

IT WAS A REVOLUTION

By VINZO COMITO

On October 27, 1922, Benito Mussolini carried out his March on Rome. Today we know that this event had a significance which goes far beyond the borders of Italy. It forced a breach in the old world of ideas, a breach through which many other nations have since marched, widening it mightily.

In this revolutionary achievement, and not in the fact that trains run on time in Italy since Mussolini, lies the importance of Fascism. Just like the storming of the Bastille more than a hundred and fifty years ago, the March on Rome ushered in a new epoch. Hence our author has not dealt so much with the development of Italy in the twenty years since the March on Rome as with what is fundamentally new in the Fascist ideology.

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BLOODLESS REVOLUTION?

WHEN, twenty years ago, Fascism came into power and the King of Italy entrusted its young and energetic leader—Mussolini was only thirty-nine years old then—with the reins of government, many people inside Italy, and almost everybody outside, looked upon Fascism with amazement and distrust. Few thought that Fascism had a chance of bringing order into the spirit of the Italian people, to say nothing of changing the face of Europe. They would ask: What is Fascism, anyhow? and the usual answer was: Just the romantic, disorderly, clamorous protest of a few young men against the government which, in spite of the victory achieved on the battlefield by a valiant army, had not enough strength to demand Italy's just rights at the peace table, nor to quell the clamor of the subversive elements that were threatening the nation with ruin at the dictates of the Red gods of Moscow.

They made fun of a Fascist or anybody else who spoke about Fascism as a "revolution." What kind of revolution is it that confines itself to a few skirmishes

with the opposing groups? What kind of revolution is it that, unlike the French or Russian Revolutions, does not cause blood to flow in the streets? Even people of high intellectual caliber as well as vast knowledge and experience did not understand the real meaning of the spark that was to light so vast a beacon in the world.

Mussolini himself said from the outset: "Fascism is a revolution, a revolution of the first rank, though it does not need to cut heads by the hundred on the Piazza della Maddalena." The man is a fool, people would comment in their self-complacency. He is drunk with self-exaltation; the experience of governing will be enough to bring about his doom.

One thing was entirely overlooked by the enemies of Fascism, and that was the fact that, in order to succeed to power in the name of some new doctrine or ideology, a man must at the right moment have struck the right cord in the spirit of his followers and compatriots, must have brought a torch so luminous and resplendent that every one of them could see and allow himself to be led out of darkness and despair into the road of life and hope.

ITALY—CRADLE OF IDEAS

People of other nations that had indulged in a campaign of disparagement and calumny against Italy and her people could not understand the revolutionary significance of the movement which had sprung from the midst of the youth of Italy. They had always thought of the Italians as a decadent race, unable to rise again because it was too old and already exhausted. History had taught nothing to such disparagers. They could not see that Italy's historic mission is imperial in the sense that she has always something new and original to impart to the world. With the Roman Empire, the highest juridical interpretation of life was given to the world, and on its ruins a new empire was born with the Cross of Jesus Christ which, through the force and prestige still exercised and enjoyed by Rome, was to cast its holy shadow all over the vast domain. It was among the Italian people that the movement known as the Renaissance was to be born and spread over the world. It was another kind of empire, the empire of thought and art, of science and the spirit of research and exploration; and it was then and there that the idea and spirit of individualism were born, a spirit which is glorified today as their own by two of the nations fighting against Italy.

A few days ago I came across the words of a Japanese, Mr. Saburo Sakurai. Chief of the Bureau of General Affairs and Education of the Tokushima Prefecture, which seem to interpret the part played by Italy throughout the history of mankind from the foundation of Rome to the present day. Mr. Sakurai says:

"Italy is the land of good ideas; in this she excels. One of the latest achievements, the invention of radio by Marconi, is the result of a great idea. Fascism is the result of a great idea, and this idea has a universal meaning and marks the transition from liberalism to a new political conception of society. In this sense the Italian race possesses the peculiarity of being the creator of new ideas."

Italy is the place of and the Italian people the yeast for the periodical renewal of Western mankind. Italy—if we rightly understand Mr. Sakurai's words—is the harbinger of new life throughout the

centuries. And it was only natural that, among the chaos of unchecked Individualism and brutal Communism that was dividing the world without the possibility of a final mutual understanding, a new idea should arise in the same cradle of civilization from the same people that had previously revitalized Europe.

Fascism was a revolution. Germany realized this, so did Spain and Austria, and Brazil to a certain extent. So did even Mr. Roosevelt, whose speech of January 3, 1938, in the House of Representatives in Washington was nothing but an elaboration of the socio-economic principles of Fascism which he had tried in vain to put through by the legislation of the New Deal.

In order to be a revolution, a movement must contribute to the social, juridical, and political interpretation of human life. It must possess an ideology which gives the dramatis personae the faith they need to win and which prevents any return to the past.

Although the Fascist movement, when it was founded on March 23, 1919, expounded no definite program, it had a number of clear aims: defense of the ideals that had prompted intervention in the Great War and appreciation of the full value of victory; strenuous, unrelenting opposition to the corroding forces of Communism and all subversive ideas; direct and confident recourse to the working classes and producers; subordination of class interests to national realities; intensification of national output and channeling of all activities towards economic self-sufficiency. In the field of foreign affairs, Fascism fought all forms of surrender, denied the Utopia of internationalism and disarmament unless the latter were equal and simultaneous for all nations ("Any level of armament, even the lowest, as long as it be unsurpassed by any other Continental nations," said Mussolini), and supported the revision of peace treaties, claiming a right to colonies.

CORRADINI AND CORRIDONI

To corroborate and enhance the spirit underlying Fascist principles, a new force

subsequently joined hands with Fascism: that of Nationalism, whose leader, Enrico Corradini, had, since the beginning of the century, been expounding ideas directed against Marxism, class struggle, parliamentarism, and bourgeoisism, as well as a set of organic principles intended to transform passive patriotism into a concrete idea of better political organization of the people for their common good in a country made greater and more powerful.

It is also interesting to note that many Fascists came from the ranks of Syndicalism—not that old form of Syndicalism that was still upholding the principle of class struggle and entertained only economic ends, but the new form, whose economic and spiritual ends were pursued with an eye to national interest. The syndicalist leader Filippo Corridoni had died as a volunteer at the front in 1915.

“THE STATE IS NOT A NIGHT-WATCHMAN”

Previous to Fascism, the two prevailing doctrines concerning the State had been the doctrine of Individualism, which made the State the servant of the individual, and the doctrine of class struggle, in which the State was the tool of an economic class. The Fascist doctrine has best been formulated by Mussolini himself in his book *Fascism's Doctrine and Institutions*. He says:

There is no concept of the State which is not a fundamental concept of life itself. The cornerstone of Fascist doctrine is the conception of the State, of its essence, its purposes and aims. To Fascism, the State is the absolute in comparison to which individuals and groups are relative. Individuals and groups are conceivable, but within the State. The liberalist State does not lead the material and spiritual activities and development of the community, but limits itself to taking cognizance of the results. The Fascist State is conscious of itself, possesses a will, and that is the reason for its being called the “ethical State.”

In 1929, at the first quinquennial assembly of the regime, I said: To Fascism, the State is not a night-watchman who only looks after the personal security of the citizens. It is not an organization whose aims are purely materialistic, as, for instance, to assure a certain amount of welfare or guarantee a more or less pacific development to social relations among the constituents, for which purpose a board of directors would be sufficient. It is not even a creation of pure politics, with no contact with the material and complex reality of

the individual and national life. The State, as Fascism conceives and realizes it, is a fact both spiritual and moral, because it materializes the political, juridical, and economic organization of the nation, and such an organization, considered in its genesis and development, is a manifestation of the spirit.

The State is the guarantor of the internal and external security of the nation, but it is also the guardian and the transmitter of the people's spirit as it was formed in the course of the centuries in their language, customs, and faith.

These utterances and definitions are revolutionary enough to provide work for more than a generation. And Mussolini continues:

When the State becomes weak and disintegrating and centrifugal tendencies prevail among individuals and groups, nations are doomed to decline. Since the year 1919, the economic and political evolution of the world has contributed to the reinforcement of this doctrinal situation. The State has become a giant. Only the State can solve the dramatic contradictions of capitalism. *If Liberalism means the individual, Fascism means the State.*

THE WAR OF THE FINGERS

The fact that this conception of the State is opposed to old-fashioned Individualism has caused many to accuse Fascism of being the tyrant of the individual. Such an accusation is the result of superficial thinking and jumping to conclusions. In reality, Fascism gives importance to the individual in no lesser degree than Individualism, both historically and socially, and does not consider his interests as opposed to those of the State, as the theory of Individualism would have us believe. Fascism considers the individual an integral part of the State. The individual is the State itself, in so far as he is part of that association of individuals which forms the community. When one considers that, according to the Fascist doctrine, the State is nothing but the irrepressible juridical, social, and political result of that association which constitutes the community, one immediately perceives the importance of the individual under the new political aspect which assimilates him into the State.

To illustrate the difference between the two conceptions, we can compare the whole social and political structure of the nation to the human body. In conformity with the individualistic theory,

the little finger of my left hand has interests that are in opposition to those of the entire body; or, in conformity with the class or Marxist theory, the class of all my fingers has interests that are in opposition to those of my body. In other words, my fingers and my body, one way or another, are in a perpetual state of conflict. Fascism thinks instead that my fingers and my body are one and the same thing in so far as my fingers are an integral part of my body.

Thus the Fascist conception of the State puts the individual upon a plane of superlative importance because the State is held to be superlatively important. The individual is freed from any kind of despotism that might be attempted against it (whether that of the landowner, the industrialist, etc.) and brought into a nucleus, the "social body" (*corpo sociale*), where he forms part of the whole. In such "bodies" the individual and the State recognize each other as one and the same thing: the *corporate individual*, the *corporative State*.

At first, the principle of Corporativism seemed most clearly defined in the economic relationship between employee and employer, in so far as, by means of corporative organization, any dissension arising between them could be settled amicably (thus eliminating any kind of class struggle). Subsequently, the principle of Corporativism revealed itself as abundantly fruitful of new juridical and moral possibilities, conferring a corporative character on the most salient manifestations of life.

While in New York I was once invited to a round-table talk, and a debate took place between myself and a man who represented the democratic side of the topic, which dealt with Fascism and Democracy. My opponent maintained that the Fascist theory was a subversive one, and that it was bound to destroy the most sacred ideas on which society was established. Against this, my argument ran approximately as follows: Human society, as we conceive it in our civilized days, is based on the ideas surrounding the institutions of family,

private property, religion, and personal freedom.

It is superfluous in this connection to speak about the institution of the *family*, since it is well known that Fascism exalts it as the most important cell in the national organization. *Private property* has been fully respected and protected, because Fascism believes that desire for ownership is an indestructible human urge and, therefore, one of the most powerful incentives for man to be active and productive. As for *religion*: the Lateran Pact and Concordat of February 1929 speaks for itself. Whereas other revolutions, such as the French and the Russian, saw their first duty in destroying religion, the Fascist Revolution believed instead that religion was to be exalted and its practice protected. In that direction it has acted tangibly and efficiently. The great majority of religious persons and orders adhere to or are in open sympathy with Fascism.

THE DEATH OF LIBERTY?

Now we come finally to the idea of *personal freedom*. When Fascism proclaimed that "liberty was dead," the democratic states started an uproar whose echoes can still be heard: How many individual and collective sacrifices had been made to the Goddess of Liberty! How many a noble life given for that lofty ideal! How many beautiful books written, how many struggles endured for it!

Fascism would be the last to deny this. As a matter of fact, Fascism has vindicated the nobility of everything that was endured by brave men and nations in the name of liberty, and liberty was reinstated by Fascism on the pedestal of reality, where it belongs.

The truth is that those who started the uproar either misunderstood or, for the purposes of anti-Fascist propaganda, gave a false interpretation to the utterances of the leaders of Fascism.

First of all, "liberty is dead" was said with reference to its killer and not with reference to the victim. What was meant

was that liberty had been killed through its abuse by those who used it as the means of attaining their unscrupulous aims. It was the happy kingdom of the strong man to use his liberty to prevail on the liberty of the weak; the kingdom of those who could, by the use of subtle sophistry, evade the law and invoke the right of liberty in order to harm individual fellow men or the nation itself. At the time when Fascism started taking effect, the Communists in Italy, for example, were loudly invoking liberty in order to be free to establish Communism and then kill liberty with it.

FREE—FROM WHAT?

Liberty was taken for granted by the people of our century, so much so that the real significance of it was almost lost. In decades gone by, men had had to fight and lay down their lives for it. The people of our century, however, thought it was just as much a natural right (*jus naturalis*) as breathing air or drinking water. Had not the philosophers proclaimed that liberty was a natural right? Yes, they had, but *when*? When certain elementary rights were not conceded to the people; when they were not free to believe in God as they pleased; when they were not free from the whims of feudal lords; when they were not free to organize themselves into nations of their own, or did not possess the right to have their representatives in a government which decided how much money should be squeezed from their meager family budgets in the guise of taxation.

Liberty then had a concrete meaning. But if I say I desire liberty for the sake of having liberty, without reference to something definite, I would be saying something that is devoid of sense.

The average person wants liberty to perform his activities aimed at the welfare and enhancement of his personality, his family, his friends; he looks for the possibility of educating himself, of choosing the trade or profession best suited to his talent; of selecting his friends, of traveling when and how he pleases; of working and advancing to a higher moral

as well as material standard of living. It is now almost universally recognized that he has the liberty to do all this, provided he does not impair or infringe upon the equal rights of his fellow men. This means that there is a limit to his liberty, and that this limit is represented by the equal right of his fellow men not to be infringed or trampled upon while he performs his own activities.

But who is going to see to it that this limit is not overstepped? The law. And who makes the law? The State through those organs which are designated to make laws. Then the liberty to do this or that is not heaven-sent: it comes from the State. It comes from that collective consciousness of the nation which has its greatest expression in the State.

The Fascist conception of the State is against classic Liberalism, which, born of Absolutism, has ended its historic function since the time when the State became the consciousness and will of the people. Liberalism denied the State in favor of the individual (when it was expedient to do so); Fascism reaffirms the State as the true reality of the individual. And if liberty is to be the attribute of real live men, not the abstract puppets to which individualistic Liberalism was referring, Fascism is for liberty, for the one and only liberty which is serious and real: the liberty of the State and the individual in the State. (Mussolini.)

A NEW CONCEPTION OF REPRESENTATION

Due to the fact that a new conception of the State has been elaborated in Italy, the conception of the right to representation (to represent or be represented) has also been changed into a form that is altogether new and which modifies the substance of the institution of popular representation.

In the liberal or individualistic State, the individual represents a group of individuals, his constituency; and, on account of the dualism existing between the individual and the State, their interests very often clash, with detrimental consequences for the national community.

In the class State of the Marxists, the class representative represents the interests of his class in opposition to those of the rest of the community.

In the corporative State, the representative elected or designated by the cor-

poration represents the interests of the corporation, i.e., that branch of the activity of the nation in which he is particularly competent. Thus, the whole population being organized into the corporative State, the entire nation has a representation organized along those lines of competency into which the nation has grouped itself during the process of its growth.

Each corporation consists of the organic aggregate of several syndicates, the simplest cells into which the different professions and trades are organized throughout the nation. Hence each member of the syndicate (and consequently of the corporation) is an expert in his trade or profession, whose problems he fully understands; and from among these experts is to be designated the one who is to assume the responsibility of being a representative in that political body which is empowered with the faculty of making laws.

The right to representation, therefore, has not been abrogated in Italy. Instead, it has undergone a substantial change, which was the natural consequence of the constitution of the large corporative organizations.

In a liberal State, all citizens are supposed to be equal both from the juridical and socio-political point of view; hence all citizens are endowed with the same right to representation in the State. This is an achievement toward which mankind has for centuries aspired in order to obtain a just distribution among the people of all the good and bad things in life, both moral and material.

But if it is assumed as a principle that all individuals in a national society are endowed with the right to be represented and become representatives, very grave problems arise, because capacity and preparedness to assume the responsibilities of political representation are often not taken into consideration. This is the case with political elections.

All citizens are endowed with the right to become physicians, engineers, teachers, lawyers, etc., and there is no doubt that

some of them succeed in realizing their ambition. But how do they succeed? Through long and patient application to study and apprenticeship, during which period many others fall by the wayside. And it is right that this should happen. Would you entrust your life to a man who is not qualified to be a doctor? Would you entrust a man who is not qualified as a civil engineer with the construction of a building or a bridge?

How, then, does it happen that, to solve the most difficult human problems and take care of the most important interests—individual and national, moral and material—men are called upon who have not gone through a period of thorough preparation in order to qualify for the difficult job of popular representation?

According to Liberalism, the only means of valuation and choice in the appointment of representatives to one of the most important organs of the State, the legislative one, is that of the election. The name written on the party ticket and the votes of people who are totally ignorant of State affairs and who are manipulated at will by clever and unscrupulous politicians, decide whether the candidate is to be elected or rejected: they decide, in the last analysis, whether the moral and material patrimony of the nation, the destiny of the people, are to be sufficiently or insufficiently protected.

THE HONORABLE CASALINI

Those who have lived under parliamentary regimes will remember many instances of incapable men reaching key positions through the parliamentary process. When I was a student in Italy in the early years of this century, the Hon. M. Casalini was a member of the Chamber of Deputies. He was a nice, agreeable fellow, but unfortunately not made of the stuff of great parliamentarians.

"He never makes a speech in the Chamber of Deputies, he never even opens his mouth," somebody said in a group of friends.

"That's not true," someone else replied, "he did speak once."

"What did he say?"

"He said: 'Close the window, there is a draft.'"

If a man does not dare entrust his life to an untried physician, and that is the life of a single person, how can we dare entrust the life of the whole nation to untried representatives?

Modern society is not in a position to abandon the individual entirely to his own resources, for the phenomenal progress brought about by the mind of man in the field of industrial, financial, commercial, and social processes, would soon crush the individual who does not possess great power of resistance and defense in the bitter fight for existence.

The individual must become organized, he must respond to the general tendency towards organization. This is a historical necessity. Trade unions, professional associations, trusts, syndicates, guilds, etc., are only a transitional solution of vast problems arising from new individual and social, material and spiritual necessities. In a certain sense, such organizations are inorganic and detrimental in so far as they tend to create privileges in favor of that section of the population which is so organized and are unfavorable to those who find it hard to become organized.

Corporativism is the solution. All workers are protected, be they manual or intellectual, because all are organized in their respective trade units or syndicates. Thus, while the individual is not left to himself, there is no danger that a new privileged class can rise against unprivileged ones. The organic nature of

the system is guaranteed because the State, through its governmental organs, is at the helm of the organized nation. And there is to be found the revolutionary character of Fascism: it denies the individualistic idea of the State, because such a State has no regard for the interests of that very individual from whom it derives its name. It denies the Marxist and Communist idea of the State in so far as too much control of the individual kills all ambition and therefore obliterates the personality of man.

Corporativism thus represents the theory of social equilibrium between these two historic conflicting theories, which, on their own grounds, can never come to a reciprocal understanding.

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The fight that is going on in this twentieth anniversary year of Fascism's assumption of power will decide whether the revolutionary new ideas effectively started in Italy are to prevail or not. One thing is sure: everything points to victory for those nations in Europe and East Asia that believe in a new order of the world.

Outwardly it is not a fight based on ideological assumptions, as great national interests are involved. But, since Fascism has arisen against social injustices within the national community as well as against patent injustices in the community of nations, it is all these injustices that the fight will sooner or later set right. Then the new social ideas sponsored by the victorious precursors will find it easy to establish themselves on the citadel of the new order, together with the flags of victory.

