

Pope and Duce

In 1922, the year Benito Mussolini marched on Rome, Pope Pius XI founded Catholic Action, a type of religious militia. It grew rapidly, soon having 15,000 clubs with some 500,000 members, but annoyed the Duce's Black Shirts, who accused Catholic Action of interfering with state control over education and of encouraging anti-Fascist political activity.

In 1931 this antagonism developed into Catholic Action-Black Shirt brawls. And finally, under pressure, the church agreed to curb its subsidiary. Last August, however, when the Pope expressed disapproval of Fascism's new racist policies before Catholic Actionists, the Fascists threatened to suppress Catholic Action altogether and the church was forced to reaffirm the agreement of 1931.

But sporadic attacks continued, and last week, in the hope of ending them finally, Pius XII made a final attempt to placate the Black Shirts. He announced a reorganization in which control will be decentralized, the diocesan branches made virtually autonomous, and members forbidden to wear Catholic Action buttons with Fascist uniforms, except at meetings. Achille Starace, secretary general of the Black Shirts, soon replied. He announced that the party will take over Catholic Action's 3,000 successful and profitable mutual-aid societies.

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