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# *Italy's Seven Years Under Mussolini*

The celebration of the seventh anniversary of the March on Rome on Oct. 27 was made the occasion by Premier Mussolini for delivering a speech in which he declared that Italy was ready for peace or war. The Fascist revolution, he said, "still has the courage to plunge the lead of its muskets into the backs of the enemies of Italy. Today, after seven years, we are as young, as strong and as implacable as ever." This utterance gives point to the article printed below, in which Mr. Beals surveys the present position of Italy after seven years of dictatorship.

By CARLETON BEALS

AUTHOR OF *Rome or Death: The Story of Fascism* AND OTHER WORKS

ITALIAN FASCISM is not merely a political and economic theory and practice, but also a sort of religion, an exalted faith. Fascism is the repository of the emotions and hopes of millions of Italians. Naturally, it is equally an object of suspicion and hate for many Italians in exile, for the more radical proletariat, for the intellectuals unable to participate in its emotional uplift. This religious and mystic quality with which the Fascisti, though seven years in power, still invest their cause, is constantly borne in upon the casual observer. And Italy certainly has need of faith of some sort.

Excessive population and limited resources lie at the root of every Italian problem. The three temporary but positive means of confronting overpopulation are emigration, industrialization, imperialism. Italy has tried, and is trying, them all. The government of Mussolini is, in addition to other things, an expression of this imperious need to solve the population problem. The comings and goings of the Italians likewise obey the imperious reality of inexorable social forces. Back of the scenes is the grim reality of the shrill brutalized lives in the dark tenements and ghettos of Italy—the reality of ten, fifteen people crowded into a windowless room;

the reality of gaunt breasts and thrift due to elementary hunger. Back of the scenes is a Europe broken into warring economic units. Back of the scenes is the urge of expanding population in a country whose productivity can scarcely keep pace—all the stirrings born of economic necessity. No simple formula will solve this centuries-old problem.

Before the war Italians emigrated at the rate of 500,000 a year, the large majority of them to the United States. The closing of the gates of our country came as a sharp warning. The Fascisti hold up population pressure as an apologia for many of their policies. Yet inconsistently Mussolini has frowned upon every attempt at birth control, and doubly so now that he has signed the Concordat; and quite inconsistently he spends much time personally presenting premiums to the parents of the largest families in the various communities. On the other hand, he has attacked the problems of emigration and industrialization vigorously.

The Fascist Government has attempted to make colonization in North Africa more attractive. It has developed the resources of Tripoli, and its colonial administration in the North-eastern African colonies has been aggressive and constructive. Italy is ob-

taining an increasing amount of coffee, cotton, tobacco and other semi-tropic products from its African colonies. This has stimulated colonization. Similarly, many Italian colonists are invading French Tunis and are even drifting into Algiers. This, however, is scarcely sufficient outlet. With the United States no longer a haven, Mussolini has turned to Latin America, and has celebrated special colonization treaties with many of the Latin-American countries looking toward the settlement of Italian agricultural labor.

3. Fascism also represents a belated effort at industrialization. The disrupting effects of rapid industrialization upon agrarian nations are well known. Yet industrialization demands order, efficiency, political stability. Dictatorship becomes a short cut, whatever the political theory it rests upon.

Seven years have passed since I stood in the Piazza Colonna in Rome and watched a horde of Black Shirts burning the library of the Republican party. Seven years since that drizzly day when the Black Shirts swarmed down the Via Tritone and Via Due Macelli to impose their will upon Italy, and Mussolini whirled down out of the gray skies in an airplane from Milan. Seven years later, in the same Piazza, I watched the massed Black Shirt militia paying disciplined tribute to two American transatlantic aviators.

Those earlier days were hectic with

civil strife. The Fascisti were partisans fighting to defeat their enemies, to gain the upper hand, fighting with mystical slogans, fighting real battles with rifles and machine guns. They were imbued with a proselytizing faith that they alone could save Italy, could recreate the Fourth Rome, could carry out the nationalistic program of Cavour, could re-establish Italy's prestige among the nations. Today they are in the seats of power. And one of the Fascist gods is order, efficiency. The Black Shirts are now part of the State. They are the State. Today Italy, if anything, is over-ordered and overregulated. This is a superficial symptom of the industrialization process going on in Italy.

Q. What has Mussolini done to increase the productivity of the country? First of all he has established order, a *sine qua non*. Even to guarantee discipline within the Fascist ranks was no easy achievement. Fascism, beginning as an amorphous expression of post-war malaise, embraced many divergent elements and many divergent views. It was composed of three leading violent elements: the *arditi*, or discharged shock troops; the militant nationalists, and the syndicalists, all imbued with theories of direct action. In the lower Po region it represented a small proprietor and land-distribution movement (as opposed to the large land-holders on the one hand and the Catholic and Socialist cooperatives on the other.) In



Map showing Italy's position in the Mediterranean

Puglia it was almost Communist. In Tuscany, particularly Florence, it was middle-class. In Milan, it had affiliations with the large Lombard industrialists. How were these warring elements to be reconciled and made to cooperate? By the doctrine of the strong State—to quote Mussolini: "Nothing outside the State, nothing against the State, everything for the State." By subordinating everything to an exalted worship of the new and powerful Italy—a sort of mystic, religious patriotism.

The new demand for order meant facing the powerful labor unions which had marched to the brink of bolshevism in 1919. It meant meeting the demands of the large nucleus of syndicalists inscribed under the Fascist banner, and the thousands of new labor elements that stampeded into the Fascist ranks

as soon as the movement showed promise of victory.

The Fascist labor unions, or *corporazioni*, which were welded into a national organization in their Bologna convention in 1921, adopted a position of nationalist collaboration in keeping with the general Fascist philosophy. With the advent of the Fascisti to power, the leaders of the *corporazioni* were taken into the Grand Fascist Economic Council. Under the leadership of the ex-syndicalist Rossini, the national organization of *corporazioni* gathered great headway, and there is little doubt that Mussolini began to look askance at its activities and the growing power of Rossini. Fortunately, Mussolini could put his finger upon certain peculations of Rossini, and the latter left the country. Mussolini insisted upon a complete

reorganization of the *corporazioni*. Instead of a national labor federation, seven national councils were to be created, corresponding to the major industries, in which labor, capital and the government would be represented. The term *corporazioni* was redefined to indicate the new type of organization; and the labor elements were given back their old word of *sindacati*. The term *corporazioni* was henceforth, declared Mussolini, to apply to the wider economic-political unit representing the full Fascist principle of social cooperation in accordance with the hierarchical theory of reciprocal class organization and largely under the direct supervision of the government.

Undoubtedly, in this process, labor—and, to a large extent, capital—have lost most of their independent prerogatives. Both strikes and lock-outs are strictly regulated, in fact have been practically eliminated. At the same time Mussolini boasts that he has done more for labor than

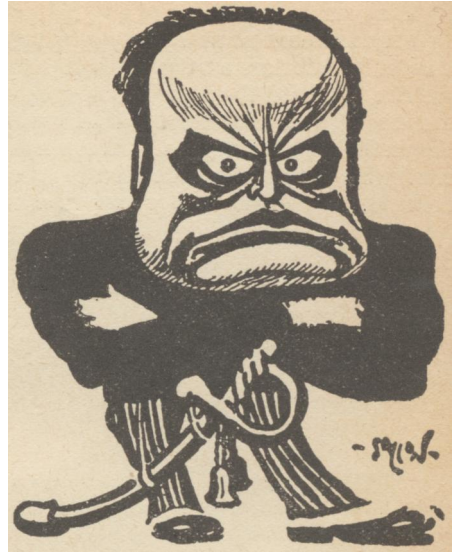


MUSSOLINI AND THE STORK  
A cartoon by Werner Hahmann, from *Kladderadatsch*

America, England or Russia. Probably idle boasting, though the material standards of Italian labor are higher than they were ten or even five years ago, and Italian labor is far from being the worst off in European countries.

Mussolini has definitely stimulated the production activities of the country. He ordered a careful and scientific survey of all the resources of the country which discovered mineral and other wealth heretofore unknown. Special attention has been given to water-power development. Italy possesses more potential hydroelectric power than any other European country. This has never been properly exploited. The war gave considerable impulse; and French enterprise not only developed new sites, but unified the distribution system of north Italy, largely for the purpose of exporting power into France. That exportation has largely ceased, but the work of the French bore fruit, and after the war commercial and industrial as well as governmental circles developed elaborate plans for further development. But not until the advent of Fascism was capital secured to carry out various projects. The Fascist régime has nearly tripled the manufacture of electric power, and it has stimulated the application of power to many industries. New electric railway lines have been constructed, and many miles of the already existing railways have been electrified.

Italian industries, owing to the necessity of importing nearly all the raw products, are at a disadvantage so far as international trade is concerned. In order to facilitate such purchases of raw materials the stabilization of the lira became necessary. One of the fundamental reasons for the failure of the proletarian factory seizures in 1919 was the concurrent decline of the lira, which made it impossible to purchase raw materials or to gain foreign credits. In addition to the stabilization of the lira, electric power development has also lightened the handicap. A third step has been the seeking of foreign markets where Italy, because of the nature of its products and its geo-



MUSSOLINI

—*Sontagsnisse-Strix, Stockholm*

graphical position, would have an advantage over other European countries. While Mussolini has not neglected the Latin-American field, especially Argentina, where the large Italian immigration gives Italian products a certain advantage, he has turned to the Near and Far East and to Russia. The shorter water haul and the need of those regions for goods of cheap quality give to Italy considerable advantage. Thus steamship lines have been subsidized all through the Aegean, to Greece, Turkey, Egypt and India. Another subsidized line follows the Black Sea coast, touching at ports in Bulgaria, Rumania, and having its terminus at Odessa.

Again, Mussolini has not neglected agriculture. Extensive experiments have been made with new products. While it is regrettable that the Fascisti, on their first advent to power, destroyed the remarkable Socialist and Catholic cooperatives, and more or less undid the agrarian reforms of the Catholic Popular party, nevertheless new Fascist cooperatives have been created. Facilities have been given to the peasants to buy land on long-term payments, and many of the older estates have been broken up for this purpose. The Roman Campagna presents a

bright appearance compared to its desolate abandonment some eight years ago. A recent historian of the Roman Empire has declared that one of the major reasons for the decline of Rome was the gradual rising of the western sea-coast, which backed up the streams and turned fertile lands into swamps. The

ly an integral part of the Fascist program. Italy's participation in the war obeyed this motive. The desire to recover as much as possible of Italia Irredenta was the chief reason that Italy joined the Allies. But the Treaty of Versailles failed to fulfill Italy's expectations. D'Annunzio's seizure of



The Italianized Austrian Tyrol, which has been heavily garrisoned by Italian soldiers since it became Italian territory after the World War

Popes all through the Middle Ages concerned themselves with projects, mostly futile, for draining the Roman Campagna, which had become a focus for malaria. The Fascist régime, through modest yet effective drainage enterprise and through efforts to eliminate malaria, has made possible the recultivation of much of the Campagna. Today, instead of a few bedraggled peasants eking out a dubious existence, living in miserable huts, and emaciated from malaria, the Campagna, sown to broad fields of grain, presents a most hopeful appearance.

• The third method for handling excess population in a nation, namely political expansion or imperialism, is undoubtedly

Fiume was a preliminary indication of the dissatisfaction of a large sector of Italian public opinion. The Fascist régime was a further reaffirmation of Italy's determination to play a prominent rôle in Europe and to continue an international policy leading toward Italian expansion in various areas of the Mediterranean region.

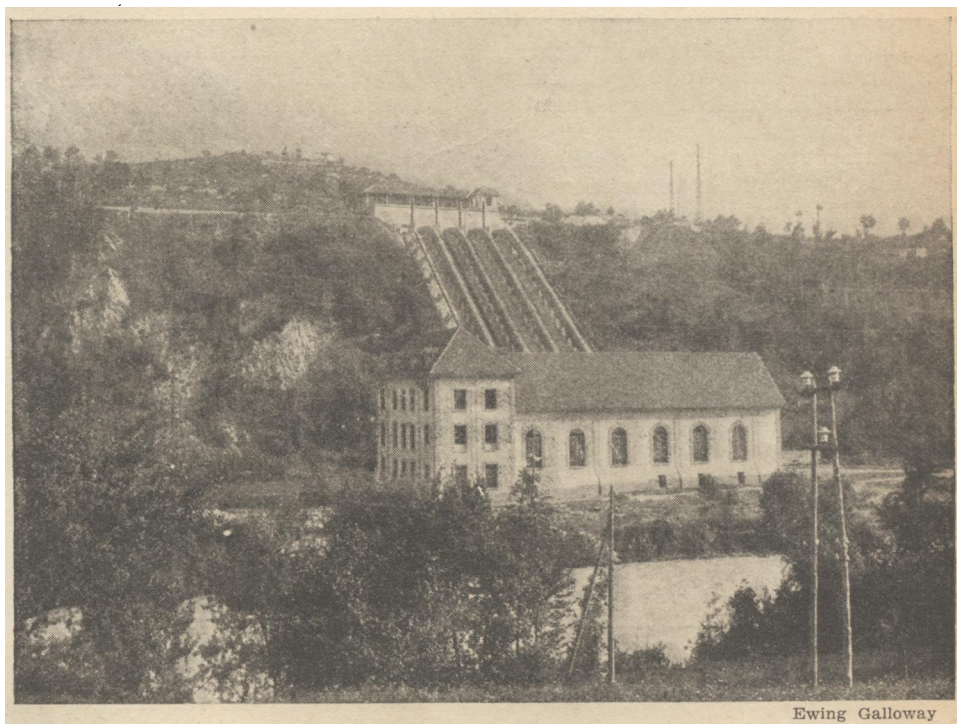
It cannot be said that the initial expansion of Italy, resulting from the World War, has brought happy results. Fiume and Zara, Italian cities on the Dalmatian coast, are in a constant feud with the Yugoslav hinterland. Both are melancholy non-economic units. Fiume is unable to secure even a proper water supply from the Yugoslavs. The

latter boycott the port, and are building up a new independent outlet. The expansion in the Austrian Tyrol has also brought about irritating racial antagonisms, and the port of Trieste has steadily declined from its pre-war prominence. Its hinterland—Germany, the Balkans, the Austrian Empire—has been cut off by the new frontiers. Czechoslovakia, guaranteed a free port in Trieste by the treaties, prefers to ship through Hamburg.

Undoubtedly the Fascist program definitely looks toward further Mediterranean expansion. Mussolini alternately denies this and rattles the saber. The gains already made as a result of

ments which would look toward Rome for inspiration. The creation of the puppet Albanian Government, under the financial and political control of Italy, in accordance with a pact which allows Italian troops to intervene in Albania whenever the *status quo* may be menaced, is one expression of the Fascist policy toward Yugoslavia and the determination of the present Italian régime to control the Aegean.

The Fascist dream is ultimately to possess the entire Mediterranean area. For the moment, its aspirations are directed toward securing political domination over the whole Dalmatian coast; Albania (partially realized); the Straits



A large hydroelectric plant at Val d'Aosta, in the Italian Alps

the war have led to continuous Italian intrigue in the Balkans and other places where Italians reside. The creation of the Yugoslav State has blocked Italy's early expansion, has created mutual jealousies and fears, and Italy's local policy has been to attempt to surround Yugoslavia with unfriendly govern-

of Otranto, thus completely controlling the Aegean; the Italian canton of Switzerland, Ticino; Nice in France; the island of Corsica; Malta, and Tunis. It is not to be expected that Italy single-handed will attempt to take by force any of these areas. She hopes to secure some of them through negotia-

tion. Also, another European conflict might permit Italy to swing in on the winning side and gain further concessions.

In the meantime, all these areas have become foci of intrigue and propaganda. The Swiss, alarmed by Fascist propaganda in the Ticino, have been obliged to put mild restrictions upon the circulation of a number of the Italian papers. The border between France and Italy has become prickly with armaments. The Italians in Tunis, as I was able to observe by a personal visit, keep that colony simmering. While I was in Italy several hundred Fascist Boy Scouts were brought over from Tunis to visit Italy. The Italian Fascisti are constantly holding parades in Tunis, reminders to the French that the Italian population is greater than theirs. The Italian press recently gave great political significance to the establishment of an airline between Italy and Tunis. This concession was wrested from the French in return for the granting of an Italian base for the new French airline to the Near East. Mussolini never misses an opportunity to remind France that Tunis should belong to Italy. Some time ago he suggested that if France expanded her control in Morocco, Italy would expect to receive Tunis. Recently also Mussolini sent Italian gunboats to Tangier when the government of that port was being settled, a reminder of Italy's interest in North Africa. The Italians have also recently stirred up religious difficulties in Malta.

The price for internal development and preparation for external expansion has, of course, been the annihilation within the country of personal liberty and democratic practices. Mussolini himself has admitted this, time and again declaring that liberty and democracy are outworn doctrines. The high regard for the liberty of the press, constantly expressed by Cavour, the father of Italian political independence; his iterations regarding free institutions; his jubilation that Italian unification had been achieved without the necessity of military dictatorship, indi-

cate the difference between the Risorgimento, a movement of national liberation, and the present Italy intent upon power and expansion, where the doctrine of the superstate has whipped the Italian public into lockstep behind Mussolini. The Fascist dictatorship represents a belated attempt at industrialization and modernization, an arduous attempt to catch up with the Great Powers. Actually it has landed in a phase of militant State capitalism.

The turning point of Fascism's governing career was the assassination of the Opposition Deputy Matteoti in 1924. The backfire from that crime woke Mussolini as never before to the dangers to his power by aroused opposition, unless he completely solidified his position. Until the Matteoti murder Mussolini played a much more dual rôle, sometimes stressing his dictatorial and revolutionary attributes, at other times stressing his legality as the appointed head of the government. But the Matteoti murder precipitated the Aventine parliamentary secession and made further collaboration with the defeatist parties impossible. The secession left the Fascisti in undisputed possession of all the legal machinery. A new terrorist drive of the Black Shirt "squadrons" soon stifled all opposition, including all vestiges of a free press. The Catholics alone were able to salvage most of their press and their religious lay organizations.

#### ELECTORAL VICTORY

The Fascisti then moved on to full control of the electoral machinery. At the time of the March on Rome, when Mussolini demanded majority control of the Cabinet, the Fascisti were but a mere handful in Parliament. In the ensuing elections, the Fascisti made a deal with the Giolittian Liberals and other elements, to put up a common nationalist ticket, on which would appear a majority of Fascist candidates. Thus the Fascisti provided most of the candidates and the old-time parties most of the votes. At the same time the Senate was diluted with a large



Ewing Galloway

The crowded slums of Naples

number of new Fascist Senators. Then, simultaneously purging the Fascist party of all but its militant members and bringing it more directly under his personal control, Mussolini permitted it to widen its power. Only Fascist organizations were now recognized as legal; all political organizations were obliged to permit the appointment of their officers by the Fascist General Council. Even the officers of the seven labor federations were appointed in this way; and the counter-

poised employers' organizations are likewise completely Fascist.

On this basis the electoral law of Sept. 2, 1928, was put into effect. This provides for the submission of candidates for the National Chamber by various political, economic and cultural organizations (all Fascist) to the Grand Council of the National Fascist party, which then forms one list from the names submitted, or any other names. The final purgated list is then submitted to the electorate for rejection or approval. The balloting is not secret, and those who vote "no" are promptly subjected to petty persecutions. In other words, the Italian Deputies are now chosen by the Fascist Grand Council (the head of which is a member of the Cabinet); the Grand Council is, in turn, appointed by Mussolini himself. The powers of Parliament, in spite of this Fascist control, are strictly limited. Only the head of the Cabinet (Mussolini) may initiate legislation. If the Duce's proposed legislation is rejected, he may call for a second vote, without discussion, within three months. The Prime Minister (Mussolini) has the power to issue regulations which have the force of law. These regulations must be submitted to Par-

liament on its third session after publication; but even if rejected, the regulations cease to have the effect of law only after two years. Cabinet officials by the law of Dec. 9, 1925, are freed from their responsibility to Parliament.

By a series of three laws between 1925 and 1927 Mussolini has also gained direct control over all local and national government employes, whom he may remove, with consent of the Cabinet, for not supporting the régime

with sufficient ardor or for other causes. In addition, local self-government has been destroyed. The Communes are now in the hands of the *podestà*, named by and responsible to the Dictator. The *podestà* is not required to report to the Commune regarding either the funds in the local treasury when he supplanted the popularly elected officials or moneys since collected. Elected provincial bodies have been supplanted by a *preside* and rectors appointable and removable by Mussolini. Private employers are held responsible for the character of their workmen and may hire no one without proper inquiry and proof that he is not inimical to the régime. Control over the judiciary has been gained through the abolition of inviolability of tenure (Law of July 22, 1926). In November, 1926, political agitators were henceforth to be tried by a special tribunal composed of army, navy, aerial and militia officials, whose verdicts are not subject to appeal. The penalty for mere criticism of the Dictator may range from three months' to thirty years' confinement on the barren islands or elsewhere. The law also provided for special local commissions to punish citizens of doubtful loyalty to the régime. These commissions are chosen from permanent functionaries, from officers of the *carabinieri* and the Fascist militia. The police are in the majority. They mete out two kinds of punishment. *Ammonizione* consists in confining a citizen to his home. He cannot be out after dark, must not meet specified individuals, must report daily to the police, and cannot leave his town without police permission. *Confine di polizia* consists of deportation to the desert islands (off Sicily and Africa). No reports of sentences are permitted to appear in the press, but the central military tribunal probably sentences about 1,500 political prisoners annually, and the police tribunals well over 2,000.

Without discussing the causes or the

possible necessity for the character of the system just described, the Fascist régime certainly has made great strides in the creation of order and discipline, in facing the problem of emigration, in stimulating the productive capacities of the nation. In addition, it has re-established the country's prestige among the nations, which was so seriously dimmed by the cynical manipulations of some of the representatives at the Versailles conference. On the other hand, Fascist foreign policy is fraught with grave risks, and the present intensive militarization of the country has aroused fears in all of Italy's neighbors. At present Turkey is the only warm ally possessed by Italy; and Mussolini's attempted alliances in the Balkans have largely failed. Likewise his treatment of Teutonic minorities caused his attempt to draw closer to the central powers, because of his fear of France, to be barren of diplomatic results.

By and large the ultimate success of the Fascist régime in Italy will probably depend upon a combination of domestic and foreign factors. Unless Mussolini seizes upon the proper moment to broaden the powers of political control and permit freer expression of the popular will, political transition can only be effected by future revolutions and convulsions which would undermine most of his constructive efforts. From the international point of view, Italy is quite dependent upon historical trends in Europe as a whole. She is part of Europe, playing a minor rôle; in spite of her present intense nationalism her destinies are inextricably intertwined with those of Europe. The progress of Europe is to a great extent dependent, in this age of international economic relationships, upon the lowering of economic and military barriers, and the reorganization of European life more in the direction of Briand's proposal for a United States of Europe. Toward this unification of economic and political life Italy is contributing not at all.