

THE SOUTH contemporary



By CARLO MARINI in the *New Statesman and Nation*, September 30, 1944

BEFORE CROSSING into liberated Southern Italy in June of 1944, I had repeatedly assured my Italian friends that I was bound for a land flowing with beer and cigarettes, cheap food, and plenty of it. These assurances made them curse the Germans with renewed vigour, while they cast skyward glances as if in search of the Allied armies. In spite of the effect of German propaganda, which especially amongst the younger people had managed to leave the impression that Italy was being liberated by hordes of Moroccans and American Negroes, there was a steadfast belief amongst Italians that General Alexander was a wholesale cigarette and chocolate merchant. During our advance into Sicily the mayor of a small town had greeted the crew of a Jeep, demanding to know how far behind them were the chocolate and grain lorries. The crew disclaimed any knowledge of these, whereupon the mayor produced a propaganda leaflet promising food to the liberated people, and his meridional blood boiled at the thought that he might have been duped. This is an extreme example of a general attitude. The mass of Italians now feel themselves to be very little concerned in the war, and since Britain and the United States have occupied their country they expect the two richest nations on earth to provide them with a pre-war standard of living. I have eaten excellent meals throughout Southern Italy, but my hosts invariably apologised for the quality and quantity of their food. Enormous dishes of very fine spaghetti were always cried on to the table with *Non si trova più niente*. Dishes of peaches, plums, oranges, grapes slid down throats which uttered continu-

ously *Povera Italia, quanto siamo ridotti*. The Italians cannot or will not realize that the Allies are concerned in an unpleasant task which directs their energies into channels other than feasting. Despite the natural poverty of Southern Italy as compared with the North, the population there is incomparably better off than its brothers under the Nazis. The farmers have not been forced to sell their grain, eggs, and live-stock at very low prices. Cigarettes and other minor luxuries are easily obtainable, even though these may be American and English brands sold on the black market, and there is a sufficiency of bread and flour, the basic ration recently being almost doubled.

There are, however, friction and unpleasantness, such as attend any military occupation. The most obvious, although not the most important, concerns women. The Germans, with their organization of brothels, have managed to gain a reputation for "correct" behaviour in some parts of Europe. The Allies, relying upon the morals of the individual soldier, have managed to cause a few unpleasant incidents and an impression which is not generally favourable.

It would be wrong and unfair to insinuate that all Allied soldiers are engaged in a constant debauch, but the Italians talk as much as they breathe, and stories run around the beaches and bars which certainly tend to give that impression. In some cities, girls have had their hair snipped while walking in company with coloured and white troops. This type of incident is usually committed by Italian troops, still in uniform and armed with knives and bayonets, in sufficient strength to safeguard them against immediate