

Ken

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MUSSOLINI IS ALWAYS RIGHT

IN Italy, unlike Germany, there is almost no opposition to the stern parent of a nation. Unlike Germany, there is practically no terror, spying, *bayazna*. There is no need for that. The subterranean forces that might undermine a one-man show are impotent. Unlike Hitler, Mussolini has no recalcitrant and suspicious army. It is as fascist as Mussolini himself.

Precisely on a par with the Hitlerite, the Italian has not an iota of freedom—except the right to inhale and exhale. He isn't too certain of the continuation of that Mussolini-ruled privilege.

You talk to a leather worker in Florence, a pottery worker in Milan, a clerk in Rome, an ex-Ethiopian soldier in Naples, a farmer in Sicily, a colonist in Libia. Their answers to your questions are as like as a carbon copy of a Mussolini speech.

Why should he resent the loss of his liberty, the right or chance to think for himself, to speak freely, to read what he wants?

"Why should we?" they demand like robots. "Why should I try to exert my initiative when we have a genius to guide us? What are my tiny thoughts compared to the magnificence of his!"

This Mussolini mass hypnotism has ensnared a nation as surely as a school of sardines in a net. You and every Italian see on all sides in wood block letters three feet high, silhouetted on embankments:

MUSSOLINI IS ALWAYS RIGHT.

And when you pass that sign, and have your eyes stabbed by:

DUCE! DUCE! DUCE!

Sprawled across the whole length of a warehouse, there is another imperious order painted on the entrance to the tunnel around the bend:

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BELIEVE! OBEY! AND FIGHT!

To talk to an Italian is like hearing one of Mussolini's broadsides, with a slight diminution of the bluster. Only occasionally is there an objective soul, who, without criticizing Il Duce, manages to view events from the Olympian heights of a normally objective mind.

Those who can, jut their jaws at the approved Mussolini angle. Those who can raise a thick beard like Marshal Balbo's, rustivating in Libia. But all of them emulate Il Duce's idea of power politics, to use every device of bluff, to overwhelm by talking in exclamation points.

They are surcharged with a resurgence of Roman pride. It has rescued them from the depths of shame for their nationality of only 16 years ago.

It is bringing the renaissance of the Roman Empire.

The Italian is keyed to the pitch of a tuned violin string. He is forever strained to the utmost, disciplined to the finite degree, forever in a combative mood.

Mussolini demands that, commands them to live "in an atmosphere of ideal tension."

That, says he, is necessary so the nation's energies shall be coiled at all times for "expansion in the world and ever-increasing power."

Il Duce and his cohorts are the physical, mental and moral Simon Legrees of every last soul in Italy. The people are totally devoid of will, and the government operates on the theory that it would be dangerous to give them complete information because they are incapable of considered judgment.

The Italian is hipped up to a fearful and war-minded mood. If war comes tomorrow to Italy, there will be no need to coagulate public opinion. It is forever coagulated for battle, for mass jumping off a building, for individual standing on the head. Trilby never had such a Svengali.

The Italian has come to believe,

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with the faith of the mesmerized, Mussolini's fiat that:

"Only in bloody effort do the fundamental values of a man reveal themselves in the full light of the sun!"

Right now, you see only isolated and unimportant evidences of the psychological inevitability—that this constant mobilization of the people's minds, tautened to a climax that is too long delayed, will leave them jaded and flabby.

That is why Italy will have war, just as Germany will have war. Indubitably and unavoidably. War is as essential to the continuation of a dictatorship as are the periodic purges of opponents.

The average Italian, including Mussolini, reminds you of Lawrence Boythorn in *Bleak House* who, with a canary squatting on his forefinger, roared defy to all and sundry. He doesn't want war. He is proud of the Ethiopian conquest but knows that one day he must go to war again to extend that conquest.

"We will fight for peace!" he shouts at you. Propaganda has puffed him, as it has the German, into a balloon of self-confidence.

YOU are surrounded by belligerence in Italy. But especially is it in the clear-eyed, eager youth with black shirts, who don't walk like children but like pigmy soldiers, carrying their wooden guns, oozing with combat lust, saluting incessantly, goaded by signs in their classrooms, on the school walls, on buildings everywhere:

LIBRETTO E MOSCHETTO—FASCISTA PERFETTO!

Book and rifle make the perfect fascist—and they will be, quite soon.

Sanctions imposed a great hardship on the Italian and yet today he tells you he is thankful for the "perfidy of other nations." It gave him three things: a start toward amazing self-sufficiency, a chance to celebrate the anniversary every Nov. 18 and a new reason for pride of race.

"Yah," he jeers, "we are poor but we

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are strong! Fifty-two nations were against us but they were all afraid!"

Because the Italian press is so rigidly controlled, the Italian has only Mussolini's word for the condition of other countries. The Roman campaign of vilification, though, finds only a partial echo in the Italian's throat. He is essentially too nice, too charitable, too humanistic—and too engrossed with his own poverty—to work up a capacity to hate anyone. He jeers, but unlike the Nazi, he doesn't hate.

Generally, he resents the Spanish adventure and the lives and money it has cost. But he says sadly:

"It is necessary for us. We cannot have communism so close to Italy."

Mussolini has not yet informed him that he wants Spain for a military vassal as Austria was to Germany before 1914.

Moreover, what communism would do to him that fascism already hasn't done, he doesn't know.

Few soldiers want to go to Spain, and there is more than one riot, especially in Northern Italy, but suppressed quickly and quietly, of weary soldiers returning from Ethiopia, dreaming of a pleasant tour of duty in Italy, but shunted off to Spain—and inevitable fist fights with the German "volunteers."

The Italian feels himself cheated by the Allies who simply "consolidated" the gains he'd already made. He agrees with Mussolini's attacks on the "bleating flocks of the reactionary, so-called democracies." He hasn't many illusions about the wisdom of pouring millions into desert Libia. He believes that Mussolini is the "Protector of Islam." The Italian doesn't know what that means. In Libia you'll find the Arab doesn't either.

From the narrow balcony of Venezia Palazzo, Mussolini sends his bull voice reverberating over the Seven Hills of Rome:

"The democracies are in a state of bankruptcy and are no longer anything but centers of infection for the communistic bacillus!"

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From such premises, stems the Italian's conviction that France is on the point of revolution, that England is both decadent and a bitter enemy. In addition, Great Britain is a coward (but "we surely wish she would loan us some money"). Didn't she back out of the Mediterranean? And now isn't she rearming to avenge that defeat?

America is a nation of rich fools, so far away that she should have no concern in Italy, except as a tourist attraction. Russia is, quite definitely, the scourge of the world, the straining bear and the ogre that keeps the Italian awake at night.

On one vastly important matter—it may prove the great flaw in Il Duce's risky foreign policy—the Italian differs with the official Mussolini.

He dislikes the Germans. No Italian man-in-the-street with whom you become fairly chummy will admit one saving grace in the Nazi—except his willingness to ally with Italy.

Harboring the very fount of Catholicism, he abhors the Nazi religious persecutions. He looks upon the Rome-Berlin axis in about the same way as the German—as papered with words, and not forged with steel.

"What could we do?" a young clerk in Naples says. "We had no allies. You see that. Fifty-two nations against us. We had to find someone. We took Germany. And now, we have Japan," and he bursts out laughing.

The Italian is an individualistic, generally gay, volatile, easy-going Latin. He resents the German temperament. He is nettled by his pomposity, austerity, frigidity and air of superiority and condescension toward the Italian.

Now, with Italy, Sicily and Libia swarming with German tourists, Nazi buttons, flags, Streicher bald-heads, Hitler mustaches and "Strength Through Joy" vacation parties, he resents him even more. The reason is that the German has been allowed to spend only \$160 a month.

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The Italian, too, has not forgotten that only four years ago when Austria's Chancellor Dollfuss was murdered, the Italian puppet press screamed against Germany's "butchery and terror."

But for Mussolini and his Press that was simply a moment of journalistic aberration. Now Germany, with Italy, is heralded as the guardian of civilization and the entrepreneur of stable, effective and progressive government. Even the all-believing fascist in the back line of the ranks, shakes his head in bafflement at that.

The Italian has no idea that Italy's mushrooming growth is finished, or halted for very long. He has been coached to eye Tunisia, some of Algeria and eventually Egypt. The Roman walks down via dell-Imperio from Piazza Venezia toward the Colosseum and studies the huge boards which show the rise and decline of Roman territory—and now the rise in the Era of Mussolini. There is ample space for another huge board—for more territory.

"America is fortunate," a small business man says, "America closed its doors to immigration. We had to go somewhere. It was Ethiopia or some other country," and he looks at you significantly.

As Mussolini has plastered on factories in Turin, on docks at Naples, on Arab houses in Libia:

THE VICTORY IS NOT A POINT TO REACH BUT A POINT OF DEPARTURE!

The Italian gets ready for the next step convinced as the slogans scream from the train sheds at Bologna, from the cliffs at Taormina, from the barns of Tuscany:

THE ITALIAN IN BLACK-SHIRT IS AND WILL BE INVINCIBLE!

And underneath the strong Mussolini visage, encased in a steel helmet five times life-size, the words roar from a bridge:

THE MORE THE ENEMIES THE GREATER THE HONOR!

THE Italians call themselves a fascist people, but for all their right

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to guide their destiny individually, they might just as well be under Russian communism, or German Naziism. When you say Italians are under a dictatorship, you have detailed their situation without playing with descriptions of social systems.

Every Italian knows that he has something called a corporative state. But no amount of pyramided bureaucracy with fancy fascist titles gives him any notion of an idea that he has voice in what that bureau does. He is well aware that everything that happens in Italy, occurs because Il Duce decrees it so.

No Italian, no matter how ignorant or poor, has the gall or blindness to presume that the cow he owns is unequivocally his. He knows it is his conditionally—conditionally on the needs of the state. Tomorrow, Mussolini may drive up and take the bovine away in the tonneau of his car. Not that the peasant wouldn't give it up. He would, probably, and cheerfully.

He is accustomed to giving things up and he is pretty well inured by now to shocks. Taxes take 26% of his income which has been steadily decreasing, although the portion of levies on it has not risen a great deal. He has all sorts of fascist rackets and organizations to subscribe to.

If you ask the farmer how bad his taxes are, invariably from the South Tyrolean to the Sicilian, he puts his hands up to his throat eloquently and expressively bulges his eyes.

But he says to you:

"I suffer now. My burdens are almost unbearable. I do not have enough to eat or enough to wear. I have no money, no savings, and always I have more mouths to feed. But soon Italy will be strong and rich and all will be well."

He is convinced that when Italy has military and geographical influence, his personal economics will be solved automatically.

It is this promise of the future, freighted with the most bare-faced, spine-tingling propaganda in the

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world, that allows the Italian to endure deprivation that would drive a less optimistic and mesmerized people to revolt.

This rainbow-chasing allows him to see his nation's deficit constantly rising, now to 17 billion lire, to wake up with new and fantastic impossible taxes on his head, to toss gold wedding rings into a melting pot, to have children annually when there is no food for more, to see miles and miles of hard-surfaced highways being built which remain deserted of Italian autos.

He has seen 400,000 men troop to Ethiopia for a war that cost 750 million dollars. He sees a million men at home marching and saluting each other. He sees a nation still solvent with little credit abroad. He sees 99% of his cotton, copper and oil, and 95% of his coal coming from abroad.

He suffers painfully, often pathetically. In southern Italy and Sicily, his children beg in the streets the way they do in a banana republic of Central America but nowhere else in Europe.

Only because the Italian is the Italian does he pull through. You can't insult an Italian by telling him his standard of living is below that of Poland, Spain or even the Canary Islands.

"It was always low," he says.

You watch women preparing oranges in Sicily for shipment to England as candied fruits. They work ten hours a day for 25 cents a day. They work with the speed of an ambidextrous bill poster in a cyclone. You think: "If the men in the Ford plant worked half as fast, they would double production."

For 25 cents a day!

Mussolini said five years ago: "There is now no economic field in which the state is not obliged to intervene."

That means whenever he thinks an industry is not producing enough, or he doesn't like the way the firm's president parts his hair or wears a cravat, that factory becomes govern-

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ment owned.

Self-sufficiency, which is as good a cloak as any to cover a multitude of actions and to whip up a populace of patriots, already has dictated the actual and complete control of some 1,200 factories, government ownership of shipping lines and shipping companies.

Every industry in Italy is already government controlled through the corporative state, which is really an economic state within the political state. It fixes a firm's wages, hours and prices. It bars strikes and lock-outs, but the employer has paid a price for that freedom from labor disturbances. He got in exchange utter government control.

The textile worker in Milan, the leather worker in Florence has a façade of freedom which he recognizes as a façade, but not an especially obnoxious one. He belongs to a syndicate (labor union) but his membership is dependent on "good moral and political conduct from the national point of view."

Even the most stupid Italian knows what that means. Moreover, it is useless to complain—and he is looked upon suspiciously if he does—to the syndicate leader about any sort of abuse.

The leader of the syndicate is put into his job by the fascist party and Mussolini is the boss of that. Whether he was inclined or not, the worker has joined the fascist party. He wouldn't stand the chance of the proverbial snowball in hell if he didn't.

The industrialist, who enjoys the status jocosely known as "private capitalism," travels a rocky road. When the government needs money, which is always, it tells him:

"You have 500,000 lire surplus. You will buy today an issue of government bonds in the amount of 500,000 lire." He does, at once.

He can't spend or invest his money abroad. He can't start a new factory unless Mussolini says go ahead. He can't borrow without Mussolini's permission.

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Although the Italian loves his king and Mussolini both, he is not torn by divided loyalty. Mussolini is careful to allow the king certain days and occasions to receive the adulation of the populace. What the average Italian doesn't know is that Mussolini very often consults with King Victor Emmanuel III.

The man in the street doesn't think very highly of Count Galeazzo Ciano, the present foreign minister, the second most publicized figure and the man who hopes to succeed his father-in-law. Generally, he is considered a "softie," and a man who married into influence instead of earning it.

An Italian who really wants to know what is happening in the rest of the world tries to find foreign papers, or reads the *Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican City paper which alone in all Italy escapes the eagle-eyed Italian press control.

Many, many Italians speak French. Mussolini found a way to delude those French-reading, misguided souls who had a curiosity to see a foreign paper. Il Duce banned the *Paris Soir*, one of the largest selling French newspapers, and now issues a *Paris Soir* in Italy, filled with anti-French articles. It looks like the genuine article.

As in Germany, as in Russia, you see the complete totalitarian state beginning with the Italian youth. If scholarship suffers, militarism will not, nor will strong physiques.

Six million children in the *Balilla* are under the direct control of Achille Starace, the general secretary of the fascist party.

Every morning in school, the child offers this prayer:

"Duce! I thank thee for what thou givest me to make me strong and healthy. Lord God, guard Il Duce so that he may long be preserved for fascist Italy."

In Italy, a child looks to shouldering a gun with the same equanimity that an American boy does to having a bar of chocolate. There are 7,000 courses for the military education of

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youth; 1,061 special technical courses for military mechanics; 263 naval schools and 138 flying schools. Military science has been added to the curriculum of every school and university in Italy.

The *Gioventu Italian del Littorio* is the youth outfit which teaches soldiering to all under 21. After that, the boy goes into the army for 12 to 18 months, depending on whether he is an only son, attends annual maneuvers until 32 and takes post graduate courses until he's 60.

If in the midst of this perpetual military training, he forgets his obligations, he can turn in any direction and see a stern edict blazoned on a building:

THE ARMY IS THE CERTAIN GUARANTY OF THE DESTINY OF THE COUNTRY!

On some prominently-placed building in every port in Italy, Sicily, Sardinia, Libia and Pantelleria there is lettered a huge sign:

"For other nations the Mediterranean is only a way to reach their possessions in the quickest time but for us Italians the Mediterranean is our life!"

Above all things, the Italian is certain that it is *Mare Nostrum*, to be his to control, to dam, to drink or to blot up. Irrevocably his. He is indifferent to the fact that ten nations and 11 dependencies border on it. He has no patience with English arguments of necessity or French protestations of security.

"It is our lake," he says flatly.

He is slowly developing the notion, too, that about everything adjacent to the Mediterranean ought to be his. Already he is convinced that Tunisia should belong to Italy and the longer France keeps it the more heinous her "steal."

"Isn't Tunisia," he asks you, "a natural prolongation of Sicily?"

On that bridge that existed millions of years ago, the Italian expects one day to march into Africa again. ●