

### CHAPTER III

#### THE REIGN OF THE BLUDGEON

THE working people in the towns and in the country bowed submissively beneath the *coup d'état* of October, 1922. They had been reduced to a state of stupefied terror by two years of sanguinary violence against which resistance legal or illegal had been unavailing.

A large section of public opinion, indifferent to party, hostile to 'Bolshevism,' but scandalized by Fascist violence, accepted the *coup d'état* as the only method of putting an end to the illegal and violent methods of the Fascist Party. Up till then the latter had had no share in the government, though it was, nevertheless, more powerful than the government. All good citizens had but one wish – to see the end, once and for all, of the civil war which disgraced the country. Now that the Fascists had taken over the government it was hoped that they would give up their tactics of lawless violence. They would of course govern according to their programme, but they would no longer murder their opponents. The reign of law would be restored.

This hope was widely prevalent in the middle classes, and its presence explains the crowds of supporters ('*fiancheggiatori*') who along with the professional turncoats hastened to back the winning party. And propaganda has spread the legend outside Italy that the re-establishment of public peace and justice is the greatest benefit which triumphant Fascism has bestowed upon the country. A French journalist, M. Henri Lucas, writing in the *Journal* on November 23, 1925, says:

'When the Fascist Party forcibly seized the reins of power it promised the nation to put an end to those acts of violence which here and there were daily disturbing the peace of the country. No one denies that this promise has been kept.'

The *Morning Post*, of April 23, 1926, informs its readers that:

'Except for sporadic outbursts and a little bullying the chapter of violence may be regarded as definitely closed.'

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And the propaganda agent in England of the Fascist Government says:

'The first measures were directed towards the re-establishment of public order. "The brawls and conflicts occurring every Sunday (Mussolini stated in a circular to the Prefects) with their tale of killed and wounded which dishonour the country, must absolutely cease"; and they did cease. . . . The Fascists had no longer any excuse for committing reprisals.'<sup>1</sup>

Such is the legend. History is very different.

### § 1: *Reprisals on a large Scale*

On the night of December 17, 1922, in Turin, a city of 400,000 inhabitants, a certain baker, once an Anarchist, now a Fascist, asked some of his Fascist friends to 'give a lesson' to a young man whom he charged with having induced his two daughters, both under age, to leave home. The Fascists attacked the young man, and a desperate fight took place in which revolvers were used. The young man, after being wounded in the legs, killed two of the aggressors. On the pretext of avenging their dead comrades, but really in order to assert their power over a compactly anti-Fascist city, the heads of the Turin Fascio on the morning of December 18, gave orders for a Fascist mobilization to carry out reprisals.

Towards noon a detachment of Fascists took possession of the head-quarters of the Confederation of Local Trade Unions (Camera del Lavoro) and set fire to the building by means of an incendiary bomb. A workman, the secretary of the metal-workers, who had not fled from the scene of the operations, was dragged along behind a motor-lorry and his shapeless and unrecognizable corpse was abandoned in the street.

At the same time, as the employees were leaving for dinner, another squad appeared before the offices of the State Railway, picked out two men and compelled them to get into their car. On the way, the occupants of the car set one of them free; the other, the secretary of the Turin branch of the Railwaymen's Union,

<sup>1</sup> Luigi Villari, *The Awakening of Italy*, p. 190.

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was taken out into the open country and shot dead with revolvers. Two other working men, Zurletti and Pochettino, were taken from their homes, where they were at dinner, in another car, and driven outside the city: one was shot dead and the other seriously wounded and left for dead. Still less ceremony was shown to Chiolero, a tramway conductor, and Anicono, a railwayman. The former, who was surprised at table, was shot dead before the eyes of his wife and child. The latter was compelled to get out of bed and come into the street, where he was killed: his wife and child were driven from their home in the night, and their furniture thrown out of the windows, saturated with petrol, and set on fire. Another workman, named Turizzo, was awakened, taken into the country, and killed by a blow from a bludgeon which split his skull. Another workman, Chiomo, finding in the middle of the night that his house was surrounded, tried to hide in a neighbouring flat; he was discovered, his head savagely beaten, and he himself killed, his body riddled with wounds being left in a field. It would serve no good purpose to continue this horrible enumeration of atrocities. It was an orgy of bloodshed.<sup>1</sup>

The next day, a railway employee, Angelo Quintaglié, was killed in his office for having deplored the massacre of the preceding day. His wife gives the following account of the murder in a letter to the *Avanti* of July 26, 1924:

'My husband was anti-Socialist but he was a kindhearted man. He had served his king and country as a Carabineer for nine years. He had received mention and had been maimed in an affray with brigands. On the morning of December 19, 1922, on reaching his room at the office, he asked a workman named Gallegari, a Fascist, where they had taken Berruti, the day before. Gallegari

<sup>1</sup> Repaci, *La Strage di Torino* ('The Carnage in Turin'), Milan, Società Editrice 'Avanti,' 1924. In December, 1922, no paper dared to give any account of these facts for fear of having its premises sacked by the Fascists. But in the summer of 1924, after the Matteotti murder, the moral revolt in the country rendered the Fascists powerless for a few months. The papers profited by this short period of liberty to recall many of the crimes about which they had up till then observed an enforced silence. None of Repaci's statements have been challenged or contradicted.

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replied: "We have killed him." My husband deplored the killing of the father of a family, and added words such as any well-thinking man would have uttered. Gallegari without replying left the room. In less than an hour there arrived six "Black-Shirts" of the "Campiglio Squad": they ranged themselves, two at the entrance, one with his revolver in front of the window in the courtyard, one at the telephone, while the remaining two broke into the room armed with pistols and bludgeons, shouting "Hands up!" Surprised at their work, my husband and his colleagues could not but obey. "Which of you is Quintaglié who has deplored the killing of Berruti?" My husband and his colleagues, terrified, did not dare to breathe. "If you do not tell which is Quintaglié, we shall fire at all six of you." "I am Quintaglié," said my husband then. This was the end. Kicks, bludgeon blows, revolver shots brought him to the ground in a pool of blood, in the presence of the others. My husband, who was a strong and brave man, attempted to resist, but a last revolver shot made him helpless. He did not die at once. He was carried to the hospital where he died after four days of indescribable suffering, asking with anguish why Gallegari had so cruelly betrayed him.'

The Fascist chieftain, Brandimarte, declared in an interview published by the *Secolo* on December 20, 1922, that he himself had ordered and organized these reprisals, 'to inflict a terrible lesson on the revolutionaries of Turin.'

'Out of a list of three hundred revolutionaries,' - he said - 'twenty-four were selected and entrusted to the best squads for punishment.'

One journalist remarked that the official list of dead totalled only fourteen. Brandimarte replied:

'The Po will deliver up the remaining bodies, if it chooses, unless they are found in ditches or ravines or in the brushwood on the hills around Turin - except two who escaped.'

Signor Villari gives the following version of these facts:

'A few isolated incidents did occur, of which the most serious.

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was the one at Turin in December, when two Fascists were murdered by Communists, and other Fascists retaliated by murdering several Communists; but the Government took severe measures to prevent or punish similar acts. Now that Fascismo was in power it must act with absolute legality.'<sup>1</sup>

The first 'severe measure' taken by the Fascist Government 'to prevent or punish similar acts' was to refrain from arresting any of those responsible for the bloodshed: even Brandimarte, who had publicly boasted that he was one of the organizers of the 'heroic' enterprise, was left undisturbed. Quintaglié's wife, in the letter to the *Avanti* of July 26, 1924, says:

'I lodged a formal complaint. The judge had on his table one of the projectiles, extracted in the autopsy. But it was no good! Or rather, all I got by it was this, that the "Black-Shirts" came to threaten me too, obliging me to leave Turin and give up a business by which I might have gained a livelihood for my children. Nineteen months have passed since then, but I still look for justice, for it seems as if I were out of my mind and dreaming an evil nightmare, that a husband so good and generous as mine was can have been so cruelly murdered and that his murderers can still be at large.'

The second 'measure' was the amnesty of December 23, 1922 – five days after these atrocities – which wiped out all crimes, including murder, if they had been committed with a 'National aim.' In the explanatory memorandum which prefaced the decree of amnesty a National aim was explicitly defined as a 'Fascist aim': thus the Turin murderers, having had a Fascist aim, were included in the amnesty.

The third 'measure' was a speech made in Turin on January 1, 1923, by the Fascist Member of Parliament, Signor De Vecchi,

<sup>1</sup> Luigi Villari, *The Awakening of Italy*, p. 190. General Sanna is even more stoical than Signor Villari. Presiding over the 'Special Tribunal for the Defence of the Fascist State,' in the Lucetti trial (June, 1927) he declared that in December, 1922, no incidents at all had taken place in Turin.

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Under-Secretary of State in Mussolini's Cabinet. In this speech, he said:

'Yes, the reaction of a few days ago was necessary: and though I was not here, I accept the responsibility for all that happened.'<sup>1</sup>

The fourth and fifth 'measures' were to appoint Brandimarte, in January, 1923, to the post of Consul of the Volunteer Militia for National Defence, a rank equal to that of colonel in the army, while De Vecchi was first made a general of the Militia, then given the title of count, and subsequently appointed Governor of Somaliland.

After such 'severe measures,' it is small wonder that the Fascists were encouraged to act with an ever-increasing 'legality.'

In the night, January 21, 1923, a Fascist named Lubrano was killed in Spezia by some brother Fascists whom the Carabinieri identified and arrested a few hours after the crime.<sup>2</sup> In Spezia, as in Turin, this incident became a pretext for violence on a large scale designed to terrorize the town. On the afternoon following the crime a squad of Fascists 'requisitioned' two workmen, Poveltoni and Rattone, from their homes in broad daylight and dragged them to the Fascist head-quarters. There the two men were savagely beaten because they could not disclose the names of the 'Communists' by whom, it was alleged, Lubrano had been killed. Another workman, Pasini, was 'requisitioned' from his home, beaten to death and his body left in the streets. Another, Bellandi, was killed and his body thrown into the river. A secondary school-teacher, Del Santo, was set upon as he left the school, ferociously beaten with fists, sticks and revolver butts and left for dead on the road: his life being saved by a miracle. A peasant of 70, Bacigalupi, was attacked in his shed in the fields: the Fascists first killed his horse, then set fire to the shed, and finally shot him with their revolvers. Another workman, a consumptive, named Zilioli, was torn from his bed, placed against a wall in the street and shot. The outrages went on for five days without the police

<sup>1</sup> *Corriere della Sera*, Jan. 2, 1923.

<sup>2</sup> They were sentenced to 30 years' imprisonment (*Corriere della Sera*, Oct. 25, 1927).

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taking any steps to check them. Fourteen persons were thus massacred and over a hundred more or less seriously injured. Not until the evening of March 26, did the consul of the 'Fascio' of Spezia issue an order to cease reprisals.<sup>1</sup>

It may be argued that these happenings at Turin and Spezia, a few weeks after the 'March on Rome,' should be regarded as the last upheavals of the revolutionary movement which preceded the Fascist conquest of the government; after such an earthquake the ground could not become solid all at once. Some landslips were unavoidable in the early months of the 'new era.'

This reasoning contains a grain of truth. Reprisals on a large scale, like those of Turin and Spezia, did not occur from January, 1923, until the Matteotti murder. Only the operations against individuals went on.

### § 2: *Operations against Individuals*

Among the operations having for their aim 'the teaching of lessons' to individuals or special groups, particular interest attaches to the outrages committed against Members of Parliament or candidates for elections. They not only show the sort of life that a Member or candidate belonging to the Opposition had to endure under Fascist rule, they also help us to discern the abundant vein of humour in the following words of the Fascist propagandist in England:

'On November, 1922, in answer to a complaint by Signor De Nicola, President of the Chamber, that many deputies had been forced by the Fascists to leave their constituencies, Mussolini assured him that orders had been issued for the immediate withdrawal of these bans of exile.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Corriere della Sera*, January 27, 1923; *Giustizia*, January 26, 1923. These facts also only became known in all their atrocious details in the brief period of relative liberty which followed on the murder of Matteotti in the summer of 1924. Paolo Marsicano, who revealed them in the *Avanti* of June 11, 17, 19, 23, 27 and August 3, 1924, was never called to account, nor even contradicted by the murderers, whose names he gave.

<sup>2</sup> Luigi Villari, *The Awakening of Italy*, p. 190.

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One of the first Members who was taught the danger of withholding full and entire approval from the working of the Fascist régime, was Signor Misuri, a dissident Fascist. On the evening of May 29, 1923, he was very nearly cudgelled to death for having ventured to deliver a speech in the Chamber criticizing, not the 'Duce' himself, but some of his most intimate co-adjutors.

'My intention' – Misuri relates in the *Indicatore della Stampa* of June 20, 1924 – 'was to denounce all that I had been able to observe inside the Party. As a final gesture of deference and devotion towards Signor Mussolini I informed him through Signors Finzi and Buttafochi, of my intention. After seeing the Premier, Buttafochi came back and said to me, "The Premier says that he will have you arrested if you speak." I replied: "In that case you may tell the Premier that the Constitution stands between him and me, and that I shall do my duty as a Member of Parliament." As threats had failed, the well-known gang planned the assault on me. A few days before, in expelling me from the Party, the Executive Council had threatened me with "severer sanctions," as an official communiqué expressed it. Any new sanctions beyond expulsion could only take the form of illegal violence. The assault of which I was the victim was the work of a detachment of Fascists from Bologna led by the "Senior"<sup>1</sup> Bonaccorsi, and including two men named Sansoni and Nobili, who had followed me step by step in the motor-car usually stationed in the courtyard of the "Viminale."<sup>2</sup>

On the evening of November 29, 1923, the Fascists invaded and looted the house of the ex-Prime Minister, Signor Nitti, in Rome. In the course of the looting, clothes, linen, silver, shoes, even a typewriter, vanished.<sup>3</sup> The Fascist *Corriere Sabino*, of November 30, gives the following account of the exploit:

'Yesterday at about 7 p.m., some 500 Fascists, not without daring, gathered in front of Signor Nitti's house. Some hundreds of the most excited of them began to fire on the villa. Two com-

<sup>1</sup> 'Senior' is a rank in the Militia.

<sup>2</sup> i.e. the Home Office.

<sup>3</sup> See frontispiece.



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fact groups attacked the railings. Some policemen ran up but were driven off by the crowd. One went to report to the Police Commissary. Meanwhile the Fascists broke into the building and smashed the windows on the ground floor with their sticks, still keeping up the firing. The group which penetrated into the house sought in vain for Nitti. The Political Secretary of the Rome Fascio declared that the capital cannot tolerate the affront of Nitti's presence, and that to-morrow Fascism all over Italy will learn the news that the days of combat are perhaps near for which all are already prepared and resolute.'<sup>1</sup>

Signor Giovanni Amendola, an ex-Minister (in England he would have been a follower of Mr. Baldwin) received five successive 'lessons.' The first was administered at 10 a.m. on December 26, 1923, in one of the most frequented streets of Rome, the Via Francesco Crispi. Five men who had been following him in a motor-car attacked him with bludgeons from behind, striking him on the face, head, and neck until he fell insensible. They then re-entered the car and made off unhindered. The assault was the work of two officers of the Fascist Militia, a man who had been discharged from the Militia for criminal offences, and two others, one of whom had already killed a newspaper seller in November of the same year and had been left at large despite this murder.

Amendola received his second lesson on March 20, 1924. On that day he had to deliver his election address in Naples. But on March 19, 1924, the General Secretary of the Fascist Trade Unions published the following ukase:

'In the name of His Excellency Benito Mussolini, Head of the Government, and Duce of Fascism, we, the General Secretary of

<sup>1</sup> Signor Giunta, the General Secretary of the Fascist Party, speaking at a public meeting in Rome on November 30, 1923, alluded to this fact in the following terms: 'It is not worth while to protest against the little harmless demonstration of yesterday evening against Nitti, when there is another man who is working indefatigably from morn to night, for the good of the country.' Admirable logic! Sir Ernest Benn, one must suppose, was ignorant of this, when he reproached Nitti for having deserted his country: *Star* of April 6, 1926.

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the Fascist Trade-Unions of Terra di Lavoro, do hereby order a great concentration of the Fascist Trade-Unions in Naples for the debate between the candidates Greco and Amendola on the subject of constitutional opposition. All members must be present in full force, with flags and black shirts. All means of public and private transport, including trains, will be requisitioned, against formal receipt, signed by the General Secretary of the Trade-Unions or by the Political Secretary. All expenses will be paid, and board and lodging will be provided free. The poorer members who attend will also be paid by the day. Managers of factories and employers to be notified beforehand to grant leave of absence to the working-men at all costs. The meeting is fixed for 2 o'clock prompt on Thursday, the 20th inst., outside Naples Station (departure side). This paper to be shown on demand.'<sup>1</sup>

The meeting could not be held. The police forbade it.

Amendola received a third 'lesson' on April 7, 1925, when he dared to disobey the Fascists by taking part in a political meeting in Rome. After the meeting he and his friend were attacked three times with cudgels. Amendola escaped unhurt, but several of his friends had to go to a hospital.

Amendola received his fourth lesson along with some other members of the opposition on June 3, 1924, a week before Giacomo Matteotti was murdered. This is the report of the *Corriere della Sera*, June 4, 1924:

'Before the Session opened, talk of a demonstration against the opposition, to be carried out at the end of the session, was heard in the corridors of the Chamber. As a matter of fact, this morning the Fascist and pro-Fascist papers published two communiqués, the first of which stated: "At 5.30 p.m. to-day, all the Fascists of the Porta Salaria branch shall assemble in the offices of the branch." About two hundred Fascists mustered there, and, after receiving their instructions, moved towards Piazza Montecitorio.<sup>2</sup> Here they awaited the breaking-up of the Chamber, acclaiming Mussolini from time to time. When Signor Di Cesarò appeared,

<sup>1</sup> De Ambris, *Amendola: fatti e documenti*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>2</sup> Chamber of Deputies.

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the few carabinieri were unable to stem the onrush of the Fascists, who surrounded the ex-minister, hissing and howling. When the deputies Amendola, Bencivegna, Molé, and Labriola, accompanied by Sig. Zaniboni and some of the editorial staff of the *Mondo*, appeared, the mob succeeded in surrounding them, and accompanied them, yelling, pushing and threatening towards Piazza Colonna. In via del Tritone, the violence of the demonstration reached its height. The police tried in vain to isolate the group of deputies. For a moment it seemed as if they would be overpowered. One maniac was brandishing a heavy Indian club. A closed car into which Amendola and the editorial staff of the *Mondo* jumped, was besieged by the crowd until the police succeeded in making a way for it to pass.'

The fifth 'lesson' was administered to him on July 20, 1925. He had gone for a cure to the baths at Montecatini. On the news of his arrival, a thousand Fascists gathered from all the villages around laid siege to his hotel, demanding that he should leave at once. He was obliged to leave by motor-car. In the dead of night a gang of Fascists who had been lying in wait for the car attacked it at Serravalle, on the road from Montecatini to Pistoia. They struck Amendola savagely on the head, face, hands, arms, and breast. This time the 'lesson' had the desired effect. Amendola never recovered. After two operations necessitated by his injuries he died on April 6, 1926. The doctors declared the cause of his death to be 'a degeneration of the left hemi-thorax consequent upon the violent blows in July, 1925.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See De Ambris, *Amendola: fatti e documenti*, Toulouse, Exoria, 1927, pp. 52 ff. The Italian Fascist papers and the pro-Fascist papers outside Italy published with the notice of his death, a statement that the dying man had declared that 'his death was not caused by acts of violence.' His brother and the members of his family who tended him in his illness contradicted this assertion, but the denial was not published in the English and French pro-Fascist papers. Another miracle of propaganda! Signor Villari writes: 'His friends attributed his death to the injuries received in the attack made on him the previous summer' (*Fascist Experiment*, p. 62 note). The truth is that it was not his friends who attributed his death to these injuries, but three French physicians: MM. Laredennois, Gandy, and de Parrel (*Corriere degli Italiani*, Paris, April 8, 1926).

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On the eve of Miss Gibson's attempt on Mussolini another Member of Parliament, Modigliani, was assaulted for the third time and badly beaten. After the attempt (April 7, 1926) his flat in Rome was invaded. He was in bed recovering from his injuries, but escaped with his wife (who had also twice suffered injuries at the hands of the Fascists) over the roof of an adjoining house.

The number of Members of Parliament who have been beaten and wounded, is about fifty.

The outrage of which Signor Forni, a candidate for Parliament, was a victim, on March 12, 1924, is described by the Attorney-General<sup>1</sup> of Milan in the request which he presented to Parliament in December, 1924, for leave to prosecute the Deputy Giunta, the latter, in his function as General Secretary to the Fascist Party, having given orders for the operations:

'On the afternoon of March 12, 1924, during the electioneering campaign, a group of about twenty persons armed with clubs surrounded Captain Cesare Forni and Signor Guido Giroldi, an accountant, at the exit of the Central Station at Milan on the arrival side. They had just arrived from Vigevano with Signor Raimondo Sala, ex-Mayor of Alessandria. Giroldi was wounded in the head, his left arm fractured. Captain Forni received many blows, one on the left side of the head with injury to the mastoidal gland and another on the upper lip. This assault, which was clearly premeditated, and which was beyond doubt essentially political in character, might have had the gravest consequences, especially for Captain Forni, against whom it was particularly aimed, as one of the principal representatives of the dissident Fascists of Lomellina, had not the Captain's exceptional physical strength enabled him to put up a vigorous defence against his assailants.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> By Italian law a deputy cannot be brought to trial before the ordinary courts, on a criminal charge, without the preliminary consent of the Chamber. When the Attorney-General of a Province presents such a demand, a parliamentary commission is appointed to examine the charge and propose the refusal or acceptance of the demand.

<sup>2</sup> See the volume *La Ricostruzione Fascista*, Milano, Corbaccio, 1924, p. 157.

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Another candidate, Antonio Piccinini, had not the same strength to resist; he was weakly and in poor health. The following account of the crime of which he was the victim is taken from the pronouncement of the Accusing Section committing the defendants to the Assizes:

'On February 28, 1924, about 8.30 p.m. while Piccinini was at home showing a picture book to his two little daughters, one nine, and the other two years old and explaining it to them, there was a knock at the door. A young man of about 19 came in; he was of decent appearance, but had his hat pulled over his eyes. He asked Piccinini on behalf of Signor Carboni to come out with him. Piccinini said that he had nothing to do with Carboni. The young man insisted with some heat, and finally ordered Piccinini to come. Piccinini's wife and little daughters grew alarmed and burst into tears. "May I at least know where you are taking me?" asked Piccinini, when he had put his coat on. "Come along, come along, no scenes," replied the unknown man, seizing his arms and dragging him out. In the broad avenue leading towards Reggio Ciano station there were some revolver shots, a last cry for pity, and then silence. The corpse was not discovered till 4 a.m. next morning. The post-mortem showed that three of the four shots fired had struck the victim.'

Giacomo Matteotti in his book, *A Year of Fascist Domination*, occupies forty-two octavo pages in setting out in summary form the list of assaults committed from November, 1922, to October, 1923: there are over 2,000 cases of murders, woundings more or less severe, beatings, forcible administration of castor oil, decrees of exile, illegal seizure and burning of newspapers, wrecking of private houses and offices, etc.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> During the last months of 1922, and the first half of 1923, one of the basest forms of violence was that of forcing the anti-Fascists to swallow castor oil. So shameful was this practice that even the Fascist leaders felt it to be their duty to put a stop to it. Having received orders to wake up, the judges opened their eyes, passed judgment on some of the culprits, and so this disgrace came to an end in Italy. But it still goes on in the Dodecanese Islands, if we are to believe a report sent from Athens to the *Manchester Guardian* of November 16, 1926. Luigi Villari (*The*

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The acts of violence during the election campaign of 1924 alone fill a book of 213 pages.<sup>1</sup>

The murder of the Deputy Giacomo Matteotti belongs to the type of operations designed to terrorize opponents and stifle every discordant voice in the Chamber.

### § 3: 'Fascistopolis'

After the murder of Matteotti (June, 1924), as operations against individuals proved insufficient to silence the opponents, the Fascists resumed large scale operations.

It is December, 1924. The scene is Florence, 'Fascistopolis' it is called in Italy, as being a favourite arena of Black-Shirt exploits.

On December 30, 1924, a notice was issued in Florence summoning a general 'mobilization' of Fascists for the following day. During the night the police made hundreds of searches and arrests among anti-Fascists. From the early hours of December 31, there was a continual coming and going of motor-cars and lorries carrying Fascists, who cheered the 'Duce' and shouted threats against the opponents. The commandants of the Militia and the Party authorities paid a visit to a neighbouring village, where they supervised the mobilization and distribution of arms. From all over Tuscany, and from provinces even farther afield, trains poured into Florence filled with 'squadristi'; the Militia was in military formation, and the squads were armed with sporting rifles, cudgels and pitchforks. At the Prefecture, the Prefect, the Chief of Police, some Fascist Members of Parliament and the most prominent members of the Party made arrangements for the afternoon's demonstration. Large forces were distributed.

*Fascist Experiment*, p. 39) finds this form of violence quite natural as 'a characteristic instrument of punishment: a novelty indeed in partisan warfare.' This gives the measure of the intellectual and moral abyss into which so many other Fascists of the upper classes in Italy have fallen.

<sup>1</sup> *La Libertà di voto sotto il dominio fascista; come il Fascismo conquistò la maggioranza nelle elezioni del 6 Aprile 1924* ('The free vote under Fascist rule; how Fascism captured the majority in the elections of April 6, 1924'), Rome, Tipografia Italiana, Viale el Re, no. 22, 1924.

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in all quarters of the town and municipal lorries were loaded with arms and ammunition.

At 2 p.m. there was a meeting in the Piazza Santa Maria Novella attended by the Mayor of the city. The crowd of 'Black-Shirts' carried placards with inscriptions such as 'Enough of Opposition!' and 'Duce! Give us a free hand!' or, slipped between the teeth of the pitch-forks, 'This is for our opponents!' When the speeches were over a procession formed and marched through the city, headed by the Mayor and the Commandant-General of the Militia in Tuscany.

Under the orders of a consul of the Militia, a column separated from the procession and marched to the offices of the *Nuovo Giornale* in the Via Faenza. The building was guarded by platoons of soldiers and Carabinieri, who barred all access. These regular troops would certainly have sufficed to deal with a few dozen Fascists, but they had orders to offer no resistance. The Fascists passed through the cordon and broke into the building. The employees sought safety in flight. Furniture and bundles of newspapers were thrown out of the windows and burnt in the street. Other furniture was even burnt inside the building. The composing room was invaded, the linotype machines wrecked, the type boxes emptied, the tables smashed; great rolls of paper were thrown into the yard, drenched with petroleum and set on fire. The firemen were prevented by the Fascists from entering the Via Faenza. Everything was destroyed. The damage amounted to nearly two million lire (then equal to £16,000).

Meanwhile, other columns of Fascists sacked the 'Circolo di Coltura' in the Borgo Santi Apostoli, throwing out books, tables, and chairs, even shutters and doors into the Piazza Santa Trinita and piling them into a great bonfire. The ex-service men's club in the Via San Gallo met with a similar fate, as did also the two Masonic Lodges in the Via della Pergola and the Via Ghibellina and the offices of the ex-service men's paper *Fanteria*, the Free-thinkers' Association, the offices of Signor Corazzini, a lawyer and one of the leaders of the Liberal Party in Florence, the offices of the Socialist Member of Parliament, Targetti and Frontini, of Signor Consolo, a lawyer and the Florence correspondent

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of the *Avanti*, and of two other lawyers, Signor Tempestini, a Republican, and Signor Tacchi. Eight Fascists, brandishing revolvers, entered the office of Signor Saccenti, a publicist, and compelled him to hand over the papers of the Reformist-Socialist Party. Numbers of people were indiscriminately beaten in the streets. For many hours Florence looked like a city in the hands of enemy troops. Traffic was suspended and shutters closed. Apart from the Fascist battalions nothing passed along the streets except fire-engines and ambulance cars. From the sky above an aeroplane dropped thousands of little multi-coloured leaflets announcing that the last hour had come for the opponents of Fascism, and that soon there would be none in Italy but Fascists.

During the next two days the 'offensive' was extended to the whole of Tuscany; Arezzo, Leghorn, Pisa and Lucca all became the scenes of similar outrages. Those committed at Pisa were so savage that Cardinal Maffi, the Archbishop, sent a telegram of protest to Mussolini, declaring himself filled with 'consternation as a Christian and humiliation as an Italian.'<sup>1</sup> From January 3 onwards, the wave of violence spread to Emilia and Lombardy.<sup>2</sup>

It is the autumn, 1925; we are still in Florence.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The whole text of the telegram is to be found in the booklet, *La Ricostruzione Fascista*, Milan, edizione Corbaccio, 1925, p. 219 ff.

<sup>2</sup> My information about the facts of Florence I owe to a group of friends in Florence, who collected at my request the facts and verified them with the greatest care. Some accounts of the outrages at Arezzo, Leghorn, Pisa, etc., were published by the newspapers in a very summary form, the only way in which the political authorities allowed them to be mentioned.

<sup>3</sup> I have compiled the record of these facts from the following sources: (a) the official Police Report in the Italian papers of October 6, 1925; (b) the issues of *La Nazione*, a pro-Fascist paper from September 6 to October 7; (c) the issues of September 25 and October 3 and 10 of the official Fascist paper in Florence, the *Buttaglie Fasciste*; (d) the reports of the public trials published in *La Nazione* and *La Stampa* on November 22-5 and December 12, 1925; (e) an early account from a Freemason source published in *The Times*, the *Manchester Guardian*, and the *Daily News* of October 8, 1925; (f) a clandestine pamphlet, published in Switzerland, *I fatti di Firenze* ('What happened in Florence') of anti-Fascist origin; (g) information collected by my friends in Florence with great



## THE FASCIST DICTATORSHIP

On the night of Friday, September 25, the Fascists of Florence inaugurated a 'man-hunt' against the Freemasons.<sup>1</sup> Bludgeonings developed on a large scale for three days up till September 28, and went on sporadically during the next day.<sup>2</sup> The squads of bludgeoners were captained by the editor of the local Fascist paper, *Battaglie Fasciste*, and by the three members of the local Fascist Directorate.

In the afternoon of October 3, after four days of almost complete truce, a squad of Fascists under the leadership of Luporini, one of the three directors of the local Fascio, went to the house of the Freemason Bandinelli, who the previous day had been beaten by the Fascists. What happened at this point is not clear. The *Nazione* of October 6, says prudently that 'certain circumstances are still doubtful; reports on this point are perhaps not very precise.' But if the usual Fascist methods of persuasion are borne in mind, it may easily be imagined that the discussion soon degen-

care on the lines of several questionnaires which I sent them; (h) the pronouncement of the Accusing Section (November 30, 1926) against Castellani and 27 other Fascists charged with the murder of Pilati and Consolo; (i) the account written by the widow of Pilati and published in the anti-Fascist Italian paper *La Libertà*, Paris, July 24, 1927, after she had succeeded in leaving Italy for the Argentine. I published myself a first account of the facts in the *Review of Reviews* of November, 1925, and a fuller statement in the *Corriere degli Italiani* published in Paris, April 11, 1926.

<sup>1</sup> Italian Freemasonry was favourable to Fascism up till the beginning of 1923. Between 1919 and 1922, many Fascist sections were founded on the initiative of Masonic Lodges. A group of high dignitaries of the order contributed three and a half million lire (£35,000) towards the expenses of the 'March on Rome' (Chiesa, *La mano nel sacco*, Rome, Libreria Politica Moderna, 1925, p. 6). The Grand Master of the Italian Masonic Order, Signor Domizio Torrigiani, published in the papers of November 2, 1922, a declaration of confidence in the new-born Fascist Government. But Mussolini, drawing up the balance, found it more profitable to ally with the Vatican and the Jesuits. From that moment the Masons were treated as foes, and, in return, Jesuits carry on all over the world an unscrupulous propaganda in favour of Fascism.

<sup>2</sup> See the Florence newspapers *Battaglie Fasciste*, September 25 and October 3; *Nazione*, September 27, 28 and 29; and *Nuovo Giornale*, September 30.

## THE REIGN OF THE BLUDGEON

erated into blows. Another Freemason, named Becciolini, who was present, drew his revolver and fired on the Fascists, killing Luporini and wounding another. He was at once thrashed, flung into a motor-car, taken to the premises of the Fascist Provincial Federation, brought back again half dead to the scene of the murder and there riddled with bullets. Bandinelli's house was sacked.<sup>1</sup>

Two hours after this immediate 'vendetta,' reprisals on a large scale were set on foot against people entirely unconnected with the original incident. The Fascists cleared the streets in the centre of the town, blindly bludgeoning everybody. The cafés were forcibly closed, the theatres invaded and the performances stopped. Soon after 10 p.m. the work of destruction began. The offices of thirteen lawyers and one accountant, a tailoring business and seven shops were wrecked – nearly all in the centre of the town, not far from the Prefecture, the police headquarters, and the barracks of the Carabineers. The furniture was thrown into the streets and set on fire. Watchers on the hills round Florence saw the columns of smoke and flame rising from the city. Many of the rioters indulged in indiscriminate looting. The *Nazione* of October 6, writes:

'These shady individuals who are found on the outskirts of every great Party abandoned themselves to excesses which the Fascist Authorities are always the first to deplore.'

An hour later operations were extended to private dwelling-houses. In the Via Giusti, a squad of Fascists set up a fusillade

<sup>1</sup> The accounts which the semi-official Italian agencies sent abroad said nothing about what had happened at the end of September, or of what Luporini was doing in the place where he was killed. His death was represented as the result of an 'ambush' laid by Communists. The Communists had nothing to do with it, but the false light thus thrown on the affair served to justify the subsequent 'reprisals.' The worst aspect of Fascist mentality is that this sort of falsification is committed with a certain degree of good faith; for, according to Fascist ideas, non-Fascists have no rights. They have to obey and hold their peace. Fascists are entitled to thrash, wound, insult, invade private domiciles and give illegal orders. Those who resist are guilty of 'provocation,' and expose themselves to 'legitimate reprisals.'

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on the house of the authoress, Signora Amelia Rosselli, which had already been sacked from top to bottom on July 15. Other squads tried to break into the houses of the ex-Member of Parliament, Frontini, of Signor Mariotti, a Socialist, who had been assaulted and beaten more than once, and of Dr. Gaetano Pieraccini, a lecturer at the University. The house of the sitting Member, Signor Baldesi, was sacked; there were no victims, the occupant being away. Another Socialist named Ferro was not so fortunate. He fled over the roof clad only in his night attire, while the Fascists destroyed everything he possessed.

The Accusing Section in its pronouncement of November 30, 1926, thus reconstructs the operations of one of the bands in that night of terror:

'A group of about fifteen Fascists took possession of two taxis and forced the two chauffeurs to drive them to different parts of the town. After smashing the shutters of the shop of Raffaele Busoni, they invaded it, damaged and threw out the goods, and set fire to it. The damage was estimated at about 170,000 lire. At about ten o'clock, having broken in the door of the office of the lawyer Signor Corazzini, they smashed the furniture, seized books and legal files and burnt them in the street, causing damage of over 3,000 lire. Thence they drove to Via Boccaccio. The two taxis stopped at the corner of the street. One of the gang got out, revolver in hand, calling the Fascists of the quarter gathered there: "Go and kill all the Communists you find." A group went to the house of the tramway-man Ademaro Cozzi. Two men went up to his flat, summoned Cozzi to come down into the street. Cozzi refused, having already suffered violence on another occasion. The Fascist with whom he spoke fired point blank at his chest. The shot was stopped by a pocket-book. But for this lucky chance, the shot would have caused serious injury, or even death. From Cozzi's house the same band drove to the tailor's shop of Cardoso. They only partially wrecked it, as the carabinieri arrived. But they returned later, and finished the destruction, causing damages of about 180,000 lire. They next rushed the offices of the lawyer, Signor Citi, on the floor above the aforesaid tailor's

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shop, and destroyed furniture and legal papers to a value of about 15,000 lire. About half an hour after midnight they went to the home of the lawyer Signor Consolo.<sup>1</sup> He had had a foretaste of violence two hours previously; three unknown men had tried to induce him by pretexts, to go out of doors; as he refused they fired revolvers outside his windows. The police, summoned by telephone, came and gave him the news of what had happened in the city and then left him, saying they would come back and protect him, as soon as he rang them up. At that late hour the whole family was fast asleep. When the alarm was given by the violent ringing of the door bell, and by the revolver shots fired against the shutters, Consolo tried in vain to ring up the police.<sup>2</sup> The Fascists broke into the house – Signora Consolo with her two children and her niece tried to reach the ground floor but were stopped on the stairs by a group of assailants. The unfortunate lady heard one of them call out: "Look everywhere, and if you don't find him, kill everybody." She threw herself on her knees to implore pity for her husband, appealing particularly to a big man who appeared to be the gang leader. He seemed at first to be moved. Then he said: "They kill so many of ours!" Signora Consolo was led to the terrace and closely watched whilst three or four men went upstairs, and hunted for Consolo through several rooms. In vain Consolo's niece tried to make them believe that he was away from home. They found him in his night-shirt under the servant's bed. They fired revolver shots at him and made off. Consolo died without being able to say a word. From the house of Consolo, the band went to that of Signor Targetti, ex-deputy. They broke in the door and hunted for him everywhere, threatening death. Not finding him, they threw his furniture into the street, causing a loss

<sup>1</sup> Consolo had been arrested in the preceding May on a charge of having helped to distribute the clandestine anti-Fascist paper, *Non Mollare* ("Never Yield") and acquitted after 40 days' imprisonment. But if judges acquit, Fascists kill.

<sup>2</sup> Consolo succeeded in telephoning to the nearest police station for protection; but the Fascists beat in his door. Leaving the telephone receiver on the table he hid in his children's room, between their two little beds. The telephone receiver transmitted automatically to the police station every noise that was made and every word that was said.

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of about 150,000 lire. Thence they went to Piazza Vittorio Emmanuale where, at about 2 a.m., they dismissed the taxis.'

Another squad silently surrounded the house of Signor Pilati, a former Socialist Member of Parliament. Pilati had lost his right arm in the war, and had received the medal for military valour. Though living in humble circumstances he was widely respected for his kindly character, his intelligence and his hard-working life. He and his family, knowing nothing of what was happening in Florence that night, were asleep, the windows being open on account of the heat. Silently placing a ladder against the sill, two Fascists climbed into the bedroom through the window, and ordered the light to be turned on.

'About 11.30 at night' - writes Pilati's widow - 'a great noise startled us out of sleep. Instinctively I turned on the light. Before me was a short, stout man with an ugly face and his cap over his eyes, pointing two revolvers at us. Another man approaching the bed, said to my husband in a threatening voice: "Get on your clothes and come to the Fascio with us." My husband answered: "Directly, directly," and began to get up raising his arm to take his trousers from the clothes-peg. The second man, who was tall, dark, with a swarthy face, repeated in an even more menacing tone: "Hurry up. Are you really Pilati?" "Yes," answered my husband. The words were hardly out of his mouth, when the man began to shoot at him. He was an easy target at point blank range. My husband, either because he feared that I should be hit too, or because he feared that my son might come in and be hit, after having received the first shot in his left shoulder quickly got out of bed and stood up against the door of the room where my son slept, trying by rapid movements of his sound arm, his wounded arm, and his whole body, to escape being hit again. I clearly saw my husband's movements and those of the man who fired, whilst the other murderer was hidden by his companion. Then a third man appeared, also holding a revolver. There was another shot, then the first two turned towards the third, saying: "Let us clear out." They were not yet out of the room when my husband almost without help got on to the bed: "See! What a lot of wounds," he

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said, and asked for a bandage. I ran to the chest of drawers. The man who had fired, fearing perhaps that I was looking for a revolver, glared at me, savagely, and then disappeared. The loss of blood was great – yet he had the pluck to tell us, who were quite bewildered, what we ought to do. My son ran to the ground-floor, and telephoned to the ambulance corps, then he came up again to examine the wounds. The wound that was mortal was not visible. We saw a wound on the left shoulder, another in the lower lip, a third on the left thigh, and another on the left leg. The ambulance men arrived. He was taken to hospital, and placed in the operating room. When questioned, my husband only answered with the words: "The Austrians disabled me, and the Italians have killed me." The shot which had hit him in the abdomen, had perforated the intestine five times. During these three days that we passed in the hospital, we were under the nightmare of further reprisals. We feared that although wounded, my husband would still be ill-treated. After three days he died.'

The order for 'reprisals' was telephoned to the Fascists in the suburbs and neighbouring communes.<sup>1</sup> In the suburb of Ponte a Mensola about 11 p.m., the Fascists collected before the house of a retired infantry captain, Fattirolli, and began shooting through windows. Fattirolli let himself down by a sheet into the fields and fled to the nearest police station, asking to be arrested and thus kept in safety.

As the Fascist flag covered all deeds done in its name, a group of 'heroes' attacked the Villa Baldi in the Via Bolognese in Trespiano, another suburb of Florence. The villa was the home of the Pizzi family – wealthy people who took little interest in politics and were even favourably inclined towards Fascism. A large number of valuable objects were stolen.

At Legnaia, another suburb, the Fascists summoned Dr.

<sup>1</sup> In the trial of the murderers of Pilati and Consolo at the Chieti Assizes, an officer of the Militia deposed that on the evening of October 3 'numerous groups of Fascists converged upon Florence from the country' (*Corriere della Sera*, May 7, 1927). Plainly this rapid concentration on the city must have been in response to a telephone summons from the Florence Fascio.

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Caparotta, a Communist, to his window. When he appeared they ordered him to come down, saying they had need of him. On his refusal, they fired on him, broke open the door, invaded the house and sacked his pharmacy. But Dr. Caparotta had escaped.

At Badia a Ripoli the Catholic Club was destroyed, and the house of Ildebrando Ottavelli sacked.

At Tavarnelle, the house of a lawyer named Chiti was broken into and looted. He escaped on foot to Florence.

At San Baronto, the villa of Torrigiani, the Grand Master of the Freemasons, was sacked and burnt.

At Arezzo, the offices of two lawyers, Gatteschi and Morvidi, were wrecked and the former was only saved from death by the intervention of an officer of the Carabinieri. At Anghiari, the village doctor was called out on the pretence that one of his patients was dangerously ill, and almost beaten to death. At Prato, the studio of the sculptor, Amedeo Strobini, the offices of the solicitor Prignani, the printing works of Martino Martini, were wrecked. At Montemurlo the rural Co-operative was also wrecked.

In Florence the disorder reigned unchecked throughout the morning of Sunday, October 4, gradually calming down during the afternoon. Bands of Fascists and criminals – the 'shady individuals' of the *Nazione*, – coming in from the country or belonging to the dregs of the city, gave themselves up freely to looting. One of these bands started early in the morning from Pontassieve, and arrived at about 8 o'clock in Florence. There it was joined by a number of Florentine 'heroes.' Their first exploit was to sack the 'Underwood' typewriter shop belonging to the brothers Breschi, Piazza Vittoria Emanuele, and the shop of the brothers Fini in the Via Cerretani. About half-past ten, in the Piazza del Duomo, they stormed a motor-bus, turned out the passengers and forced the conductor to drive them to Via Mattonaia. Here they sacked the house of the accountant Carrer.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> One of these 'heroes' had spent five months in jail for theft and three months for illegally carrying arms: he had been charged with murder but acquitted on the ground that he acted in self-defence. Another had been prosecuted for theft but amnestied; another for fraudulent bankruptcy

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Other bands sacked the shop of a tailor, Rossi, in Via Tornabuoni, and made a new attack on Dr. Pieraccini's house, but again failed to break down the door.

A lady in Florence wrote in a letter dated October 4, 1925, now before me:

'I went out to see the damage that had been done. You cannot imagine the scene. Window frames torn out, plate glass smashed, merchandise of all sorts ruined in half a score of shops. Baldesi's home was completely looted: happily the women had been warned and got away in time. One flat in Via della Mattonaja and another in Via dell' Ariento have been treated in the same way: the furniture thrown out of the windows - the crockery, even a piano and a bicycle - everything into the street and set on fire.'

In the evening these bands were still marching round the outskirts of the town, firing their revolvers into the air, using their cudgels liberally, and ordering people indoors.<sup>1</sup>

The official report of October 6, 1925, the only one which the Italian papers were allowed to publish, stated the number of dead to be four: the Fascist Luporini, and the anti-Fascist Beciolini, Pilati and Consolo. But the report was reticent. Signora Pilati, writes in her account:

'Two family friends whose names I omit, went to the hospital to take farewell of my husband's body. They were accompanied by armed Fascists to a broken-down door that would not open. After a good quarter of an hour they managed to get it open. A revolting sight met their eyes. A dirtier room could not have been found. It was more like a pig-stye than a mortuary chamber. On a table lay my husband covered by a cloth. In the same room on planks lay four other corpses still dressed, with rough boots still covered with dust. These four unfortunates had no doubt been killed on

and for rape, being acquitted on the latter charge because the complaint was not made in time. Another had been sentenced for swindling and assault, for robbery and violence: *La Stampa*, November 25, 1925.

<sup>1</sup> See Note A at the end of the present chapter.



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the same evening, returning from their day's work. Nothing was ever known about them. The Fascists in these days killed seven innocent men, and not three.'

### § 4: *When there are no Reprisals*

After Zaniboni's attempted assassination of Mussolini on November 4, 1925 – or rather, after the Police had thought fit to disclose *urbi et orbi* that Zaniboni had schemed to make an attempt on Mussolini's life – the Fascist Government stated in the Italian and foreign Press that Mussolini had ordered the Prefects of the provinces to prevent reprisals. And Signor Farinacci, the General Secretary of the Fascist Party, had the courage to congratulate himself, in an official speech, on the fact that following Mussolini's order no incident had occurred after the news of the attempt; a proof of the heroic discipline in the ranks of Fascism.

As a matter of fact, at Brescia several lawyers' offices and the offices and printing works of two newspapers were sacked and burned, and a number of persons bludgeoned.

At Parma, Signor Micheli, a Christian-Democrat ex-Minister, was nearly beaten to death. Signor Venturini, a lawyer, and several other persons were bludgeoned. The offices of Signor Albertelli, an ex-Member of Parliament, of Signor Candian, a lawyer, of two other lawyers, of a notary, and of an engineer, were sacked; a grocer's shop shared a similar fate; and the clinic of Dr. Braga was destroyed.

In Padua, Signor Nogari, a lawyer, was beaten and seriously injured.

In Este, several lawyers' offices and a dozen shops were sacked, as were the offices of Signor Garbagni, a lawyer in Milan.

In Forlì the Fascists profited by the excitement to make a demonstration against the Prefect, whom they regarded as insufficiently energetic against Freemasonry, and a bomb was thrown at his house.

In Trieste the Fascists burned the printing works of the Slovene paper *Edinost*, and sacked the houses of two lawyers, Ara and Samaja, and of Colonel Finzi.

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In Reggio Emilia the Fascists attacked the surgeon, Signor Alberto Furno, and beat him, as he was motoring home from his round. He succeeded in reaching home, and, fearing a renewed and more violent assault, hid in the cellars of a neighbouring grocery, belonging to a man called Ancesti. The Fascists found him out, beat him until the blood flowed, and locked him in the cellar: they then set fire to the house of the grocery. One of them, less ferocious than the rest, liberated the unfortunate doctor, and took him to the railway station to escape. The firemen who came to put out the fire were attacked and driven away. From Thursday to Sunday there was a real pogrom in the town. The house of Commander Montanari, Secretary of the Savings Bank, was besieged, but thanks to a friend he escaped. Signor Magnavacchi, an engineer, had his arm broken. An employee of the Volta Moncasale Co-operative store was badly wounded by a revolver, and a large number of people were bludgeoned and more or less seriously injured. The police declared themselves unable to restore order, and urged all anti-Fascists to get out of harm's way, if they did not want to be killed.

In Mantua, the editor of the Christian-Democratic paper, and Signor Frignani, a teacher, barely escaped with their lives. A crowd peaceably assembled in the weekly market in Via Garibaldi was indiscriminately bludgeoned. Fifty-seven persons were arrested and kept in prison for three days; on their release they found awaiting them a double file of 'Black-Shirts,' who beat them brutally one after the other; thirty of them were taken to hospital with serious injuries.

At Savona three lawyers had their offices stripped.

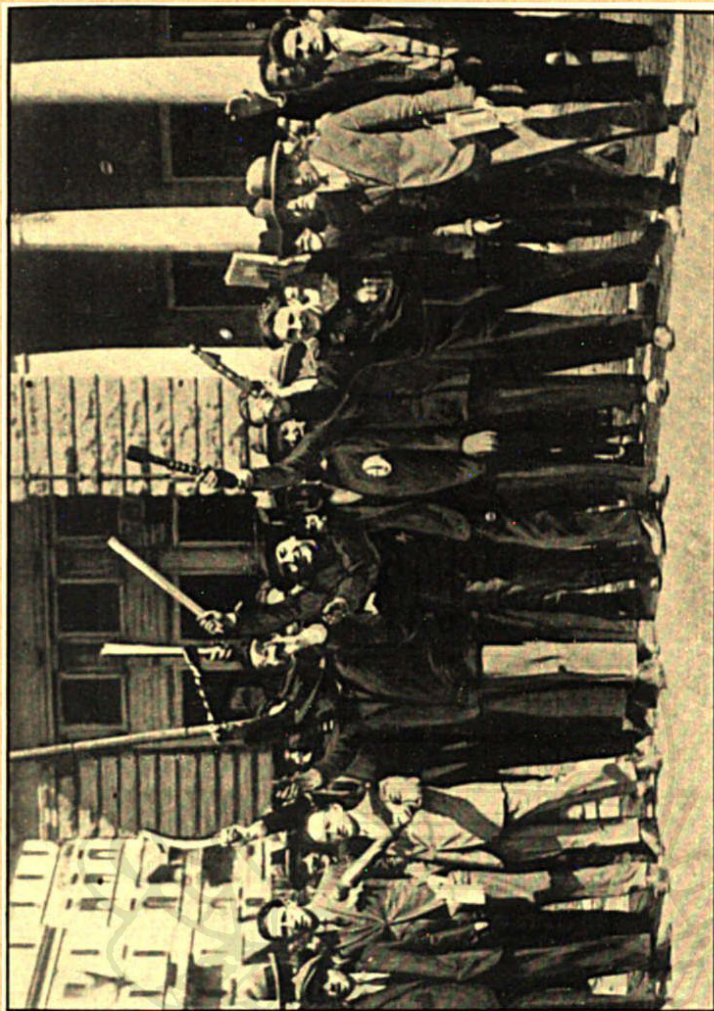
In Venice, the ex-Member of Parliament, Piva, was attacked.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> None of these facts were ever reported in the Italian papers. I collected the information from letters sent by persons residing in the various towns mentioned, and it is certainly far from being exhaustive. From central and southern Italy I had no reports. The French journalist who discovered Italy, in the autumn of 1925, with the aid of glasses provided by the Fascist Government, commented as follows on the Zaniboni affair in *Le Journal* of November 24, 1925: 'After the discovery of the attempt, Signor Mussolini seems in reality to have employed all his skill on the one hand to exploit general indignation to get Parliament to pass such

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Even after Miss Gibson's attempt on Mussolini's life (April 7, 1926), the Fascist Government broadcasted to the world that there had been no disturbances or reprisals. The truth is that, in Rome, the offices and the printing press of the opposition paper *Il Mondo*, were looted from top to bottom: furniture, books, etc., were thrown into the street and set on fire.<sup>1</sup> Other newspaper offices shared a similar fate: those of the *Risorgimento*, *Voce Repubblicana*, *Giustizia* (a weekly), the Roman agencies of the *Avanti* and *Unità*, and the headquarters of the Republican Party. The house of the Russian ambassador was enthusiastically stoned. The house of Signora Lerda, correspondent of German Socialist papers, was invaded and looted: that of Signor Giannini, editor of the satirical laws as would enable him to stifle his opponents once and for all, and on the other to prevent this crime from leading to others for which the responsibility might be attributed to him. His word of command "No reprisals" was placarded in the streets of Rome the same evening: he repeated it with insistence to the crowds that thronged to cheer him in front of the Chigi Palace. At the same time the offices of the Opposition papers and houses of well-known opponents of the government were guarded by troops. Terrible threats were made by some of the Fascist leaders and papers of the extreme kind but they had to obey orders. Propaganda can indeed work miracles! In his book, *The Awakening of Italy* (spring of 1924), Signor Villari mentioned nothing but the looting of Signor Nitti's house (p. 267, Note 2). In his recent book, *Fascist Experiment*, he condescends to record, in addition to 'the raid on Nitti's house,' the 'attack on Amendola, Forni, and Misuri' (pp. 62-65), the 'murder of Matteotti,' the 'incidents' of Florence (October 3-4, 1925), and that is all. 'The few serious crimes and the many minor offences committed by individual Fascists undoubtedly merit the severest reprobation. But . . . against the murder of Matteotti can be set a whole series of atrocities, from the horrible murders in Turin, Bologna, Modena and Ferrara in 1920, down to that of Nicola Bonservizi, in Paris, in 1924, and the more than sixty murders of Fascists committed after the Matteotti affair' (p. viii). He evidently thinks that the crimes of his friends are cancelled by those of his enemies. Moreover, he lays in the one scale a mass of crimes perpetrated by his enemies; and on the other side one single crime committed by his friends, thus putting himself in a position to protest against those foreigners who condemn the Fascist régime 'on the basis of incidents which, in some cases, are grossly exaggerated, in others non-existent, and in others again merely isolated episodes' (p. vii).

<sup>1</sup> See plate facing the present page.



FASCISTS, AFTER LOOTING THE PREMISES OF THE 'MONDO,' MAKING A DEMONSTRATION IN HONOUR OF MUSSOLINI, IN FRONT OF HIS OFFICIAL RESIDENCE, APRIL 8, 1926 (see page 187)

*Facing page 188.]*

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paper *Il becco giallo* ('The yellow beak'), was invaded but not looted, though 25,000 lire disappeared from a drawer. Later in the afternoon, operations spread from the centre of Rome to the outskirts. It is impossible to know the number of people who were beaten, because the victims remain silent for fear of being sought out and beaten again. It must not be forgotten that these are very convenient opportunities for the settling of private feuds under cover of the Fascio.

At Genoa, the offices of the paper *Il Lavoro* were looted and the sub-editor, Federico Striglia, was seriously wounded; the premises of the barristers Uttini, Lotti and Vassia, of the deputy Francesco Rossi, and of the stockbroker Gino Levi were wrecked.

At Milan, a group of Fascists invaded the headquarters of the *Avanti*, and dragged the former deputy Schiavello down the stairs, beating him on the head. Other squads wrecked the headquarters of the *Unità*, and beat the manager and his wife. The same squad invaded the offices of the General Confederation of Labour, the Co-operative stores in Via Solar, a restaurant in Via Pietro Colletta, the premises of Giovanni Bensi, former Secretary of the Milanese Chamber of Workers. Bensi and Azimonti, an official of the Confederation, were dragged from the former's house into the street and savagely bludgeoned. Another squad attempted to invade the house of the Socialist deputy, Signor Turati.

In Venetia, at Vicenza, Arterga and Pordenone, there was the same looting and bludgeoning.<sup>1</sup>

After Luccetti's attempt on the life of Mussolini (September 11, 1926), the same manœuvre was repeated. The Duce ordered that there were to be no reprisals, and Fascist papers at home and pro-Fascist papers abroad gave out that no reprisals had taken place. As a matter of fact, at Milan, in the afternoon of September 11, a squad of Fascists invaded and sacked the offices of the *Avanti*. Twenty-five police, who were on duty there, allowed them to break

<sup>1</sup> No paper was allowed to give an account of these incidents. It is therefore only possible to know what happened from private sources. What took place in southern Italy and in many small towns and villages of northern and central Italy, remains unknown.

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in, disappearing when the work of destruction was well under way. During the night a squad arrived at the office of the lawyer and Reformist-Socialist deputy, Signor Treves, and threatening his portress with revolvers, forced her to open the door, whereupon they ransacked his papers, took away three great packets of them and smashed the furniture with axes. Signor Treves' office is fifty yards from the police headquarters. The procedure was the same at the premises of another lawyer, Signor Francesco Clerici. Other squads wrecked the printing press of the *Unità*, a Co-operative store at La Cagnola and the house of the novelist Mariani. The sub-editor of the *Unità*, Peluso, was savagely bludgeoned and had several ribs broken. It is impossible to give the total number of beatings distributed broadcast.

At Monza and in the Brianza (part of the province of Milan) Fascists sacked the premises of those Christian-Democratic clubs which had escaped their attentions on previous occasions. At Ravenna there was a veritable orgy of beatings. One of the bludgeoned men, the Republican Arnaldo Guerrini, a character of magnificent tenacity and courage, gets beaten, arrested, and has his house searched, on every possible occasion. The Chief of Police told him in April, 1926: 'You must make your choice: either leave the country or kill yourself.' One of the wounded, a woman, Lucia Morini by name, had a chair thrown at her face while she was trying to defend her husband.

At Bologna, during the night of September 11, a squad broke into the house of the workman Amedeo Faustini, and beat him so savagely before the eyes of his aged mother that he died the next day in a hospital.

Another anti-Fascist was murdered by the Fascists at San Giovanni Persiceto (province of Bologna).

At Modena the Fascists sacked fifteen lawyers' offices and private houses. Amongst the most savage havoc made on this occasion that of the chambers of the lawyer Pedrazzi must be mentioned, and of the Socialist ex-deputy Donati. Paolo Bentivoglio, a blind man, whose house was broken into, was forced to escape through a window in order to save himself, together with his eighty-year-old father.

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At Leghorn and at Trieste, Fascists attacked the French Consulate. At Rome, the American vice-consul was assaulted, and the Fascists wrecked the premises of the Maximalist Socialist and of the Reformist-Socialist Parties. At Santa Marinella (on the coast near Civitavecchia), they invaded the house of the dissident Fascist, the deputy Susi, and beat him in bed.

Other beatings took place at Piacenza, and at Asti. In a Slav village on the Carso (Loqua, near Corniale) the Fascists attacked and wrecked an inn, savagely beating a dozen Slavs.

The worst disorders occurred at Trieste. Here the Fascists had for some time been demanding that the old-established 'Philharmonic Society' should give up its handsome quarters to them. The members of the 'Philharmonic Society' are rich merchants and business men, almost all Fascists, who saw no reason to give up their quarters. They subsidize the Fascists to hold down the workers, not to turn them out of their own premises. The Fascists, however, excited by the success of their attack upon the French Consulate, thought that this was the moment to win their point with the 'Philharmonic.' Thus on the night of September 13, they attacked the building and took possession of it. The 'Philharmonic' being the property of the richest class in Trieste, the Carabineers intervened. Received with revolver shots, they replied with rifles. Before the Fascists could be dislodged, one was killed and another seriously wounded. Next day (September 14), at 10 a.m. a squad of some fifty Fascists retaliated by attacking the Carabineers' barracks in Via Sanità, throwing two bombs at the door and firing a hundred revolver shots at the windows. The rabble broke in the door and brutally murdered the Carabineer Mario Grassi, and wounded the Commissioner of Police, Falcone, and several other Carabineers. Reinforcements were called up, the building was surrounded, and after a fierce struggle the Fascists were all arrested. While this was going on, another squad made an attack on the police headquarters, but was repulsed. Other incidents occurred between Fascists and squads of Carabineers patrolling the city. On the evening of the 14th, the Prefect had to proclaim martial law. Assemblies of more than five persons were forbidden, and cafés, theatres and places of public entertain-

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ment were closed. On the 15th, newspapers were allowed to appear only on condition that they did not print a line on these events. The *Piccolo*, however, for September 15, informed its readers, on page 4, that by express command of the Prefect, it abstained from 'all allusion, direct or indirect, to the occurrences of which we are duly aware, and to their tragic and justly deplored consequences.'

The news of these incidents at Trieste provoked encounters between Fascists and Carabinieri in various cities of Istria during the days that followed. At Capodistria, on the 15th, Fascist squads attacked the barracks of the Carabinieri, and two Fascists and the captain of the Carabinieri were wounded.

About what happened in other towns I have no information.

### § 5: *The Pogrom of November 1926*

After the attempt on Mussolini's life made by the dissident Fascist Anteo Zamboni at Bologna on October 31, 1926, the 'propaganda' announced to the world not only that Mussolini had remained 'calm and smiling,'<sup>1</sup> but that he had given orders to his friends that 'no one must lose his head.'<sup>2</sup> The 'fascitized' *Corriere della Sera* (Nov. 2, 1926) proclaimed:

'All last night there was intense activity at the Home Office. Signor Federzoni, Home Secretary, and the Chief of Police, remained at work until the early hours of the morning. Signor Federzoni was again at the office early this morning (Nov. 1), and remained in touch with all the Prefects of the Kingdom. These assured him that public order was in no way disturbed.'

The immediate results of the 'Duce's' command was that the high Fascist personages, who were in the car following that of the 'Duce,' themselves took part in the lynching of Zamboni. One of

<sup>1</sup> The fascitized *Giornale d'Italia*, November 2, 1926, made the blunder of revealing that Mussolini himself drew up the communiqué in which the 'smiling calm of the Duce' was broadcasted for the admiration of the world.

<sup>2</sup> Interview given by Signor Grandi, Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, to the *Giornale d'Italia*, November 1, 1926.



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them, Arconovaldo Bonaccorsi, cut the boy's throat with his dagger. Another high personage in the car, shot twice at the tortured body. The corpse was dragged about the streets, and left eleven days unburied; at last it was buried, as a sign of contempt, outside the ordinary cemetery. Mediæval barbarism comes to the top again in its most savage and repugnant forms.

The Treasurer-General of the Fascist Party, Signor Marinelli (who was charged as a promoter of the murder of Matteotti, and amnestied on July 31, 1925), in a speech delivered on November 1, 1926, at Milan, said to the assembled and enthusiastic Fascists:

'The first words of the "Duce" yesterday after the attempt made on his life were these, "It must be made known throughout Italy and the whole world that the assailant was lynched." These words have great significance. Signor Turati, Secretary of the Party, said that as a sequel to this first act of justice carried out at Bologna, all moral accomplices must be struck at inexorably.'

At Bologna, 2,000 'moral accomplices' had already been imprisoned during the days which preceded the visit of the 'Duce.' (Who could have foreseen that the danger was going to arise in the very ranks of the Fascists themselves?) Thus the 'raw material' on which the Fascists could carry out the 'Duce's' orders was lacking in Bologna, where, in consequence, few acts of violence took place.

But in Milan the printing premises of the Communist paper, *L'Unità*, were looted and burned, as were the premises of the Socialist paper *Avanti*, the head-quarters of the General Confederation of Labour (or rather, of what remains of that once powerful body), the offices of the publishing company, *La Coltura*, the offices or private houses of the deputies Treves, Caldara, Gonzales, Dugoni, Chiesa, Bentini; of the lawyers Levi, Morandi, Momigliano, Bertolotti, Crestana; of Signori Nenni, Passigli, Schiavi, Montanari, Gaetani, Mariani, Cilla, Palmiotta, Gardenghi, Gilli, Brigatti, Salvalai, Fanoli, Buscaglia, Pini. The timber yard of Mazzocchi at Lambrate (a suburb of Milan) was burned and destroyed. A bomb was thrown at a Palace in Via Spiga, 25, and the entrance and the stairs were damaged.

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Three workmen, Suardi, Bersani, Barilati, were killed. The members of Parliament, Bentini and Repossi, and the following citizens, Salvalai, Mariani, Silvestri, Scalarini, Leonetti, Fanoli, Brigatti, Morinari, Cassoni, Scorza, Rosa, Tengoni, Cottrè, Bruschi, Alemanni, Postingher, Manini, Morilli, Sardi, were more or less savagely cudgelled. These are not all the names. No one can know the number of the persons who were wounded and beaten, but took good care to conceal their misfortune.

The house of the deputy Chicsa, after having been sacked, was appropriated by the Fascists, who established a Club in it.

At Bergamo, the secondary school-teacher Fachery and the lawyer Briolini were flogged. The Fascists looted the house of Count Secco Suardo and of Signor Gavazzeni, ex-Member of Parliament. The first was ferociously beaten and forced to sign a declaration that no violence had been done to him. Signor Gavazzeni was dragged out of his house, beaten and spat at along the streets, and taken outside the city to a place where a gallows had been erected. The Fascists put a noose round his neck, lifted him on to a stool and kept him there for some time, as if they were about to hang him. Before letting him go, they beat him nearly to death.

At Como, the Fascists got hold of many of the Opposition and painted their faces in three colours. Amongst the persons who suffered this vile treatment were the proprietor of a clock factory at Monte Olimpino, the proprietor of a cement factory at Pontechiano, and Commendatore Rosasco, one of the most important silk weavers of the district. The houses of Signor Noseda, a member of Parliament, of the lawyer Beltramini-Frontini, and of the priest Primo Noiana, were sacked. The last named was also severely bludgeoned. The three victims were kept in prison for three days.

At Sondrio, the deputy Merizzi's house was looted.

At Brescia, the printing establishment of the paper *Il Cittadino di Brescia*, and the head-quarters of the Christian-Democrat organizations were smashed and burnt: the damages amounted to £18,000. Signor Ducos, Member of Parliament, was flogged.

The Bishop of Vicenza, preaching in the Cathedral, dared to deplore, not only the attempt itself, but also the reprisals which

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had followed it. The Fascists laid siege to the episcopal palace for several hours, and had to be dispersed by a detachment of troops.

At Verona, the Christian-Democrat deputy, Signor De Gasperi, was seized in the train on a journey from Milan to Trent and led to the local Fascist head-quarters. Here the Fascists tried to extort from him a signed 'recantation' of his anti-Fascist past. De Gasperi did not yield. A fictitious 'recantation' was published in the daily press. De Gasperi's letter of protest was not allowed to appear.

At Padua, the Fascists sacked the Bishops' Printing Press, the Jewish Synagogue, and the house of the lawyer Toffanin, and occupied the aristocratic Pedrocchi Club, 'a den of anti-Fascist slander.' In the local Fascist paper, November 3, 1926, the following ukase from the Fascist Federation may be read:

'No Fascist is allowed to comment in public, or in any way, on the events of the past few days, under penalty of expulsion.'

At Treviso, the Fascists destroyed the premises of the chemist Fanoli, the offices of the lawyers Grollo and Visentini, the engineering works of the brothers Ronfini, and the clinic of Doctor Bergamo, Member of Parliament. Before setting fire to this latter building, the Fascists forcibly transferred the 40 patients to the town hospital: three of the sick men died on the way. The brothers Ronfini were dragged through the streets with ropes round their necks, spat upon, and whipped amidst disgusting shouts and insults; outside the city, they were placed beneath a gallows, and for the last time, flogged.

At Venice, the premises and offices of the paper *Il Gazzettino*, the chambers of the lawyer Cornoldi, the offices of the engineers Samasso, Fano, and Carli, and that of Commendatore Grubisich were wrecked. The sub-editor of the *Gazzettino*, Stringari, Commendatore Grubisich and the workman Mondaini, were flogged till the blood flowed. All the Christian-Democratic clubs of the city, about fifteen in all, save one, were wrecked.

At Trento, the Fascists wrecked the offices of the *Azione Cattolica* (head-quarters of the Christian-Democratic organizations), the offices and printing press of the paper *Nuovo Trentino*, and the

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head-quarters of the *Sindacato Agrario Industriale*, which is the centre of all the Christian-Democratic Co-operatives of the district. The safe of the *Sindacato* was emptied.

At Genoa, the printing presses of the paper *Il Lavoro* were completely wrecked. This is how the fascistized *Corriere della Sera*, November 3, 1926, describes the exploit:

'The assailants broke open the doors and entered the editorial offices and the printing rooms, where they destroyed everything. They then sprinkled paraffin and petrol over the furniture and the paper stores and set fire to it. By the time the firemen arrived the flames had already taken a good hold. The fire brigade was from the first hampered in its movements by the aggressors; but later under the protection of the troops they were able to get on with the work of extinguishing the flames. The twelve linotype machines were wrecked; moreover, the most important parts of the rotary machines were carried away. Besides the premises of the *Lavoro*, the house of Signor Beccaro, the landlord of the building, where the paper has its premises, was also destroyed.'

On November 3, the Fascists threw all the furniture of the house of Signor Francesco Rossi, an ex-deputy, into the street and set fire to it with petrol. They likewise wrecked and burnt the houses of Signor Canepa, Member of Parliament and ex-Minister, of Ansaldo, Uttini, Lotti, Raimondo, and Faralli. Numberless people were beaten in the streets.

At Forte di Marmi (prov. of Lucca), the country house of Count Sforza, the ex-Minister for Foreign Affairs, was wrecked. Valuables, books and papers were stolen. Three heaps of furniture were made on three different floors, oil was poured upon these and they were set on fire.

At Pesciano, near Perugia, Signor Oro Nobili, a member of Parliament, was kidnapped in a motor-car, and taken towards Todi. On the way two other cars came up, filled with Fascists, who rained blows upon him, and left him for dead. He was carried to the hospital at Todi in a serious condition.

At Rome, the Fascists wrecked the premises of the newspapers *Mondo*, *Risorgimento*, and *Voce Repubblicana*; those of the Reform-

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ist-Socialist Party, of the Intransigent Socialist Party, of the Republican Party, the head-quarters of the International Confederation of Transport, the Morara printing premises and the houses of the journalists Cianca, Giannini and Mrs. Olga Lerda-Olberg, of General Bencivenga, Member of Parliament, Signor Sardelli, Member of Parliament, Signor Ferrari, ex-Grand Master of the Freemasons, Signori Campanozzi and Bombacci, ex-Members of Parliament, Signor Zanerini, secretary of the Reformist Socialist Party, and several shops in the suburbs. While some Fascists were wreaking havoc in the house of Signor Cianca, others loaded furniture, clothes and linen on to a lorry, and departed for an unknown destination.

This is how M.s. Olga Lerda-Olberg describes the house in which she lived, after the punitive expedition:

'On the ground floor everything is destroyed; the telephone in fragments, the electric installation destroyed, the central heating radiators thrown out of the windows; not a window, not a door, not a shutter left intact. In the streets there are heaps of smashed furniture. Although a lorry has already gone laden with furniture, the courtyard is full of broken pieces. Of the three typewriters, only one broken piece has been recovered; probably the wind has carried away the rest, like the telephone, the cyclostyle, and other things. The house is now absolutely abandoned. The ground floor is without windows, shutters, or doors. Four Carabineers mount guard, and the public gazes curiously through the empty windows at the devastation and disorder within. A sight like this in one of the principal streets of the new Rome! The capital has a garrison of several tens of thousands of men. However, it was not possible to prevent an attack, of which warning had been received two hours previously, against a house in which there were only a man of seventy, three women, and a little girl.'

The editor of the *Voce Repubblicana*, Schiavetti, was seriously assaulted with cudgels. It is impossible to estimate the number of those flogged, especially among the workmen in the suburbs.

At Naples, the Fascists sacked the houses of the following: Senator Benedetto Croce, ex-Minister, the world-famous philo-

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sopher; the Members of Parliament Labriola, ex-Minister, Pre-sutti, a professor of the University, Bracco, the well-known dramatist, and Lucci; of the journalists Scaglione, Marvasi, Scar-foglio; and of the citizens Bordiga, Colozza, Pistolesi. Colozza was seriously wounded. Bracco's library, one of the finest theatrical collections in Italy, was entirely ruined.

'In my house on the outskirts of the city' - writes Signor Labriola - 'I and my son, a boy of fifteen, were alone. It was a Sunday night. At 2 a.m. we heard loud knocking at the door. Jumping out of bed without dressing, I went to open the door, but before I could reach it, it gave way under the blows rained upon it. Ten or a dozen armed Fascists put their revolvers to my head and ordered me not to move. Then they pushed me into a corner of the dining-room and set two of their number to stand guard over me. Meanwhile my son had got up and came and stood by my side. I said to the leader of the gang - "Do what you like with me, but let the boy go." He answered: "Not a bit of it. The boy must stay here." The Fascists then entered the bedroom and began to smash everything. In the room there was a large wardrobe with a big mirror, a wedding present from my mother. The Fascists banged at it with their sticks, but failed to break it. Withdrawing a few paces they then fired their revolvers at it and smashed it. Next they invaded my study, and threw all my books out of the window. Luckily there is a terrace below the window which belongs to another tenant, so that the Fascists were unable to set fire to the books after having thrown them out. But they took their revenge by heaping up in the garden all the clothes, linen, and other effects they could find, soaking them with petrol, and burning them. After half an hour of these operations, nothing remained of my home. Neither I nor my son had a rag to cover ourselves with. Before we could get away we had to borrow clothes from our neighbours. The Fascists took away nothing except an almost worthless revolver and two letters that Mussolini had written to me in 1922. From the deputy, Signor Lucci, one of the most distinguished lawyers in the city, they stole some 40,000 lire which had been deposited with him by his clients. In the interest of his

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clients, Lucci was obliged to lay information with the authorities, but two days later he was arrested. For seventeen days he was kept in prison, and then set free without explanation. No magistrate examined him while he was in prison; and when the barristers of Naples made inquiry of the Public Prosecutor, the latter declared that he knew nothing of the arrest, which had been made unknown to the judicial authorities. Yet, according to the Italian Code of Penal Procedure, the judicial authorities must be informed within twenty-four hours of every arrest that is made.<sup>1</sup>

At Cagliari, the Fascists sacked the printing premises of the two papers *Corriere di Sardegna* and *Il Solco*, the offices of the lawyers Pais, Mulas, Mereu, and Angius, the club of the Christian-Democratic University students, the offices of the Christian-Democratic Boy Scouts, etc. The house of Signor Lussu, Member of Parliament, who was one of the most brilliant soldiers during the Great War, was attacked.

This is how the now pro-Fascist *Corriere della Sera* describes the affair:

'A small group of youths gathered in front of Lussu's house and began to make a hostile demonstration. They were held in check with much difficulty by a platoon of Carabinieri who were guarding the entrance. Without anyone noticing him, the Fascist Porra climbed up on to a parapet and succeeded in reaching the balcony of Lussu's flat on the first floor. Signor Lussu, from behind the shutters, fired at Porra, wounding him seriously in the head. Porra with a cry fell from the balcony. While he was being carried to the hospital he died. The crowd, enraged by this insane (sic) act, tried more than once to break into Lussu's house, but did not succeed owing to the resistance of the police, who arrested Signor Lussu.'

<sup>1</sup> *Review of Reviews*, Sept.-Oct., 1927. The *Popolo d'Italia* of June 29, 1927, alludes to the looting of Signor Labriola's house in the following terms: 'It was merely owing to the unauthorized initiative of a group of Neapolitan black-shirts if on the morrow of the Bologna attempt some bits of furniture belonging to Signor Labriola's study ended up in the street.'

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Signor Lussu appointed as his counsel for the defence a barrister named Marcello. Two hours later Signor Marcello received from the Fascist deputy, Signor Cao, a letter, ordering him to decline the task. Upon his answering that he knew where his duty lay, he was arrested.

Bologna, Milan, Bergamo, Como, Sondrio, Brescia, Verona, Treviso, Venice, Genoa, Forte dei Marmi, Perugia, Rome, Naples, Cagliari, are only 15 out of the 9,200 cities and towns of Italy. Who will ever give a full account of the outrages committed in the whole country? <sup>1</sup>

In face of facts of this kind it may well be asked how there can exist in the world people so ill-informed or so fanatical as to affirm that in Italy 'in the present state of affairs life and property are safe and one can go about one's business or one's pleasure without let or hindrance' (*Morning Post*, April 26, 1926). When it is said that there is no disorder in Italy under the Fascist Government, the statement is a half truth which is worse than the blackest lie. To-day there are no longer disorders of the kind provoked by the 'Bolshevists' in 1919 and 1920. There is no longer the disorder of the civil war of 1921 and 1922. But there are disorders of a new kind: beatings, woundings, killings, perpetrated by the members of the Party in power on their opponents.

### § 6: 'Militia' and 'Squads'

But how are such outbreaks of violence possible? For the maintenance of public peace the Italian Government can command 15,000 police, 60,000 Carabineers, and 265,000 members of the 'Volunteer Militia for National Security.'<sup>2</sup> What are all these armed forces doing?

Among them there is one body, the 'Militia,' whose main *raison d'être* is in reality the fomenting of disorder.

When the *coup d'état* of October, 1922, took place, there was in Italy a police force, the Royal Guard, numbering about 35,000

<sup>1</sup> See Supplementary Note B at the end of the present chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Such is the figure given by Mussolini in his interview with the *Sunday Express*, January 24, 1927.



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men, which had vigorously resisted the 'Bolshevist' tide in 1919-20, and in 1921-22 had faithfully obeyed the order to back the Fascists in the civil war. It was a non-party force, which would have loyally served whatever government was in power. In January, 1923, it was disbanded and replaced by the 'Militia.' What Mussolini and his friends wanted was a force entirely devoted to their party. Moreover, their followers were claiming a share in the spoils, and posts in the 'Militia' were their first reward.

The members of this new force took an oath of personal loyalty to Mussolini. The officers were Fascists who had taken a leading part in punitive expeditions before the 'March on Rome.' None but Fascists are admitted to its ranks. 'Militia' officers are frequently members of the committees of the 'Fasci,' i.e. of the local branches of the Fascist Party. The 'Militia' describes itself as 'Super-Fascism.' Armed, equipped and maintained at the expense of the taxpayer, but placed at the discretion of the Prime Minister, it is the actual backbone of the Fascist Party.

'The Militia' - said Mussolini in a proclamation of September 12, 1925 - 'draws its officers and men exclusively from the Fascist ranks, and its chief task is to defend *at all costs*, both at home and abroad, the régime which came into being with the "March on Rome."'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The director of the British Institute of Florence, Mr. Goad, writes in this connection: 'It is curious to be told so often and so emphatically that the National Militia is a Party Force, when we are personally acquainted with members of that patriotic body who are not and who never have been Fascist' (*Journal of the British Institute of International Affairs*, March, 1927, p. 121). The probabilities are that the official proclamation of Mussolini on this point is more to be relied on than the 'personal' acquaintanceships of Mr. Goad. Signor Villari, *Fascist Experiment*, p. 165, writes: 'A man need not be registered a member of the Fascist Party to be admitted, but his political antecedents are inquired into, and all whose patriotism is regarded as doubtful are rejected.' As under Fascism, patriotism = Fascism, it follows that there is no discrepancy between the statement of Mussolini and those of his propagandists: only in the latter there is the desire to muddle the cards. The propagandist, while concealing that the Militia has a partisan character, finds it perfectly natural for it to receive orders from Mussolini. 'The government' - he says - 'is one and under one

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In giving his sanction to the creation of this 'Militia,' the King, 'prisoner of war,' made the first open breach in the Constitution;<sup>1</sup> he signed a measure which had not been passed by Parliament, transforming an armed political party into a legally recognized body maintained by the taxpayers of all parties.<sup>2</sup>

The Militia has two functions: the one, official and legal, is to aid the police and the Carabinieri in the maintenance of public peace; the other, semi-official and illegal, is to stifle 'at all costs,' as Mussolini says, any opposition to the Dictatorship

When the Militia is on regular service, or in attendance on official ceremonies, its members wear uniforms. But when they are out to burn, beat, and kill, uniforms are left at home. They are then no longer 'militi' (members of the 'Militia') but 'squadristi,' members of 'squads.'

As we have already seen, the semi-official and illegal activities fall into two main types: (a) attacks on single individuals; (b) large-scale operations.

When an attack on a single individual is planned, the assailants, as a rule, outnumber him ten to one; and as a further precaution,

head; even if the Militia was placed directly under the Minister of War, it could not be employed on a large scale without the Prime Minister's authority. At present the Prime Minister is also Minister of War.' The propagandist substitutes the Minister of War, who has nothing to do with internal affairs, and the Prime Minister, who may not be Home Secretary, for the Home Secretary, under whom the Militia ought to remain. He further hides the fact that the members of the Militia take an oath of allegiance not only to the King (since August, 1924), but also to Mussolini. Such an oath of personal allegiance not only to the King as representing the nation as a whole, but also to the chieftain of a faction, is without precedent either in Italy or elsewhere, unless we go back to the days of the last of the Merovingians and their Major-domos. The relative position of the King of Italy and Mussolini to-day bears many resemblances to that of Childeric III and Pepin the Short in A.D. 750.

<sup>1</sup> Art. 5 of the Constitution enacts: 'The King commands *all* land and naval forces.'

<sup>2</sup> The officers and a proportion of the men hold permanent paid positions. The rest are called up in case of emergency and are then paid by the day. The relative proportions of these two categories are wrapped up in mystery, as is also their cost to the budget. See Note C at the end of the present chapter.

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uniformed 'militi' are sent on in advance to search the house and person of the intended victim. Having thus ensured that he is unarmed, the uniformed men withdraw and the 'squad' appears to finish the job. Should weapons be found, the possessor is arrested and prosecuted for carrying arms without a licence. Occasionally, however, if the precaution has been omitted and the victim is armed and able to turn the tables on his aggressors, the uniformed 'militi' are called in and the man is shot dead, or tried for resisting the public authorities:

*Cet animal est fort méchant  
Quand on l'attaque il se défend!*

When an enterprise on a large scale is to be carried out, the leaders mobilize Fascists from the neighbourhood – or even from distant towns. The bulk of the uniformed force waits close to the scene of operations ready for all contingencies, while the squads carry out their assault on the printing offices of the newspaper, or the Trades Union premises, or the persons marked out for attack. Should there be a serious attempt at resistance, the troops who are in waiting are summoned, and speedily settle matters.

These methods are not applied everywhere in the same proportions. In the centre of big cities violence is comparatively rare. In a big city news spreads more rapidly and public opinion might still be roused. The great anonymous masses are less easily controlled and might play an unexpected part. Rome, from this point of view, is a haven of comparative peace as the presence of the Embassies and of many foreign journalists compels the Fascists to observe a certain self-control. But even in cities, especially in the outlying suburbs, violence is often used. In Rome itself very serious outrages have taken place, such as the attacks on Signor Misuri and Signor Amendola, the wrecking of the houses of Signor Nitti and of Signor Modigliani, and the murder of Matteotti. In the small towns and villages, where people are known to one another, and where the Fascists can control the inhabitants individually, the life of anti-Fascists is made unendurable; threats, pressure, bludgeonings and woundings are of daily occurrence.

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The 'squads' have characteristic names: 'the Savages,' 'the Damned,' 'the Desperadoes' ('la Disperata'). They as a rule consist of a nucleus of 'militi' eked out by other Fascists not enrolled in the Militia.

When the Militia was created in January, 1923, the Government declared officially that the 'squads' were to be disbanded. But they continued to exist. In March, 1924, for instance, one 'squad' of 'Arditi' (members of shock-troops during the war) drove about Milan in a motor-lorry, armed and wearing Militia uniform. The Commander-General of the Police, De Bono, telegraphed to the Prefect of Milan:

'All persons appearing in Milan in uniform are to be arrested. If the notorious Volpi<sup>1</sup> makes any difficulties, arrest him and put a stop to this, once and for all.'

In the following June this 'squad' was still active. On June 13, 1924, De Bono again telegraphed to the Prefect of Milan:

'It must be definitely understood that the "Arditi" are once and for all to be dissolved - and dissolved in real earnest.'

Till then the orders had obviously neither been given nor taken in real earnest. The head-quarters of this 'squad' were searched on June 14, and 20 rifles, a quantity of ammunition, 13 bombs and a machine gun were discovered.<sup>2</sup>

In an article, published in the review *Gerarchia* (October, 1925), reproduced in the *Sunday Times* of October 25, 1925, Mussolini wrote:

'It is opportune to state that Fascist armed squads did serve their purpose at the proper moment. They must now cease functioning. They should form a regular part of the Militia, which is the Party's only military formation, as well as the aristocracy of Fascism. All other pseudo-military organizations are merely artificial or harmful to Fascism.'

<sup>1</sup> Volpi was one of those who took part in the murder of Matteotti on June 10, 1924.

<sup>2</sup> This appears in the documents produced by De Bono on July 8, 1924, in the preliminary inquiry into the Matteotti case.

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Consequently, on October 16, 1925, the Commissioner of the Fascist Party in Piedmont issued a circular to all the branches of the Party saying:

'On no pretext whatever shall squads be permitted to exist in your district. Should any of them exist, you will take measures to dissolve them immediately and enroll their members in the Militia, which is the only organization worthy to continue the traditions of squadristo.' (*Corriere della Sera*, October 17, 1925.)

And on October 22, 1925, the Press-bureau of the Fascist Party issued the following statement to the newspapers:

'The Secretary General of the Party has instructed Fascist Head-quarters at Siena that the squads known as "the Savages" of Colle Val d'Elsa are to be disbanded.'

But the Fascist *Corriere Latino* of January 13, 1926, writes as follows about the 'swaggering squadristi':

'The village Anticoli has been forcibly entered at night and terrorized by a gang of black-shirted hoodlums, who have allowed themselves the Sunday sport of a punitive expedition, going the length of pricking with their daggers the unarmed and peaceful customers of a local wineshop. This is an instance of the excesses to which the degeneration of "squadristism" can lead. We know perfectly well who the culprits are. Some of them, unhappily, come from our old ranks. But most of them are new-comers on the scene: they are outcasts from family life, unfit for honest work, beggars exploiting the patient generosity of others, hanging about in swarms around the public-houses.'

On February 1, 1926, Mussolini again said:

'All the squadristi must join the Militia. . . . The squadristi are to be employed by public and private bodies on duties requiring energy, fairness, lack of prejudice and the spirit of sacrifice.'<sup>1</sup>

In plain words, the 'squads' never have been dissolved and never will be: only their members are to be enrolled in the Militia.

<sup>1</sup> Official communication of the Stefani Agency, published in the papers of February 2, 1926.

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The 'squads' continue to function for the tasks which require 'energy' and 'lack of prejudice,' the words fairness and the spirit of sacrifice being added for the sake of appearances.

Let us give examples of the 'fairness' and 'spirit of sacrifice' displayed by the 'squads' after this solemn admonition from the 'Duce.'

In *La Stampa* of May 8, 1926, a statement appeared to the effect that the Prefect of Turin had dissolved the 'Mutual Benefit Society' among the 'squadristi,' because 'on many occasions public order has been disturbed by its riotous and lawless demonstrations.' The members of the Society attempted to wreck the office of the Fascio in Turin, but were driven off by the police (*La Stampa* of May 9, 1926).

The *Osservatore Romano*, the official organ of the Vatican, which is most favourably disposed to Fascism, wrote in its issue of June 12, 1926:

'Following on the very serious incidents provoked at Leghorn by the squad known as the Forlorn Hope during the Eucharistic procession, the Bishop has forbidden all processions. A large group of evilly-disposed and violent persons, stationed at intervals along the route of the procession, in which the Bishop himself took part, broke into the ranks, profaned the religious vessels and assaulted our unarmed, peaceful young men, who are not members of any party. The band of the Institute of Saint Francis of Sales, marching at the end of the procession, was forced to play profane music formally forbidden by the Canon law. These are the facts. We should add that these bullies—who were not, we must admit, enrolled Fascists—were allowed to proceed with their ruffianism without interference from the police, whose head-quarters were in the vicinity: and so far we have not heard that any arrests have been made.'

Next day the *Osservatore*, amending its previous statement, disclosed that 'the aggressors were genuine Fascists, amongst whom even certain leaders were noticed.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Mail*, November 2, 1926: 'Religion under the Red tyranny was persecuted, and attempts were being made to force atheism on all the children in the schools. Nothing of that kind is permitted under Signor Mussolini.'

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The Roman Fascist paper, the *Tribuna*, in its issue of May 8, 1926, deplores the continued existence and activity of the 'squads':

'These squadristi not knowing whom to attack, commit a series of small but irritating outrages, which are often a grotesque imitation of the sacred violence which delivered Italy from the scourge of Bolshevism and Democracy. This squadristo of the 1926 type is moreover ridiculous in its outward appearance, long hair floating in the wind, gold and silver braid rivalling that of a commissionnaire or a general of the Republic of St. Domingo, glittering baldrics, yard-long pistols, and, worst of all, collections of medals of all kinds.'

Mussolini's circular of January 5, 1927, to the Prefects of the Provinces, reveals that the squads had still not been disbanded:

'Now that the State is armed with full powers of prevention and repression, certain "remnants" must disappear. I mean the "squadristo" which in 1927 is simply anachronistic and sporadic, but which nevertheless makes a tumultuous appearance in moments of public excitement. Lawlessness ("illegalismo") must cease. Not only the lawlessness which vents itself in petty acts of local bullying, which help to harm the régime, and sow futile and dangerous rancour, but also that lawlessness which breaks loose after some serious occurrence. It must be borne in mind that whatever happens, even to me, the time for reprisals, looting and acts of violence' is over.'

How is this? Have we not been persistently answered by Fascist propaganda that 'reprisals, looting and acts of violence' came to an end soon after the March on Rome? Has not the Duce in person broadcasted at intervals ever since that event that he has disbanded the squads? <sup>1</sup>

To sum up, the Fascists not only use against their opponents all the legal means of repression at the disposal of a modern state; they also employ a far more formidable weapon, illegal

<sup>1</sup> Mussolini, *La nuova politica dell'Italia*, pp. 22, 142, 183; Villari, *The Awakening of Italy*, p. 225.

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violence. The two activities of the Militia, which might seem logically and morally incompatible – legal maintenance of public peace and illegal oppression of opponents – are in practice not contradictory but complementary. It is precisely the Militia's legal function that renders possible and cloaks its illegal activities.

### § 7: *The Rasses*

In many towns there is a 'Ras' (in Abyssinia the Ras is the chieftain of a band and holder of a fief). The Fascist Ras is either the secretary of the local branch of the Party or an officer of the Militia. He is lord over the Police, the Carabineers and the Mayors. He is above the law, and when he thinks fit, he brushes aside the regular official hierarchy.

When a Ras enjoys some measure of credit among his subordinates, he will even revolt against the central authorities of the Party, and carry on as he pleases, precisely as the Abyssinian Rasses flout the authority of their Emperor.

To realize fully what a Ras is, let us make the acquaintance of some of them.

The Ras of Vecchiano, Ponte a Serchio and the neighbouring communes in the province of Pisa, is a certain Alessandro Carosi, an ex-lieutenant. His police record contains the following entries:

'Charged with eloping with a girl under age with her consent: case dismissed as he came to terms with the girl's parents. Charged with unlawful wounding; charged with threats and breaking into private premises; cases stopped through amnesty; condemned to two months' imprisonment for wounding.'

But these were matters of no importance. He habitually introduced himself as 'Lieutenant Carosi, seven murders.' He made regular exhibitions of ferocity; for example, when he went into a café he would spear with his dagger the cakes he wanted. The peaceable customers in the café were often compelled to rise when 'Ras Carosi' came in, and one of his amusements was to terrify them by firing revolver shots into the ground at their feet.



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On October 28, 1923, in the garden of the 'Trionfo' Club, at Filettole, he decided to give a public imitation of William Tell. A peasant aged 28, Pietro Pardi, was compelled to serve as target; his hat was to be shot through. The bullet struck him full in the face and killed him instantly. In September, 1925, Carosi had to answer another charge at the assizes at Genoa, and referring then to this earlier affair, he said that 'it was a misfortune which had been exploited by his enemies who thus displayed their lack of generosity' (*La Stampa*, Sept. 18, 1925).

On the night of April 8, 1924, Carosi set out with a group of Fascists to avenge the death of one of their comrades, who had been killed by a Communist. He went to the house of Ugo Rindi, a compositor, a harmless being who took no part whatever in politics but was wrongly suspected by the police of complicity in the murder. Carosi forced him to get out of bed, representing himself as a police officer. He led him out of the house, killed him with a thrust of his dagger, and left the corpse lying in the street.

One of the Rasses of the city and province of Florence, Augusto Tamburini, was, before the war, an insignificant individual, who touted at lawyers' offices for orders for visiting cards printed by himself at two lire the hundred; one would give him the two lire and not expect to get the cards. A sentence of five days' imprisonment for petty swindling stood to his record. After 1920, Tamburini became a real pillar of society in Tuscany. In 1923 he was appointed Consul of the Militia. A libel case tried in Florence in February and March, 1925, threw a singular light upon the moral character of this Fascist dignitary. The Marquis Luigi Ridolfi, a leading Fascist, gave evidence that, as the result of an inquiry, he had drawn up a report from which the following is an extract:

'Almost every day at the head-quarters of the Fascio, men were summoned to give information, and beaten. Often those who went thither beheld the unedifying spectacle of bloodstains along the stairs and on the walls. In many cases such beatings were not political reprisals but personal vendettas. On one occasion a

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man who had come to the Fascist head-quarters to enroll as a Fascist was beaten on the pretext that he had previously been a Socialist. This beating was witnessed from the windows of a neighbouring boarding-house by a number of foreigners, who called out for it to stop. The Fascists resented this interference, threw stones at the windows, and even tried to invade the boarding-house. A Fascist named Merciai Renzo was beaten by Tamburini and 20 others for having boxed the ears of Tamburini's chauffeur.<sup>1</sup>

Another witness, Dr. Pieraccini, deposed that he had twice visited a tramwayman named Parentini:

'Parentini had been beaten by the Fascists for being a Socialist. The unfortunate man had weals all over his back, resulting from blows inflicted either with a stick or with a whip. He had been beaten as one would not beat a beast. He told me that after stripping him the Fascists held him face downwards and beat him with rods. It was, as he said, like a scene from the Inquisition. At a certain point, one of the most ferocious assailants asked him, "Do you recognize me? I am Tamburini." I asked Parentini if he knew Tamburini, and he answered that he did, as he had happened to see photographs of him. Parentini opposed the doctors giving their medical report.'<sup>2</sup>

While a witness was giving evidence about this and other beatings, Tamburini protested:

'If a Consul was to be sentenced for giving a beating or two, there would not be a Consul left in Italy.'<sup>3</sup>

A witness named Carcassi deposed:

'I was bludgeoned by the Fascists one evening in front of the Alambra, why, I don't know, as I never mixed myself up in politics.

TAMBURINI (*starting up*): Here it is Fascism which is being put on trial!

<sup>1</sup> Statement during sitting of February 11, 1925.

<sup>2</sup> Hearing of February 13, 1925.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 1925.

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THE PUBLIC PROSECUTOR: It was yourselves who demanded the trial.

WITNESS: That evening I was with my brother-in-law Armando Mazzoni. He was seized by the Fascists, dragged into a taxi, and taken to the Fascist head-quarters. The Consul Tamburini was there. He expressed regret at what had happened.'

Mazzoni's evidence illustrated the consequences of Tamburini's regrets.

'I was in Piazza Beccaria with my brother-in-law one evening in July, 1923, and was stopped by a band of Fascists. They asked me if I was Mazzoni, and began to beat me. I ran away, but was pursued, caught, and dragged to the Fascio. Here they told me that they had brought me there to save me from further bludgeonings, and that I could go away freely. I asked for a word with Consul Tamburini. He assured me that nothing else would happen to me. But as I was leaving, some Fascists sprang on me and beat me again.'<sup>1</sup>

It was proved that a certain Professor Murray, in bringing a suit against his wife for adultery, came to an arrangement with certain Fascists that they were to spy upon her movements, while another of their number played the rôle of the lady's lover and was taken *en flagrant délit*.

'Murray'—runs the Marquis Ridolfi's report—'was accused by his wife of bribing the witnesses. This bribery was effected by means of jewellery that Murray sent to the witnesses through his servant or his chauffeur. Tamburini received from Murray a diamond ring worth 7 or 8,000 lire. In all probability he provided the men to watch the lady, and to stage the discovery of the adultery. At the trial, Tamburini and numerous other Fascists were among the general public, and openly took the part of Murray.'

In spite of these facts, Tamburini remained in Florence a pillar of the new Italy up till the autumn of 1925.

After the bloodshed of October 3-4, 1925, for which he bore the

<sup>1</sup> *La Nazione*, February 13, 1925.

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prime responsibility, he was sent from Florence to Tripolitania. But in September, 1926, he reappeared at Geneva, in the suite of the Italian delegation to the League of Nations.

Another Ras whose name deserves to go down to posterity is Antonio Arrivabene, Consul of the Militia, Secretary of the Fascist Party at Mantua and Member of Parliament. The 'Permanent Court of Honour' in Florence ascertained the following facts about him on March 23, 1924:

'Signor Arrivabene was aware that a fatherless young girl had been betrothed a few days previously to Signor Attilio Ferrari. Notwithstanding this, on December 19, 1923, he went personally to ask for her hand. The girl's mother and she herself having confirmed the news of her betrothal, he answered that he was quite aware of this, but that he attached no importance to this sort of thing. He refused to admit any right of precedence, he only recognized that of force. He insisted upon his request. He did not care at all whether the girl had freely consented to marry Signor Ferrari, or not, being quite sure that when she knew *him* better she would call him back of her own accord. He therefore announced that he would do everything in his power to become acquainted with her and would begin by writing to the young lady every day. On the remonstrance of the mother, he answered: "If my letters are sent back unread, I will find other means of becoming acquainted with your daughter at any cost." In order to cut this painful and absurd discussion short, the mother said: "Do what you like." Signor Arrivabene, on leaving, exclaimed that he knew perfectly well that after this conversation he would no longer be able to set foot in the house.

'The girl's aunt intervened and tried to persuade Signor Arrivabene not to molest the girl and the family; but he declared that he would keep to his decision and would gain his end.

'On December 23, 1923, having met the girl's fiancé in the street, he asked whether the latter were aware of the visit he had made her and what he thought of it all. Signor Ferrari answered: "Do what you like, as long as you leave my fiancée and myself in peace."

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“No,” replied Signor Arrivabene, “my intention is precisely to molest you. You get there before me, but nevertheless I do not admit that you have any prior claim and I shall do everything I can to get in your way.”

Moreover he informed Signor Ferrari that he would return next day and challenge him more energetically if, within 24 hours, he had not received Signor Ferrari's seconds.

Next day, Signor Ferrari sent his seconds, and on the same day his fiancée returned two letters which Signor Arrivabene had written her.

The seconds met and compiled three records quite wrongly showing Signor Ferrari in an unfavourable light. The first two of these records were not communicated to Signor Ferrari. A typewritten, unsigned copy of the third was the only one sent him, from which it appeared that the dispute was settled in favour of Signor Arrivabene. It was only on March 7, 1924, that Signor Ferrari succeeded in obtaining authentic records in which both parties were declared to have behaved honourably. Signor Ferrari found in them statements against his honour and even against the reputation of his fiancée.

In its judgment the Court deplored the behaviour of Signor Arrivabene and blamed the seconds for the manner in which they put an end to the dispute. Is it unnecessary to add that, in spite of this verdict, Signor Arrivabene is still a prominent personage in the Fascist Party.

But even Signor Arrivabene is not the very finest specimen of his kind. A still more perfect one is Commendatore Italo Bresciani, Ras of Verona, who was once secretary of the Party for that province and a general of the Militia. The *Corriere della Sera* of November 27, 1925, published the following verdict pronounced by a Committee of four high Fascist dignitaries:

‘The Committee, before examining the various questions, remarks that all the activities bound up with the Fascist revolution cannot be judged by moral standards, having been sanctioned by the success of the revolution which culminated in the March on Rome.

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'Having made this reservation the Committee passes on to examine the accusations.

'(1) Signor Bresciani is accused of having had very intimate and not disinterested relations with a woman of ill fame, a brothel keeper. The Committee had found no proof of not disinterested relations between Signor Bresciani and the keeper of the brothel, which he is known to have frequented, and is unanimous in judging that general and insufficient evidence cannot be regarded as proof, especially in view of the poverty of Bresciani, acknowledged by all the witnesses. Signor Bresciani can only be reproached for not having behaved in a more dignified manner, more suited to his position in the Party and to his rank in the Militia.

'(2) Comm. Bresciani is accused of having, when a general of the Militia and a high official of the Government, gone to Rome with and at the expense of another brothel keeper, in order to obtain for the latter the concession of a gaming house; he is even said to have entertained to dinner in the company and at the expense of the above person, well-known members of the Fascist Party, who, of course, did not know in what indecorous company they were. The Committee has ascertained that at that moment Signor Bresciani was neither a general nor a high official. There is no proof of his travelling at the expense of the above person. He travelled in the company of other Fascists of Verona with the object of obtaining from the Government a concession which then was considered legitimate. The Committee finds no cause for censure, all the more so as the above brothel keeper was not acting in his own interest but in that of a financial group of the district.

'(3) Signor Bresciani is accused of having, when a high official of the Government, broken into a private office with a squad and seized private documents relating to a pending trial. This act being a political one and included in the complex phenomenon of the Fascist revolution, the Committee for the reasons given in the prefatory remarks, abstains from pronouncing any judgment.

'(4) Signor Bresciani is accused of having retained in the

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Militia against all pressure, in charge of a most delicate mission, a person who, on account of previous dishonest behaviour, was totally untrustworthy. The Committee has ascertained that two inquiries were held on the above person, one by a consul of the Militia and one by Signor Bresciani himself; both were submitted to the general staff of the Militia, who decided that the person in question should be retained in his post. Therefore no imputation can be made against Signor Bresciani.

'The Committee has extended its investigations to other minor charges, which could not be substantiated.

'In any case the great merits of Signor Bresciani, as founder of Fascism in Verona and one of the heads of the Fascist revolution, must be recognized.

'Finally the Committee cannot but recognize that Signor Agostino Fiorio, editor of the newspaper *Audacia* (in which the accusations were raised) acted in good faith and with the utmost honesty and correctness.'

The document is characteristic, as proving not only what a Ras is capable of, but also what was the moral sense of the four members composing the Committee who, in face of accusations of such a nature, absolved both accused and accuser.

Signor Villari, writing in the spring of 1924, gave an assurance that the Rasses had ceased to exist:

'The Fascist high commissioners in the provinces who tended to override the Prefects and nullify their authority have been abolished. The *fiduciari*, or trustees of the party, in the various towns and districts, who at one moment seemed inclined to take the place of the high commissioners, have been reduced to order.'<sup>1</sup>

Signor Villari went too far. Mussolini himself in a speech on November 11, 1924, did not venture as much as to say that 'Rassism' had ceased, but merely stated that it was 'in evident decline.'<sup>2</sup> A year later, in December, 1925, and January, 1926, a

<sup>1</sup> *Awakening of Italy*, p. 265.

<sup>2</sup> *La nuova politica dell'Italia*, p. 406.

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Senator, Signor Ciccotti,<sup>1</sup> and a Fascist Deputy, Signor Amicucci,<sup>2</sup> deplored the activity of the local *Rasses*, declaring the necessity of checking their arrogance.

In the spring of 1926 Signor Villari no longer dared to assert, as he had done two years previously, that 'Rassism' had ceased:

'During the early days of the Fascist Government the local party leaders were apt to get out of hand and to exercise undue influence on the prefects and other properly constituted authorities. This, of course, is nothing new in Italian political life, for there have always been unofficial personages who dominated the situation in the provinces. But Signor Mussolini *had done his best* to eliminate such irregularities.'<sup>3</sup>

In January, 1927, the all-powerful Duce had still not succeeded in 'eliminating such irregularities.' In a circular of January 5 he had to remind his followers once more:

'The Prefect is the highest authority of the State in the province. Citizens, above all those who have the great privilege and the honour of serving in the Fascist ranks, owe respect and obedience to the highest political representative of the Fascist

<sup>1</sup> Signor Ciccotti's speech in the Senate on December 15, 1925: 'In Italy one may bow to a single central Dictator, but 9,382 miniature dictators, one in each town, are too much to be borne, especially since so many undesirable elements have filtered through into the Fascist ranks. The citizen is constantly trodden under foot by men with neither right nor ability to rule. This cannot be endured.' Signor Ciccotti's error consists in his believing that it is possible to have a 'single central Dictator' without 9,382 miniature Dictators.

<sup>2</sup> *La Nazione*, January 26, 1926: 'In the provinces it is indispensable that the Prefects alone should command. It is inconceivable that provincial party secretaries should take the place of the Prefects, or what is worse, that they should pursue a policy of rivalry with the Prefects.'

<sup>3</sup> *The Fascist Experiment*, p. 59. The propagandist is right in asserting that even before Fascism there were in the provinces 'unofficial personages who dominated the situation.' But he forgets to mention that: (1) Before Fascism many provinces, especially in Northern and Central Italy, were free from this disease, whereas under Fascism it has been disseminated over the whole country, (2) Before Fascism it was possible to criticize these 'unofficial personages' without being murdered.



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régime, and must collaborate as subordinates with him to facilitate his task. . . . Let it be quite clear to all that authority cannot be split up between two persons. It must be one and indivisible.' .

One of the journalists of the régime commented on the Duce's declaration as follows:

'Mussolini's circular is addressed to the prefects, but it is meant in the first place for the Fascists. This document . . . it is clear was not born by chance. It corresponds to a necessity recognized as immediate. It is no mystery that until yesterday the life of the Nation laboured under a state of confusion which gave rise to many evils and many uncertainties. The man who to-day is consecrated as the "highest authority in the Province" was too often resisted as an enemy, and not seldom overthrown by insidious intrigues. The authority now justly declared "one and indivisible" was degraded and split up in a way now sharply condemned. The truth did not always reach the ears of the Duce, and the ambiguity of certain situations and episodes caused laxity and inertia. To-day all this is dead and buried. When the words we have quoted have become iron law, morally and materially, then violence and lawlessness will disappear, public peace will no longer be disturbed, public finances will be rigidly administered, and it will be possible to banish from the ranks of the Party all those whom Mussolini defines as "jobbers, profiteers, self-advertisers, braggarts, incurable politicians, swelled-heads, gossip-mongers, sowers of discord, and all those who live without a recognized occupation." To the true Fascists falls the task of putting this document into practice. The application of this ruling may at last bring about internal order and social peace.'<sup>1</sup>

Four years after the restoration of 'internal order and social peace' this order and peace have still to be born. Four years after Mussolini had given the Italian nation the 'Strong State,' the Prefects, the 'highest authority of the State in the Provinces,' are given permission to check the lawlessness of the Rasses.

*Rassegna Italiana*, January, 1927.

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### § 8: *Molinella*

The characteristic methods of the Fascist Dictatorship are most clearly exemplified in the rural centres of the valley of the Po, where, as in all districts formerly most deeply penetrated by Socialism, the strongest efforts were needed on the part of the Fascists in order to subdue the workers.

The case of Molinella will give a typical illustration of the life to which the people are now condemned in Italy.<sup>1</sup>

Molinella is a commune of 15,000 inhabitants, 20 miles from Bologna. The population consists chiefly of agricultural labourers. Up to the time of the Fascist reaction, Molinella was regarded in Italy as one of the most impregnable strongholds of Socialism, the local Socialist organizations comprising a total of 4,700 members.

By thirty years of iron discipline, the workers of Molinella had created a co-operative system which aroused the admiration of all those who went to see it. A wide area of land was cultivated by an agricultural co-operative organization, to which was added a co-operative building society, and a central co-operative store, with seven branches, which did all the wholesale and retail buying and selling for the needs of its members. The co-operative organization had a reserve of a million lire in the bank, in addition to its buildings, machinery and stock.

Molinella was one of the last Communes conquered by the Fascists.

The fight against the Socialist workers was directed by the Secretary of the Fascio, Augusto Regazzi. Before attaining glory as a Fascist leader, Regazzi had been condemned to a fortnight's imprisonment for striking and wounding, and had been prosecuted (but acquitted for lack of evidence) for alleged fraud in connection with military supplies.

The offensive began in September, 1922. The local landowners

<sup>1</sup> A list of the acts of violence committed by the Fascists from November, 1922, to October, 1923, in Molinella is to be found in Matteotti's book, *Un anno di dominazione fascista* (English abridged edition: '*The Fascists exposed*,' pp. 103-9). Here we only give the most serious incidents.

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organized themselves in a Fascio, decreed a general boycott of all the workers belonging to Socialist associations and cancelled all outstanding contracts with them. Workers were brought in from the neighbouring regions of Ferrara, Bologna and Venetia, in order to reduce the local workers to destitution; the newcomers were paid more than the local rates of wages. So far, nothing had been done which went beyond the rights of owners engaged in an economic struggle with the workers.

On September 12, 1922, the Fascists began pillaging and burning. On the day after the 'March on Rome' (October, 1922), the premises of all the organizations, including the people's library, were confiscated by the Fascists, who took over the buildings and installed their offices and their members in them. The leaders of the Socialist organizations had to fly in order to escape death. The landowners issued a notice announcing that they would give out no work except to workers belonging to the Fascist Unions.

In March, 1923, two English journalists, Mr. Aubrey Waterfield and his wife, having heard vague stories about the Molinella co-operatives, and about struggles between Fascists and Socialists, in which the whole population of Molinella was reported to have passed over to the 'National' flag, were prompted by curiosity to investigate the happenings on the spot. Only Britons could have conceived and carried out such an enterprise.

This is the account of their visit as given by Mrs. Waterfield in the *Observer* of March 18, 1923:

'I had heard about Molinella, a village some eighteen miles from Bologna, practically run by Co-operation: Nationalists and others had told me about Massarenti, "the red baron" and the Socialist tyrant of Molinella, and I had received a vivid impression of a remarkable man. I had read about the feud between Fascists and Massarenti's followers in the *Resto del Carlino*, and my one desire was to go myself to the spot. I told Dott. Cacciari of my intention, the head of the Fascist Syndicate of Agriculture, who had given me a most interesting account of this new organization. My husband had put aside his painting to study

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'Sindicalismo Nazionale' and was determined to accompany me.

"There lies the village of suffering," said the guard of the train, pointing to a long line of houses, a crooked campanile, and a mediæval tower set in a vast expanse of corn and rice fields.

"But surely there is peace now that the Fascists are in charge?"

"Every other night there is trouble: *è un brutto posto*," he answered gloomily.

I entered into conversation with some country-woman, who, with the usual courtesy of the Italian people, welcomed my suggesting that we should rest in their house. The Fascists told us later that we had spoken with the families of the leading Socialists of the neighbourhood. To us they only seemed a crowd of respectable, hard-working country-folk.

"I have heard that Massarenti, the red baron, is a thief, that he ground you down, and now does not care to show his face among you. Is that true?" I asked.

"No," they all shouted, "It is a lie. *Gli vogliamo bene*."

"Let *her* speak," said some of the women, pushing one of their companions forward.

Freeing her head from her heavy black shawl, which fell like a hood, she stretched out her hand towards me and said: "Massarenti was our *Parrocco* (our Parish priest), our benefactor. If ever you see him tell him this from us: tell him that the Proletariat will never abandon him, never; tell him that we will sooner live by eating the grass on the roadside than enter the Fascist Syndicate."

No one spoke for a time and the silence was only broken by the sobs of some of the women. Then one old woman, bent and haggard, tottered towards me: "It is slavery here now. Our men are beaten with great sticks, and women too, and we must look on."

There was a violent knocking at the door. "The Fascists," whispered the women, but nobody stirred. I insisted upon opening the door which was just at my back, and as I did so I was confronted with the muzzle of a revolver. Hastily removing my nose I tried to explain matters to the young Fascist, but he

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refused to listen, and pushing forward, he swept the room with his weapon: "Hands up, or I fire!"

'No one moved, and we continued to drink our hot milk. Faced by a crowd of peasant women who gazed at him stolidly, he was evidently disconcerted. Fascists with stout sticks and Carabineers with rifles protected him in the background. To our protest that a man should threaten to shoot women, a Fascist replied: "He did right."

'A courteous young lieutenant, enveloped in an immense cloak, strode in. When he had examined our papers duly signed by the Italian police, he strode out again murmuring: "I don't understand."

'Presently a representative of the local government authority arrived, and on the grounds that our papers were not in order we were marched off to the barracks of the Carabineers under the escort of the Fascist who had threatened us, and who mounted guard over us for some time in company with the Carabineers.

'It was unfortunate that owing to the fact of the authorities taking some seven hours to discover that our papers were in perfect order, we were prevented from hearing the other side of the question. So far as our own experience went, "persuasion by violence" dominated the situation at Molinella. Instead of interviewing Fascist workers, we sat in a small bedroom, marked *disciplina*, in company with two Carabineers who were also under arrest.

'At about six we were taken in separately and subjected to severe cross-examination by the Chief Commissioner of Police, who had come from Bologna for the purpose. He acknowledged that our papers were in perfect order, and yet we were not allowed to catch the last train back to Bologna, the reason given being that he was anxious to make our acquaintance! Neapolitan politeness is certainly a special brand. Upon my suggesting that his personal acquaintance with us had evidently not removed the impression that we were dangerous revolutionaries, he affected horror at such a suggestion. No, we were not accused of anything, and he had quite realized we were not Soviet envoys with full purses.

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“Yet we are detained?”

“But no, you are not detained.”

‘The word “detained” seemed to grate upon his sensitive ears. We were not detained, and yet we were not free.

‘At the eleventh hour Dott. Cacciari arrived from Bologna, having just heard of our plight, in order to offer us the use of his car, but the Chief Commissioner wished “to have the pleasure of taking us back in the special motor which the Prefect was now sending us.” We shall never forget the kindness of Dott. Cacciari and also the feeling of confidence and relief which his r.ere presence brought us.’

In the *Manchester Guardian* of April 5, 1923, Mr. Waterfield gave further and still more striking details:

‘We heard how over 3,000 workers had signed a petition to Mussolini for the return of the occupied institutions and for the liberty of organization; the signatures had been obtained in the dead of night, and the messenger was only able to get through to Rome by the skin of his teeth. Bentivoglio, the leader held responsible for the petition, was soon afterwards set upon by an armed band of Fascists in the streets of Bologna, as he was going to his work, and now lies in hospital with a fractured skull. . . .

‘Now that the important moment of the year has arrived for the cultivation of the rice fields, a desperate attempt is being made to drive the peasants into the Fascist organization, either through starvation or by fear of the *manganello*, the Fascist club, often heavily weighted with lead. In addition to arbitrary arrests made only a few days ago by Carabineers, and also by the very Fascists who had tried to murder Bentivoglio, a further campaign of violence was begun to prevent the peasants from cultivating the land. On March 22, two punitive armed expeditions visited two farms where the labourers, who still clung to Co-operation, were at work; they flogged men and women, even a girl of fifteen. Meanwhile the official representative of the Government on the spot continued the forced sales of the private property of the Co-operatives without any sanction from the members. On March 25, the oxen belonging to the ‘Co-operativa Agricola’ were

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sold at forced sale prices to local shopkeepers and landed proprietors, to re-sell at enormous profit. The case of the Spada property gives an idea of what is going on. It has been seized from the Co-operative who rented it, and leased to the Fascist leaders who sublet it to the starving workers at a fantastic figure. "It is slavery now at Molinella," the women all told us. The authorities have made it almost impossible for the poor people to get medicine or medical attendance, and have arbitrarily closed the charitable institutions which take the place of our Poor Law relief.'

On August 9, 1923, Regazzi led a punitive expedition against the family of a farmer named Pietro Marani. In court, Pietro's father described the affair as follows:

'That afternoon I was with my family: my wife and three sons and two daughters-in-law. We were working in the fields. About 4.30, I suddenly heard a motor-car; it stopped at Manardi's house and Fascists got out of it. Expecting one of the usual punitive expeditions, we all hurried indoors. Soon after, forty Fascists arrived; they must have been armed with guns or revolvers, for they fired several times. One of them told us to come out, because he meant to knock us down. We did not go out, but told them that they had no right to call us out as we were in our own house. They stopped talking and began trying to tear down a door and a window.

'My sons were armed with their tools, but we were helpless in face of the violence of the aggressors. We fled to the upper story.

'The Fascists then climbed on to the roof, beat it in, smashed the ceiling and began throwing tiles into the room. We were frightened to death and hid under the beds. In the room in which the crime was committed my wife and I were under the big bed with our son Augusto; Pietro had hidden under a smaller bed.

'While stones and plaster continued to rain through the roof, the entrance door gave way, leaving the assailants a free run of the house. In a few moments four men came into the room in which

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we were hidden. At first I only recognized Domenico Bussi, who overturned the little bed under which my Pietro was hiding. At that moment another Fascist, whom I recognized as Regazzi, fired the shot which killed my son, almost instantly. The noise of a motor-car going off post-haste, indicated to us that the assailants were making off.'

In court, the dead man's widow gave the following account:

'I heard the Fascists' threats. In my fright I took my nineteen-months-old baby in my arms and sought refuge in the upper story in the room of my mother-in-law; both of us were terrified. When we heard them beginning to break up the roof, we took refuge under the beds, clasping the children against our breasts; they were in danger of being stifled by the dust of the plaster. I heard two shots, and then a cry from my mother-in-law: "They have killed Pietro." I forced myself to keep up my courage; I got on my bicycle and went for the doctor. But on the way, one of the Fascists came up to me and threatened to hit me with his bludgeon, shouting that he would send me into the next world to keep company with my husband; so another woman had to go for the doctor.'

On August 12, 1923, the Fascists went round the fields and farmhouses striking at everybody with their clubs—men and women, youths, old men, women and children, all members of four families. On the following day a peasant woman, Albertina Galliani, was taken to the Fascist head-quarters; there she was threatened with death, whilst her sick husband was dragged from his bed in her presence, and bound hand and foot to a chair.

The Fascio issued a proclamation, on August 12, granting to 'the Trade Unionists still belonging to the Socialist League a twelve hours' truce to enable them to submit: after that'—it was declared—'the struggle will be resumed without mercy.'

On April 6, 1924, during the elections, a worker named Angelo Gaiani, 60 years of age, who declared he would vote for the Socialists, was attacked as he came out of the polling booth,



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and killed instantly with a bludgeon. The murderer, Oreste Ciuti, was a member of the Fascist Militia (*Voce Repubblicana*, October 14, 1924).

On August 14, 1924, Augusto Matarelli, formerly a butcher in the co-operative store, was flogged in bed, where he had lain since an earlier beating. A few hours later he was found hanging in his stable. Dr. Tonini, in charge of the post-mortem, having expressed a suspicion that this might be a cleverly camouflaged murder, was flogged in his turn and had to flee the country.

On September 12, 1924, a young man, Angelo Frazzoni, was mortally wounded by gunshot. No one ventured to go out into the dark to help him. His father tried to go out, but was followed by a Fascist and turned back. His mother cried out: 'You traitors, you have killed my son and you want to kill my husband too.' The Fascist answered, 'Shut the door,' and remained on guard to prevent any neighbours from going for the doctor.

Under this system of oppression the population of Molinella took up an attitude of passive resistance, which it maintained with wonderful solidarity, as long as possible.

The labourers remained loyal to their Unions and refused all work offered by the Fascist labour exchange. It meant destitution. In order to live, or at least to eat, the strikers collected edible snails in the hedges and valleys, or they went into the fields, already harvested, in order to glean a few ears of wheat or maize. Gleaning is the poor folks' customary right. The peasant carefully collects even the most miserable fruits of the earth. But this gleaning was considered a revolt. By collecting a sack of rice or wheat, one can live without having to eat the bread of the Fascist Unions. The gleaning women were chased away, pursued, their ears boxed, their faces smeared with black. Five women who had been struck, complained on September 26, 1924, to a non-commissioned officer of the police. They were threatened with arrest. A hundred women then gathered in front of the police station, declaring that they also had committed the same offence and should therefore be arrested as well.

One day in September, 1924, the poor people arranged a secret meeting amidst the reeds of a marsh. Two hundred and fifty

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day-labourers working within reach were told of the projected meeting at the last moment. The women had been away since the morning, their gleaners' sacks on their backs, and they had covered thirty kilometres on foot. The organizers had arrived on bicycles during the night, and had hidden in the reeds until 2 p.m.

The meeting discussed and passed a resolution in which the workers demanded the restoration of political liberty. They protested against the acts of violence which had been committed and once more affirmed their loyalty to their Unions

This meeting, and the fact that an interminable list of signatures had been published in honour of Matteotti's memory, made the Fascists fear that the Socialist organizations were coming to life again. They appointed two agents with the purpose of crushing every sign of opposition. The agents forced the landowners to dismiss the last of their non-Fascist workers; they stopped all works which would allow non-Fascist workers to gain even the barest livelihood; they increased the measure of beatings and pillagings. Every reported outrage in the papers, every word of criticism, every protest, brought forth fresh episodes of violence.

During the night of October 31, 1925, a Fascist squad, after shouting songs until 2 o'clock in the morning under the windows of Erminio Minghetti, an ex-service man, set fire to his house.

'It was nearly 3 a.m. when Minghetti's little daughter, nine years old, rushed into her parents' room, crying "Mother, the house is on fire!" Minghetti jumped out of bed, ran to his little girl's room and saw the roof already in flames. He rushed to the stairs to try to get out, but the staircase was on fire. He ran back to his children, the little nine-year-old girl, and a baby of six months, and to his wife and his old mother, whose leg was broken. All were suffocated by the smoke. It was impossible to escape by the stairs: the tumble-down old house was in flames. Minghetti jumped out of the window in his shirt, found a ladder, ran up it, and came down with his children on his back, then his wife, then his old mother. Neighbours came and gave shelter to the wife and children and the old woman, all shivering in the cold.

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The neighbours brought Minghetti clothes of some sort to put on. He sat there on a chair and watched the destruction of his home, his only possession, while women put compresses on his legs, which were terribly injured' (*Voce Repubblicana*, November 5, 1925).

In three days alone in November, 1924, 142 persons were imprisoned, many of them women (*Corriere della Sera*, November 28, 1924). The town was placed under the supervision of an imposing armed force.

After Miss Gibson's attempt on Mussolini's life (April 7, 1926) there ensued days of still more acute oppression. Five working men were kidnapped by Regazzi and other leaders and dragged to the former head-quarters of the Socialist Co-operatives, now commandeered by the Fascio. They were first questioned by a captain of the Carabinieri and the police commissioner. These authorities then having left the room, a squad of Fascisti rushed in and bludgeoned the captives. By the time the Carabinieri put in an appearance, one of the workmen, Bagni by name, was lying unconscious on the floor, bathed in blood. This was the seventh beating he had received. Among Socialists and Trade Union organizers in Molinella it has become quite a topic of conversation to recount how many beatings each has received and to discuss whose record is the longest. In the night of April 7, police and Fascists searched a number of houses and arrested sixty-three working men whom they dragged off handcuffed to prison at Bologna. On the 9th, fifty-five of these men were released, eight, among whom were Bagni and the others beaten the previous day, being detained until the 12th, the aggravating circumstance against them being the beating they had received.

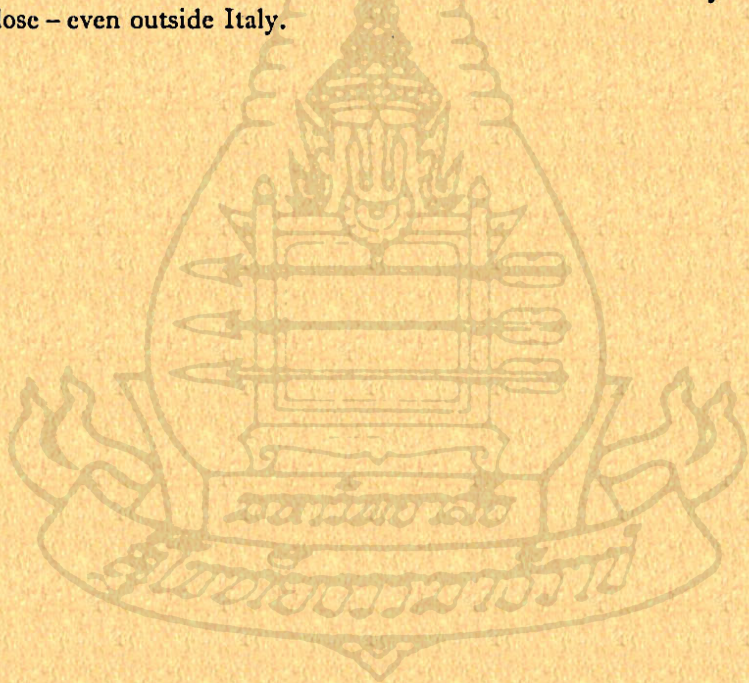
This nightmare state of affairs still goes on. By these means the workers of Molinella are being 'reconciled with their country' - in the terminology of the 'new era.'

We often read that Mussolini and his 'Black-Shirts' are building up a 'new civilization.' In Italy, the Fascists understand quite well the sinister meaning of this term. Outside Italy they leave it unexplained and ordinary folks are incapable of grasping

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its true significance. In Italy the Fascists say: 'Well done.' Outside Italy, they say: 'It is not true.' They are not courageous enough to proclaim frankly to the outer world what their civilization actually stands for. They qualify the anti-Fascists as cowards for not answering force by force; but as soon as any anti-Fascist attempts to use violence, they treat him as a criminal worthy of every kind of reprisal.

Up to a certain point it is understandable that such should be the mentality of the Fascists, in the heat of the struggle. But when we see people in highly civilized countries not involved in the same struggle and yet sharing the same hysterical mentality and speaking of 'a new epic of Fascism' (*Morning Post*, Sept. 13, 1926), we are forced to recognize the saddening truth that a high standard of moral conscience is hard of attainment and easy to lose — even outside Italy.



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### *Note A to Page 185*

Signor Villari (*Fascist Experiment*, p. 90) states that the account of the outrages in Florence published in various foreign periodicals 'were the most monstrous travesties of the real facts.' He takes good care not to explain what these 'monstrous travesties' were. One has to take his word. In his own narration he omits to say that the Fascists had been bludgeoning Freemasons for four days before one of these killed Luporini. Only thus can he maintain that 'the event which gave origin to the trouble was the murder of a prominent Fascist, Luporini.' Writing about the reprisals which followed, he withholds from his readers in what abominable circumstances Pilati and Consolo were murdered, and contents himself with the innocent words:

'After, Fascists seized the opportunity to murder two Communists, who had nothing to do with the affair.'

The Fascist Senator, Signor Corradini, writing in the *National Review* (December 1925, p. 525), also avers that everything the non-Italian papers published in October, 1925, on the Florentine outrages was much exaggerated:

'If my readers want proof of exaggeration, I will refer them to the fact that none of these foreign pilgrims - English, American and others - thought it necessary to cut short their stay in Florence. You may be quite sure that if half of what the newspapers write had been true, they would have run away from Florence and got out of Italy as fast as their legs could carry them. Do you ask for a better proof?'

The Fascist Senator does not grasp that foreigners, knowing that they had nothing to fear personally, had not the slightest reason to 'run away'; but neither had they the same reason as the Fascist Senator for not seeing what was happening under their eyes and telling what they knew.

The Italian Consul at Manchester tried to discredit my account (in the *Review of Reviews*, Nov. 15, 1925) by publishing in the

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*Manchester Guardian* of January 2, 1926, a letter received from 'an eminent English scholar living in Florence' whose name he did not disclose. The letter stated:

'(1) The official version entirely corresponds to the truth; as everyone here may find out for himself, Signor Bandinelli is known to members of the British colony, and has given his version of the story.

'(2) The attack on the Fascists was quite unprovoked in the first instance.

'(3) With regard to Farinacci's orders for reprisals to cease immediately, the town was placarded with them the following day, so there was no disputing that matter.

'(4) The account of the whole affair was fully and correctly reported in the *Nuovo Giornale* of Florence, as well as the *Corriere della Sera*, the Liberal paper of Milan, and many other journals, which should confute the charge of the official suppression of the news.

'(5) Contrary to many statements the shops were all open as usual on Monday the 5th, except at the moment of Luporini's funeral, when the shutters were generally put up in sign of mourning.

'(6) To talk of a "reign of terror" is ridiculous. The aspect of the city was quite normal and business went on as usual.

'(7) As for the shops that were looted, several belonged to Fascist families; they were sacked by gangs of ordinary criminals, who took advantage of the riot and excitement on the night 3rd-4th, in order to commit burglary.

'(8) Those Fascists who got out of hand are all in prison; those guilty of minor charges have already been sentenced - eighteen of them in all, I think - to terms of imprisonment varying from nine to fifteen months.

'(9) Those charged with the murder of the two Communists Pilati and Consolo will be tried in course of time.'

(1) The 'eminent English scholar' swallows the official version and overlooks important details: (a) The official version is silent as to the organized bludgeonings of the Freemasons by the Fas-

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cists during the last days of September; the absence of any reference to these previous outrages puts in a misleading light the act of the Freemason who killed one Fascist and wounded another, on the evening of October 3. (b) The official version lies shamelessly in asserting that 'at 2 a.m. on Saturday order was re-established; on Sunday, October 4, a few isolated incidents occurred in the morning, but nothing more.' In actual fact the trials of November 21 and 24, and December 11, 1925, clearly proved that several other serious crimes were committed during the morning of October 4. (c) The official version so mixes up and mutilates the record of what took place on the night of October 3, that it is impossible to make head or tail of it. (d) The official version tries to show that the police used every endeavour to suppress disorder, but all the records, even those emanating from the Fascist side, agree that it is impossible to name a single person who was arrested during the outbreaks. If the 'eminent English scholar' accepts a document of this kind as the whole truth and nothing but the truth, he must be a 'scholar' whose critical sense is easily satisfied.

(2) The 'eminent English scholar' does not tell us what version was given by Bandinelli of the story. And since this alleged version has never been given us from any source by any newspaper or any pro-Fascist propagandist, it is impossible to argue about it.

(3) After a storm of bludgeoning has raged for four days, two Fascists visit a man who has been beaten by their comrades the previous evening; in the course of an altercation a friend of the bludgeoned man loses patience and fires. The 'eminent English scholar' is convinced that the attack on the Fascists was quite unprovoked 'in the first instance.' It would be interesting to know if this 'eminent scholar' would reason in the same way if he or his wife had been bludgeoned.

(4) I never denied that Farinacci had issued orders that reprisals were to be stopped; but I pointed out that this order was issued, not on September 26, when the outrages began, and when it might have stopped them, but on October 4, when they had already degenerated into looting and murder. The 'eminent English

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scholar' does not deal with this crucial point, but diverts attention by disputing a detail about which no question arises.

(5) The account of the whole affair published in the *Nuovo Giornale* in Florence and the *Corriere della Sera* in Milan is simply the official version. It was given to the newspapers by the police and they were forbidden to publish any other. When the 'eminent English scholar' says that this account should confute the charge of official suppression of news, we can only conclude once more that he is easily satisfied.

(6) I stated in the *Review of Reviews* that all the shops in Florence were closed during the funeral of the murdered Fascist, because if they had not been so closed, they would have been wrecked. The 'eminent English scholar' replies that the shops were only closed during the funeral and were open the rest of the day: here again he avoids the crux of the question to discuss an unimportant detail.

(7) The 'eminent scholar' must have been endowed by Nature with a most heroic soul: for he finds it ridiculous to speak of terror in a town where the police stood invisible while houses and shops were pillaged and citizens murdered in their beds. Another Englishman who was in Florence at the same time wrote in the *Manchester Guardian* of October 17, 1925:

'In all Florence this week it has been literally impossible to persuade anybody, at least of the better classes, to talk about the week-end's events or what has led up to them. Just as innocent travellers on the railway are liable to be disturbed by some officious interfering members of the Fascist Party, so in every house and office and gathering there is always likely to be a spy. Delation is universal and the terrorism is complete - more complete than I knew it in Budapest after the overthrow of Bela Kun.'

This Englishman obviously had not the intrepid soul of the 'eminent scholar,' his fellow-countryman.

(8) The 'eminent scholar' does not explain how it happened that not a single one of these 'ordinary criminals' was arrested in the course of the Fascist operations.

(9) The farce of the trials is dealt with in Chapter IV of the



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present book. Pilati and Consolo were 'Socialists' – not 'Communists.' The 'eminent scholar' interchanges the words, because, perhaps, it seems to him natural that 'Communists' should be murdered before the eyes of their wives and children.

To give an idea of the shameless audacity with which certain pro-Fascist residents in Italy, when writing or speaking to people in England, contradict even the most notorious facts, a single instance may suffice. The former Secretary of the Christian-Democratic Party, Don Luigi Sturzo, who lives now as an exile in London, writes in his book, *Italy and Fascism*, p. 140:

'The man in the street, if on the passage of a Fascist pennant with "Me ne frego" (I don't care a damn) written across it, has not hastily raised his hat, has run the risk of a crack on the head from a Fascist bludgeon.'

This Fascist usage gave rise to so many revolting incidents that in November, 1926, the Government itself found it necessary to put a check on the abuse. It issued a decree which categorically laid down in what cases citizens are bound to raise their hats. *The Times* (Nov. 15, 1926) commented on the new measure in the following terms:

'Englishmen who have not uncovered their heads at the passing of Fascist forces have found their hats unceremoniously laid in the dust at their feet. A Fascist order now establishes the correct procedure to be followed by citizens and foreigners alike at the passing of a Fascist procession. "The standards of the Legions and the *gagliardetti* of the Fasci" – it declares – "are the only colours for which the act of homage should be executed." The pennants of the *Avanguardie* (Fascist youths from 15 to 18), *Balilla* (Fascist boys from 8 to 14), and sporting associations need not be saluted. Experience will soon enable the foreigner to distinguish between the *gagliardetto* and a pennant, and it is hoped that misunderstandings will in future be avoided.'

Yet in reviewing Don Sturzo's book, the Director of the British Institute in Florence, Captain Goad, writes:

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'It is most surprising for us "men in the street" to learn from an exile residing in London, that if we do not raise our hats at the passage of a Fascist pennant with any ribald motto written on it, we run the risk of a crack on the head from a Fascist bludgeon! We have watched so many scores of Fascist processions without dreaming of acting otherwise than we should act in England! Perhaps it is just as well that we never knew our danger until now.'<sup>1</sup>

The primary rule of propaganda is to assert or contradict with barefaced audacity according to the needs of the moment, leaving to the other side the onus of proving the contrary. There will always be people whom the lie will reach and not the proof of its falseness.

Open glorification of crime is better than this kind of lie. Here, for instance, is what Sir Percival Phillips, special correspondent of the *Daily Mail*, wrote in 1923:

'A public act of disloyalty is in Italy to-day a form of suicide. The man who wishes to jeer at the Italian flag should first make his will. An insult to the King assures painful meditation in a hospital, if not the seclusion of the grave.'<sup>2</sup>

### *Note B to Page 200*

The foreign newspapers affiliated to the propaganda either ignored all that happened in Italy during those terrible days or gave only vague indications. In compensation, they published on November 25 an official communiqué proclaiming:

'The Head of the Government is quite satisfied with the state of order generally prevailing since the attempt made on his life on October 31. He is now personally investigating the causes of *some* of the outbreaks in the provinces, in order to determine their exact nature.'

<sup>1</sup> *Journal of the British Institute of International Affairs*, March, 1927, p. 121.

<sup>2</sup> *The Red Dragon and the Black Shirts*, p. 12.

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The text of the communiqué published in Italy (*Corriere della Sera*, Nov. 27, 1926) was different. It ran:

'The public peace *which had been disturbed* after the episode of October 31, was everywhere promptly restored.'

It was not possible to publish in Italy that 'the Head of the Government was quite satisfied with the state of order generally prevailing since October 31.'

The result of the 'personal investigations' of the Head of the Government was as follows:

'In more than sixty provinces there was no incident of any consequence, while in the remainder there were, here and there, episodes against persons and property; but many of these have been exaggerated, and small, harmless fireworks have become bombs and high explosives. There have been reports of destruction, but these have never been verified.'<sup>1</sup>

The Pope, however, was not of the same opinion. And in his Allocution of December 20, 1926, he strongly deplored the acts of violence and devastation committed against the clergy and the Catholic organizations.

'Regardless of the sanctity of the churches, the venerable dignity of the bishops, and the sacred character of the priests, the best among the faithful Catholics were persecuted, together with their organizations and their Press. The fairer and more promising the harvest, the more grievous the damage, the ruin, the loss. Flourishing organizations and works, the fruit of the conscientious labour of many years and of untold sacrifices, have been in a few hours destroyed, damaged, and compromised.'

The Pope's words are all the more significant when one considers that His Holiness does not concern himself with outrages against people who were not 'faithful Catholics.'

In a speech in the Chamber on May 26, 1927, Mussolini declared:

<sup>1</sup> Mussolini's statement at the Cabinet meeting of December 6, 1926.

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'The petty local bullying is at an end. Likewise acts of lawlessness. In these first three months of 1927 disputes resulting in wounding number 11 for the whole of Italy. Last year they were 99.'

Ninety-nine: neither more nor less! If you do not believe this figure, go to the spot and count for yourself. But if you come to a different result, be careful, or you will find yourself interned.

In the same speech of May 26, 1927, the Duce protested against the statement that Fascism is a reign of terror. 'Do you know what Terror is?' asked the Duce. - 'There is terror when at least 20 people are guillotined a day, when thousands are drowned in the rivers, and thousands buried in the prisons, as happened in France 'between 1789 and 1793' (the chronology is the Duce's). In Italy there has never been anything of the kind. 'Sometimes there has been the destruction of a lawyer's offices or a professor's library.' Therefore in Italy there is no terror: 'the Fascist Revolution simply does its duty: it defends itself.'

It is not surprising that a man who reasons thus has no liking for freedom of speech and of the Press, and wants a Chamber without an Opposition - that is, a Chamber without discussion.

### *Note C to Page 202*

Signor De Stefani, then Minister of Finance in the Fascist Government, speaking on May 13, 1923, stated that the Militia cost only 25 million lire, whilst the Royal Guard had cost 285 million.

To arrive at this latter figure, he must have added together the total expenses of this body for the three years of its existence, including the outlay for initial equipment. In the budget for the fiscal year 1923-4 which the Fascist Government presented to the Chamber in November, 1922, the expenses for the Royal Guard were estimated at 84 million lire.

As for the Militia, the untrustworthy nature of Signor De Stefani's statement is shown by the fact that an Order in Council (No. 917) of April 19, 1923, assigned 46,730,000 lire to the

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Militia. This is only a month before Signor De Stefani declared the expenditure to be only 25 million lire.

In a speech to the Senate on December 4, 1924, General Tassoni said:

'Last year, a little ingenuously perhaps, a question was asked in this House as to the cost of the Militia. The Minister of Finance in reply gave the figure of 25 million lire. The same sum is now before us for the financial year 1924-5. The official report remarked that this answer was received with signs of hilarity. With a little less humour they would have been called signs of incredulity. The fact is, no one in this House believes that this figure is correct.'

\* In 1924, in his book, *The Awakening of Italy*, Signor Villari tried to make out that the Royal Guard 'proved enormously expensive' (p. 213), while the Militia was far cheaper (p. 226). In his next book, *The Fascist Experiment* (1926), he writes:

'The total cost of the Militia is 35 million lire per annum, although certain special detachments and services are paid for by other departments' (p. 167).

The word *total* clashes with the word *although*!

According to an official communiqué in the Fascistized *Corriere della Sera* of April 11, 1926, the Militia costs 40 million lire a year. But it is well known that a large part of the Militia outlay is borne by the Budgets of other Departments, such as the railways, postal services, forests, etc. Hence the mystery of its cost remains unsolved.

In December, 1926, the following additional credits were allotted to the Militia: 1,528,000 lire for 'services of special importance'; 30 million for the Militia guarding the frontier; 33 million for the secret service (*Corriere della Sera*, Dec. 21, 1926). These 64½ millions must be added to the 40 millions avowed some months previously.

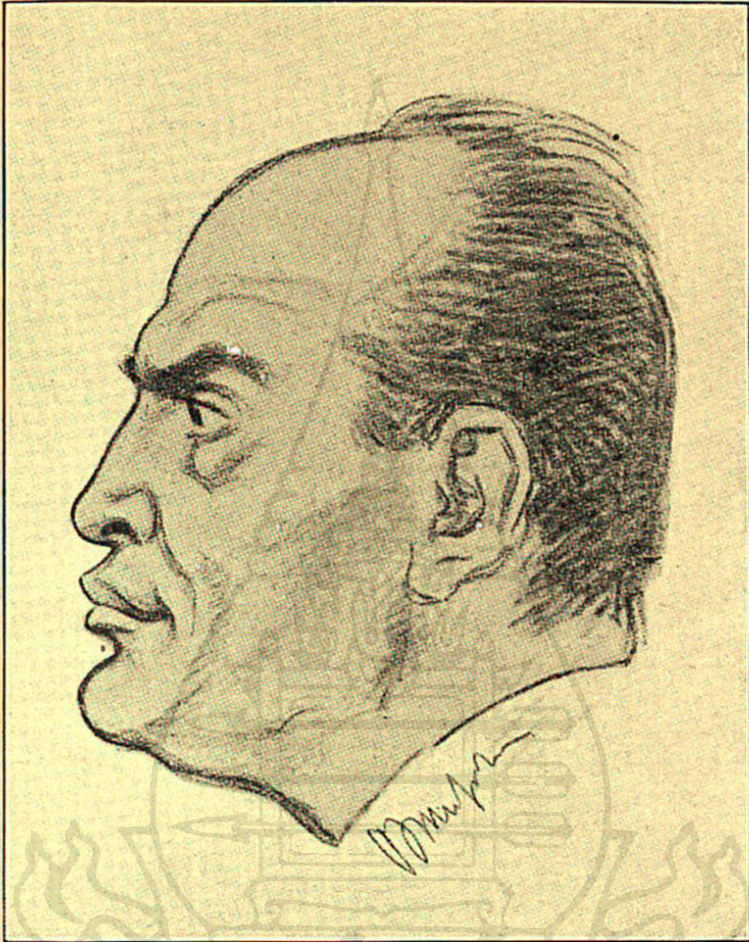
In the budget proposals for 1927-8 estimates for the expenses of the Militia amount to 61 millions, 7½ millions being for Militia

## THE FASCIST DICTATORSHIP

on service in the ports. Thus the Militia proper would cost  $53\frac{1}{2}$  millions!

In his speech of May 26, 1927, Mussolini stated that the Militia guarding the railways, ports, post and telegraph offices and roads consisted of 10,000 men, while those watching the frontiers numbered 2,800. The Militia forest-guards number 5,500, according to figures published in *Milizia Fascista*, April 16, 1927, by Signor Melchiorri, Vice-Secretary General of the Fascist Party. These special detachments number therefore altogether 18,000 men. If the 2,800 Militia troops on frontier duty cost 30 million, it follows that the 18,000 cannot cost less than 190 million. Besides these special detachments, there is the Militia proper, with its officers whom Mussolini in the same speech computes as numbering 20,000 (*sic*), and with its 10,000 men in permanent service (Mussolini's interview with the *Daily Express*, Jan. 24, 1927), i.e. two officers for every man! These 30,000 men can hardly cost  $53\frac{1}{2}$  million if the 18,000 already mentioned cost 190 million. In this, as in so many other points, the figures given by the Fascist Government are undoubtedly false.

In *The Times*, August 27, 1927, Signor Villari, forgetting the official declarations made by Mussolini himself in his speech of May 26, 1927, contradicts the statement of *The Times* correspondent that the Militia contains at least 20,000 salaried officers, and endeavours to make out that 'the total strength of the Militia, all ranks included, is 190,000, and the budget amounts to 53,000,000 lire, i.e., 279 lire (about £3) a year per man.' He arrives at this latter figure by dividing the total up equally amongst the 20,000 salaried officers and the rank and file who are paid by the day as wanted!



MUSSOLINI AS THE FASCISTS SEE HIM  
(From the volume *Fascismo Liberatore*, Florence, Bemporad, 1923)

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