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20

Its History & Significance



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FASCISM

Its History and
Significance

by
L. W.

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RASSISM

Its History and

Significance

M. D.

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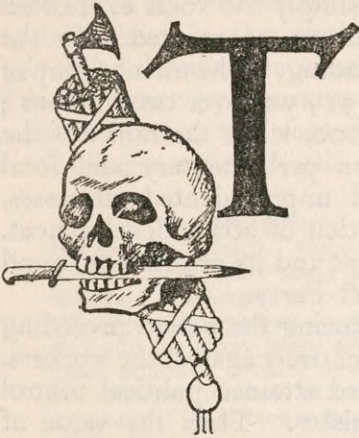
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FASCISM

I.—THE ORIGIN AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF FASCISM



HERE are many impudent arguments that have been used in support of Fascism, and the capitalist press has exercised its utmost skill in representing Mussolini as the saviour of Italian civilisation and the embodiment of almost all the political virtues. It is not surprising, therefore, that the claim has even been advanced that the Fascists are not an anti-Labour force. Mussolini himself constantly poses as the friend of the working classes, as the apostle of ordered freedom and proletarian well-being. Thus, speaking at Milan

on 6th December, 1922, he made great play with the fact that he was of working-class origin (his father was a blacksmith). "The Government," he went on, ". . . is not, cannot and does not wish to be anti-proletarian. The workmen are a vital part of the nation . . . it is a Government that wishes to act in the interests of the working classes, interests which will always be recognised when they are just," that is, of course, when they do not seriously threaten those of the capitalists.

This sort of thing is a demagogic device and is not to be taken seriously. But many interpreters and apologists of Fascism equally claim that the movement is "above class," is nation-wide in its policy, and is specifically not anti-labour. The voluble Mr. Odon Por even makes the fantastic suggestion that Fascism is leading to the establishment of a kind of Guild Socialism in Italy.

It is true that Mr. Por's conception of Guild Socialism is a muddled sort of thing and does not imply a complete expropriation of the capitalists; nevertheless, even Mr. Por anticipates in his ideal society a large measure of workers' control over the conditions of industry and a definite increase in the freedom, dignity and standard of living of the proletariat. To expect any of these things to result from the

triumph of Fascism is like expecting to "tear a pension out of the hands of a courtier" or his prey from a ravenous tiger.

Against these fanciful theories we may set the concrete facts. The violent smashing of the Labour Movement in 1919 and 1920 by armed bands of blackshirts is not disputed. The beatings, the burnings and the murders carried out against the political and economic organisations of the workers are openly admitted. The hypocritical defence is, indeed, put forward that the Trade Unions, the Co-operatives, and the Italian Socialist Party did not really represent the working class; they were simply the vocal expression of the more "extremist" sections. No one acquainted with the facts can accept such inaccurate special pleading. The membership of the General Confederation of Labour in 1919 was over two millions; of the P.S.I. (Italian Socialist Party) 70,000, while the ranks of the latter were constantly swelling. In the parliamentary and local elections of 1919, the Socialists gained unprecedented successes, and the whole movement was in a condition of active development. The working class was in a state of ferment and its aspirations found political expression in the Italian Socialist Party.

The murderous policy of the Fascists during the period preceding their seizure of power was directed almost entirely against the workers. Nor did their policy change when they had attained political control of Italy and Mussolini was Prime Minister. Then the value of his pious phrases about class collaboration and the brotherhood of Italians in pursuance of national ideals became plain for the nauseating cant that it was. In accordance with the usual practice of bourgeois rulers, the Fascists carried on their class legislation behind a screen of fine phrases. "Economy in State Finance" was needed to restore national credit; so the State railway services were cut down on the ground that they were unremunerative, while employees were dismissed, and a vast reduction of wages set going; the eight-hour day has been attacked and, on the railways, nullified by a "spread-over" system. New taxes on the workers (carefully collected at the source) have been imposed, at the exorbitant rate of over 10 per cent. on wages, while death duties (which are paid mainly by the wealthy) have been drastically reduced, luxury taxes lowered ("to encourage the production of motor cars"), and the law prohibiting the issue of bearer stock repealed so that capital holdings may be anonymous and more easily escape taxation. Nor have the acts of violence which characterised the Fascist rise to power now been checked. Mussolini himself issues half-hearted protests against violence from time to time, but it continues to be used as the means of securing political compliance and the adherence of the workers to the Fascist labour organisations. It reached a climax at the recent elections (April, 1924). Protests against the

brutal attacks made by Fascists on their political opponents (mostly Socialists) were made by (*inter alios*) the Rome correspondent of the *Daily Herald* and by Professor Guglielmo Salvadori in the *New Statesman*. The former was deported from Italy and the latter beaten by armed Fascist hooligans in Florence, while the police looked on. Even *The Times* correspondent, who is no enemy to the Fascists, comments from time to time on the lawless violence still current in Italy, and eye witnesses continue to bring sad reports of the beatings and burnings which proceed. A terrible revenge has been taken by the Fascists on the workers who dared to vote heavily against them in the elections. In the province of Milan alone, 57 workers' buildings were burnt or sacked within two days. *The Times*, a paper by no means hostile to the forcible maintenance of capitalist order, was forced by the weight of the facts to write in its leading article on 5th May, 1924:—

“Numbers of disgraceful outrages were perpetrated by local Fascisti during the electoral period. Only a small part are reported, but the protest of the Vatican shows that many Roman Catholic associations of a charitable kind had their buildings wrecked under the eyes of the police. From Milan, where the Opposition parties are strong, there came reports of similar crimes in the city and for many miles around. The repeated destruction of copies of the great Milanese Liberal newspaper, the *Corriere della Sera*, notwithstanding the extreme mildness of its comments upon domestic politics, is a startling exposure of the pretence that opinion and the Press are free. They are nothing of the kind. Attempts, however moderate, to assert them are avenged by the local Fascisti, and hitherto—or, at least, until the other day—no real effort was made to repress or punish the offenders, or to protect their victims. It is stated with much probability that the real organisers of these crimes are well known to the authorities. The impunity they enjoy is a worse stain upon the Government and a far more ominous symptom of the situation than the impunity of the tools who do their bidding.”

It is as a force directed against the interests and ideals of the workers that Fascism is receiving a special study here. But it is not sufficient to define Fascism merely as an anti-labour force, like the White Guards of Hungary or the army of Wrangel. Fascism has special characteristics which give it an international importance, even greater than that derived from its success in Italy. Fascism operates primarily in the interests of industrial capitalists. Often it opposes the land-owning elements in society, but allies itself with them in their common antagonism to the workers. Further, Fascism in Italy was built up not to ward off a working-class revolution, but as a result of the failure of the workers to seize and consolidate a revolution which was already half won. “Fascism,” says Clara Zetkin, “. . . is not the revenge of the bourgeoisie in retaliation for proletarian aggression, but it is a punishment of the proletariat for failing to carry on the revolution begun in Russia.”

The success of Fascism in Italy is due to two causes: the con-

ditions of Italian economic life after the war, and the failure of the working class to dominate the situation in 1919.

The first thing to be understood about Italian economy is that it is primarily agricultural. Only in the north is industrial capitalism well-established, and even there the greater part of the population follows agricultural pursuits. In spite of their numerical inferiority, the industrialists are now the ruling class in Italy. Until the war, the landlord class predominated, the whole system of government working in their interests and hindering the expansion of the industrial north.

The prime economic problem of the Italian industrialists is to secure a good supply of raw materials, especially of coal and iron, in which the country is very poor. The war gave the industrialists the opportunity they needed. An active policy of intervention in the war, with its promise of imperialist extensions, new markets, and new sources of fuel supply, was precisely what the industrialists desired. The agrarians, on the other hand, had no concern in imperialist expansion or coal supplies. They opposed the war, and in this they were joined by the proletariat, both urban and rural.

It was at this stage that Mussolini appeared in the forefront of Italian politics. A campaign to popularise the idea of intervention among the workers and the small bourgeoisie was started. Mussolini had been a right wing Socialist and was the editor of the Party paper *Avanti*; as a result of his militarist attitude, a resolution expelling him was passed on 25th November, 1914, at Milan. Immediately afterwards, with funds provided largely by the French Government, he founded the paper called *Popolo d'Italia* to support the case for Italy's participation in the war.

It is significant that Mussolini's first arguments for war were drawn from Socialist ideology. War was to be the midwife of revolution; it was to achieve the ideals at which Socialists aimed. "War or a Republic!" was his cry, the implication being that the Republic was coming in any case—either before war or as a result of it: either way, the industrialists stood to gain, since either eventuality would give them the control of the State apparatus. *Popolo d'Italia* bore on its title page the phrase "a Socialist daily paper" until 1917, when Mussolini's Socialist principles were finally swamped by nationalist and bourgeois ideas.

Giolitti, the Prime Minister, at that time represented (owing to his connection with the *Banca Commerciale*) pro-German and agrarian interests, and he was able to withstand the pressure of the interventionist campaign for a long time. But in the spring of 1915 he was forced to yield and his Government resigned. The King (although closely allied with the landed interests) dared not oppose the war movement, and the new Government declared war on Austria,

and, later, on Germany. Thus Mussolini achieved his first victory for the industrialists. Had that victory been a final and complete one, Fascism would not have developed after the war ; it would not have been necessary.

When the war was over, it was time to count the gains of conquest. Victory had been purchased at a heavy price. The agrarians had been driven out of power, while the industrial bourgeoisie who had replaced them were now in turn faced with ruin. Heavy industry had been enormously expanded for war purposes. Vast capital expenditure had been incurred and the economic machine, if it was to continue to run on capitalist lines, had to earn profits on a basis of enormously inflated capital. While, on the one hand, the capitalists were relatively inexperienced and inefficient, the proletariat, on the other, were unwilling to co-operate in re-establishing a social system with which they had no sympathy. They had been driven into war ; urged to work and to fight for social ideals which now seemed impossible of realisation. The cost of living was rapidly rising, and economic discontent added to the disillusionment with the results of the war. The nationalist aims had not been achieved: the Adriatic was not an Italian lake: the major members of the Allies were securing all the plums and Italy was left out. Then there were the familiar grounds of dissatisfaction among soldiers in regard to demobilisation, and later, pensions.

Such were the causes underlying the wave of revolutionary feeling in 1919. On the crest of this wave there rose the two antagonistic currents—the revolutionary Socialist movement and Fascism. The course of these movements will form the subject of the two succeeding chapters.

II.—THE ITALIAN LABOUR MOVEMENT

THE Italian Labour Movement has long been remarkably "left" in its ideas and policy. There has always been a strong syndicalist strain in the theories both of the Italian Socialist Party (*Partito Socialista Italiano*) and of the General Confederation of Labour (*Confederazione Generale del Lavoro*), and this has gone far to counteract the influence of the reformist elements. Actually the reformists have controlled the C.G.L. since 1911, but Italian reformism would seem a very advanced sort of socialism to some members of the British Labour Party.

The close connection between the industrial and the political sides of the working-class movement in Italy is noteworthy. The control of the C.G.L. is entirely in the hands of Socialists, and the

Secretary, D'Aragona, is a member of the Executive Committee of the P.S.I. This unity is not, unfortunately, sufficiently developed to ensure immediate common action on matters of urgent importance to the workers. At the time of the occupation of the factories in 1920, much valuable time and energy were wasted in discussing whether the movement was political or industrial in character, and which of the two organisations should accordingly control it.

The policy of the P.S.I. tended continuously leftward throughout the ten years before the Great War. In 1911 the Tripoli war gave the Party an unexpected advantage. This war was remarkable even in the records of European imperialism for the brutality of its motives and methods. In the early stages, the Socialists offered only a slight resistance to the war, but the opposition grew in intensity and influence, its wide popularity becoming manifest. The membership and prestige of the Party rose rapidly and the pro-war sections were expelled.

The experience of 1911 was of the utmost value to the Italian Socialists in 1914. When the campaign was started to secure the intervention of Italy on the side of the Entente, the P.S.I. adopted a clear anti-war attitude. The usual abuse was showered on the Socialists, who were criticised as friends of German autocracy when they were really the friends of the European workers. After the interventionists had triumphed and the workers of yet another nation had been led to the slaughter, the Italian Socialists were amongst the most active to secure peace negotiations. They made every effort to revive the International, and it was their influence that brought about the Conference of Socialists at Zimmerwald in September, 1915.

Anti-war propaganda was certainly more readily received in Italy than in any other belligerent country, and the position of the Party in 1918, as a result of its anti-war policy, was more favourable than ever. The membership stood at 70,000, while the Party's influence was very wide. The years 1919 and 1920 furnished great opportunities to a revolutionary party, and the P.S.I. had many things in its favour. There had grown up in the Party a clear body of opinion in favour of a final break with reformism and the pursuit of a revolutionary policy. The programme had to be brought up to date.

At the Bologna Congress in October, 1919, this step was taken. The Party had already in March of that year affiliated to the Third International by Executive resolution, and at Bologna a Communist resolution supported by Serrati and his friends was carried. The Party declared a belief in the need for illegal and violent methods of revolution, the establishment of soviets, and the dictatorship of

the proletariat. Parliamentary activity was to be used solely for propagandist purposes.

Once again a bold left policy was successful. In the Parliamentary elections of December, 1919, the Party achieved unprecedented successes and became the largest single party in the Chamber. In the municipal elections which followed, 2,500 out of 8,500 communes elected Socialist majorities, including the important towns of Milan, Turin and Leghorn.

This rise of the P.S.I. was proceeding, as appeared in the previous chapter, side by side with a progressive decay of the bourgeois social system. Prices were rising; there was a constant shortage of the raw materials on which Italian industry depends; the processes of commerce and manufacture were hindered by a succession of strikes. The incapacity of the Government to re-establish capitalist order was patent. Ministry after ministry found the position hopeless and resigned. The probability of a revolution became almost a certainty. A brief summary of the rise and fall of the ministries will show the instability of the political situation.

The war had been commenced under the premiership of Salandra, a nominee of North Italian steel interests. In its early stages the war went very ill for the Italians, and Salandra took the opportunity offered by a defeat on a vote of confidence following a series of military reverses to resign. An attempt was then made to secure a ministry which should embrace all parties and all interests, the premier being an aged politician named Boselli. This ministry lasted from June, 1915, to October, 1917, and was called on to deal with the strong anti-war campaign of 1917. This was by no means limited to Socialists, being supported by Giolitti's paper, *La Stampa*, and to some extent by the Catholics. How effective the anti-war propaganda was among the troops it is difficult to say. It certainly had a profound effect on public opinion at home, and enabled the Italians to avoid some of the grosser excesses of war-hysteria that characterised this country and France.

The vast military débâcle of Caporetto, which laid open to invasion the rich plains and cities of Northern Italy, swept away the Boselli ministry, and Orlando (a prominent southerner) took office. He was still Premier when the armistice was signed, and he, Baron Sonnino and Salandra represented Italy at the Peace Conference. Nitti was at the Treasury until early in 1919, when he resigned. The negotiations at the Peace Conference were, it will be remembered, protracted and contentious; in particular, the Italians found it impossible to secure the support of the Conference to their claims in the Adriatic. Ultimately, Orlando returned to Rome to report on the situation, was defeated in the Chamber, and resigned. He was replaced by Nitti, a Liberal Imperialist.

Nitti made some efforts to reorganise the police and generally to stem the tide of social disorganisation, but he found it impossible to go far on account of the impoverished state of the exchequer and of the bourgeoisie whom he represented.

The elections of November, 1919, weakened Nitti's position, but threw up no party or combination sufficiently powerful to replace him. There followed the Fiume adventure and an intensification of the social discord throughout Italy. Nitti's internal policy had grown, from the bourgeois point of view, weaker and weaker, and he was defeated on this issue in May, 1920. Again no alternative cabinet could be found, and Nitti took office for the third time. He finally fell owing to a concession made to the Socialists in regard to the statutory price of bread. The bourgeoisie were pressing for an increase, and when Nitti wavered he was defeated.

Once more Giolitti took charge of Italian affairs, and it was his lot to deal (or fail to deal) with the occupation of the factories in September, 1920. In the attitude of *laissez-faire* which he adopted he was actuated by two sets of considerations. It was not entirely the fact that he could not act, but to some extent at least that he would not. Giolitti at that time was still mainly agrarian in his outlook: his sympathy for the industrialists was not great, and if they got into trouble with their workers, he was not prepared to go out of his way to help them. When the capitalists had won, however, Giolitti was willing to give official sanction to the proceedings and to reap some of the glory of the "settlement."

But other difficulties arose—the problem of the price of bread and the ever-growing deficit on the budget. From mere inability to know what to do, Giolitti dissolved the Chamber in April, 1921. New elections were held, resulting in Liberal and Catholic gains and Socialist losses. In the new Chamber there were forty Fascists. Giolitti resigned in June, and Bonomi took his place. Bonomi was a patriotic Socialist who was as incapable as his predecessors of restoring social order and re-establishing the economic machinery. He remained in power only till February, 1922, when Facta took his place. The latter held office until July, when he was defeated by a Fascist manœuvre in the Chamber. He resumed his position, however, and retained it until driven out by the Fascist revolution in October.

In spite of the growth of the P.S.I., its effectiveness was constantly hindered by the fact that though its majority was Communist, a reformist right wing led by Turati still adhered. This wing was powerful in Parliament and was able to secure wide publicity for its sectional views. The Second Congress of the Third International was held in August, 1920, and laid down the famous Twenty-one Conditions of Affiliation. Included in these was a demand for

the expulsion from constituent bodies of all reformists, Turati being specified by name. A prolonged and very damaging controversy arose. Serrati, the editor of *Avanti*, adopted a centrist course, advocating the acceptance of the conditions but demanding the right to interpret them according to Italian circumstances. This reservation meant that the reformists should be expelled later on, it being argued that, for the moment, unity was more important to the party than theoretical purity.

An understanding of this difference between the P.S.I. and the Communist International is essential in order to realise why the Italian Socialists failed to take the opportunities of 1920 and why Fascism became not only possible but inevitable. The crux of the matter is to be found in the centrist attitude of Serrati. The undesirability of the Turati group was agreed on by the vast majority: the dispute was as to the proper time at which their expulsion should take place. The Communists urged that it should be effected at once. They insisted that, in the then existing conditions in Italy, a revolution was immediately possible; in order that the working class should be effectively led in the critical hours of such a revolution, it was essential that the Socialist Party should be single-minded and united: the presence of hesitant elements was then more than ever dangerous. The Executive Committee of the Communist International wrote in October, 1920:—"The P.S.I. acts with too much hesitation. It is not the Party which leads the masses, but the masses which push the Party. . . . In Italy there exist all the necessary conditions for a victorious revolution except one—a good working-class organisation."

The argument of the Serrati group was that the revolutionary situation was much less ripe than was supposed by people outside Italy, that unity in the Party was essential, that there were not enough suitable Communists to fill the key positions in working-class organisations, and that to get rid of reformist trade union leaders might alienate also the rank and file. They considered that Italy's economic position was such that a revolution there was foredoomed to failure. If foreign supplies were cut off by blockade, Italians would perish for lack of iron and coal. In reply it was pointed out that the proper way to get control of the Trade Unions was not through a compromising alliance with "Yellow" officials, but by direct contact with the workers. The blockade argument was admitted to constitute a real difficulty, but "if certain Italian comrades claim that they must wait for a revolution in Germany or in England, because Italy cannot exist without imported coal, the comrades of other countries present exactly similar arguments." The economic help that would be given by Russia in case of an Italian revolution was also pointed out.

The essential point in the issue was the inclusion of reformists in the ranks of the Party, and the consequences of allowing this are clear enough. The Socialists talked everlastingly of revolution : they fed the workers with hopes and with words, and, when the time came to translate their promises into realities, they held back. And the influence holding them back was precisely that of the reformist elements, Turati, Treves, Modigliani and D'Aragona. They can be convicted over and over again from their own admissions. To take one instance; in 1922, when the split was an accomplished fact, these same reformists were in conference. Prampolini was speaking in defence of their action in remaining in the Socialist Party in 1919—20 in spite of their being a minority of reformist lambs among a crowd of revolutionary wolves. He said : " By remaining in the Party, we were able to fulfil our duty as Socialists. It would have been quite impossible for us to have accomplished, outside the Party, the task we achieved inside." And D'Aragona at the same sitting explained what that task was. " We were in fact too easy-going while the follies of pseudo-revolution were proceeding ; but we did what we could," i.e., to stop these " follies."

There can be no doubt, in the light of subsequent events, that Zinoviev and his friends were right, and that Serrati was wrong. There is a time to hold one's hand and a time to strike hard, and the hour for striking hard had come in Italy in the autumn of 1920. The situation was fluid. Any strongly organised Party could have taken power. The Socialists failed, and the opportunity for cunning and unscrupulous reactionaries arrived.

The occupation of the engineering factories by the workers in the autumn of 1920 marked the highest point in the development of the proletarian attack on capitalism. Spasmodic strikes had occurred in the industry throughout the previous eighteen months, and in June, 1920, things grew to a climax. The F.I.O.M. (Metal Workers' Union) put forward demands for a large increase in wages and after prolonged delay the owners refused to grant any concession. A stay-in strike was inaugurated and the owners replied by a lock-out. To this a more dramatic answer was given by the workers, who forcibly seized the factories, guarded and fortified them, and commenced the operations of industry under the control of their own factory committees. The movement spread to other industries with wonderful rapidity, and the supply of raw materials for the engineers was guaranteed from a score of other types of factories which the workers were now controlling. In spite of the partial sabotage of the administrative and technical staff, considerable progress was made with the establishment of a system of centralising production, purchase of raw materials, marketing products, and victualling the workers.

While this revolutionary situation was developing, the Government stood by inactive; the bourgeoisie felt itself powerless, and it was left to others to betray the workers and deprive them of the fruits of their victory.

By 6th September the vital significance of the occupation of the factories was widely understood. A conference between the political and the economic organisations of Labour was called to discuss the situation: the question before the conference was whether the movement was political and should be controlled by the Socialist Party, or was economic and should be directed by the C.G.L. By a vote of 591,245 to 409,569 control was vested in the C.G.L., which set up a Committee of Action, dominated, of course, by the extreme right-wing leaders.

The first step of the Committee of Action was to open negotiations with the employers and the Government. These were very ready to come to terms and a settlement was reached on 19th September. The settlement contained three essential clauses: (1) giving a share in the control of the industry to the workers, legislation for this purpose to be drafted by a Commission of six workers and six employers; (2) granting a wage increase of 20 per cent. (as against the 60 per cent. originally demanded); and (3) *providing for the return of the factories to the owners*. The enormous strategic advantage held by the workers was given away by the leaders in return for an insignificant wage-increase and for a promise of partial workers' control which, as it was bound to do, turned out to be completely useless.

The rank-and-file did not submit easily to these defeatist terms, but in the end they were induced to agree to the evacuation by the end of September.

The history of the Italian working class since the evacuation of the factories had been a continuous one of defeat. There followed all the familiar incidents of reduced wages, increased hours, partial strikes easily overcome, falling trade union membership, the loss of courage and unity among the workers—just as we saw it in this country. But the economic weapon was not enough for the triumphant bourgeoisie. They must use physical violence also to punish the workers for their temerity in taking possession of their masters' factories and attempting to secure decent terms of existence for themselves.

The Fascist movement was already well developed by this time, but the acts of violence which had been hitherto committed were slight compared with what was to follow. The evacuation of the factories was the signal for an outburst of physical attacks on the workers.

The record of the Fascist attack on the workers will not be repeated

here in detail. As is well known, it took the form of physical violence against all leaders of Trade Unions and left wing political organisations, and against numbers of the rank and file. The victims of these attacks were forced to drink castor-oil, were beaten, and in many instances killed, on account of their working-class sympathies. Trade Union, co-operative, socialist and other working-class buildings were ransacked, smashed and burned. This campaign of terror, thoroughly well organised and subsidised, was defended in a widespread propaganda as an essential preliminary to instilling sound political ideas into the masses. The bacillus of Bolshevism must be eradicated before the heavenly grace of nationalism could be instilled into the purified minds of the workers.

The campaign had its natural results in intensifying the troubles of the proletarian organisations. Men were terrified out of their Trade Unions and terrified into the Fascist Unions which were established in 1921. These were not Trade Unions in the proper sense of the word, since they organised both workers and employers in their ranks. The adherence of the latter never developed to any degree, but the Unions remained collaborationist in their policy throughout. Membership of a Fascist Union gave the workers a little temporary respite from violence, but it gave few other advantages. The Fascist Unionists suffered equally with their comrades outside from the reduced wages and deteriorated conditions of labour. Perhaps they enjoyed some preference when employment was scarce and dismissals were afoot, but even this slight benefit soon went. When the degradation of the working class had been carried far enough, the bourgeoisie cared no longer for distinctions between one worker and another. While they could exploit those distinctions and set "war heroes" against non-service men, Fascist workers against others, and so on, they would do so, but when they no longer needed such means to beat down their employees, they saw each worker as factory-fodder and as no more. The bourgeois victory was complete and Mussolini could receive his well-earned knighthood.

III.—THE RISE OF FASCISM

THE essential character of Fascism has been much misunderstood, owing partly to the confused political conditions in which it arose in Italy, and partly to the confused minds of certain observers. The critic, for instance, who talked of "red shirts beneath the black," must have been incapable of understanding so well known an idea as socialism, much less a complicated political phenomenon like Fascism. Fascism

has been variously described as a terrorist movement run by landowners, a mere "stunt" of excitable young ex-officers, a desperate outburst on the part of war-ruined middle-class elements, and so on. Each observer saw only one aspect of the movement, and regarded that as its main feature.

A close study of the whole situation reveals the fact that Fascism is essentially a movement expressing the interests of industrial capitalists. It is true that, at one time, the Fascist ranks were crowded with the sons of landlords, at another with ex-officers and the lower middle classes, while at another there were even considerable numbers of workers and of ex-socialists. But these are facts of temporary or minor significance. The financial support for the whole movement came in the main from capitalists, and the effect of the seizure of political power in Italy has been, as we shall see in detail later, administrative and legislative action in the interests of the same class.

We have already seen how the industrialists won a great victory over their agrarian rivals for power in securing Italian intervention in the war. But this victory was not a final one. The bourgeoisie emerged from the war in a shattered condition, while the land-owning class had lost but little of their power. To a certain extent, these rivals had one aim in common—the subjugation of the proletariat; both wanted a docile, underpaid body of labourers, and the participation of the agrarians in the Fascist movement was an expression of their willingness to join the bourgeoisie in this issue. The Fascists had a difficult part to play; they had to cooperate with their minor enemy, the landlords, in opposition to the common foe, while at the same time they had to build up the hegemony of the capitalists against the pressure of the landlords.

The Fascist movement proper arose in March, 1919, when Mussolini formed his first *Fascio Italiano di Combattimento* (Italian Service Men's Union) in Milan, and subsequently all over the country. The early *fasci* were by no means reactionary. In fact, they shared in the general revolutionary character of all political movements of that time. The war against the "old State" (i.e., the agrarian State) was carried on under the plea that the politicians were wasting the fruits of the victory in the world war, and that ex-soldiers must unite to ensure that the nation reaped the benefit of the war-time sacrifices.

The early programme of the Fascists is fascinating and significant. Its demands included proportional representation, adult suffrage, the eight-hour day, a legal minimum wage, improved scales of social insurance, participation of the workers in the control of industry, expropriatory taxation, abolition of the standing army, nationalisation of munition factories, and so on. To secure these

ends, Mussolini pointed out, the authority of the State must be restored and the "old gang" of politicians (i.e., largely the agrarians) must be cleared out of the way.

These demands were put forward with considerable propagandist skill throughout 1919 and 1920. The device by which Mussolini, while not alienating the proletariat as such, attacked the Socialist Party, was to argue that the latter were working for the destruction of "National unity"—a stunt which Mussolini has worked to the last degree. The advanced nature of this programme was, of course, due to the need for a bait to catch unwary workers. If these could be got into the ranks of Fascism, so much the better; and the best means to this end was to steal the programmatic thunder of the Socialists.

The early *fasci* were to a large extent armed, but no great use was made of violent methods until after the evacuation of the factories by the workers in the autumn of 1920. The factory owners had indeed felt the sword at their throats; they had really been expropriated, and the end of their rule seemed to have come. When the workers had been tamely withdrawn from the field of their victory by their leaders, the owners recovered their power and proceeded to use it. The Fascist bands were turned loose on the workers, and terror prevailed.

While this crude but simple punishment of the proletariat was proceeding, the Fascists were following a subtle and difficult policy in regard to the Government. Giolitti had taken office in the summer of 1920 on the cry of re-establishing the authority of the State. Now this was precisely the slogan of Mussolini—from whom Giolitti had cunningly stolen it; but no real identity of interest lay behind this similarity of political objective. Mussolini meant Big Business; Giolitti, Landlordism. And so Mussolini had to fight on two fronts—against the workers and against Giolitti. The latter he attacked as an opponent of the war and as an enemy of Italian gains following the peace. This anti-government (and anti-monarchical) policy gave a revolutionary tone to the Fascist propaganda of that time which misled many observers into overlooking its fundamentally reactionary character.

Giolitti's reaction to this policy was characteristically subtle. He could have crushed the Fascist movement by means of his control of the State armed forces, but he realised too well the value of the movement as an anti-proletarian influence. The steps he took were two. First, he declared the State to be "neutral" in the faction fight proceeding between the workers and the Fascists; this, of course, was a hypocritical sop to the Fascists, since it deprived the unarmed workers of their sole defence—the forces of the State. Secondly, Giolitti dissolved the Chamber in May, 1921, and in

the ensuing elections offered the Fascists the privilege of inclusion in his electoral *bloc*. This, again, was an advantage to Mussolini who at that time had no organised party or electoral machinery. But in entering the *bloc* of the "parties of order," he naturally deprived himself of the power of attacking Giolitti and his agrarian supporters. Giolitti had drawn the teeth of the Fascists.

There followed a big drift of agrarians into the Fascist ranks. It was under the influence of this section that the fighting squadrons were formed. The earlier expeditions against the workers were carried out by Fascists selected *ad hoc* on each occasion. There was no "standing army" of trained assassins. The landlords came into the movement with the clearest and bloodiest intention of smashing the resistance of the landworkers and reducing them to a condition of economic slavery. A formal organisation of armed men was established out of the most promising elements—at first, the sons of farmers and their hangers-on, and later such declassed elements as ex-officers, ex-N.C.O.s, and the like.

Mussolini was now faced with a serious menace. His organisation was diluted with numbers of the very class he was out to oppose. During the elections, he had perforce to accept this position: a split in the Fascist ranks would not only have ruined his electoral prospects, but would have ranged against him the forces of the State. So soon as the elections were over (in which the Fascists secured forty seats) he set about clearing the air. Once more he made a bid for the support of left wing elements, but only as a trick to drive out the agrarian right. He emphasised the "republican" character of Fascism and forbade the newly elected Fascists to attend the opening of Parliament, "since no true Fascist could cry 'God save the King!'" The move was partly successful, and a number of agrarians left the disloyal Fascists and entered other parties. Nevertheless, the agrarian section remained large and powerful, and other steps had to be taken to control it. The means adopted was the internal organisation of the movement into a centralised and disciplined party, subservient in every respect to Mussolini and his masters. In this Mussolini has never entirely succeeded. The agrarian section remains even to-day a thorn in his side. In general, the so-called "dissident" Fascists represent the agrarian element—the terrorist section which even to-day Mussolini cannot control. It is in this division of interest that is to be seen the seed of the ultimate collapse of the Fascist government.

Throughout the history of Fascism right up to the present time, one hears of warnings issued by Mussolini to his followers not to go "too far" in their acts of violence. This is no mere humanitarianism: it is a sign of the ever-present antagonism between the capitalist and the agrarian interests. The latter desired nothing

from Fascism but the violent subjugation of the landworkers. But Mussolini had other and wider aims. He wanted Fascism established as the permanent controlling force in Italian public life. He had no objection to the use of violence as a temporary means to the attainment of political power, but he by no means desired a state of civil war to characterise Italy perpetually. When he and his capitalist masters were settled in the saddle, he would prefer to use constitutionalism as his governing instrument. Violence, then, as a political weapon must be kept within limits and not become the accepted and permanent method of politics. A further important point of difference between Mussolini and the landowning class was that he did not desire so much a beaten and broken working class as a body of "free" labourers. However complete the process of smashing the workers' organisations, there was always the danger of their being rebuilt and constituting a fresh menace to the domination of the employers. To this problem in 1921 the Fascists turned their attention.

The means adopted to counter the danger of revived Trade Unions was the formation of rival organisations, the Fascist Trade Unions or National Corporations. These bodies are essentially collaborationist and opposed to a recognition of the class war. Originally it was proposed to unite in one association employers, technicians and workers. This was soon found to be an unworkable scheme, and modifications were made to provide for parallel groupings of employers and workers respectively, federated for common purposes. Even so, it was impracticable to get the federal bodies to function, and the affiliation of employers rapidly became nominal only. The workers' organisations played a considerable part in the campaign for reducing wages and worsening conditions of labour. As a friendly critic naïvely puts it: "The difference between Fascist organisers and other Trade Union organisers is that the former say frankly that, for the time being, wages must be reduced owing to present conditions in industry, while the latter are unwilling to recognise the necessity."*

The National Corporations have given the Fascist leaders a good deal of trouble, and the workers organised therein have by no means always been prepared to take the advice of their organisers to accept the lowered conditions of life offered to them. Many instances have occurred in which the Fascist Unions themselves have turned on the employers with economic demands of their own; there have been seizures of farms, ships and factories by the Unions when the proprietors refused all concessions, and, as might be expected, the antagonism between the Unions and the landowners has always

*Odon Por. *Fascism*, p. 243, note.

been bitter. In November, 1922, when the Fascist government was in power, an attack on the eight-hour day of the State railway was made. The Fascist Railway Union in Naples retaliated by seizing the station and driving out the Government officials, who were endeavouring to enforce the new hours system. This revolt, like so many others, was suppressed, but it is symptomatic of the workers' attitude to the Fascist regime even inside the National Corporations.

The Fascists have given figures of membership which indicate a very high percentage of workers organised in the Corporations. There is no doubt that a large number of workers joined the Corporations out of fear: they saw what happened to active members of the genuine Unions, and they hoped to escape the wrath of their masters by enrolling in the Yellow Unions. Their great value to Fascism lay in the fact that they brought the masses under the ideological influence of Fascism and gave the Fascists unparalleled opportunities for propaganda. It was through the Corporations that Fascism, which had been an isolated terrorist movement and had developed into an organised political party, now finally became a genuine mass organisation in the sense that it controlled the minds and actions of the majority of the workers. When that point had been reached, the seizure of the power of the State became possible.

But this was in fact only achieved through further acts of treachery on the part of the right wing leaders of the working class. These had, by their advocacy of the evacuation of the factories, first opened the road to the Fascists. Then, as the terror developed, appalled by the consequences of their weakness, they could conceive no better remedy than an abject surrender—which they called "complete passivity till the storm blew over!" From the extreme of futile pacifism, the leaders rushed to another and (in the circumstances) disastrous policy. Turati, in July, 1922, made efforts to secure inclusion in Facta's newly formed cabinet, but the bourgeois terms were impossibly high. This left Turati and his friends in a difficult position, and they made a bold bid to recover their prestige by a move to the left. They declared a general strike. But the movement was badly organised. Whether the reformists were determined to bring about a failure so that they might use it as an argument against direct action, or whether they blundered through incompetence, is not clear. What is beyond dispute is that the declaration of a strike and its immediate and total collapse played into the hands of the Fascists. "The Bolshevik danger" was the slogan. The Fascists could point to the frivolity and the ineffectiveness of the socialist leaders as an awful warning of what might happen if the socialists obtained power. And as the labour movement broke up under the badness of its leadership,

the ranks of Fascism were swelled by recruits from many sections of society.

By this time a state of civil war was in existence. Fighting between Fascists and Socialists, burning of socialist buildings and all the accompaniments of warfare, were constant occurrences. The Fascists were rapidly building their organisation firmly as a basis of the seizure of power. By the end of October, 1922, *The Times* could say of their Party: "A couple of years ago they did not exist. Now they are supreme. They have a real army of their own, armed, admirably disciplined, and full of daring and impatience. They command the enthusiastic adhesion of the National Army, of the Navy, and of the bureaucracy, or at least of a very large proportion of them. They have so terrorised the Press by threats to burn newspaper offices and destroy the machinery, that the Italian people themselves know but little of their misdeeds, their insolence, and their cruelty in a great part of northern Italy. Thousands have been driven from their homes and dare not return. Mayors, prefects, officials of all sorts, are forced to resign at their bidding. Magistrates who have dared to punish Fascisti, however inadequately, for grave crimes, have been seized and beaten. The tyranny of the organisation is complete, and it is a brutal and intolerant tyranny."

With such forces at their command, and a debased and corrupted proletariat as their only opposition, the Fascists found the road open before them as they marched on Rome to seize power. The proper forms of constitutional opposition were maintained by the Government of Facta, who declared a state of siege. But the King, ever careful of his own position, sided with the big battalions of Mussolini and refused to sign the declaration. The Government fell, and Mussolini came into power on November 1st, 1922.

IV.—FASCISM IN POWER

THE rise of the Fascist Party was a triumph of political organisation, and the efforts of its leaders to achieve the ends for which they stand have been remarkable for their intensity and skill. It is true enough that Fascism has no intellectual content, no theoretical basis, that its political arguments carry no conviction to a reasonably intelligent critic and that its programme fluctuates in a chaos of contradictions. But these facts do not in the least alter the value of Fascism as a weapon in the hands of the industrial bourgeoisie. Mussolini's political tactic may be summed up as one of dividing his opposition and setting section against section. He carefully distributes concessions to the

industrial capitalists ; gives exemption from taxation to the agrarians ; offers alternately fair words and bullets to the proletariat. He threatens the capitalists with Bolshevism and the workers with unemployment if they do not support him. And over all he throws the glamour of patriotic romance, telling of Italy the ancient heiress of the Roman Empire, the fair queen of the Mediterranean, the centre of mediaeval art and culture, now again to be raised to the forefront of nations—if only the Fascists retain power, and if only the workers will collaborate with the employers and not pursue their own selfish ends. By such means he has broken down all opposition ; he has smashed the working class in Italy, imposed on them his ideology and established the heavy industrialists for a time in control of events.

An important point in the Fascist triumph is the degree of unification which it has secured in the bourgeois ranks. Italian parliamentarism has always been the field of countless sectional quarrels between small groups of the bourgeoisie, each with its own private or local petty interests to foster above the interests of the class. The menace of the proletarian revolution after the war was so serious that unity of action became essential if the ruling classes were to survive. This was a large part of Mussolini's work—to put an end for a time to the competition between individual professional politicians and the intrigues of their little sections, and to build up in the place of this a bourgeois united front against the workers. In this he achieved a remarkable measure of success which could not, in the nature of things, be lasting. The character and the extent of the divisions in the bourgeois ranks are such that no statesmanship can ever nullify their influence permanently.

The proof of the subservience of Fascism to heavy industrial interests may be seen most clearly in the way the early Fascist programme was repudiated when Mussolini came into power. This contrast indicates, not merely the waning of enthusiasm common to politicians after the election, but a complete antithesis between the interests of the class whose votes were sought and of that which Fascism exists to support.

The programme had demanded a very democratic reform of the electoral law. The law was indeed drastically reformed, but in a sense by no means democratic nor favourable to the workers or the petty bourgeoisie. The political conditions of 1923 led to the introduction of the famous electoral law in the following circumstances.

Throughout the summer of 1923, Mussolini's power was constantly threatened by political dissensions. Not only was his Government subjected to attacks from hostile parties, but the Fascists themselves were sadly split. The ground of external attack was

the question of constitutionalism, and inside the party also a division grew up between the Diehards who stood by violent methods, and the "evolutionists" who wanted to compromise with parliamentary and constitutional forms. Mussolini himself saw the undoubted advantages of settled and constitutional government, provided that its machinery was guaranteed to work in his favour and in that of the interests which he represented. The first requisites were a compact parliamentary majority for the Fascists and a weak and disunited opposition. To secure these ends a scheme of parliamentary reform was worked out.

The electoral law of July, 1923, is remarkable even among the electoral devices designed to secure bourgeois supremacy. The main features of the law are as follows: the whole of Italy is treated as one electoral area, and each constituent votes, not for an individual, but for a Party. He may, if he so desire, also indicate his preference for an individual candidate in the party list which he selects. The votes cast for each Party are then counted by the authorities and on these totals an amazing scheme is based. The party which heads the poll receives, not a representation proportionate to the number of votes cast, but *two thirds* of the number of seats. The winning party will quite probably receive only a minority of the votes, but it nevertheless enjoys complete and unchallengeable supremacy in Parliament.

As regards the remaining one-third of the seats, these are divided among the unsuccessful parties in proportion to their votes. The opposition parties are thus split into the maximum number of fractions, while the party in power is united. The scheme is a clear expression of the Fascist dictatorship in the realm of Parliamentary government. It is not remarkable that the Bill met with much opposition, and that Mussolini thought it well to arrange for the Fascist Militia to meet in Rome when the project was before Parliament—a plain hint that the familiar Fascist methods would, if necessary, be employed to secure the passage of the measure. The hint was turned into a threat in the final debate, when Mussolini offered either collaboration or a fight to a finish on Fascist lines. The deputies chose collaboration and voted the bill by 225 to 123.

Such was the Fascist achievement in regard to electoral machinery. Their record in other fields shows equally their subservience to the interests of Big Business.

The eight-hour day which had been promised was guaranteed in words. It was, however, made subject to so many exceptions both as regards special trades and particular circumstances, that its value to the workers was negligible. As an example we may take the case of railway workers, where a system of "spread-over" makes their effective hours of duty often twelve or more a day. No minimum

wage bill was ever introduced but, instead, wages were drastically reduced through all branches of industry. The existing scheme of national insurance against sickness and old age was abolished. Instead of developing the system of workers' control in industry, the Fascists destroyed the few remaining Works' Councils. A further obstacle to the development of industrial democracy was furnished by the Fascist policy of denationalisation. The capitalist sharks gathered round the State with hungry jaws agape and one by one the dainty morsels were flung out to be devoured by the profiteers.

Telephones, wireless, parcel post, matches—each State monopoly was handed over to private control. Even the railways were in the market and would have been sold but for an amusing incident. Mussolini had himself seen to the details of this transaction and the sale was on the point of final ratification. The lucky capitalists who had nearly secured the prize were delighted, but their rivals were not! One group of rivals who had themselves been in the bidding succeeded in raising trouble, suggesting that there had been a corrupt deal and practices contrary to the national interest. So in this case the falling out of thieves enabled the community to retain its own. In the more recent case of the concession of the oil-bearing lands of Italy to an American syndicate, the results were even more embarrassing to the Government, as will appear later.

The Fascist defence of their policy in this matter is that the services in question have been ill-organised under State management. Such statements are always highly suspect, coming as they do from those who have a direct interest in vilifying public ownership and bolstering up private enterprise. If Mussolini found the bureaucracy inefficient, he had ample power and opportunity to reform it. If he really held the Guild Socialist views of D'Annunzio and Odon Por, with which some friends credit him, here was his chance to apply them. Instead of this, he played into the hands of his capitalist masters, and the idealists who believe in his essentially revolutionary objective are still waiting for him to be free to realise his heart's desire!

Mussolini seems actually to have achieved some improvement in the technical efficiency of the civil service, but the staff reductions were merely window-dressing episodes. The dismissals were promptly followed by the appointment of Fascists to the vacant posts.

The policy of the Fascist Government as regards public finance shows unmistakably its anti-proletarian character. The programme favoured expropriatory taxation of the rich; the Fascists in power remitted the luxury tax, the motor-car tax and inheritance duties. In place of these there have been imposed taxes on wages (i.e., a reduction in the exemption level for income tax) and increased in-

direct taxes. A new land valuation was carried out with a view to raising revenue from heavier taxes on land, but so far the agrarians have succeeded in preventing this. Giolitti's government had appointed a commission to inquire into war profits. Normally, such a commission would have reported to parliament, but Mussolini directed that it should report to him personally and threatened with six months' imprisonment anyone who should prematurely publish any details of the report. When the document was published with the official *imprimatur*, it had been discreetly castrated to avoid offence to that section of the bourgeoisie which profited most from war conditions, i.e., the steel magnates. As a final instance of the contrast between the vote catching programme and the reality, we may note the proposal to impose a tax on ecclesiastical property. This proposal was entirely dropped when the Fascists achieved power, and a pro-clerical policy was pursued. Religious teaching was re-established in the schools—a most reactionary policy in a country where the church is so potent a weapon in the hands of the possessing classes. Next to omitting to exhibit a picture of Mussolini in the school, the most serious offence a teacher can commit is to neglect to hang up a crucifix.

The anti-militarist talk of the early Fascists soon ceased. The record of the Fascist Government is one of extensive additions to all the fighting arms. The period of obligatory military service has been raised from eight to eighteen months, thus increasing the standing army from 230,000 to 350,000 men. A big forward policy was pursued in laying in extensive stores of arms and ammunition. The navy was increased and many new flying machines built. The whole fighting machine was developed and strengthened at very heavy cost.

But more remarkable even than these military preparations was the policy of the government in regard to the Fascist militia. When the Fascists had attained control of the State, their own armed forces, the black shirt squadrons, were still in being, and their disposal became a matter of no small difficulty. The thousands of young men who had been absorbed into the ranks found life there by no means unpleasant. They were paid and maintained on a generous scale. They had become accustomed to their work, which no longer disgusted even the most squeamish of them: the danger of the occupation was slight, since their numbers, their organisation and their weapons were markedly superior to those of their working-class opponents.

Many of these young men had never followed any regular employment, or had lost, in the course of their military service, all aptitude for useful work. In these circumstances, to have disbanded the Fascist squadrons would have been to throw on to the labour market

at a critical time a mass of largely unemployable men used to securing their ends by violence and liable to increase the difficulties of their late employers. The Fascist forces had by this time developed a hierarchy which ably pushed their interests as a corporate body before the eyes of those in power. Every concession had to be made, therefore, by the Government to the armed body that had brought them to power and on whose strength they must continue to rely. The means taken to keep the Fascist troops in being under the pretence that their purpose was a national and not a party one was to enrol the black shirts in a Militia for Public Safety. The militia, which is responsible to Mussolini and not to the King, and is strictly Fascist in membership, control and objective, exists to this day. In one sense it is Mussolini's main support; in another it is one of his chief difficulties. The unanimity with which the Liberal and Democratic parties demand its disbandment shows that it is a valuable support to the Fascist Government. On the other hand, the militia has constantly tended to get out of hand and to pursue an extremist policy regardless of Mussolini's desire for moderation. After the Matteotti murder, Mussolini made frantic efforts to placate the opposition and promised among many other things the fusion of the militia into the regular army. Efforts to achieve this seem to have been made, but they have not really gone far. The militia, though its members are now to be required to take an oath of allegiance to the King, remains in effect the organ of a party and the practical means by which Mussolini in a crisis can keep himself in power. The "constitutionalisation" of the militia was postponed again and again and recent public utterances of its chief officers show clearly that its loyalty is to the Fascist Party and not to the crown.

The bourgeoisie to-day is by no means united in supporting Fascism, and the future of the movement is threatened as much by dissensions among the bourgeoisie as by the opposition of the proletariat. Quite apart from the antagonism of the land-owning classes who were deprived of their control of the State machine by the instrumentality of Fascism, there are important cleavages of interest in this matter among the capitalists themselves. For example, Nitti has shewn considerable fear of the developments of Fascism. This politician is the instrument in Italy of English and American financial interests, which have watched with keen anxiety the rise of Fascism backed by heavy industrialists in close association with French coal and iron magnates. Giolitti was originally a protagonist of agrarian interests and was keenly anti-fascist. But early in 1922 the financial group (headed by the Commercial Bank) on which he depended began to develop industrial interests which had formerly been the preserve of the Discount Bank (bankrupt in

December, 1921). With this change in the policy of his masters, Giolitti swung over to a modified support of Fascism. But he regarded it primarily as a stick with which to beat the workers.

In fact, all groups of the bourgeoisie united in support of Fascism in so far as it was specifically anti-proletarian. All groups had a common interest in the re-establishment of law and order on a bourgeois basis and in subjecting the workers to wage reductions. For six months after the Fascist seizure of power this community of outlook sufficed to keep the bourgeoisie united in support of the new State. But it was impossible for this to last, and before long the inherent divisions made themselves apparent.

The struggle in the bourgeois ranks revolved round two main issues—military preparations and the restoration of constitutional government. The former issue is a real one, the second, a mere veil to cover the crude reality of a struggle for power.

The only section really concerned to foster a forward military policy is that of the heavy industrialists. These have a threefold need for military and naval preparations. In the first place, the manufacture of munitions means profits for themselves; in the second place, they have to provide the weapons for their Militia in order to keep the opposition in forcible subjection; and, third, they must pursue a firm foreign policy to establish Italian prestige abroad and to ensure markets for their exports. Meanwhile, the militarist policy of the Government is opposed by all other sections of the bourgeoisie, who see it primarily as a means to the economic and political aggrandisement of the heavy industrialists, and who, moreover, object to the indefinite postponement of national economic recovery which follows from continued expenditure on military preparations.

An examination of Italian foreign policy since the Fascists have held power shews clearly their heavy-industrial bias. In regard to France, their policy has been to endeavour to secure ample supplies of Lorraine iron for their steel industry. As a bargaining weapon in their struggles for this, they have used the Franco-British-German quarrel over the Ruhr. If France will guarantee iron supplies, then Italy will support her Ruhr policy; if not, then the Italians will turn to England and Germany. The imperialist necessity for markets demands an energetic colonial policy. The administration in Tripolitania, and other North African colonies has been tightened up; frequent military operations against the natives have been undertaken, not always with complete success. The reverses recently experienced by the Italian troops have led to accusations against the rival imperialist Powers established in North Africa, it being suggested, for instance, that the French are supplying arms to the natives. Jubaland has been added to the Italian sphere of

exploitation and the aims of the Fascist imperialists are still soaring. The Adriatic and even the whole of the Mediterranean are claimed as the proper preserves of Italian commerce—much to the horror of *The Times*, and the leading French papers, which warn the Italians in avuncular terms against such exaggerated claims.

Inside the Fascist Party, the dissension between the "old" or "dissident" elements and the orthodox supporters of Mussolini grows rather than lessens. This dissension is a fairly straightforward one and is between the agrarian elements still in the Party and the Fascists proper. The presence of agrarians has always been a thorn in Mussolini's side, and the powers of censorship have been applied to criticisms raised by the dissidents against the Government. A large concession of petroliferous land has recently been made to the American Sinclair Syndicate. The dissident Fascists in their journal *Il Nuova Paese* have attacked this policy on nationalist grounds, but further criticism has now been prohibited by the Government. The policy is equally distasteful to the Nationalists and another break in the bourgeois front is made.

The quarrels in the bourgeois camp have recently come to a head as a result of the murder of the Socialist Giacomo Matteotti. There is no doubt that this was an act of the utmost unwisdom. It had the result of uniting all the elements of the opposition against the Government. In spite of Mussolini's policy of "moderation," his personal attitude towards violence was highly compromising, even five days before this murder. Speaking in the Chamber in reply to criticisms raised by the Communist Gennari, the Premier pleasantly remarked:—"What you want is a bullet in your neck. We have the courage to see that this is done, and we shall do it. We have still time, and we shall act sooner than you expect. . . ." The extremists were shouting for a victim and Mussolini gave way. Matteotti was selected.

It is not difficult to see why the choice fell on Matteotti. He was a brilliant, capable and honest leader of the reformist socialists, but this did not of itself mark him as a danger to the Fascists. His offence lay in his efficient exposure of the corruption in the Fascist movement. He recorded the deeds of Fascism day by day—not only its deeds of violence and tyranny, but its deeds of financial jobbery and commercial dishonesty.

The enmity of the Fascists towards Matteotti was comprehensible enough, but they should have hesitated before they gave such rein to their passionate hatred. The murder of Matteotti, as Mussolini remarked, was not only a crime but a blunder. It played into the hands of the opposition by giving them an invaluable ground of attack on Fascism. Fascism, they argued, is defended as a means

of restoring order and avoiding anarchy, and here is the sort of order it secures.

The opposition was, moreover, singularly perturbed by the death of this particular member of their ranks. In Italy, as elsewhere, a reformist-socialist government is one of the last and most valuable defences of the capitalist system. The Italian bourgeoisie, if the dictatorship of Fascism fails, may have to rely on the constitutional support of the middle and lower classes, organised politically in right-wing socialist parties. Matteotti would have been an invaluable leader in such a political move. Even as things stood, he was doing good work for the capitalists by canalising the rebellious tendencies of the workers into the safe ways of reformism and hindering the development of communism.

Mussolini's reaction to the political storm which followed the murder was to throw overboard all members of his ministry who were more blatantly associated with terrorist methods. Previous murders of Socialists and other opponents of Fascists had been successfully lived down without any pretence of legal action against the guilty parties. But in Matteotti's case a vast appearance of activity on the part of the police was set going; suspected persons were arrested and imprisoned, and a trial may eventually be held; the personal complicity of many prominent Fascist leaders in the outrage is already beyond doubt. In the political sphere, the cabinet was reconstituted to include several non-Fascists, all selected from the bourgeois parties.

It is still too early to see how far Mussolini will succeed in weathering the storm. He has made considerable concessions to the opposition and he will undoubtedly make more if necessary. He has, of course, given away much more in promises than in reality. The incorporation of the Fascist militia into the regular Forces of the crown is still only a project. The order which he promised is still only a thing of the future. Fascist violence continues and new forms of tyranny (the new press censorship, for example) are being imposed. In all things, Mussolini acts with cunning. He sees to it that the press decree is applied to *one* Fascist paper and to a score of opposition journals: he can then point to the impartiality of the administration.

If Fascism is to remain in power as the organ of the wealthy bourgeoisie, it must secure (either constitutionally or by force, but preferably the former) the continued support of the petty bourgeoisie and the compliance of the workers. If it cannot do this, its masters will throw it over and will use the device so popular just now of a Liberal-Labour Government to keep Italy safe for capital. Another alternative is that the bourgeoisie will have to resign the reins of power in favour of the workers.

V.—FASCISM OUTSIDE ITALY

THE essential features of Fascism as it developed in Italy have been seen in preceding chapters. The Italian movement arose as a bourgeois reaction to the revolutionary tendencies of 1920. It is a movement of lower middle class and declassed elements organised on a physical force basis to further the interests of heavy industrial capitalists ; it has succeeded by the combined methods of terror and of propaganda in dominating the political sense of the workers.

It would be pedantic to deny the name of Fascist to movements in other countries simply because they do not conform in all details to the Italian model. Whatever purists may desire, it is certain that common usage will fix the meaning of the title sufficiently wide to cover any organisation fighting extra-constitutionally for the bourgeoisie against the workers.

The situation in most countries other than Italy is that, while numerous bodies exist which are potentially Fascist in character only a few have openly taken the field against the workers.

The only countries other than Italy where there is a definite Fascist movement are Germany, Austria, Poland and Hungary. In other lands, there exist movements which might, in given conditions, form the basis for such an organisation, but it cannot be said that the so-called Fascism in Spain, France or England is really worthy of the name.

There are a number of organisations of a Fascist character in Germany. The membership is formed of ex-officers, students, de-classed elements, and other miscellaneous sections of the lower middle classes. The most powerful section is that formerly under the control of Hitler* in Bavaria, known as the National Socialist Party and financed by heavy industrialists ; others are The Union of Patriotic Societies, in North Germany, the German Order, which consists of public officials, and the National Union of German Officers. A National Fascist Congress was held in the early part of 1923, and Hitler defined the principal objective of the movement as "the destruction and the expulsion of communists and of the criminals responsible for the events of November [1918]." The methods used by the Germans are taken from the Italian models, and consist of acts of violence directed against working-class organisations and propaganda among trade unionists. This propaganda is of a nationalist, anti-semitic and even slightly anti-capitalist nature,† the last element being put in to attract the workers who suffer most

*Hitler has temporarily retired from active political life.

†Cf. the early radical programme of the Italian Fascists.

from the existing social system. The Fascists pursue a policy of "permeating" the trade unions and workshop committees, and have started a few unions of their own, following the usual lines of class-collaboration and nationalism. A national federation of Fascist unions has been set up, whose objects are defined as including the defence of private property, opposition to Marxism, to strikes and boycotts, and to co-operation with international organisations of workers or organisations in any other country. So far the Fascist trade unions appear to have secured the adherence only of those who in any case would be enrolled in the ranks of strike-breakers, and the movement presents but little danger of causing a serious split in the German Trade Unions. The historic value of the Fascist movement to the reactionaries of Germany lies in its role in time of revolution or upheaval. The German Fascists are organised politically in the German Freedom Party, under whose auspices a number of political murders have been carried out, including the famous cases of Erzberger, Rathenau and Maximilien Harden. It has an elaborate underground organisation, including a "Star Chamber," whose orders (such as those for assassinations) are obeyed by the membership.

The Austrian and Hungarian Fascist movements are closely allied. Hungary shares with Italy the distinction of having the oldest Fascist history, and the phenomenon may here be seen in classic simplicity. Following the downfall of the Soviet regime, the bourgeoisie used the lower middle classes (civil servants, officers and students) to re-establish themselves in power. The principal organisation in Hungary is that of the "Awakening Magyars," which is dominated by well-known nationalist and anti-semitic christians. Neither in Austria, nor in Hungary, is there a Fascist trade union movement, though in Austria one finds the economic side of the movement represented by a "Union for the Protection of Order and Economic Interests." This began as a purely strike-breaking body, but has since taken the offensive against the workers at all times. It is famous for its organised provocation and espionage among the workers.

The Austrian movement consists of a number of sections bearing various titles, but having similar aims and methods. They derive their support from financial houses and, it is said, from the government.

In Poland the Fascist organisations (like the Communist) are illegal. There are several such bodies, of which the most active are the Order of Fascists, the Civic League, the National Popular Defence, the Legion for the Protection of the Constitution, and the Committee of Polish Patriots (P.P.P.). The last-named is the most important. Its methods resemble those of the American Ku-Klux-Klan with mystic rites presided over by priests in subterranean churches. The

programme of the P.P.P. includes proposals for the abolition of universal suffrage (only "educated" men are to vote), the suppression of all strikes, the "removal from harm's way" of all communists, socialists, and Jews. The illegal nature of the organisation has necessitated secret work. The members all use assumed names and an elaborate machine for underground activity exists. It is said that a number of members of the police force are secretly controlled by the P.P.P. and that ministers themselves are included in its ranks. It is difficult to estimate the degree to which the P.P.P. is able to pull wires in high political quarters, but it is certainly evident that it wields considerable influence. In spite of its illegal character, it operates with little interference from the Government, and at a recent trial of some members for conspiracy the prosecution was carried out with the smallest possible skill and enthusiasm.

In France, Spain and England, there is no real Fascist movement except in name. Such organisation as is usually associated with this movement is really only a possible basis for its subsequent development, and consists of those elements of society which are commonly concerned with strike-breaking.

The French movement of this character is certainly a considerable one. There exists a number of Civic Unions whose objective is in the main to ensure the carrying on of industry in time of strike. These bodies are federated in the National Confederation of the Civic Unions of France, and under the auspices of this body have been established the cadres of Civic Guards. The declared objects of the Confederation have been relatively mild, covering only "a voluntary mobilisation with a view to putting obstacles in the way" of strikers, and, more particularly, of those who prepare for a general strike. "The National Confederation of Civic Unions groups its members outside of all class distinctions or political or religious faith, with a view to assisting in maintaining indispensable national services if the workers cease to carry out their duties," runs the third article of the constitution. But it is not to be doubted that the ultimate objective of the Confederation is a more definitely bellicose one, and we can read the words of one of the leaders of the movement (M. Saint-Marcet) which prove this:—"In general, the Civic Unions are organised with a view to co-operating with the government, but in the quite probable event of the government falling into the hands of anti-social parties, the Unions would immediately modify their tactics in order to act as an instrument of public safety and as a means to get rid (as in Denmark in 1920) of ministers who are hostile to order and constitution." The threat of violence against a workers' government is clear. The Civic Guards are another indication of the Fascist tendency of the movement. They are of a definitely military character, and their constitution expressly

provides that they are controlled by their own officers and are not responsible either to the police or the military. The Italian movement has powerful *fasci* in France, notably at Paris and Lyons.

Spanish Fascism is only in embryo. An organisation of volunteer police known as *somaten* has been developed with anti-proletarian objects and has attained to considerable power and numbers; it is well armed and organised for attacks, both physical and propagandist, on the workers. Other elements favourable to Fascism are the re-actionary carlist royalists, the military officers, and the "free" unions, which latter fulfil the traditional role of yellow unions in time of strikes. The revolution of September, 1923, was purely military in character under the leadership of General Primo de Rivera. It appears to derive its support from the landed aristocracy and its opposition to Catalonian separatism (supported by industrial capitalism) differentiates it clearly from Italian Fascism in spite of the similarity of its methods.

The English Fascist movement is commonly regarded as an object of laughter, and, so far as its pretensions to the scope of the Italian movement are concerned, correctly so. The economic and political conditions in England are not such as are likely to lead to the development of a powerful Fascist movement. The governing classes have other and better weapons to hand in the class war. The reformist trade union and labour leaders of this country will ensure the fundamental docility of the workers far more effectively than an amateur body of white guards. Unless a vital change takes place in the situation, the English Fascisti will remain only a glorified Boys' Brigade in normal times, and will take their share in strike-breaking when the occasion arises. If a genuine workers' government seemed likely to secure power, the governing classes would no doubt use every degree of force to combat it, but it is very unlikely that they would be so ill-prepared as to have to rely on the British Fascisti. The Fascisti to-day have not the organisation nor the intellectual capacity to constitute a serious peril to the proletariat, but their development will be carefully watched. They have some pretensions to secret "intelligence" and military work, but the loyalty and intelligence of their membership are so low that all these matters are common knowledge.

The American ruling class has developed a powerful repressive machine to rule the workers, but it is hardly Fascist in character. Many large corporations have their private armed police, or "gunmen," to smash any serious movement among their employees, and these forces are always available for a more general political purpose if required. After the war, the Ku-Klux-Klan was revived to support the ideas of Hundred Per Cent. Americanism, political and religious orthodoxy, and the rest of the ideological paraphernalia necessary

for the maintenance of the capitalist order of society. This secret society has been responsible for numerous deeds of brutality against "radical" workers. In South America the capitalists are not so firmly in the saddle, and a revolutionary menace has led to the formation of an anti-proletarian organisation which has one remarkable feature : in the Argentine there is a (capitalist) Association of Work to which all capitalists are *forced* to adhere, under threat of boycott. It organises all the usual attacks on the workers, and controls (through its daughter association the Patriotic League) considerable armed forces.

Fascism is a menace to the workers throughout the world. To counter it, they must unite internationally in their political organisations. The existence of close relationships between the German and the Italian Fascists and the French and the Italian is known : other such international groupings undoubtedly exist or will be established. The reply of the workers must be to set up an all-embracing political association of their own.

VI.—CONCLUSION

FASCISM is a move in the class war, and its opponents can hope to succeed only if they recognise this fact and act accordingly. Except in Italy, Fascism has not succeeded in capturing the minds of the workers, and in that country its success was due to the failure of the reformist leaders to follow a clear working-class policy.

The mass of the Italian workers and their political representatives are still too cowed to make any effective move against their tyrants. After the Matteotti crisis, a magnificent opportunity for attacking Fascism arose. The Government was severely shaken by the murder and its political consequences ; the opposition had its chance. The Communists demanded a general strike as a step towards overthrowing the Fascist Government, but the reformists* once more saved the situation for Mussolini. Instead of following a working-class policy, they chose to co-operate with the bourgeois anti-fascist parties. Their opposition to Fascism was to be mainly parliamentary, but took the strange form of abstention from attendance at parliamentary sessions. Since, moreover, parliament was adjourned not long after the Matteotti crisis developed, parliamentary action could be of little avail. The effect of this passive policy was to give the Government precisely the opportunity it needed of

* i.e., the Maximalist and Unitary Socialists.

living through the intensest time of crisis and re-establishing itself—an opportunity of which it took every advantage.

Nevertheless, the present situation offers valuable opportunities to the workers to overthrow the Fascist tyranny. The middle class is disillusioned. Bankruptcies among the smaller trading sections of society are rapidly increasing. House rents and the cost of education are rising. While the salaries of higher State officials have been raised, the lower civil servants have had their pay reduced and their conditions of work generally worsened. The general economic situation is bad. The lira remains low in the exchange. The cost of living rises. Wages are falling. The peasants are dissatisfied owing to increased taxation and the fall in the price of wine; many are faced with ruin and armed risings against the Government have occurred in the south.

The opposition to Fascism among non-proletarians is thus at its height. The Matteotti crisis gave expression to this general discontent. But the petty bourgeoisie cannot for the moment smash Fascism. The latest indications show that Mussolini considers his position once more strong enough for him to move to the right, and he proposes to establish a still more autocratic form of government.

In these circumstances there is a clear need for strong and definite action by the workers against the Fascist tyranny. The masses have thrown off their adhesion to Fascist ideas; in spite of the electoral wangle, the 1924 elections gave more votes to communist and socialist candidates than the socialists secured in their "peak" year of 1919. Fascism, notwithstanding its appearance of strength, could be smashed by a united attack from the workers. And the first step towards developing such an attack is the formation of working-class unity for this specific purpose. Co-operation among the sections of the working-class movement to shatter this temple of capitalism could succeed, and it would have the very desirable effect of binding together the active political elements of the proletariat for the final conquest of power in Italy.

Co-operation with the bourgeoisie is a policy whose harmfulness is now manifest. The working-class antagonism to Fascism needs to be clearly differentiated from that of the Liberals, for this, if it succeeded, would result in the establishment of a petty bourgeois government *indirectly* controlled (instead of *directly* like the Fascist government) by Big Business and the landlords.

In this task of smashing Fascism, it is not for any one section or party among the workers to act alone, but for the whole proletarian movement to co-operate. But, while all should unite for action, there must be no confusion as to objective. No question of class collaboration can be thought of; that way lies the destruction of

all working-class hopes and endeavours. The present position in the working-class parties is by no means simple. The reformists in their two parties, the Maximalists and the Unitary Socialists, are confronted by a united communist party embracing the Third Internationalists, who, until recently, preserved a separate organisation. The strong distinction between the Communists and the Socialists is strikingly illustrated in the attitude taken up towards the respective parties by Mussolini. It is a remarkable fact (especially noticeable during the April elections) that the anti-proletarian activities of the Fascists were concentrated on the Socialists, and that the Communists were left relatively free from interference. The Fascist wrath reached its climax in the murder of Matteotti, who was a reformist and not a revolutionary. The reason for this is probably that Mussolini regards the Communists with as much contempt as hatred. He does not regard them as his possible successors in power. But the danger of a reformist Liberal-Labour government, supported directly by the smaller trading and transport capitalists, and indirectly by the heavy industrialists, must always be present to his mind. Such a government is the most likely alternative to his own, and he must regard the right wing Socialists as his most immediate rivals.

But this is Mussolini's problem, not that of the workers ; a petty bourgeois government is no more their ideal than is a Fascist. The workers have, however, the difficult task of co-operating politically against Fascism with reformist Socialists whose policy must inevitably lead to a middle class triumph, unless it is corrected by genuine proletarian tendencies. The task of applying the united working-class front against Fascism which now confronts the Communists and their sympathisers is, indeed, a delicate one : they have to avoid the danger of working-class sectionalism on the one hand and of class collaboration on the other.

That is the problem. The conditions in which it has to be solved are certainly happier than at any time since 1920. Already the Fascist Unions show frequent signs of revolt against the class peace which they exist to maintain : all such tendencies can be developed and the Fascist Unions finally disrupted by the proletarian elements within them. At the same time, the genuine trade unions can be rebuilt with the old time socialist ideology to provide an effective counter-attraction to the Fascist bodies. This can only be achieved by constant propaganda campaigns inside the factories and among the peasants, who are increasingly ready for joint action with the industrial workers.

The revival of active propaganda and organising work amongst the proletariat will undoubtedly involve a recrudescence of the violent measures of the Fascists, and the workers must prepare

themselves to offer the utmost resistance. The foregoing remarks on the present situation show that the support of Fascism which formerly existed has now to a large degree disappeared. And the Fascists will find that, as their ideological support has gone, so has their physical. After Matteoti's death the order was given for the assembly of the Fascist militia, but only 20 per cent. mobilised ; the full strength turned up only in a few rural provinces and this personnel had to be drafted at once to Rome. But the workers cannot yet risk an open fight. Much propaganda and organisation have yet to be carried out, but the methods and the objective are clear enough. The courage and political sense of the Italian workers have often been proved ; if their leadership and organisation can only reach the same high standards in the coming struggle, Fascism can be crushed and a workers' government set up in Italy.

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