

I · T H E · N O R T H · contemporary

ITALY

This is the first of two articles by a correspondent of the *New Statesman and Nation*, CARLO MARINI, who spent 1943 behind the German lines in Italy.

WHEN MUSSOLINI'S Italy collapsed in July, 1943, the German Army faced a difficult situation. Up till then its rear had been safeguarded by the discipline enforced by the *Milizia Fascista* and O.V.R.A., the secret party police; by the time of the Armistice the German Army found itself in a disorganized and rather hostile country. I saw a Nazi corporal forcibly requisitioning masses of Army supplies from an Italian Colonel, giving in exchange receipts which he knew would never be honoured, and this method was used on a large scale to secure everything from trains to typewriters.

The farmers were at the mercy of foraging bands who left notes saying *paghera Badoglio*—"Badoglio will pay." The Fascist machine having broken down, some kind of coercive force was essential to suppress opposition to this organized looting. So the Republican Fascist Party was created. At first the Fascist groups only policed the industrial north and undertook such other odd jobs as the Nazis would entrust to them. They guarded British prisoners of war, patrolled military dumps, and helped enforce the curfew. The bribe of two new uniforms, new boots, German weapons, and increased pay, together with the tacitly understood opportunity for looting and brigandage, induced sufficient young men to join their ranks. Quite early Marshal Graziani was somehow enticed into the movement. His exact position in the

Republican Fascist Party is still obscure. But at that moment it was essential to produce a Fascist counterpart to Badoglio, and Graziani was the only candidate who was not too discredited in the eyes of the public. From time to time I saw in the *Corriere del Adriatico* (which reappeared shortly after the Armistice) articles casting Graziani for the role of a nationalist leader who would do for Italy what Mustapha Kemal had achieved for Turkey. In such ways as this an attempt was made to re-establish the old order. The result was only a façade but it was a façade which served the Germans well. Without it they would have been obliged to police Italy themselves.

The activity of the Fascists sufficed to suppress the feeble beginnings of political initiative which had appeared after July, and millions of people sank back into the acceptance of Fascism which had characterized them for twenty years. This apathetic mentality continued throughout the period, dangerous to the Germans, between the defection of Italy from the Axis and the creation of a more effective coercive machine under the Republican Fascist Party.

This interim period ended when the Allied advance halted on the Pescara. The Republican Fascists had attempted to give a broad national basis to their movement, which so far had been little more than a minor task force of the Wehrmacht. Publication of a new pro-

