dead as 3,000, but a year afterwards they gave 2,000 as the number to

¹ The *Popolo d'Italia*, December 14, accused Boldori of having threatened the Fascists with a revolver, but Boldori never carried arms. Signor Farinacci declared Boldori's death to be his own fault, since he had 'a weak formation of the skull.'

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M. Henri Lucas, correspondent of *Le Journal*, November 27, 1925. A young Englishman in Italy seriously asserted to the *Morning Post* correspondent that the Fascist dead numbered 50,000, but the correspondent himself preferred to limit it to 3,000 (*Morning Post*, April 23, 1926). Signor Bazzi, while editing a pro-Fascist paper in Rome, wrote that up till the spring of 1924 the number of Fascist dead was 2,000 (*Nuovo Paese*, March 20, 1924); but the editor of another Fascist paper, Signor Filippelli, while imprisoned as an accomplice in the Matteotti murder, stated that the number of dead was 4,000 (Memorandum, October 30, 1924). Signor Gray, a Fascist Member of Parliament, speaking in the Chamber on November 27, 1925, reduced this figure to 3,700. With these figures, which every one doctors to his own taste, the Fascist propagandists conduct a systematic campaign outside Italy to spread the belief that the ranks of the Fascists consist of nothing but 'martyrs,' while the ranks of the anti-Fascists consist of nothing but assassins.

But as soon as propaganda forsakes the upper air of unsubstantial assertion for the *terra firma* of sober fact, the over-inflated figures collapse.

The names of Fascists killed during the twenty months from February, 1919, to September, 1920, when the so-called 'Bolshevists' lorded it in Italy, are recorded in two Fascist publications: *Barbarie rossa* ('Red Barbarities') issued in the spring of 1921, and *Le Pagine eroiche della rivoluzione fascista* ('Heroic pages of the Fascist revolution') issued in the spring of 1925. These give for above-mentioned period 10 names.

For the two years of the civil war (October, 1920—October, 1922) the *Pagine eroiche* gives 351 Fascist dead. Of these, 46 lost their lives in conflict with the police; one Fascist died as the 'result of an unfortunate accident' (p. 233), of which we are not told the nature; one fell from an aeroplane (p. 233), and one was run over by a lorry during a Fascist expedition (p. 264). Thus this Fascist source fixes the number of Fascist deaths, for which the 'Bolshevists' were responsible, at 302.

The *Pagine eroiche* mention only 'the most dramatic episodes.' But it seems clear that the 'most dramatic episodes' were those

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in which men lost their lives, and the less dramatic episodes were those in which men did not lose their lives. In any case every person of sense can judge whether it is likely that Fascist lists simply omitted to record the names of 1,500, of 2,000, of 3,200, or of 3,500 'martyrs.'

While thus multiplying the number of Fascists 'martyred' by the 'Bolshevists,' Fascist propaganda meticulously hides the number of victims killed by the Fascists. At most it condescends to vague statements that 'the numbers of anti-Fascist victims of Fascist vengeance is a mere trifle in comparison with the large numbers of Fascists murdered by the Reds.'¹

A systematic survey of the *Corriere della Sera* from October 1, 1920, to October 30, 1922, gives the number of those killed by the Fascists as 406. The paper did not record all the conflicts that happened: this can be seen from the fact that it only records 216 Fascist dead instead of 302, as given by the *Pagine eroiche*. Hence a third at least of the conflicts escaped the notice of this paper. Moreover, the *Corriere* gives only the names of people who died on the spot and not those of the wounded who died later on as the results of their wounds. The people clubbed on the head or chest often die several months after having been beaten: this is the method preferred by the Fascists. The *Pagine eroiche*, on the contrary, give the names of all the dead, both those who were killed immediately and those who died later. Bearing these circumstances in mind, we are justified in conjecturing that, if the actual number of Fascist dead was 302 instead of the 216 given by the *Corriere*, then the numbers killed by the Fascists must likewise be proportionately increased from 406 to round about 600, i.e. about double the Fascist losses.²

¹ Villari, *Fascist Experiment*, p. 58.

² For the period 5th to 21st April, the *Corriere della Sera* gives only 24 Socialist dead, while a contributor to the *Nation* of London (quoted by Mowrer, *Immortal Italy*, p. 364) gave for the same period 43 dead. This example would justify us in doubling the number of anti-Fascists dead given in the *Corriere della Sera*, rather than increasing them by half as much again. But it is as well to be very cautious in making these calculations.

In a Fascist publication, *Italiani, ricordate* ('Italians, remember'), issued

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If to these 300 Fascists and 600 anti-Fascists who killed one another, are added the Fascists and anti-Fascists who died in conflict with the police force,¹ and the members of the police force and of the general public who were killed in the conflicts, then the number of dead reaches 2,000. But it is not fair to pass off these 2,000 casualties as heroic Fascists killed by vile 'Bolshevists.' 'If the 2,000 dead in the civil war of 1921-22 are compared with the 200 dead in the period of the bloody 'Bolshevist tyranny,' 1919-1920, it is evident that the evil caused by the civil war was worse than that caused by 'Bolshevism,' even granting civil war to be necessary to save Italy.

In order to explain the Fascist excesses, the civil struggles of in April 1924, the Fascist dead during the two years of the civil war are only 147. The list is evidently less complete than that given subsequently by the *Pagine eroiche*. The Socialist publication, *Il Fascismo: inchiesta socialista sulle gesta dei Fascisti in Italia* (Milano, Società editrice Avanti, 1922), gives 161 deaths caused by Fascists up till March, 1922. This list, too, is evidently incomplete.

The Socialist paper *Avanti*, June 16, 1921, stated that 202 persons were killed by the Fascists between January 1 and May 31, 1921 (quoted by Beals, *Rome or Death*, pp. 58-9). But it is safer not to rely on these figures. Sir Percival Phillips, special correspondent of the *Daily Mail*, wrote in 1923: 'The Fascists have restored justice. They avenged the murders of their comrades by inflicting reprisals. Yet they have killed in all only 2,500 malefactors' (*The Red Dragon*, p. 8). Sir Percival somewhat exaggerated the prowess of his friends.

In a letter to the *Saturday Review* of September 4, 1926, Signor Villari wrote: 'I should have preferred not to enter into details on this series of crimes, which all good Italians fervently hope is definitely passed, had it not been raised by others.' For four years the propagandist and his friends have been inundating the world with fantastic figures. The discussion therefore was raised by them and not by 'others.' What they really deplore is that 'others' have come forward and shown their figures to be imaginary.

¹ These casualties among Fascists are explained by the following circumstances: (a) Often those Fascists who had not yet forgotten their old revolutionary habits, attacked not only the Reds, but even the police and drove them to self-defence; (b) sometimes the police attempted to maintain order against the excesses not only of the Reds, but also of the Fascists, either because they had not received suitable orders, or because some official acted on his own responsibility.

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the mediæval Italian communes are often cited as a precedent. But a *precedent*, especially one so remote, is not an *explanation*. During the Middle Ages, and in even more recent centuries, political struggles, not only in Italy but in all countries, were wont to be accompanied by bloodshed. If in England to-morrow, the Communists were to institute a 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat' on the Russian model, would anyone explain the new situation by harking back to the precedent of Cromwell?

In explanation and up to a certain point in palliation of Fascist violence, two circumstances may be borne in mind: (1) In Italy, unhappily, crimes of bloodshed were more common, even before the war, than in other civilized countries; (2) Four years of war necessarily attenuated the repugnance to bloodshed which in Italy had never been great.

But these two circumstances excuse and palliate also the violence of the 'Bolshevists' in the period of their domination. It should further be noted that, while the 'Bolshevist' crimes of 1919-20 were nearly always the work of an excited populace, the 'heroic' deeds of the 'anti-Bolshevists' were too often planned and carried out in cold blood by members of the better classes, who claim to be the custodians of civilization.¹

Moreover, two facts would still require explanation: (1) The extent of Fascist violence, much greater than that of 'Bolshevist' violence; (2) The methodical ferocity of the Fascist violence.

During the two years of their 'tyranny' the 'Bolshevists' did not

¹ 'If Socialist violence often verged on the bounds of criminality and sometimes overstepped them in the barbarity of its reprisals, our civilized conscience took refuge in the thought that the masses could be slowly educated and raised above the blind cruelty of instinct and of obtuse selfishness. But no excuses, no consolation come to our aid when we think of acts of premeditated and armed violence—callously perpetrated by well-to-do men whose superior training, education, social position, habits, standards of life, did not restrain them from murder, and what is even worse, from bludgeoning. If an ambush of Trade Unionists is always a shameful thing, a punitive expedition, officered by university men, who have learnt by heart Carducci's "Song of Love," brings a chill solitude to the heart.' Missirotti, *Il Fascismo e la crisi italiana*, 1921, in the book *Il Fascismo e i partiti politici italiani*, p. 36.

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once sack an office of any association belonging to industrialists, agrarians or traders; they never forcibly compelled the resignation of any local council controlled by the Conservative parties; they did not burn a single newspaper printing press; they never looted a single house belonging to a political adversary. Such deeds of 'heroism' were introduced into Italian life by the 'anti-Bolshevists.'

The professional soldiers, who armed and officered the Fascist bands, imported their mentality into the Fascist movement, and with it that methodical ferocity which was unknown to Italian political struggles before 1921. It was the military authorities who gave the Fascists their strongly hierarchical organization. Without this aid, the armed organization of the Fascist force could never have come into being, nor would the Fascist Party machine have differed essentially from that of any other Italian party.

§ 6: *The Military Conspiracy*

In this atmosphere of civil war the elections of May 15, 1921, took place. The official organ of the Vatican, *Osservatore Romano*, stated that on the polling day alone there were 40 killed and 70 wounded.¹

The result of the elections was a blow to the hopes of the Government. The Socialists and Communists, who, if left to their internal quarrels under a regime of liberty, and without the near prospect of elections, would have mutually weakened each other, suddenly left off squabbling, and only faced the offensive of the Government and of the Fascists, to avoid an electioneering disaster. Whilst on the field of lawlessness they could not fight with success, on the legal ground of an electoral contest they were still very strong. Among the working-classes the bewilderment which had been manifest in December, 1920, and in January and February, 1921, gave way to a wave of moral protest against the Government as the abettor of Fascist violence. In the Chamber

¹ Quoted by Mowrer, *Immortal Italy*, p. 364.

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of 1919 there were 156 Socialists; in the new Chamber of 1921 there were 122 Socialists and 16 Communists.

The Christian-Democrats, who in the preceding Chamber numbered 101, rose to 107 in the new Chamber. The other groups increased their total from 250 to 280. The proportions of the three sections in the Chamber thus remained almost unchanged.

Whilst the numerical proportion remained unaltered, the psychological situation changed for the worse. The Reformist Socialists who in 1920 had preached the necessity of abandoning the intransigent attitude, and taking part in the Government with the Democrats, could not now ally themselves with the 'Democrats,' as long as these were led by Giolitti who had employed the Fascists to 'make the elections' with revolvers and bludgeons. All the intransigency in 1919, which in 1920 was beginning to fade away, was exasperated in 1921.

The Christian-Democrats also, who would have liked to pursue a policy of collaboration, had been forced by Fascist violence to stand in the elections as opponents of the Government. They returned to the Chamber elated by their victory, and angry with Giolitti, for having caused their electors to be bludgeoned by the Fascists, after inviting their leaders to join his Cabinet.

Among the mass of deputies, neither Socialist, Communist nor Christian-Democrat, which the Government regarded as its majority, was a group of 35 Fascists, young and violent, who had behind them outside the Chamber an armed organization ready for any excess.

Officially the Chamber (without counting the 15 Communists and other little independent groups) was divided in three Sections: Socialists, Christian-Democrats, and Constitutionals. As a matter of fact, it was divided into four Sections: Socialists, Christian-Democrats, Democrats, and Nationalist-Fascist-Conservatives.

Giolitti and his Democrats were willing to ally themselves with the Christian-Democrats and Reformist Socialists; but these did not trust him. They would neither ally with Giolitti, nor were they able to combine against him. No one group could govern without co-operation of other groups, but a coalition was impossible. The

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Chamber of 1921 was impotent to check the disorders of civil war just as the Chamber of 1919-20 had been impotent to check the disorders of the post-war neurasthenia. Giolitti had burnt the house to roast a pig.

The new Chamber at once overthrew Giolitti's Cabinet by a confused vote, in which Socialists, Fascists, Nationalists and Conservatives all voted against the Government. But the new Cabinet like its predecessor had to lean on a coalition of Democrats, Conservatives and Christian-Democrats, excluding Socialists and Fascists. Nothing was changed but the Prime Minister. Giolitti who had authorized the arming of the Fascists, relinquished his post to Bonomi, who had armed them. Giolitti enjoyed a great personal prestige, which might have served either for good or for evil. Bonomi was a man devoid of all personal authority, incapable of doing either good or evil.

He perhaps hoped, in the first days of his government, to put a stop to the Fascist movement, now that it had ceased to serve his purpose. He soon found out that he had made a great mistake. The armed and organized Fascist bands were not disposed to let themselves be demobilized at the convenience of these gentlemen.

Moreover, the high military authorities, who in arming and drilling the Fascists, had acted at first in agreement with the Government, realized in the course of 1921, that the new organization might in their hands become a formidable weapon for ensuring political power to the military caste. From that moment they ceased to obey the civil authorities.

The pivot of the military conspiracy was the Duke of Aosta, the King's cousin.¹ The figure of this man can be discerned behind all the seditious movements which followed the war. He hoped that the Fascist movement would lead to the abdication of the King and a change of dynasty by which he might profit.

General Badoglio, as Chief of the General Staff, had played his part in arming the Fascists at the end of 1920. He resigned his post in February, 1921. Whilst ready to obey precise orders from

¹ He was remunerated for his pro-Fascist activities by the law of December 20, 1925, which raised his annuity as Prince of the Royal House from 400,000 lire to one million.

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the Government, he was not willing to assume responsibilities which were equivocal. His place was taken by General Vaccari, a protégé of the Duke of Aosta. Badoglio was not the only general who remained outside the conspiracy. Generals Caviglia, Albricci, Cattaneo, and some others loyally refrained from any share in the intrigue, but having no instructions from headquarters, they remained passive spectators of events. The majority, however, took an active part, more or less overtly, in the sedition.

The conspiracy of the high military authorities had a decisive effect on the subsequent development of Fascist activities.

The first Fasci, in 1919-20, consisted of patriotic youths who thought that by their 'anti-Bolshevist' activities they were serving their country.

In 1921, Fascism became an anti-Trade Unionist movement in the interests of the profiteers.

In 1922, it also became an anti-parliamentary movement in the service of a military 'Black Hand.'

This new phase of the Fascist movement was marked by a new type of operations. Up to the summer of 1921 the Fascists had worked in comparatively small groups. From the summer of 1921, operations carried out by thousands became the fashion. They would concentrate on a town, sometimes from great distances travelling by rail or on motor lorries, supplied by industrialists or the military, according to regular plans of mobilization, to which, of course, the police as a rule opposed no hindrance.

One of the earliest operations of this kind was the occupation of Treviso on July 12, 1921. It was directed not against 'Communists' or 'Socialists,' but against the Christian-Democrats, who had taken the part of some labourers against two land-owners, who were subscribers of the Fascist organization:

'Fifteen hundred men' - writes the American journalist Mowrer - 'brought together from districts as remote as Tuscany and Triest, armed with rifles, hand-grenades, machine-guns and steel helmets part of which had been supplied by the regular troops, arrived before Treviso late, in a hundred camions preceded by a white motor car. Under cover of darkness they surrounded the

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walled town and penetrated into the streets. Their plan was complete, their enemy "whoever isn't a Fascist." First they broke into and sacked the offices of the Christian-Democrat newspaper *Il Piave*, and then those of the republican *Riscossa*, where a few defenders were overcome after some hours of siege. Dawn found the Fascists masters of the town, for the police and soldiers had assumed an attitude of "benevolent neutrality." So for a few hours the Fascists tyrannized the place, sacking a few shops and houses, and then withdrew.¹

Another operation of the same kind had not so victorious a result. On July 21, 1921, at Sarzana, six Carabineers were enough immediately to disperse 500 Fascists who had attempted to rescue certain of their companions from prison.² Those Carabineers had not been suitably instructed by their superiors.

Such misunderstandings were avoided in subsequent operations. In September, 1921, the sixth centenary of Dante's death was to be celebrated at Ravenna. The city would be thronged with strangers from every part of the world. It was the moment for all parties to lay aside their petty rivalries and to spare the visitors any undignified exhibition of violence. But the Fascist Deputy of Bologna, Signor Grandi, now Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, thought otherwise, and a month before the celebrations, he proposed that the Fascists should, on that date, make a 'march on Ravenna.'

'It seemed' - wrote the pro-Fascist paper, the *Resto del Carlino* of Bologna, September 13, 1921 - 'that the idea was to stage a great demonstration of those Fascist forces that were opposed to peace with the Socialists. The leaders had in mind a spectacular march past in close formation with flags flying, that would begin at Bologna, make its way along the Via Emilia as far as Imola and double back towards Lugo before reaching Ravenna. Thus the new forces of Italy, marching in column - so it seemed to the minds of those who framed the scheme - should pass through the

¹ *Immortal Italy*, p. 367.

² Banchelli, *Memorie di un fascista*, p. 217.

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classic territory of communism and be received with open arms by the former republican towns and villages.'

Signor Baldini, the Reformist Socialist Deputy of Ravenna, personally called the attention of Signor Bonomi to the disturbances which would certainly ensue if the Fascists were allowed to concentrate at Ravenna. Signor Bonomi gave his word of honour that the march of the Fascists on the city should be forbidden at all cost.¹ It is evident that in making this promise he was sincere. Even he could not fail to grasp the necessity for avoiding a scandal occurring on such an occasion, and in the presence of so many foreigners.

But Signor Bonomi had reckoned without General Sani, the Commandant of the Army Corps of Bologna, who included Ravenna in his command. It was he who should have prevented the 'March on Ravenna,' which was generously advertised beforehand.² But on the day of the celebration, while the Fascists were advancing on the city, he went instead to Ravenna, to pay homage to Dante. He was notoriously one of those generals who, during the years of civil war, most actively helped the Fascists in his district, giving them arms and allowing the officers under him to take part in punitive expeditions.

The path was thus clear for this unheard-of demonstration. On September 9, squads of 'Black-Shirts' with flags flying began to gather freely at Bologna from Rovigo, Reggio, Modena, Carpi, Finale, etc. At six o'clock in the morning of September 10, a column 450 strong with trumpets at its head took the road (*Resto del Carlino*, September 11, 1921). The column had the delicacy to avoid Imola, the Socialists' centre, and, going by way of Medicina,

¹ Signor Baldini himself described to me the promise made him by Signor Bonomi.

² According to the *Regolamento per il servizio territoriale*, of July 8, 1883 (Art. 30, par. 218), the military authorities could not take any initiative in the suppression of disorders, unless requested beforehand by the police. But the Appendix to these Regulations, issued in 1899, and still in force in 1922 (see the edition of 1922), made it incumbent upon the military authorities to take the necessary repressive measures in the case of grave disorders, even without any previous request by the police.

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marched directly on Lugo. At the same time another column, 500 strong, set out from Ferrara, proceeding by way of Argenta. The two columns met at Lugo, in the afternoon of September 11 (*Resto de Carlino*, September 11). As they proceeded, their numbers naturally increased. Four lorries full of Royal Guards followed the march! (*Resto del Carlino*, September 13.) On the morning of September 12, 3,000 Fascists invaded Ravenna.

The events of September 12 at Ravenna were recounted by the correspondent of the *Giornale d'Italia* on September 21, 1921, as follows: ¹

'The Fascists reached Ravenna at 11 o'clock on September 12, and marched through the principal streets of the city singing their hymns, while the crowds greeted them with clapping and with cheers. The Fascists compelled every one to uncover, exercising their cudgels upon the deaf and absent-minded. However, no incident (*sic*) worthy of note occurred.

'In the afternoon, while a group of Fascists were sitting in a café, insulting remarks were addressed to them by a Communist, who suddenly fired a revolver-shot amongst them without hitting anyone. The Fascists rose up to pursue their assailant, when a second Communist appeared before them and fired a second shot. In the confusion that followed the two Communists succeeded in disappearing.² The news of this encounter spread rapidly among

¹ It should be borne in mind that the *Giornale d'Italia* was favourable to the Fascists and protested against the 'exaggerated reports' circulated regarding the Ravenna incidents.

² This part of the account must be taken with a grain of salt. In the reports which Fascist and pro-Fascist newspapers give of these 'expeditions,' encounters always begin with Communist shots or provocations. Is it possible in this case that the two Communists could have disappeared after having shot twice at the Fascists without hurting anyone? Luigi Fabbri, *Controrivoluzione preventiva*, pp. 66-7, gives the facts as follows: 'The Fascists, en route for Ravenna, looted the Clubs of Godo and San Michele Fornace. At Ravenna, they at once began to compel the people to uncover at the passing of the Fascist colours, beating those who refused. Amongst those who were beaten, there happened also to be some foreigners who had come for the celebration. The Fascists broke into an inn, demanding that all present should show their personal papers. One,

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the Fascist mass. The Fascists, divided into powerful bands, wrecked the premises of five Socialist clubs in the suburbs. The Chamber of Workers was likewise wrecked. In the square, pictures, papers, and benches were piled together and set on fire.

'The authorities had taken praiseworthy precautions; troops were stationed here and there, strong bands of Carabineers and Royal Guards guarded the most important points of the city; lorries full of policemen were waiting ready in the courtyard of the Prefecture to hasten wherever they were needed, and an armoured car was stationed at its entrance; but the attack on the various clubs was so sudden and so unexpected (!) that it could not be prevented. Four or five thousand is a large number. The police force wisely confined itself to interfering only to prevent further damage. An attack by them would have resulted in a massacre. The city and its suburbs seethed with a crowd whose like had never been seen at Ravenna.

'The premises of the Federation of the Co-operative Societies situated in Via Maggini were guarded by a large force of police. A band of Fascists gathered in the street shouting: "Out with the Flag! Out with the Tricolor!" The police stationed there assured them that the flag would be hung out; but while they parleyed with the mass of Fascists, some of these, having climbed up like squirrels on the iron gratings of the windows and later on a ladder, succeeded in entering the building and hanging out the flag. Registers and bundles of papers were thrown down from the windows and were soon burnt to ashes.

'In the evening, while a lorry full of Fascists was passing in front of a café, a young man seated at a table threw a plate or a glass at it. A Fascist jumped down from the lorry and gave the rash youth a blow with his cudgel. Revolver shots sounded from the café. The Fascists replied. Then entering the café, they com-

Colombo by name, found to be in possession of the membership-card of the Chamber of Workers, was violently beaten; he took to flight; the Fascists chased him with their sticks uplifted. At last, a revolver shot rang out. The pretext had been found. In the afternoon, the punitive expeditions began.' Between the Fascist and the anti-Fascist version, it is impossible to arrive at the exact truth.

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pletely wrecked it, smashing furniture, mirrors, glasses, china, and bottles of spirit.

'The authorities succeeded in sending back the Fascists the next day by three special trains.'

That the military authorities connived at the Fascist behaviour is evident, even if we accept the version that attributes to the so-called 'Communists' the responsibility for the first provocation. In these cases, sooner or later, a revolver shot is always fired, and the one party invariably tries to throw the responsibility for the shot upon its opponents. The real responsibility lies with those who created, or allowed others to create, the situation in which that shot could not but be fired. To permit more than three thousand armed persons to congregate in a city, and then to protest that a massacre would ensue if they were interfered with – and this in a country where a year's experience had shown how such gatherings began and ended – what else was this but deliberately to promote violence, knowing quite well beforehand what would happen?

Signor Italo Balbo, who led the column which came from Ferrara, in speaking of this 'March on Ravenna' in a speech at Milan on April 23, 1923, said:

'It was in September, 1921, that Fascist "squadrist" assumed a regular military formation. On September 12, 3,000 blackshirted Fascists entered Ravenna. It was a small army, divided into regiments, battalions, and platoons; an army which had been three days on the march. At Ravenna the black-shirts raised the cry of "to Rome! to Rome!" The experiment was a complete success. Squadristm could be transformed from a local phenomenon into a national phenomenon' (*Popolo d'Italia*, April 24, 1923).

The connivance of the high military authorities with the Fascists is still more clearly shown by the two following facts.

(1) Between May 31 and June 2, 1922, ten thousand Fascists from neighbouring provinces concentrated in Bologna, and demanded the dismissal of the Prefect, accusing him of being the accomplice of the 'Bolshevists.' It is plain that the Prefect would

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have prevented this concentration if he had been able to count on the army, but General Sani was absent during the whole crisis, just as he was during the 'March on Ravenna' eight months previously.

(2) Between September 30 and October 4, seven thousand Fascists from Lombardy and Venetia concentrated on Bozen and Trent, to *protest against the civil Governor of the Province*. No one intervened to prevent their transit on the railways.

At 2 p.m. on October 4, the Commandant of the Seventh Division of Trento assumed plenary powers for the maintenance of order. The result was to increase the disorder. At 4.30 p.m. a colloquy took place between the Fascists and the Governor, in the presence of General Gherzi, commanding the Verona army corps, the General in command of the Acqui Brigade, and 'other officers of various ranks.' The Fascists demanded that the Governor should resign and leave the district, and were not satisfied by his answers (*Popolo d'Italia*, October 5, 1922). The following night, the Fascists besieged the Governor's residence:

'The troops were disposed in such a way that the slightest move on the Fascists' part would have so intermingled soldiers and Fascists, that the soldiers would have been unable to use their arms. In this situation the Fascist leaders contented themselves with a solemn (!) display of strength (!) and discipline (!), a spectacle which lasted till three o'clock in the morning' (*Popolo d'Italia*, October 6).

In the afternoon of October 5, the Fascists raised the siege of the Palace:

'General Gherzi had assured them that the Governor would leave immediately' (*Popolo d'Italia*, October 8).

Giovanni Zibordi, a Reformist Socialist deputy, wrote in the beginning of 1922:

'Instead of the typical *coup d'état* or the traditional palace revolution, carried out by one or more generals, or by military factions in the capital, with the aim of replacing the reigning sovereign by

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some royal relative – things of which there was and still is talk – we find in the provinces here and there officers and N.C.O.'s of the Carabineers and Royal Guards, who threw in their lot with Fascism, that is, with an armed and lawless organization. This is nothing less than military sedition.'¹

It is the fashion to repeat that Italian post-war Cabinets were weak and unstable. This is true. But one must distinguish between the Cabinets of 1919–20 and those of 1921–22. The Cabinets of 1919–20 were weak because the whole of society was shaken by a storm of unrest, the aftermath of the war. Nobody in the country wanted to obey, and nobody was capable of commanding. The Cabinets of 1921–22 were weak for a very different reason – because many generals betrayed their oath of allegiance to the Constitution, and were in revolt against the government. Undermined by the Right, after having been shaken by the Left, the Cabinets could be nothing else than weak and ineffectual.

My friend Dr. Arthur Livingston, professor at Columbia University, New York, reviewing the American edition of the present book, declared that he cannot believe that generals could have had the intelligence with which I credit them. Certainly, if, to explain what happened in Italy from 1921 onwards, it were necessary to attribute political genius to the Duke of Aosta, General Diaz, General Gandolfi, General De Bono, Admiral Thaon de Revel, and the other exalted personages who, betraying their oath to the Constitution, formed the military conspiracy, my interpretation of the facts would on the face of it lack all plausibility. But an hypothesis of this kind is not necessary. The Fascist regime, as we have it before us to-day, after seven eventful years, was not foreseen by anyone in 1921 and 1922. As the politicians who in 1920 authorized the military authorities to arm the Fascists, did not foresee that after six months the military authorities would be acting on their own account, so the generals who, in the second half of 1921, began to act on their own account, did not foresee the developments of 1922, and still less those of the following years. In order to take the first step in certain crimes, an intelligence

¹ *Critica Socialista del Fascismo*, p. 16.

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above the mean is not necessary; all that is required is an absence of scruples above the normal. When the first step is taken, the succeeding ones are still unforeseen; but he who has begun to sin, must go on sinning, to avoid the consequences of his first sin. Only when the chain of cause and effect has reached its end, do the men who stumble forward towards unforeseen results, appear to have guided events towards a devised goal.

Some might find it difficult to discover in the Duke of Aosta and Company, even the modicum of intelligence necessary to take the first step in the path of treachery. But it should not be forgotten that, from 1910 onwards, a clique of nationalist politicians, leaders of war industries and military men, always acted in the background in Italy. The Duke of Aosta and Company, in taking the first steps in 1921 and 1922, needed to make no unusual expenditure of cerebral matter: it was enough to let themselves be advised by men like Federzoni, Rocco, Forges-Davanzati, who led the Nationalist movement, and were by no means stupid men.

If all these exalted military personages had had a sufficiency of political intelligence they would have refrained from taking part in the Fascist activities, throwing themselves and their country into such a dangerous adventure.

§ 7: *Mussolini in 1921-22*

What was Mussolini's personal rôle in 1921-1922?

The Fascist organization - I repeat, not the ineffectual movement of 1919-20, but that which seized the government in October, 1922 - was not Mussolini's creation. The branches of the Fascist Party in the various towns were founded by intellectual middle classes, retired officers, officers on leave, members of the police and agents of the industrialists and landowners. The military authorities armed and drilled them. The big war profiteers subsidized them. And the police and the magistrates assured them of impunity. While the military authorities, the war profiteers, the police and the magistrates pulled the wires behind the scenes, Mussolini stood in the limelight, arousing the enthusiasm of the younger men by daily articles in his paper, exalting the Fascist

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'victims,' throwing mud at his adversaries, and urging ever new offensive movements.

In Spain, Greece, and Hungary, the military cliques, who after the war captured the governments, set up soldiers as their figure-heads. In Italy in 1921-22, none of the generals who built up the Fascist machine had the courage or the chance to set themselves up as leaders of the *coup d'état*. They acted more cannily. They sought a figure-head elsewhere.

Before the rôle of figure-head was entrusted to Mussolini, D'Annunzio was destined to play this part. The *coup d'état* of October, 1922, had been originally fixed for November, 1921.¹ A large number of Fascists were to assemble in Rome with the pretext of celebrating the anniversary of the Italian Victory (November 4). D'Annunzio was to deliver a record-making speech, and during the ceremony he was to place himself at the head of the Fascists, overthrow the government and be proclaimed dictator. But at the last moment the poet failed to appear. Signor Bonomi, who was Prime Minister at that time, could explain this defection, but will never do so. The Fascists gathered together in Rome without a leader, committed excesses of every kind but were repulsed from the popular quarters of the city.

Until then Mussolini had played a subordinate rôle as compared with D'Annunzio. His past as a Socialist with Anarchist leanings, and his ultra-revolutionary attitude in the early post-war period, were not such as to gain him the confidence of the industrialists, big landowners and army-chiefs, despite his later display of ultra-nationalist sentiments. The fighting groups (*Fasci di combattimento*) while multiplying around him, obeyed the impulse of unforeseen forces that escaped his control. In the

¹ The first idea of a 'March on Rome' emanated from D'Annunzio, at the end of 1919, whilst in Fiume. Mussolini at that time did not think the enterprise would be successful (Pronouncement of the Arbitration Committee of the Lombard Journalists' Association, February, 1920, in the *Secolo*, February 14, 1920). Eighteen months after, in the *Popolo d'Italia* of May 31, 1921, Mussolini wrote: 'From this moment the Fascists of Latium, Umbria, the Abruzzi, Tuscany and Campania, are morally and materiall; pledged to concentrate on Rome, at the first call sent out by the directing authorities of our movement.'

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spring and summer of 1921, he tried to extricate his followers from the grasp of the new-comers, who were invading and dominated their organization on all sides. This is a crucial point in the political career of Mussolini. It deserves to be noticed as a striking proof that Mussolini (like all leaders of collective movements) was able to lead his followers only in so far as he was himself led by them: *je suis leur chef, donc je dois les suivre*.

We have already seen that the elections of May, 1921, showed the Socialists still possessed of capacity for strong resistance when using legal methods, whereas they were incapable of organized and efficient resistance in street fights. The Christian-Democrats, too, seemed invincible in their positions. Having entered the Chamber as the leader of only 35 Fascist deputies, Mussolini ran the risk of remaining permanently in the opposition, if he allied only with the Nationalists and Conservatives of the Right. Fascist strength lay outside the Chamber in punitive expeditions. But the country was tired of civil war.¹ From all political camps and from all parts of the country, protests arose against the inertia of the Government. Several of the Socialist deputies were already beginning openly to advocate the laying aside of tactics of absolute negation and the forming of a new parliamentary coalition. Still fresh from the electioneering struggle, they could not ally with Giolitti, who had manipulated the elections against them, but they were ready to work under another Prime Minister. Even the Christian-

¹ Amongst the innumerable legends circulated outside Italy about this phase of the Fascist movement, there is the one that the middle classes as a whole viewed with benevolence, nay enthusiasm, the civil war waged by the Fascists. The opposite is the truth. Here is one document chosen from hundreds. On September 26, 1921, some Fascists in Modena were killed in an affray with the police. The Fascists of Florence tried to get up a demonstration of public mourning in their city. But the city remained indifferent. On September 30 the Fascio of Florence posted up in various parts of the city the following manifesto: 'Very few citizens have felt it their duty to hang out flags of mourning for the tragic events of Modena. Not a shopkeeper closed his doors. In face of this open or covert hostility on the part of the citizens and especially of the bourgeoisie, the Florentine Fascists have decided to relinquish their struggle and stop reprisals against the anti-national parties of all colours.' (*Corriere della Sera*, October 1, 1921.)

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Democrats began to show themselves inclined towards an alliance with the Reformist-Socialists. A combination among Democrats, Reformist-Socialists and Christian-Democrats seemed possible, if not immediately, in the not distant future. A Cabinet supported by such a majority would disarm the Fascists. When deprived of their strength in street-fights, and reduced in the Chamber to an unpopular alliance with Nationalists and Conservatives, the Fascists would soon have melted away. Mussolini would have been left a general without an army. He was determined at all costs not to let things come to this.

He tried a bold change of tactics. In an interview with the *Giornale d'Italia* of May 22, 1921, he declared:

'Fascism tends towards a republic ("é tendenzialmente repubblicano"). In this it differs distinctly from Nationalism which is monarchist by definition. The group of Fascist deputies will abstain officially from taking part in the opening of Parliament. In the Chamber we wish to help to solve some of the problems, which are fundamental to the life of the Country. In the field of social legislation and of improvement in the standard of life of the working classes, the Socialists may find unexpected allies within Fascism. The salvation of the country may be assured not by the suppression of the antithesis between Fascism and Socialism, but by their reconciliation within Parliament. A collaboration with the Socialists is quite possible, especially at a later stage, after the clarification of ideas and tendencies, under which the socialist party at this moment labours, is ended. It is evident that the co-existence of Intransigent and Reformist Socialists in the same party will in the course of time become impossible. Either revolution or reform resulting from participation in the responsibilities of power.'

He ended by declaring himself favourable to a Cabinet under the leadership of Signor Meda, who was at that moment the most authoritative deputy of the Christian-Democrat group: 'In short, if at a given moment it pays us to do so, we shall support the Government and even join it.' It was an explicit offer of alliance between Fascists, Christian-Democrats and Reformist-Socialists

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'at a given moment,' that is after these latter had broken with the Intransigents.

This interview roused a widespread revolt in the pro-Fascist Conservative papers, and among the Nationalist element which formed part of the Fascist membership. The Nationalist party (behind the Nationalist one must always perceive the military 'Black Hand') officially urged its members belonging to the 'Fighting Groups' to oppose Mussolini's republican tendency. Several Fascist deputies declared that they did not share Mussolini's opinions expressed in that interview.¹

Mussolini at first thought he could weather the storm:

'I shall not allow' - he wrote in the *Popolo d'Italia* of May 24, 1921 - 'Fascism to be altered and made unrecognizable by changing from republican in tendency, as I founded it, and as it ought to remain, to a monarchical, nay more, a dynastic movement. Our symbol is not the scutcheon of the House of Savoy; it is the Roman, and, with your permission, republican, lictorial fascio. The Fascist abstention from the opening of Parliament is an act of plain logic. It is not permissible to preach one thing and practice another. If by chance these ideas of mine should not meet with the approval of Fascism, it makes no difference to me. I am a chief who leads and not a chief who follows.'

Next day, faced with the growing protest of his followers, 'the chief who leads and does not follow' began to lower his sails:

'Fascism is superior to monarchy and republic. If Fascism is monarchical, it is no longer Fascism. If Fascism is republican, it is no longer Fascism. We do not mean to step into the shoes of the republican party, but we do not mean, either, to kneel before the throne. Nobody can swear that the destinies of Italy are bound up with the cause of monarchy, as the Nationalists will have it, or to the establishment of a republic, as the republicans believe. The future is uncertain, and the absolute does not exist. Those who would draw the conclusion that Fascism espouses the

¹ Mowrer, *Eternal Italy*, p. 367.

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republican cause, and regards the setting up of the republic as a prime necessity ("pregiudiziale repubblicana") reveal a lamentable want of understanding. In speaking of Fascism as republican in tendency I only meant – speaking now for myself alone – I only meant to make a commotion in the stagnant waters and disturb certain frogs. The magnificent flame of Fascist youth runs the risk of being extinguished in the pool of conservatism and selfishness. Nests of cowardice are hidden within Fascism, i.e. people who jeered at others or who jeered at us. Selfish elements, rapacious and rebellious against every aspiration towards national concord, have slipped into Fascism. Others have taken advantage of Fascist violence, to satisfy paltry personal ambition.'

These last words were the barrage, under cover of which the 'leader who leads and does not follow' beat his retreat. On June 2, there was a meeting of Fascist deputies. After a confused discussion, they decided that each should be free to attend the Opening of Parliament or not, as he thought fit.

Forced to surrender over the question of republicanism, Mussolini still stuck to the idea of 'national concord.' On July 1, two Socialist and two Fascist deputies met in Rome, to discuss a 'truce' between their respective parties. Mussolini was favourable to these negotiations.

But in the provinces the Communists refused the Socialists the right to negotiate in their name. The Fascists of Emilia, Tuscany and the Puglie, likewise declared themselves opposed to conciliation. They took advantage of the *intransigence* of the Communists, to demolish, not the Communist institutions which were few in number, but the Co-operatives, the Chambers of workers, the newspapers which were run by Reformist-Socialists, Republicans, Christian-Democrats or non-political bodies. The Nationalists were the most uncompromising opponents of conciliation.¹ The civil war grew more and more savage. This was the exact moment at which the high military authorities began to conspire against

¹ See an article of July, 1921, by Maffeo Pantaleoni denouncing the Bolshevik degeneracy of Fascism: Pantaleoni, *Bolscevismo italiano*, Bari, Laterza, 1922, p. 214 ff.

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the regular government and connive at the 'occupation of the towns' by the Fascists.

Despite the resistance from the extremists of the Left and of the Right, the representatives of the Fascist party, the Socialist party, and the Confederation of Labour on August 3, 1921, signed an agreement, in which 'they undertook at once to stop threats, acts of violence, reprisals, punishments, vendettas, pressures and outrages of every kind.' Things went from bad to worse. Sixty secretaries of Fascist branches representing 160,000 members, met at Bologna and repudiated the agreement.¹

Mussolini took offence and resigned from the National Executive of the Fasci.

'Fascism' – he wrote on August 7, 1921 – 'is no longer liberation, but tyranny; no longer the safeguard of the nation, but the upholding of private interests and of the most grovelling and unenlightened classes existing in Italy.'

In the *Popolo d'Italia* of August 18, 1921, he asked:

'How is peace to come about? Perhaps you think you can get it by wiping out the two millions of citizens who voted for the Socialist party? But are you not running the risk of perpetrating civil war? Or of finding yourselves in rebellion against the whole spirit of the nation? Or of being obliged to submit to a Socialist peace to-morrow, owing to some other quite probable turn of the tables? Do you not see signs of this? Will not the united anti-Fascist front, destroyed by the agreement, form up again to-morrow almost automatically? I lay down the leadership. I remain, and hope to be able to remain a simple member of the Fascio of Milan.'

Cesare Rossi, the intimate collaborator of Mussolini, followed suit on August 20, 1921:

'Since I have been one of the warmest advocates of the treaty of peace' – he wrote – 'and also one of its signatories, I can no longer earnestly and honestly remain among the leaders of the

¹ Beals, *Rome or Death*, p. 64.

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Fascist organization, when, in noisy conference and what is worse, by everyday happenings, it shows its determined hostility to the treaty. The early character of Fascism has been swamped by the influx of late-comers who joined mainly when the enemy was beating a retreat. Innumerable grand Panjandrums, who once formed the clerical-agrarian and conservative fraternities, have flooded Fascism. Our courageous minority of 1919 has been overwhelmed by later waves of reinforcements, which brought in insincere or hysterical states of mind or interest of caste, class or local cliques. Fascism under the pressure of its rank and file, has become an absolutely conservative and reactionary movement. It is not the reaction we preached and practised when Italy was really in danger of falling under the dictatorship of the Socialist party. It is the foolish, cruel and purposeless reaction against everything that points to the orderly, peaceable and necessary progress of the working-classes to-day. The Fascists of the fighting zones wish, for instance, to eliminate strikes - a phenomenon which we may indeed try to render less frequent and less harmful, but which is also an economic reality and cannot be suppressed; but in actual fact they end by obstructing the liberty of assembly, the freedom of the Press and the right of association of their opponents. That very mentality of petty, tyrannical, over-bearing bullying, of which we used to accuse the Socialist party in the days of their arrogance, has now been wholly transferred to the rank and file of the Fascist movement. Have you ever asked yourselves, for instance, how many sacred affections are associated with those houses and their furniture, which our followers burn with such an easy conscience in some parts of the valley of the Po, only because they are the homes of their opponents? The motion passed during the occupation of the factories in September, 1920, against a political development of the movement [see p. 41], the breach between Socialists and Communists at the congress of Leghorn [see p. 66], the present crusade of the Communists against the Socialist party and the Confederation of Labour, the disillusionment about Bolshevism in the minds of the working classes [see p. 43], the patriotic revival in the last communal elections [see p. 63], the Fascist

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counter offensive, the new cleavage between Reformists and Intransigent Socialists: all these facts do not exist and have no value for those thoughtless ones, who are in the habit of muddling up everything. We plunge forward one time consecrating a flag and another invading a town, without any coherent plan, without discipline, incapable of reflecting, incapable of facing the problems of the hour. The Fasci have carefully refrained from establishing one single popular library. The most they do is to burn down those of their opponents. Those who rejected the treaty of peace did not understand that it met a national necessity, was a patriotic duty and for Fascism in particular represented an immediate and future advantage.'

Words thrown to the winds! The industrialists, agrarians, and the military clique, did not wish to listen; and the Fascist rank and file which carried out punitive expeditions, excited by the fighting, pleased to hunt down 'Bolshevist' peasants like wild beasts, well paid and sure of impunity, were even less disposed to listen than those who cool-headedly pulled the strings.

What then did the 'leader who leads, and does not follow' do? He waited and saw. And when he saw that the defeat of the anti-Fascists, under the ruthless Fascist pressure, was certain and irreparable, he withdrew his resignation, came to the congress of the party in Rome, in November, 1921, as if nothing had happened, declared the treaty of peace of the previous August to be a 'temporary arrangement,' and embraced Signor Grandi, who had been the leader in the revolt of the uncompromising extremists against himself. Since the mountain would not come to him, Mohammed went to the mountain.

The moment selected by Mussolini to follow his followers was well chosen. In those very days D'Annunzio deserted his post as condottiere of the Black-Shirts in the projected *coup d'état* of November, 1921. In January, 1922, Asclepia Gandolfi, a general of the regular army, centralized the organization of the Fascist bands, setting up a complete hierarchy of officers.¹

Mussolini took the place left empty by D'Annunzio as condot-

¹ Signor Italo Balbo's speech in the *Popolo d'Italia*, April 24, 1923.

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tiere of the 'Black-Shirts.' Henceforward he was the figure-head of which the military 'Black-hand' was in need. In 1919-20 as long as a social revolution seemed possible, he was ultra-revolutionary. In the spring and summer of 1921, when Fascist violence seemed to be becoming an anachronism, he attempted the treaty of pacification. As soon as the defeat of the Socialist movement became irreparable, he turned reactionary.¹ All the while by a great display of revolutionary fireworks, he contrived to keep his hold on his original adherents, the 'Fascist of the first hour.' These were his companions in adventure, his strength, his capital. Revolutionary rhetoric was needful to keep them at boiling point. And it was not difficult to cast a *revolutionary* halo over their *violent* activities. Lawless violence may always be masked as revolution, even if it serves the purposes of reaction.

Mussolini's task was no easy one. It required no ordinary amount of skill. The rank and file of the Fascist movement included men of the most diverse origin and mentality: employers of labour, who provided funds, and Syndicalists, who but yesterday had led revolutionary strikes against these very employers; army officers, schooled in monarchical ideas, and Republicans, who would have nothing to do with monarchy; landowners, who took up arms to defend their properties, and a half-starved intellectual proletariat, with nothing to lose and everything to gain; boys of good family, playing truant from the secondary schools to join in punitive expeditions under the illusion that they were doing a patriotic thing, and criminals taking advantage of these same expeditions to gratify their lust for violence.

Some common faith was necessary to hold these diverse elements together, and to promote their co-operation. Collective political action is only possible when those taking part in it can hoist the banner of some common faith which appeals to their better feelings - even if their activities spring from baser sources. It might well have seemed an impossibility to find a

¹ Box, *Three Master Builders*, p. 145: 'Mussolini and his co-workers, seeing from what source their recruits were coming in, definitely ran with the crowd, and infused the fluid programme of earlier Fascism with the doctrines of the bourgeois reaction.'

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common faith for such a motley crowd. Mussolini performed the miracle.

• His head was not furnished with a great wealth of ideas, but certain deep-seated instincts guided his actions.

In the first place he hated the Socialists, whose leader he had been up till the autumn of 1914, and who now threw mud at him as a renegade and a traitor.

Secondly, he had borrowed from Communism and revolutionary Syndicalism a contempt for Liberalism and Democracy, and the cult of violence as a political weapon.

Thirdly, he had borrowed from the creed of Imperialism its appeal to patriotic exaltation.

Such were, and still are, the directing principles of his whole propaganda. Such were, and still are, the elementary feelings common to all the groups jumbled together in the Fascist movement.

But each group had in addition its own particular feelings, interests, ideals.

From day to day, to hold his followers together, Mussolini was always quick to pick up from one or another group, some formula or scrap of a formula, with which to please some without displeasing others, encourage some without disheartening the rest. He would un-say to-day what he had said yesterday. He would on the same day contradict himself on different pages of the same paper, in different sentences of the same articles. When Einstein came to Italy as lecturer on his theory of relativity, and the ladies in every drawing-room were discussing Einstein's relativity without in the least understanding the subject, Mussolini immediately seized upon the new incomprehensible word, and proclaimed that he himself had already discovered and applied the principle of relativity in the field of politics, before Einstein discovered and applied it in the field of science. In this way he managed to satisfy the heterogeneous and chaotic expectations of the composite crowd to which he spoke.

He knew his public, as only a man can know it who has been a journalist, first of the Left, and then of the Right; and he played on it with the skill of a demagogue of the first rank.

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By a skilful use of the formulæ and symbolism invented by D'Annunzio at the time of the occupation of Fiume (September, 1919, to December, 1920) Mussolini worked up a large section of the youth of Italy to a state of frenzied excitement. These young men either had left school to go to the war, or learned little or nothing in the disorganized schools during the war years. War literature had intoxicated them with hysterical nationalistic sentiments and with an unmoral admiration for bloodshed. For this younger generation Mussolini was 'the leader' (Il Duce), 'the Saviour,' 'the messenger of God,' 'the man of Destiny.'

He was not the creator of the Fascist movement. He was the propagandist of the Fascist mysticism.

He succeeded wonderfully in turning topsy-turvy the ideas of both followers and opponents – so that no one really knew what his aims were. No one realized that under a cloud of revolutionary words a militarist *coup* was being carried out. He often says: 'The greater the confusion, the better.'

§ 8: *The General Strike of August 1-3, 1922*

On February 2, 1922, Bonomi's Cabinet resigned. Its vacillating attitude had pleased neither the Fascists nor the anti-Fascists. It might have seemed impossible to discover a Prime Minister more incapable than Bonomi. But one was found in Signor Facta. On July 19, Signor Facta also had to resign.

For a fortnight negotiations for a new Cabinet went on between the different groups and between their leaders and the King. In the course of those days an important new development occurred: the majority of Socialist deputies, rebelling against the Intransigent Socialists, who controlled the central executive of the party, declared themselves ready to support a new Cabinet on condition that it restored public peace. On July 29, the Reformist-Socialist leader, Signor Turati, with the consent of his colleagues, had an interview with the King to discuss the political situation.

But the restoration of public peace could not be attained without disbanding the Fascist organization. This meant challenging the military 'Black Hand' which was already too deeply compromised

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in the Fascist adventure. In censuring the post-war Chambers for their incapacity to form a stable Ministry, one must distinguish the cause which paralysed the Chambers from November, 1919, to July, 1922, from that which made itself felt in July, 1922. Up to July, 1922, the cause of the paralysis lay within the Chamber itself; all stable coalition was made impossible by the intransigent attitude of the Socialist deputies and by the mistrust which all parties felt towards the Christian-Democrats. In the July of 1922 these internal troubles were on the point of disappearing. But now an external cause paralysed the Chamber: the Black Hand, having little strength in the Chamber, but a formidable armed organization outside, laid its veto upon the parliamentary coalition of the Left which the new attitude of the Socialist deputies was making possible. 'The Chamber' - said Turati, in an interview with the newspaper *Epoca*, July 20, 1922 - 'is in the clutch of fear, physical fear.'

Had the Socialists taken their decision in July, 1921, they would probably have saved the country from the evils of military-Fascist anarchy and free institutions from destruction. In July, 1922, it was too late. But a year earlier, immediately after the ill-omened elections of May, 1921, what Socialist could have taken this step without arousing the revolt of all his fellows? The more one reflects on the events of those sad years, the more unpardonable appear the politicians, who, at the end of 1920, and the beginning of 1921, armed the Fascists as instruments of chastisement and electioneering pressure.

While the parliamentary groups were stopped dead by this obstruction, and the King was unable to find a Prime Minister who, backed by the majority in the Chamber, would stand firm against the Fascists outside, a Genoese paper, *Il Lavoro*, on July 30, announced that a general strike was called for August 1.

This crazy step was taken by an 'Alliance of Labour,' which had been formed in the previous December by the representatives of the Railwaymen's National Union, the General Confederation of Labour, the Federation of Seamen; the Italian Syndicalist Union and other lesser organizations.

In the Central Executive of the Railwaymen's Union the

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anarchists had a great deal of influence, although the great mass of members were anything but anarchist. The Confederation of Labour was led by, and mainly composed of, Socialist-Reformists, but there was an active and noisy minority of Communists and Intransigent Socialists. The Italian Syndicalist Union consisted of Anarchists and revolutionary Syndicalists. The Seamen's Federation and the other lesser organizations were made up of members belonging to various parties. The initiative in forming the Alliance of Labour emanated from the Central Executive of the Railwaymen's Union. The aim of the Anarchists, who preponderated in it, was to form a coalition of the economic organizations of the working classes, rejecting all contact with parliament. The leaders of the Confederation of Labour joined the Alliance under pressure from their Communist and Intransigent Socialist members in the belief that it would never achieve anything, and hoping to curb the extremists. For the first six months of 1922, the Alliance of Labour confined its activities to vague talk of a general strike. In July, 1922, the discussion grew heated. Those most eager for the strike were the Anarchists; the leaders of the Confederation of Labour were against it. After a month of wrangling, the motion for a strike was carried by a slight majority against the vote of the Confederation of Labour.

It is probable that, besides the extremists who hoped for a genuine revolution as the outcome of the strike, there were *agents provocateurs* amongst those who prompted it.¹ But it must also

¹ This is the opinion of Don Luigi Sturzo, *Italy and Fascism*, London, Faber and Gwyer, 1926, p. 107. Don Sturzo, as General Secretary of the Christian-Democratic Party, was in a position to obtain reliable information. I can confirm his opinion. Four weeks before the strike was proclaimed, a friend of mine, who was on the Central Executive of Railwaymen, came to me for advice as to how to vote in connexion with the proposed strike. He noticed that the most zealous advocates of the strike were men suspected of being spies of the Railway Management. He thought that the Management wanted the strike to lure the men's union into a disastrous battle, and then dismiss the most active of the men's leaders. On my advice he voted against the strike. When the strike was called, he obeyed the order. He was dismissed, while many of those who had advocated the strike were retained.

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be remembered that the working classes throughout the country were infuriated by the prospect that the new Cabinet would be in league with the Fascists or at any rate impotent to disarm them.

The final impetus was given by the disorders at Ravenna of July 26-29. On July 26 a Fascist was killed by a group of Republican and Socialist strikers.¹ A conflict with the police ensued in which seven strikers were killed. The Fascist squads of Ravenna, Bologna and Ferrara were mobilized. The Republican, Socialist and Communist leaders were ordered to leave the city within twenty-four hours. On the 27th, the Fascists destroyed the *Casa del Popolo* and attempted to invade the Chamber of Workers, the town-hall, and the chief premises of the Co-operative for the whole district. The following day they destroyed the offices of a newspaper and a Co-operative branch, burnt down a club, and by an incendiary bomb, set fire to the chief premises of the Co-operative: only the ground floor and one wing of this fine palace where Byron had once lived, were left; the damage amounted to 1½ million lire, representing twenty-five years of steady and able work. The workmen of Ravenna replied by proclaiming a strike, in which the railwaymen took part. On the 29th, in street encounters, three Fascists were wounded and one killed.

Under the influence of these happenings the Alliance of Labour proclaimed the general strike.² As Ravenna was the chief stronghold of the Reformist-Socialists, these were weakened in their opposition to the strike. Many of those who at the last moment were swept into voting for the strike, not only meant to protest

¹ My source is still the *Corriere della Sera*. It must be borne in mind that the correspondents of the paper were favourable to Fascism and tended to make their adversaries responsible for the first acts of provocation. I can vouch for neither the accuracy nor the completeness of the particulars. I merely attempt to give some idea of the facts as they appeared, not to anti-Fascists, but to those who favoured Fascism, even if not approving of its extremes.

² Signor Villari, *Awakening of Italy*, p. 153, makes this strike spring up like a mushroom in the night and then pronounces: 'Of the many strikes which had occurred during the last three years none was more absolutely unjustified than this.'

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against this senseless destruction, but hoped that a large display of anti-Fascist forces, proving that the Fascists were not masters of the country, would bring about the formation of a Cabinet of the Left. To drag in these non-revolutionary elements, the Alliance of Labour, in calling the strike, proclaimed that it was necessary to 'crush the attack made by the reactionary forces on the organs of the State.'

This news took the Reformist-Socialist deputies by surprise in the midst of negotiations for the new Cabinet. The strike undid all their efforts towards parliamentary co-operation. Prevent it they could not, because the extremists who had proclaimed it, were not under their control, and the leaders of the Confederation of Labour, having made the initial mistake of joining the Alliance, were pledged to abide by the decision of the majority. Had they disavowed the strike, they would have been held responsible for its failure, at a moment when the Fascists would take advantage of the failure to launch a new offensive. Had they kept silent, they would have been accused of awaiting results before making up their minds. In this embarrassment they made the worst possible choice: that of supporting those elements whose intention in striking was to protest against the danger of a Fascist Cabinet, but not to carry out a revolutionary movement. When interviewed on the afternoon of July 30, Turati declared that the impending strike aimed at defending the constitution against anti-constitutional strikes:

'It would be a strike in defence of legality ("sciopero legalitario")' - he said. 'The proletariat will stand by the State to defend it from the Fascists.'¹

But a general strike, if intended simply as an anti-Fascist demonstration, would have had to be called for a definite period (not more than twenty-four hours), and would have needed the co-operation of the Christian-Democratic organizations. These had not been consulted, and declared against the strike. Moreover no time limit was set, since the Anarchists and other extremists who promoted it, deluded themselves with the hope

¹ *Corriere della Sera*, August 1, 1922.

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that they could carry through a revolution, after eighteen months of irresistible Fascist pressure!

To this incoherent challenge, the leaders of the Fascist party replied with an able move. They proclaimed that the Fascists would wait forty-eight hours for the State to assert its authority:

'At the end of this period the Fascists will assume complete liberty of action, and substitute themselves for the State, which will once more have given proof of its impotence.'

If the general strike had not been general, its failure would have been visible by the end of the second day: the Fascists, taking the field on the third day, would have claimed all the glory of the victory. If, on the other hand, the strike had been general, the first forty-eight hours would scarcely have sufficed for the Government to put the machinery of repression into motion: the Fascists, arriving on the scene just as the machinery had begun to work, would again have taken to themselves all credit for the repression. Whatever the turn of events, the Fascists would present themselves as the sole saviours of the country.

The proclamation of the strike had as first result that the King broke off all negotiations for a settlement of the Cabinet crisis, and retained Facta as Prime Minister, so as to have some sort of government to restore order.

From the beginning the general strike was a fiasco. The railwaymen, whose representatives in the Alliance of Labour had most strongly advocated the strike, answered the call partially and irresolutely. Of 229,000 men, only 60,000 came out.¹ The other groups responded in the same incoherent way. It was the last ill-timed move of the pugilist who is about to receive the knock-out blow. On the night of the second day, the Alliance of Labour called off the strike for the noon of the following day, August 3.²

¹ Amministrazione delle Ferrovie dello Stato, *Relazione per l'Anno 1922-23*, Roma, 1924, p. 124.

² This general strike of August 1-3, 1922, is constantly invoked by Fascist propaganda as a proof that Italy was threatened by Bolshevism even on the eve of the 'March on Rome.' For instance, Signor Villari writes in *The Times*, August 27, 1927: 'It is very misleading to state that

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On August 5, the Fascist press-bureau issued 'the first approximate list' of the towns in which the Fascists in reprisals had occupied town-halls or wrecked Chambers of Workers' clubs, Co-operatives, etc.: Alessandria, Ancona, Antignano, Ardenza, Campicanello, Falconara, Figline Valdarno, Florence, Fornovo, Gallarate, Gravina, Intra, Leghorn, Milan, Muggia, Noceto, Novara, Novi Ligure, Oderzo, Pavia, Pegazzano, Pistoia, Ponte a Signa, Rimini, Ronco, Rebocco, Sanpierdarena, San Secondo, San Jacopo, Savona, Scandiano, Schio, Spezia, Tabiano, Torre, Torino, Vigevano, Voghera. These reprisals continued until August 17.

While this storm of violence raged throughout the country, Facta concentrated all his efforts on negotiating with the Fascists, to prevent them from occupying Rome. Having secured their promise to respect the Capital, he left them a free hand in the rest of Italy. He was the most convenient of all possible Prime Ministers for the Fascists, until such time as they should decide to occupy the Capital as well.

The House, which had refused to accept Facta's policy on July 19, gave him a vote of confidence on August 10 and went into recess. Nobody thought, however, that the new Cabinet would survive the recess. August and September were months of intensive negotiations behind the scenes. In the Socialist Congress of Rome of October 1 to 3, 1922, the Reformist-Socialist delegates represented 29,119 votes, while the Intransigent Socialists represented 31,106. The Reformist wing broke away and formed a new party, the 'Unitary Socialist Party.' As a result of this split the General Confederation of Labour dissolved its connexion with the Intransigent Socialist Party.

The way thus became clear for a stable resettlement of the parliamentary groups: - a Left coalition majority of Reformist-Bolshevism was at an end a year before the Fascist March on Rome. As late as August 1, 1922, the political general strike proclaimed by the various allied subversive parties (1) would, but for the Fascist reaction (?), have suspended the whole life of the country, as the authors of the general strike in Great Britain in May, 1926, attempted to do.' The English general strike of May, 1926, involved 5 million workers and lasted nine days. What is 'very misleading' is to put the two strikes on the same footing.

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Socialists, Christian-Democrats and Liberals; a Right opposition composed of Fascists, Nationalists and Conservatives; and an extreme Left minority composed of Communists and Intransigent Socialists. No definite agreement between the new Unitary Socialist Party and the Christian-Democrats and Liberals had yet been arrived at. But such a resettlement was a matter of a few months – possibly even of a few weeks. Among those most anxious for this parliamentary resettlement were the Communists and Intransigent Socialists. After the new Cabinet had pacified the country, they would accuse the Reformist-Socialists of having betrayed the proletariat by allying with the bourgeois parties to obtain office.

At this point the 'March on Rome' took place.

§ 9: *On the Eve of the 'March on Rome'*

The 'March on Rome' was not directed against 'Bolshevism.' Not even a shadow of the 'Bolshevist' peril remained in Italy in 1922. Mussolini himself wrote in the *Popolo d'Italia*, a year before the 'March on Rome,' July 2, 1921:

'To say that there still exists a Bolshevist peril in Italy, is to substitute certain insincere fears for the reality. Bolshevism is vanquished. Nay more, it has been disowned by the leaders and by the masses. The Italy of 1921 is fundamentally different from that of 1919. This has been said and proved a thousand times.'

And on December 1, 1921, he said to the Chamber of Deputies:

'It cannot be denied that the Italian proletariat finds itself in a period of what I shall call moral collapse, not only because of the more or less violent action of Fascism, but even more as a result of the collapse of all the ideologies which had been violently injected into it after the war. Moreover the subversive parties are fighting amongst themselves.'¹

¹ *Popolo d'Italia*, December 2, 1921. The proofs that the peril of a revolutionary crisis was definitely over in the second half of 1921, have been collected by Bonomi – the man who, at the end of 1920 as Secretary of War, armed the Fascists for civil war – in his book, *Dal Socialismo al Fascismo*, Rome, Formiggini, 1924, pp. 39 ff. See also Bachi, *L'Italia economica nel 1921*, pp. 225, 336, 339.

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Fascist 'propaganda' gives the name of 'Bolshevism' to the disorders of the Civil War, as if a homogeneous series of acts of violence lasted from the spring of 1919 to the autumn of 1922. The truth is, that in these years one must make a sharp distinction between the period of 1919-1920 (up to the occupation of the factories) and the period 1921-1922 (from the massacre at Bologna to the 'March on Rome').

In the first period, the disorders were almost always provoked by 'Bolshevists'; the police opposed to these attempts a resistance that was doubtless incoherent and intermittent, but which was not in the least weak, as some bloodthirsty people affirm, and which in any case prevented the impetuous torrent of post-war neurasthenia from overflowing all barriers; resistance on the part of the public was then little felt, being made only by scanty groups of Fascists, who from time to time even took the initiative themselves in attacking.

In the second period, the Fascists, backed by the military authorities, police and magistrates, grew rapidly in number and everywhere took the offensive, or replied to the Bolshevist attack with an overwhelming counter-offensive. The 'Bolshevists' soon became a defeated army, defending itself confusedly, without any connected plan, and without the least chance of success.

If one gives the name of 'Bolshevism' to the first period, the second period must have a different name: that of 'anti-Bolshevist reaction.' Those who seek in Russia the parallel of Italian events, must equate the Italian happenings of 1921-2, not with the Bolshevist revolution, but with the anti-Bolshevist attempts of Kolchak, Denikin, Wrangel, etc., bearing, however, in mind, the difference (not indeed insignificant) that the Bolshevist revolution succeeded in Russia, and the anti-Bolshevist attempts failed, whereas in Italy the 'Bolshevists' failed, and the 'anti-Bolshevists' triumphed. But it would be best to leave off using these Russian words when speaking of Italy. The Italian disorders of 1919-1920 do not deserve *ni cet excès d'honneur ni cette indignité* of being recorded in history under the name of 'Bolshevism,' and the Italian reaction had none of these formidable difficulties to overcome, which in Russia frustrated every attempt at reaction. Between Russia and

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the Italy of 1919-22 there is the same difference as between a tornado which devastates a whole country, and a gale which breaks some windows and blows down trees and chimney-pots. It would be more appropriate to speak of 'post-war neurasthenia' in 1919-20, and of 'civil war' in 1921-2.

If one strives for still greater precision in this analysis, one must distinguish in the civil war of 1921-2, two secondary periods: that extending from autumn 1920 to summer 1921, in which the Fascists and the military authorities acted in concert with the regular government; and that extending from summer 1921 to autumn 1922, in which, no longer obeying the regular government, they acted on their own account. The former period should receive the name of 'Fascist reaction'; the latter that of 'Fascist-military anarchy.'

Let the English reader who would realize what happened in Italy in those years, recall the general strike of May, 1926, in England. During this crisis, the volunteers, who enrolled as special constables, remained under the control of the official authorities, and acted within the bounds of the law. They did not form themselves into lawless bands to kill or banish Trade Union organizers and Labour M.P.'s, or to loot their houses, or burn the offices and registers of the Trade Unions. Had they tried to do anything of this kind, they would have had to reckon with the police and the Bench. In other words, strikers had to face 'a conservative' and not a 'Fascist' resistance. Let now the English reader imagine that in May, 1926, the English people, instead of meeting the general strike with calm, had been seized with panic, and that Mr. Baldwin, having lost his head and every rudiment of moral sense, should have ordered the police to launch the special constables against the strikers, without legal restraint, and the military authorities to provide them with rifles, machine-guns and lorries. If this had happened, the English workmen would have had to face, unarmed, an armed and lawless organization, being at the same time treated as rebels, if they had attempted to resist this illegal violence. This is what happened in Italy from the autumn of 1920 to the summer of 1921. Let the English reader make another effort of imagination. Mr. Baldwin, in this cowardly

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policy, has destroyed his own personal prestige and that of the Government. The military authorities emboldened by this moral breakdown of the regular government, conceive the plan of suppressing the liberties of the English people. To reach this aim, they intensify the man-hunt against the workers and their leaders. Finally, they replace Mr. Baldwin in the Government by Lord Rothesmere. This is what happened in Italy from summer 1921 to autumn 1922. Now let the English reader make a last and still more strenuous effort: let him give the name of 'Bolshevism' not only to the general strike of May, 1926, but also to the civil war and military anarchy which must have followed it, and let him justify this use of the word by the fact that the English workers had more or less obstinately resisted the violence both legal and illegal, of the special constabulary, police and military authorities.

Fascist 'propaganda' makes out that in October, 1922, Italy needed to be saved from economic dissolution and financial bankruptcy, due to 'Bolshevism.' In the second volume of this book, I give a whole chapter to the economic conditions of Italy before and after the 'March on Rome.' For the present some essential indications will suffice.

The second half of 1921 and the first half of 1922 were the darkest periods of the post-war economic crisis. To attribute the hardships of that year to Bolshevism which was by then stamped out, is just as absurd as it would be to attribute them to Fascism, which then had complete ascendancy. The difficulties were common to the whole world. Riccardo Bachi wrote towards the end of 1920:

'The crisis was evident in the world-markets during the second half of 1920, and now warns us of difficult times, and severe economic stress ahead. It made itself just felt in the past spring (1920) in Japan, whence it spread step by step over the entire world. The immediate future promises great economic hardships.'¹

During the winter 1921-1922, the general crisis was aggravated by acute local difficulties in the electrical industries. This was the

¹ Bachi, *L'Italia Economica nel 1919*, pp. xii, 193, 224.

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result of an exceptional drought, which exhausted the reserves of water power.¹

Notwithstanding this crisis, Italian economic life at the end of 1921 showed all the symptoms of convalescence. Giorgio Mortara wrote in December, 1921, in *Prospettive economiche: 1922*, pp. xv-xx:

'Italy has decidedly improved her condition in the course of 1921. It would be too much to say that she lies on a bed of roses. Nevertheless, remembering the difficulties overcome yesterday, we can consider without undue fears the difficulties of to-day. Agricultural industry, the base of our economic life, seems to be distinctly on the way to recover normal conditions; the deep depression consequent on the war has passed away. Not less reassuring, perhaps even more so, is the situation of cattle breeding. The mineral industries suffer the foreign and domestic depression - some of their branches, however, are active. The Textile industries, which, taken as a whole, are among the most important and vital of the transforming industries of Italy, support better the slackened demand: active in finding new outlets, and quick to adapt production to the tastes of the markets, they passed without excessive expansion through the war period, and in the same way, without undue restriction, they traverse these years of laborious readjustment. The food industries are also firm: many of them find in the home markets a wide field for the absorption of their products. The electrical industry is expanding: the production of power is inferior to the demand; under the impulse of necessity plants for the exploitation of Italy's waterfalls are being undertaken with greater activity. The building industry, and that of building materials, are still vegetating feebly, the difficulties which paralysed them during the past years being not yet overcome, although there is some improvement. Some branches of mechanical industry are still active, either by their own vitality like the motor car industry, or thanks to government orders like those which provide railway material. The industries which languish most are those which, born and developed during the war, had a fictitious appearance of prosperity: with a return to less

¹ Bachi, *L'Italia Economica nel 1921*, pp. 221, 305.

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abnormal conditions, organs which once were useful and necessary, become parasitical and superfluous, or out of proportion to needs: the eliminations and restrictions which take place to-day, were inevitable from the day of the armistice. On the whole the depression of the industries which transform raw materials, appears serious and widespread even in Italy, but is far from reaching the intensity and extension which has been the lot of the big industrial countries, such as the United States and the United Kingdom. The working of the railways has distinctly improved. The mercantile fleet has increased. In the ports, things, without being altogether satisfactory, are improving. The uneasiness in several home industries has occasioned widespread unemployment. Against these depressing phenomena may be set the comforting fact of the greater steadiness and efficiency of labour. A good source of hope for the economic future of Italy is to be found in the progress of foreign trade. In 1921 the excess of imports over exports diminished from 10-12 milliards to 5-6 milliards. The expenditure of tourists in Italy has increased, sufficiently to compensate for the reduction which has occurred in the remissions of the emigrants. Our foreign debt has perhaps increased in 1921, but certainly in a much smaller degree than in 1920. The year 1922 promises well as regards foreign exchanges. It will perhaps be necessary, during the first months of the year, to increase to some extent the import of coal, to make up for the dearth of hydro-electric power; but the prosperity of the agriculture and cattle breeding in 1921, makes large imports of corn and of other food-stuffs unnecessary. The export of half-manufactured finished goods, is still fairly active. The exports of fruit and vegetables, in spite of many market difficulties, reach a sufficiently high figure. The influx of tourists does not seem to abate - indeed it seems to increase.'¹

Imports of coal rose from 6.9 million tons in 1920, to 7.9 in 1921 and to 9.6 in 1922.² Imports of petroleum, benzine and similar

¹ Mortara, *Prospettive economiche*: 1922, pp. xv-xx.

² Mortara, *Prospettive economiche*: 1922, pp. 207-218; *Prospettive economiche*: 1926, p. 271.

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products rose from 2,310,000 quintals, yearly average, in 1919-1921, to 2,911,000 quintals in 1922.¹ The consumption of electricity, notwithstanding the crisis of production due to the drought, remained stationary at 4.3 milliards of kilowatt hours in 1921-1922.²

The following table³ shows the figures of Limited Companies in 1921 and 1922, compared with those of 1920:

	Number of Companies.	Capital.
1920	5,541	17,784 million lire
1921	6,191	20,350 " "
1922	6,850	21,395 " "

The following figures⁴ show the savings deposited by Italians in 1919, 1920, 1921 and 1922:

1919	. . .	10,643 million lire
1920	. . .	13,213 " "
1921	. . .	15,576 " "
1922	. . .	17,250 " "

Speaking of Railway transport, Mortara said in December, 1921, that it had 'distinctly improved.' This recovery in the service occurred gradually, as the quality of the coal improved, and as the rolling stock worn out during the war was renewed:

'In the four years following the Armistice' - wrote Mortara in December, 1922 - 'the deterioration of the war period was in part made good: new material was acquired, and old stock repaired where possible. In 1921-2 traffic has distinctly increased, and in all probability it will go on increasing in the near future.'⁵

In 1913-14, on the eve of the war, the State Railways carried 42 million tons; in 1919-20 they carried only 40 million; in 1920-21

¹ Einaudi, *Italy, Financial and Economic History in the Encyclopædia Britannica*, 1926, p. 757.

² Mortara, *Prospettive economiche*: 1926, p. 334.

³ *Credito Italiano: Società Italiane per azioni*, 1925.

⁴ *Annuario Statistico Italiano*: 1919-1921, p. 509.

⁵ *Prospettive economiche*: 1923, pp. 330-347.

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they carried 39 million; in 1921-2 they regained the ground lost in the former years, and again carried 42 million as on the eve of the war.¹

Bus routes, which at the end of 1920, had a total length of 19,500 kilometres,² had at the end of 1922 a length of 24,000.³

Railway strikes were much less numerous and serious from October, 1920, to July, 1921, than they had been from January to October, 1920. The most important were:

- I. The national demonstration of May Day, 1921, in which most of the employees took part;
- II. An economic strike lasting nearly a month (April 26 to May 22, 1921) in Venezia Giulia, which ended with the defeat of the strikers;
- III. Twenty-two days of 'working to rule' (from November 18 to December 1, 1921); and six days of 'stay-in' strike (from March 1 to March 5) in the station of Paola in Calabria;
- IV. There were further:
 - Twenty-three strikes lasting for a few hours;
 - Fourteen one-day strikes, six of which occurred in stations of little importance, three only being on important lines (October 18, 1920, on the Roman line; March 17, 1921, on the Modena-Mantua line; March 29, 1921, on the Roman lines);
 - Five two-day strikes (one in Sardinia, one in Calabria, one in the district of Florence, one in the station of Taranto, one in the station of Rimini);
 - One three-day strike in Calabria (October 15-18, 1920);
 - Four four-day strikes (February 28 to March 3, 1921, in the district of Florence; April 7-10, 1921, on the Venice-Mestre-Portogruaro line; April 8-11, in a minor station of Naples; June 13-16, in the station of Venice).

In many cases they were lightning strikes in protest against acts

¹ *Prospettive economiche*: 1923, p. 338.

² *Annuario Statistico Italiano*: 1918-1921, p. 378.

³ Mortara, *Prospettive economiche*: 1923, p. 349.

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of violence committed by Fascists on railwaymen or their organizations, or on workmen's associations.¹

As regards military transports, the Report of the administration of the State Railways for the year 1920-1921 says:

'The stoppage frequent in the preceding year, by Railwaymen of trains carrying soldiers, royal guards and war-material, has almost entirely ceased.'

For the year July, 1921, to June, 1922, the Report states:

'In the period July, 1921, to June, 1922, the unrest among the Railwaymen was much diminished, in comparison with the preceding year.'²

There were nine cases of 'working to rules' or strikes, none of which lasted more than twenty-four hours; the usual May Day abstention, in which this year only 29,350 employees took part, and a lightning strike in Rome on November 10, 1921, in protest against acts of violence committed by the Fascists (see p. 119). This strike lasted four days and involved 12,000 men. It spread to the district of Naples where it lasted until November 21, for economic reasons, but the strikers had to return to work without having gained anything. There was not one strike to stop military transports!³

Between July 1, 1922, and the 'March on Rome,' occurred the strike of August 1-2 (see pp. 131-5), in consequence of which 124 employees were dismissed, 770 were degraded, 44,000 were punished with the postponement of increase of wages, and the rest with lesser fines.⁴

In the days of the 'March on Rome,' it was possible in a single day, October 31-November 1, for 60 extraordinary trains with 40,000 Fascists, to start from Rome, without disturbing the ordinary traffic.⁵ And Rome has only two stations. This fact is

¹ Amministrazione delle ferrovie dello Stato, *Relazione per l'anno 1920-1921*, pp. 13-14.

² *Relazione per il 1921-1922*, pp. 14-15.

³ *Relazione per il 1922-1923*, p. 14.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Margherita Sarfatti, *Dux*, Milan, Mondadori, 1926, p. 282.

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enough to show whether the Railway Service was in a state of breakdown, when the Fascist Government arrived on the scene on October 31 and snatched it from chaos.

If the Railway Service was being gradually re-organized in 1921 and 1922, the financial administration never needed to be re-organized, it had always functioned with ruthless vigour. The revenues which amounted to 9,675 million lire in 1918-19, and 15,207 millions for 1919-1920, rose to 18,820 millions for 1920-21, and 19,790 millions for 1921-22.¹

In 1920-21, 12.1 milliards, and in 1921-22, 12.6 milliards of war liabilities, fell due, and were paid off. In 1922-23, after the Fascists conquered the Government, only 6.6 milliards of war liabilities had to be met; in 1923-24, 4.7 milliards; in 1924-25, 3.8 milliards.²

The pre-Fascist Governments had to face the maximum of war liabilities; the Fascist Government had a less stiff task, because the farther the war receded into the background, the more the expenses resulting from it decreased. But the taxes which had been increased or freshly imposed between 1919 and 1922, continued to bring in their returns. The Fascist Government concluded the work of the preceding Governments, reaping where others had sown. As early as December, 1921, Mortara forecast that the deficit in the budget would cease by 1923-24:

'The situation of public finance' - he wrote - 'although yet far from happy is less threatening now than at the end of 1920. The deficit is much diminished during the present fiscal year, it will be again diminished next year, and perhaps altogether eliminated in the one following.'³

In his speech to the Chamber on July 12, 1922, the Minister of Finance, Signor Peano, provided for a deficit of 4,000 million lire, for the coming fiscal year. When we consider the deficits of 22.7

¹ Einaudi, *Italy*, pp. 576-7.

² Paratore, *Alcune note di politica monetaria*, Rome, Modernissima, 1925, p. 43; and Anonymous, *La politica finanziaria del Governo Fasciste*, Rome, Morara, 1926, p. 7.

³ *Prospettive economiche*: 1922, p. xx.

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milliards in 1918-19, 17 milliards in 1920-21, and of 15 milliards in 1921-22, we can appreciate the difficulty and importance of this achievement. The 'Cape of Storms' of Italian finance was safely rounded.

In the same speech of July 12, 1922, Signor Peano made the following déclaration:

'The most important financial circles in the world are not pessimistic about our financial and economic situation. This is proved by the fact that offers of loans have been repeatedly made us by very important English and American bankers. The government has not found it necessary to accept these offers so as not to burden our commercial balance with new debts and because we think that *aes alienum aeterna servitus*. On the other hand, the government looks with a favourable eye on every sort of initiative calculated to procure fresh capital to private enterprise.'

According to Fascist 'propaganda,' Italy was expiring on the brink of bankruptcy when the Italian Minister of Finance made that declaration. The great sin of pre-Fascist Ministers was that they were accustomed to speaking quietly without rolling their eyes and gnashing their teeth.

When the Fascists took possession of the government, the economic situation of the country, according to Mortara, was as follows:

'In spite of all obstacles, and in spite of the political disturbances that preceded the peaceful revolution of October, 1922, the economic activity of the country has strengthened steadily during the course of this year. The people work with greater faith in the future, and with greater steadiness and regularity. Agriculturalists, in spite of the poverty of the harvest, have succeeded in keeping supplied certain notable channels of export, and have reopened others. Stock-breeders, in spite of the drought, have remained in a reasonably good position. The electrical industry has been restored to vigour. The industries concerned with the manufacture of raw materials, and agricultural and pastoral products continue to pick up. The state of the cotton industry can fairly

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be called good, that of silk and wool satisfactory, and that of the minor textile industries hopeful. The iron industry, however, is still depressed. In the mechanical industries some branches are flourishing; others vegetate, others threaten to disappear altogether. Among chemical industries there is a necessary movement on foot to eliminate those to which Italy does not offer a propitious home: others are returning to their early vigour. The lowering of the price of building materials has assisted the revival of the building industry. Railway transport is being slowly reorganized: complaints against delays and irregularity of delivery are growing less. The improved conditions of the ports is easing sea-transport, which has greatly suffered from their disordered state. For two years now Italy has done without the help of foreign capital, on which she still relied in 1919 and 1920. The increase of paper money is already stopped.¹

Riccardo Bachi wrote, at the end of 1922:

'The machinery of Italian economics showed itself on the whole far more solid and consistent than might have been expected. At a year's distance from the acutest point of the crisis, a hint of blue appears in the sky and gives hope of better things.'²

In short, on the eve of the 'March on Rome' behind the screen of parliamentary paralysis and the noisy disorders of the civil war, the machinery of public administration worked with full efficiency and the economic life of the country had already recovered the equilibrium which the war had overset, and was slowly making its way towards a new phase of progress. Political events often stand to the economic life, as the waves on the surface stand to

¹ *Prospettive economiche*: 1923, pp. xvi and ff. See also *Prospettive economiche* 1924, pp. xi, xiii; Luigi Einaudi, *Italy in the Encyclopædia, Britannica*, 1926, p. 573: 'In the two succeeding years (1921-1922) the world crisis made itself felt, and the effects were intensified because, owing to the bad harvests, the spending power of the poorer classes was greatly reduced and the demand for manufactured goods thereby lessened. But in 1922 conditions began to improve.'

² *L'Italia economica nel 1921*, p. 7.

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the depths of the sea: whilst the former are lashed by the winds, the latter hardly move.

But in politics appearances are more important than reality, if for no other reason than that appearances are perceived at once, whilst reality is only known years after when statistics are available to substantiate it. In the summer of 1922, the longing for peace after three years of war and four of disorder, abhorrence of the cruelties of the civil war, anxiety aroused by the military anarchy, worry over the economic and financial situation of the country which though no longer desperate seemed still to be so, weariness of the futile manœuvres of the parliamentary groups, contempt for the ineptitude of a prime minister like Facta, all these feelings resulted in a widespread mood of shame and discouragement. To escape from a moral situation which had grown intolerable, the country would have accepted any fresh government on condition of its restoring public peace.

This state of public bewilderment and anxiety was seized upon by the Conservative and Capitalist Press to launch a campaign against the alliance between Reformist-Socialists, Democrats and Christian-Democrats which was maturing in the Chamber. This alliance was the 'Bolshevism' against which the alarm was raised. Give a dog a bad name and then hang him.

Don Sturzo who, as General Secretary of the Christian-Democratic party, was at that moment in an advantageous position to observe the situation at close quarters, penetratingly analyses it in his book, *Italy and Fascism*, pp. 108-112:

'Italy in 1922 became a prey to suggestion, to unreasoning fear and unreasoning hope - the fear of Bolshevism, when Bolshevism had been overcome two years before; the hope that the energetic and intimidating action of the Fascist Irregulars would prove the one means of saving middle-class economy and the constitutional State from the advance of Socialists and Popolari (Christian-Democrats). This state of mind, excited by the general strike and by the parliamentary crisis in which industrial and agrarian capitalism had caught a glimpse of the peril of Socialist collaboration in the Government, kept the country in a state of agitation and under

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the incubus of inevitable coming events. . . . Thus was invented the fable that Fascism in 1922 saved Italy from Bolshevism; if by Bolshevism is meant the agitations and disorders of 1919-20, up till the occupation of the factories, these were already past history. There does not exist in Italian political life a more insincere phenomenon than the fear of Bolshevism on the part of the wealthy classes, in 1922. The latter had taken the offensive against the State by the Fascist acts of violence, and had to justify both offensive and violence: this they could only do by crying out that there was peril of a Bolshevization of Italy in the near future.' ¹

Don Sturzo's presentation finds confirmation from an unsuspected witness:

'The leaders of the collaborationist Socialist group' - writes Signor Villari - 'Turati, Treves and Modigliani, worked hard to convince their comrades of the advisability of such a policy, and at one moment it seemed as though it had a good chance of being adopted by the Party and of materializing. Among several of the other parties there was a regular competition to secure the support of the collaborationist Socialists for the formation of the future Cabinet, *as it was believed that a combination with the moderate Reds would secure it a long tenure of office.* . . . The Fascists, Nationalists, and the Right generally were rigidly opposed to this experiment, for the following reasons: *revolutionary Socialism was no longer a serious danger*; the Communists might commit occasional outrages and acts of terrorism, but they had lost the support of a large proportion of the labouring masses. . . . *But collaboration represented a much more real and insidious danger.* . . . It might be thought that *once the Bolshevik peril was eliminated and with it the possibility of a social revolution*, the Fascists should have been satisfied with their success and limited their action to a policy of fighting collaborationist tendencies and of speeding up the Government to a higher pitch of energy and efficiency. But this was not Mussolini's view. Mussolini firmly believed that . . . a reform of the body politic of a much more general character was necessary. But such a reform no Government handicapped by

¹ See Supplementary Note A at the end of the present chapter.

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the existing parliamentary conditions was capable of carrying out. . . . Only a force like that of Fascismo . . . practically independent of parliamentary politics, could achieve this task.'¹

If, in place of the term 'Mussolini' we read some such term as 'the military combine and the politicians which pulled the strings of the Fascist Party,' the passage fits the case perfectly.

In the speech made by Mussolini at Naples on October 24, 1922, just before the 'March on Rome' not a single word is devoted to 'Bolshevism.' All his thunder-bolts are aimed against democracy. In the proclamation with which the Fascist Quadrumvirate heralded the 'March on Rome,' parliament, not 'Bolshevism,' is the target. The 'March on Rome' was designed, not to put an end to parliamentary paralysis, but to prevent parliamentary paralysis from coming to an end in a coalition Cabinet of the Left, disconcerting to the plans of the 'Black Hand.' Had coalition of the Right been able to capture the government by parliamentary methods, the manœuvre would never have been devised.²

In September and October, 1922, Mussolini was in touch at the same time with the parliamentary leaders of the Right and of the Left, ready to throw in his lot with whichever group was disposed to grant him and his friends the greater number of Ministerial posts. All that he cared about, was not to be left out of any combination. The other leaders of his party, amongst whom were the agents of the military 'Black Hand,' wished for a Cabinet in which the premiership should be given to Signor Salandra, Mussolini and his friends occupying in it only a subaltern position.

None of those who launched the movement foresaw that it

¹ *The Awakening of Italy*, pp. 150, 168.

² As early as the summer of 1921 there was talk of collaboration between Christian-Democrats, Reformist-Socialists and Liberals in order to 'put an end to the reign of the Fascist bludgeon.' Luigi Fabbri (*Controrivoluzione preventiva*, pp. 83-4) noted that 'this fact, which the military caste and the more parasitic groups of the bourgeoisie unmistakably feared, would probably have provoked a sudden *coup d'état*, a military *pronunciamento*, a violent mobilization of Fascism and militarism, of an anti-constitutional, reactionary and anti-parliamentary character.' This was exactly what happened in October, 1922.

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would end in a Cabinet led by Mussolini. This was the unlooked-for result of unforeseen circumstances.

§ 10: *The 'March on Rome'*

The legend of the 'March on Rome' has been transcribed by Sir Percival Phillips, special correspondent of the *Daily Mail*, in the following manner:

'It was a march of simple peasants, some of whom saw a large city for the first time, and of working men from the mills and factories, intermingled with other elements of society, all demanding liberty. Nearly 120,000 armed men, all loyal, all pledged to put self aside and think only of their country, gathered at the gates of Rome. They came like the legions of old, in cohorts, in companies commanded by centurions, in 'manipoli,' or sections, bearing names made famous by their exploits in action.

'The details of the final military campaign which was to overthrow the existing Government were settled at a meeting of the leaders under Signor Mussolini at Milan on October 6. Another military conference was held at Florence on October 15. A conference between Signor Mussolini and his chiefs was held the night of October 24, at the Hotel Vesuvius at Naples, at which it was decided to open negotiations with the Government for the transfer of its powers to the Fascisti within 48 hours, failing which the legions would march on the capital and take it by force. Signor Mussolini demanded six ministries and the control of the Air Force. Signor Mussolini went to Rome next day, but the Government refused to yield.

'Within 24 hours general mobilization of the militant Fascisti was begun. Mobilization began on the night of October 27. Throughout the provinces of the north the Fascists quietly occupied Government buildings, prefectural and municipal offices, posts and telegraphs, telephone exchanges, railway stations and many of the police barracks.

'By next morning they were moving on the first three points of concentration, under the direction of General Fara. The Supreme

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Council of three (General De Bono, Signor de Vecchi and Signor Balbo) remained at their general head-quarters at Perugia. Black Shirts from Umbria, Romagna and Tuscany concentrated first at Foligno, and then moved to Monterotondo, 20 miles north of Rome.

'More from the Abruzzi came down from their mountain homes and gathered near Tivoli, about the same distance from Rome on the north-east of the capital, under Signor Bottai.

'Fascist units from Genoa, Milan, Bologna and the north-west generally moved down the sea-coast to Santa Marinella, a little port near Civitavecchia, where Signor Pollastrini was in command.

'Thus Rome was surrounded on three sides by an army of nearly 120,000 men, perfectly organized and disciplined and ready to fight. I am asked to emphasize the fact that this converging movement was one of small units, not of large military hordes. Squadre and manipoli simply met at their usual rendezvous and made their way direct to the mobilization centre. They travelled by train, motor-car and lorry. They were equipped with carbines, revolvers and trench-helmets. The Government remained helpless and incredulous to the end. When, too late, the magnitude and the weight of the Fascist machine was realized, a proclamation was drawn up declaring martial law. Preparations were made hurriedly for the defence of Rome which inspired derision rather than confidence. Barbed wire was erected round the city. Guns were mounted on the walls (?). The garrison was under arms. Then the King saved Italy. He refused to sign the edict establishing martial law. Instead, he telephoned to Signor Mussolini, who was at Milan calmly waiting the outcome of the *coup d'état*, and asked him to come to Rome.'¹

Such is the legend. But for the legend to become history, certain essential particulars must be added to the picture.

The first is that, until September 29, the Central Executive of the Fascist Party knew that, in the event of a Fascist concentration on Rome, 'the Army would observe an attitude of

¹ *The Red Dragon and the Black-Shirts*, pp. 14, 54-5.

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neutrality.'¹ Not only was a general (De Bono) one of the Quadrumvirs directing the Fascist movement, but five other generals (Fara, Maggiotto, Ceccherini, Zamboni and Tiby) commanded the groups which were moving towards Rome.²

The second important particular which must be added is that General Diaz, the Commander-in-Chief, on the evening of October 27, when the 'mobilization' of the 'Black-Shirts' against Rome had already been proclaimed, spoke to the Fascists of Florence from a balcony of the Hotel Savoia, expressing his 'emotion at the welcome with which they had greeted him'; and, on October 28, he allowed the *Nazione* to publish an interview in which he declared his sympathy with the Fascist movement.³ An Englishman, who was in Rome during those days, and who took notes hour by hour of the news which was circulated, writes in this connection:

'Not for nothing was General Diaz - how reminiscent of Mexican politics is the name - in Florence on the night of the 27th.'⁴

¹ This essential point for understanding the 'March on Rome' was revealed a year after by Alessandro Chiavolini, who in 1922 was Mussolini's private secretary, in an interview given by him to the *Popolo d'Italia*, October 27, 1923. Mussolini, too, in a speech at Perugia, on October 30, 1923, said: 'Who would have resisted us? Those pallid men who in that moment represented the Government? They could never have prevented us from reaching our goal with their machine guns, which at the right moment, would not have fired' (*Popolo d'Italia*, October 31, 1923).

² *Popolo d'Italia*, November 1, 1922. See facing page 74 the picture of these generals, who broke their oath of loyalty to the King and the Constitution. Anyone going through the Fascist papers would find hundreds of names of Army officers who, in 1922, openly enrolled amongst the Fascists, shared in their public ceremonies and sent telegrams of support to Mussolini. For the three months of July, August and September of 1922, the *Popolo d'Italia* mentions the following generals: Zirano (July 5), Bertolini (July 8), Moriani (July 30), Campo-mazza (July 23), Ceccherini (July 25), Zampieri (July 26), Gandolfi (July 30), Fiori (August 1), Pastore (Sept. 8), De Marzillac (Sept. 14), Milanesi and Oro (Sept. 9).

³ *La Nazione*, October 27 and 28, 1922.

⁴ Beals, *Rome or Death*, p. 286.

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The third particular is that the Duke of Aosta, the cousin of the King, went to the neighbourhood of Perugia, to keep in touch with the Quadrumvirate directing the movement.

With the addition of these particulars to the picture, its perspective becomes profoundly changed. Still more is this the case when the actual number of the Fascists who 'marched on Rome' is reduced to its true proportions.

According to Sir Percival Phillips, the Fascists numbered nearly 120,000, or more precisely 117,000, 'of whom 70,000 were Black-Shirts of the first line troops' (page 57). Signor Villari, in his book, *The Awakening of Italy*, p. 179, published in 1924, stated that 'the March on Rome was entrusted to a body of 70,000 men, afterwards increased by 20,000 more.' Two years afterwards, in the *Manchester Guardian*, March 27, 1926, he raised the number of Fascists who marched on Rome to 200,000. Sir Ernest Benn did not find the figure of 200,000 large enough, and raised it to 300,000 (*Star*, April 6, 1926). Neither Sir Percival, nor Signor Villari, nor Sir Ernest Benn asked themselves how many trains and railroads, and motor-trucks, and roads would have been necessary to convey towards Rome in a single night such a multitude.

A special edition of a Fascist newspaper published in Rome, *La Patria*, October 31, 1922, calculated 'that the Fascists who encamped at the gates of Rome during the night of October 29, were about 70,000' (*Popolo d'Italia*, November 1, 1922). This figure too was imaginary; the Fascists see everything large. The Fascists who after the 'March' evacuated Rome between October 30 and November 1, were, according to the *Popolo d'Italia* of November 3, about 45,000. Mussolini's own estimate of the men at his disposal in Rome during those days was 52,000.¹ In a speech made on June 17, 1924, he increased the estimate to 60,000.² In a letter of October 22, he went back to 50,000.³

But the Fascists who evacuated Rome after the festival of victory were much more numerous than those who *on the morning*

¹ Speech of March 24, 1924, published in Mussolini, *La Nuova Politica dell'Italia*, pp. 20, 155.

² *Ibidem*, p. 182.

³ Carlo Gualtieri di Avarna, *Il Fascismo*, p. 85.

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of October 28, might have had to face the regular troops round Rome. Once the King, by his refusal on the morning of October 28 to sign the proclamation of martial law, had given the Fascists the victory without their having had to fire a shot, there was a rush of Black-Shirts towards Rome from every part of Italy for three days – October 28, 29 and 30 – all the more so as they had free passes on the railways. Thus the number of Fascists in Rome on October 30 rose to about 50,000. A staff officer who was in Rome at the time, gave me the figure of 8,000 as his estimate of the number of Fascists scattered around Rome at various rallying points on the morning of October 28. This figure also, is of course, merely approximate.

Another point which deserves to be cleared up, is that these 'first line troops,' as Sir Percival Phillips calls them, were badly armed,¹ disorderly as carnival revellers, and dispersed between Santa Marinella, Monterotondo, Tivoli, Valmontone, in 'localities unsuited and insufficient to house them.'²

The regular forces, concentrated in Rome, might easily have driven back these loosely organized groups. The men coming from greater distances might have been stopped on the railways. Bloodshed would not have been necessary. Had the groups gathered round Rome been left to themselves for a few days in the desert of the Roman Campagna, in hunger and thirst, it would have been easy to make a clean sweep of them.

The King, returning from San Rossore (Pisa) to Rome on the evening of October 27, was indignant with the Cabinet for allowing

¹ *Popolo d'Italia*, November 1, 1922: 'One of the characteristics of this powerful (!) post-war army is its quaint uniforms. Its chief weapons are bludgeons and revolvers, but there are also very numerous guns with scanty supplies of cartridges.' The Belgian member of Parliament, M. Louis Piérard who happened to be in Rome in October, 1922, describes the Fascist army as follows: 'Men armed in the most fantastic manner, with revolvers, sporting-rifles, cudgels, machine-guns, and hoes' (*Le Fascisme*, Bruxelles, L'Eglantine, 1923, p. 7). The Englishman Beals, who was in Rome at the time, wrote: 'The Fascists, armed with guns, table legs from wrecked labour head-quarters, tree roots, have been coming into town on the dead men' (*Rome or Death*, p. 290).

² *Popolo d'Italia*, October 31, 1922.

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things to go so far. 'Rather than yield, I will take my wife and son and go away,' he said in Piedmontese to the Prime Minister, Facta, who awaited him at the station. In the night of October 27, the Cabinet, sure of the King's consent, decided to proclaim martial law. While waiting for the King's signature, they instructed the Prefects of the Provinces to take without delay the first measures. But when in obedience to the decree of martial law, the civil authorities surrendered their powers to the military authorities of the provinces, these everywhere allowed the Fascists to seize public offices, railways, post and telegraph offices, depots of arms, and newspaper offices.¹ It was the order of the day, which all obeyed.

When, at 10 a.m. on October 28, the Prime Minister, Facta, brought the decree of martial law for the King's signature, the King hesitated. Facta – one of the biggest idiots of all times and all countries – hesitated more than the King. He was then negotiating with the Fascists for an amicable compromise, and 'cherished the confidence' that things would mend of themselves. The King clutched at these negotiations as a drowning man clutches at a straw: since there was hope of a peaceable understanding, why should he proclaim martial law? The Cabinet would do well to reconsider the question. Facta therefore returned to the Cabinet.

The Ministers stuck to their first decision. Facta brought the decree back. The King refused to sign it. In the interval, a group of Nationalists and Fascists, and certain Army and Navy chiefs,

¹ In the *Popolo d'Italia*, October 28, 29, 31, the accounts from Siena, Florence, Piacenza, Cremona, Vicenza, Alessandria, Verona, Mantua, Bologna, all testify to the same procedure: the civil authorities hand over their powers; thereupon the Fascists seize the public offices, while the military authorities stand passively by. A member of the Fascist squad which, on October 28, occupied the railway junctions of Canello and Caserta, writes: 'A rumour had got about that the Carabinieri were intending to break our lines, so we took up our posts with a small tin of bully beef and a little loaf of bread as our entire day's ration. But the Carabinieri, unjustly defamed, did not come. Instead there came a captain of the commissariat who, singing hymns in praise of Mussolini, gave us a lorry-load of all sorts of good things.' (*Pagine eroiche della rivoluzione fascista*, p. 319.)

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had spoken with him, and had assured him that the Army would refuse to fight the Fascists.¹ The news that the Duke of Aosta was among the Fascists, ready to take up his cousin's crown as soon as the King should let it fall, gave the final push. The official statement that 'the Cabinet Meeting had decided on the proclamation of martial law throughout the realm from noon October 28 onwards' was communicated to the Press by the Stefani Agency at 10.20 a.m. on October 28. At 12.15 p.m. the Stefani Agency announced that the decree of martial law was withdrawn.²

The decree of martial law being recalled, the politicians and Army Chiefs, who had advised the King not to sign it, put forward the name of Signor Salandra as the best man to form the new Cabinet. They soon perceived that they had backed the wrong horse. The Fascists, who had been panic-stricken at the prospect of martial law, recovered their swagger when the revocation was announced. The whole country had the impression of a sweeping Fascist triumph. Up till 12.15 p.m. Mussolini might have been treated as a subaltern. After 12.15 the subaltern had become the master.

The King tried for one more day (October 29) to find a Prime Minister who was not Mussolini. But in refusing his signature to the decree of martial law he had disarmed himself. From all parts

¹ Luigi Sturzo, *Italy and Fascism*, p. 119: 'At the same time various persons gave the King to understand that a fight between the Army and the Fascisti would be a most serious matter, of which the consequences could not be foreseen. . . . The advice of certain Army Chiefs decided the King to refuse his signature.' Don Sturzo was at that time in Rome and had first-hand knowledge of what was going on behind the scenes.

² I owe my information regarding the behaviour of the King and of the Cabinet to three sources, which, while independent, agree in every respect: (a) Signor Amendola, who was Minister in October, 1922, and with whom I had a conversation on this subject in November, 1924; (b) a friend of Signor Taddei, who was Home Secretary in October, 1922: Signor Taddei (now deceased) gave a full account of the events of that time to my informant; (c) a senator, a personal friend of the King, whom I cannot name under the conditions obtaining in Italy to-day; (d) Signor Alberto Cianca, now an exile in Paris, who was himself an eye-witness of the happenings in Rome and as editor of the Roman daily paper *Il Mondo* was in hourly touch with Amendola.

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of Italy thousands of Black-Shirts stormed the trains without paying fares, and thus 'marched' on Rome. Every hour increased the numbers of the converging multitudes. Repression, which would have been easy on the morning of the 28th, had become impossible on the afternoon of the 29th. The King feared that Mussolini, invading the capital at the head of that unruly rabble, would proclaim a republic. So as to have at hand another irregular force with which, in case of need, to oppose the Fascists, the Nationalists and the military authorities hastily hired men in the more disreputable quarters of the capital and despatched lorries to collect men in the country round. These mercenaries were supplied with blue shirts (the Nationalist garb), while the Fascists were held back as long as possible on the outskirts of the city. In the night of October 29, the King, finding no other man able to set Mussolini aside, telegraphed to him to come to Rome and form a Cabinet. In this way Mussolini also, in the night of October 30, 'marched on Rome' in a sleeping-car.

An old Roman prelate, Monsignor di Bisogno, who had stood beside Pius IX in Rome on September 20, 1870, when the Italian troops occupied the city, and put an end to the temporal power of the Pope, commented on the 'March on Rome' in the following Tacitean sentence: 'We, in 1870, defended Rome better.'¹ The Italian troops in 1870 lost about twenty killed before the Papal garrison surrendered.

There was no revolution, as has been claimed, but a *coup d'état*, staged as a spontaneous rising of 'Black-Shirts,' but in reality carried out by a military 'Black Hand.' This *coup d'état* was not directed against Bolshevism, but against the Chamber of Deputies and against the King. From that moment Italy no longer had free and representative institutions, but a dictatorship. From that moment Italy no longer had a King – but only a 'prisoner of war' with the title of King.

¹ Ugo Ojetti, *Cose Viste*, Vol. I, Milan, Treves, 1925, p. 265.

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'Note A to Page 149

The Director of the British Institute at Florence, Captain Harold E. Goad, writing in the *Journal of the British Institute of International Affairs*, March, 1927, p. 121, contradicted Don Sturzo's assertion that 'Bolshevism' had been overcome 'two years before 1922, after the occupation of the Factories.' He writes:

'Every Englishman who was in Italy during 1922 will surely be ready to reply that life and property were safe for no one at that time, even in a great town like Florence. For unrestricted bands of brigands sacked every unguarded flat and villa in broad daylight, and the country-side was still infested with gangs of "Communist" ruffians, whom the Fascist Government was only able to suppress after some months of rule. The writer of this review speaks feelingly on this matter, having been plundered of every object of value as late as at the end of December, 1922; and few were the resident foreigners in Florence who had not a like experience . . . Moreover, Don Sturzo forgets the strike of August 1, 1922, as well as sundry other shadows that would sadly darken his idyllic picture of the state of Italy immediately before the Fascists came into power.'

Don Sturzo never claimed that Italy in 1922 was in an 'idyllic' state. The right way to refute the views of an opponent is not to misrepresent them. In 1921-2 Italy was in a state of 'civil war.' The strike of 1922 was an episode in the 'civil war.' It is unfair to lay upon 'Bolshevism' alone the blame for this strike and all the other disorders and outrages of the 'civil war' instead of distributing the blame between 'Bolshevism' and 'Fascism.' It is not honest to term as 'Bolshevism' a 'civil war' in which the 'Bolshevists,' especially in 1922, desperately fought a losing battle against the Fascists, who were backed by the Army, the Police and the magistrature.

Captain Goad invokes his personal experiences of Florence in 1922. I, too, was living in Florence in 1922, and I maintain that

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Captain Goad gives rein to his imagination in his description of the conditions in Florence and the surrounding country-side during that year. The Florentine Conservative paper *La Nazione*, in its daily records of 1922, gives no confirmation to the picture drawn by Captain Goad. I do not say that in these records there is no mention of outrages against life and property. Even in times of political stability such things occur: For instance, in the *Corriere della Sera* of June 30, 1927, the two columns devoted to the daily chronicle of the city of Milan gives the following facts: a man attacks a woman with a revolver, and resists the policemen who try to disarm him; a dismissed shop-boy wounds his employer: 'persons unknown' rob a post office, break into the safe and carry off 36,000 lire; thieves make a large hole in the wall of premises in the heart of Milan, and are only by chance surprised by the caretaker who had got up early to view the eclipse. By Captain Goad's reasoning, Milan in 1927 must have been in the throes of 'Bolshevism.' Captain Goad's flat in Florence was burgled in December, 1922. The Press of June 16, 1927, records that burglars robbed Countess Di Robilant's flat of half a million lire worth of jewels. Are we to consider Countess Di Robilant as a victim of 'Bolshevism' in 1927? In the *Corriere della Sera*, July 7, 1927, Captain Goad may read:

'Burglaries are occurring in Milan with exceptional frequency and audacity. To mention only the most noteworthy effected during the last few days; on Sunday night Signor Baronio's goldsmith's shop was visited by thieves; on Monday, in broad daylight, the house of Signor Pigliafreddo; yesterday it was the turn of the shop "Città di Londra," situated in via Pattari. The proprietor of these premises, on going out yesterday after midday, as usual, to lunch, locked the glazed door of the shop, which also has a large window. The thieves, using skeleton keys, opened the door of the shop, and were able to collect at their leisure a plentiful and somewhat cumbersome booty, so much so that for its removal they must have made use of a motor-car. Pieces of stuff, a dozen or so English mackintoshes, shirts, woollen garments and silk ties, umbrellas and other objects, among the most expensive in the

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shop, were carried off. The thieves did not forget to take the ready-money, amounting to about a thousand lire, from the cash-desk, which had just been smashed in. The damages are calculated to amount to 60,000 lire.'

Are we to consider the city of Milan as the prey of 'Bolshevism' five years after the 'March on Rome'?

The American writer, C. E. McGuire, in *Italy's International Economic Position*, New York and London, Macmillan, 1926, p. 15, does not agree that Italy in 1922 was already in chaos. But he knows that Italy 'must surely have been engulfed in economic chaos if no change had come.' It is not very easy to know what 'must surely have' resulted, if things had turned out differently. Oracles, such as the above, can neither be approved nor disproved. They are not scientific statements, but declarations of faith.

