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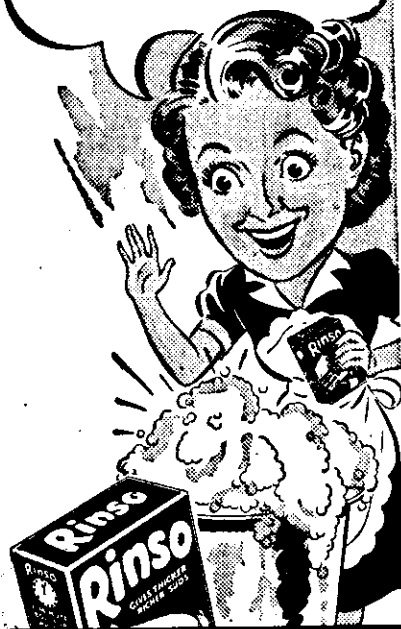
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THE END OF AN EPOCH

Back To Italy's "Old Institutions"—But What Are They?

WHEN King Victor Emmanuel resumed control of Italy last week, he called on his people to "find the way of recovery in respect for Italy's old institutions." That perhaps means something that does not appear on the surface, but what most living Italians will see or remember if they look back is neither peace nor stability.

The King himself found internal disorder and unrest in his kingdom from the time of his accession in 1900. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* he was a "liberal-minded and well educated prince," but until Mussolini gained favour with the people for doing what the Government ought to have done, Victor Emmanuel's governments failed to secure the smooth running of Italy's industries. In the first six months of 1901 there were 600 strikes, involving a million men. The elections of 1900 increased the number of radicals in the Chamber to nearly 100 out of 508, and unsatisfactory working-class conditions brought about strikes which disabled public utilities, transport, the docks, textile factories, and agriculture. By 1904 strikes were becoming riots.

Enter an Agitator

In 1914 there were riots at Ancona because an anti-militarist meeting had been forbidden; the leader was an anarchist, Malatesta, and a prominent agitator was one Benito Mussolini. As the Great War got under way, the Catholics advocated neutrality out of dislike for "atheist" France, while the Socialists opposed all war except class war. But the speeches of the poet D'Annunzio and the articles of Mussolini (now editor of *Il Popolo d'Italia*) whipped up interventionist feeling in the hope that war would promote social changes, and in May, 1915



Mussolini and King Victor Emmanuel

Italy entered the war on the side of the Allies.

Peace, however, brought troubles within the State. The bread subsidy left a huge deficit in the funds, doles encouraged idleness, and then the transport workers became "insubordinate."

There were also experiments with methods of government. The year 1919 saw the introduction of yet another

electoral change—the proportional system, whereby the citizen voted, not for the candidate, but for a list. The result was that constitutional groups were split up and were without programmes when the next elections were held, and the returns showed 156 Socialists, 101 Popolari, and 30 Combatants, but no Fascists. The next year, internal troubles reached their zenith—strikes and lock-outs became general. Workers tried to run the industries, and there was a practical attempt to introduce Communism, which failed.

The March on Rome

Then the Fasci established groups throughout the State and masses of workers began to join the one movement which seemed likely to solve their troubles. In 1921, Parliament was dissolved, but in the ensuing elections, liberals and democrats of various kinds got 275 seats and Popolari 107; the Socialists fell to about 130, and 35 Fascists got in. The following year saw Fascists and Communists in conflict, the Fascists volunteering to work where strikers immobilised industry. This, and the party's declaration in favour of the monarchy, secured the support of many sections which were not specifically Fascist. Besides Mussolini's hints at revolution were taken for figures of speech. Thus the movement swelled and Mussolini was entrusted with a party mandate to conduct a political or even a military action to bring Fascism to power.

"What we have in view," he said then, "is the introduction into the Liberal state, which has fulfilled its functions . . . of all the forces of the new generation which has emerged from the war and the victory." So in October, 1922, the Fascist Quadrumvirate was formed, and four columns prepared to march on Rome.

Victor Emmanuel refused to sign a proclamation of martial law, seeing that it would mean civil war, and four days later the occupation of Rome was complete.

Believe! Obey! Fight!

The rest most of us can remember. Mussolini's followers were given a martial slogan: "Believe! Obey! Fight!" Il Duce himself hurried from naval reviews to manoeuvres at sea, from military exercises to grandiose mock campaigns on land. He learned to salute like Caesar, scowl like Napoleon, wear uniforms like the Kaiser. He raised a generation of Italians, including his own sons, to live dangerously, consider pacifism a bourgeois vice, and to take a sensuous aesthetic pleasure from exploding bombs and the music of gunfire.

It sounds a little odd, in the face of a record like that, to call the people back to their "old institutions," but the King perhaps knows what they are.

Meanwhile *Time* proposes an epitaph for Mussolini:

"He picked up the cult of superman from Nietzsche, the creed of power from Machiavelli. Pareto taught him to despise democracy, Marx to scorn capitalism, and Sorel the myth of universal violence. He courted martyrdom, spat at priests, lived promiscuously with at least half-a-dozen women. Out of Marxism, jingoism, and obscurantism he compounded a new thing called

(Continued on next page)

★ Illusions of Grandeur ★

WHEN New Zealanders who had been prisoners-of-war in Italy came home recently, some of them were able to speak at first hand of how Italians felt about their leader. One soldier told "The Listener" that the staff of the hospital he was in listened to a speech by Mussolini "without one atom of enthusiasm," and the only applause was that which came over the air. There have been other stories from Italy over the last 20 years which depict Il Duce as a comic-pathetic figure with illusions of grandeur not shared by his people:

On the 19th birthday of Italian Fascism, Mussolini spoke "his usual bombast" (says "Time") to the "usual, picked, cheering crowd": "Bolshevism . . . is dying . . . The Italian people will be equal to the greatness of their past . . . we go forward with indomitable courage . . . There are those who are trying to prevent Fascism from passing, but we will pass."

"Il Duce jutted out his jaw, and was silent. Three times the crowd gave the usual ovation, and then left Benito Mussolini free to ponder whether Fascism was likely to pass on, pass out, or pass away."

Once, the story goes, Il Duce was dissatisfied with the reports he was getting on his latest speech, and decided to find out for himself what its effect had been; he put on a beard and walked in the streets until he met a likely looking citizen:

"Buon giorno," said Mussolini, "and how did you like Il Duce's last speech?" The citizen was terrified; he looked up and down the street to see if he was overheard. Then he took Il Duce off to a side street, and said, in a cautious whisper: "I liked it very much."

Returning home on another occasion, Mussolini decided to drop in at a picture theatre. He entered and took a seat, unrecognised. Presently his own face appeared on the screen, and everyone stood up and applauded—except Il Duce.

His enjoyment of the gratifying demonstration was interrupted by a man who leant over and said: "Stand up and clap, you fool! They'll arrest you if you don't."