

The Work of the Fascist Government
And the Economic Reconstruction of Italy
By Giuseppe Bianchini

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*(Lecture delivered at the Teatro Olimpia in
Milan on February 1, 1925, under the auspices
of the Italian Committee for the Study of
National Problems)*

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MILANO
UNIONE ECONOMICA ITALIANA
Via Meravigli, 11

THE WORK OF THE FASCIST GOVERNMENT
AND THE ECONOMIC RECONSTRUCTION
OF ITALY.

In order to pass a fair and impartial judgment on the work accomplished by the Fascist Government of Italy, we must begin by comparing the Italian situation of 1922 with that of to-day, for it is only through this comparison that we can realize the extent of the progress achieved.

Let us then see what were the economic, financial and social conditions of Italy in 1921-22. I advisedly include the year 1921, because if the Fascist movement did not come into power until the end of 1922, it had developed its action in the country for some time previously to that date — in fact as early as November 1921 it already comprised over 230,000 registered members. The struggle against Socialism and Bolshevism had been going on for some time, a struggle sanctified by the

heroism of the dead, most of them youths who had sacrificed their lives for a noble and wholly disinterested ideal. In 1921 the battle was being fought not only in the country, but in Parliament, which had so deplorably degenerated through the disastrous strife of intriguing groups. It was the handful of Fascists who first raised the standard of revolt against these deplorable methods, and their leader Benito Mussolini on June 21, 1921, under the Giolitti régime, alone of all those who took part in the debate on the reply to the speech from the Throne, spoke out words of warning from the benches of the Extreme Right where no one then dared to sit.

He thus began:

« My speech will be definitely anti-democratic and anti-Socialist, and when I say anti-Socialist I also mean anti-Giolittian, for never before has there been such a touching interchange of loving correspondance between Sig. Giolitti and the Parliamentary Socialist group as in these days ».

That speech was of peculiar significance, because the Fascist leader undertook, to use his own words, « to

define certain political, and, if I may say so, historical positions », and it contained a programme inspired by the soundest and most orthodox policy of economic reconstruction. He demanded that the functions of the State be restricted to the creation of those conditions which are necessary for individual activity in economic life, agriculture, industry and trade and are advantageous to the consumer; they should be similarly restricted in the field of science and art. The State should not confer privileges on one class to the detriment of another; it should not be a manufacturer, a farmer, a trader, a ship-owner, a railway company, a banker, a co-operative society, a newspaper proprietor; it should abstain from establishing monopolies and a form of censorship through the post office and the schools; it should not support the idle by means of doles, nor enrich the favoured few and impoverish the rest of the community by means of State contracts granted for reasons of political protection or as gifts disguised under the mantle of co-operativism, which claims to be a productive force, whereas it merely squanders the money of the community through tech-

nical incompetence or speculation. Only thus can the bureaucracy be reduced and the State saved from bankruptcy. Only in these conditions can sound intellectual and economic development and the real freedom and equality of citizens be assured. Let the State provide security for life and property and swift justice; let it make contracts safe and not be the first to give the example of dishonesty. Let it protect the interests and dignity of its citizens abroad and not make of our national flag a rag for others may clean their boots with.

This then was the situation. The Constitutional parties were split up into groups and fractions, with more or less leftward or rightward tendencies, more or less democratic or social-democratic, their leaders bitterly squabbling among themselves for personal reasons, but anxious above all to organize plans of campaign to get into power, oblivious of the real and urgent needs of the country. The nation was spiritually divorced from Parliament, alarmed at the apparently inevitable risk of plunging into the abyss, deeply outraged by the fact that the results of its magnificent effort in winning the

war had been frittered away and that the country had sunk into such a slough of despond that not a voice was raised to proclaim its needs and aspirations.

Now began the healthy reaction, which sprang forth from the living forces of the country, and from the people arose a man of more spacious views, who realized the danger and saw where salvation lay. He at once took up his position against the mean opportunism of Parliamentary intriguers, and proclaimed his fighting programme with courageous conviction enlightened by a truly Roman ideal of his country's greatness.

Let us not forget the situation as it was before Benito Mussolini became Prime Minister. Gross insults to the national flag went unpunished, the Army, ex-combatants and war-disabled veterans were outraged in the streets, the public services were daily subjected to arbitrary suspensions, the legal organs for the defence of property and order were admittedly impotent; the result was that the economic and financial efficiency of the country were gravely jeopardized, while abroad there was a general and absolute lack of confidence in Italy.

Good citizens had to pay their burdensome taxes punctually, but from day to day they did not know what fresh surprises were in store for them, and when they arose in the morning they never knew whether the railways, the tramways, the postal and telegraph services would still be operating, whether light, water and bread would be available. I need not recount the whole history of those days, although it is regrettable that so many people appear to have forgotten it.

I think that a few figures of the prices of securities will help to show how dangerously depressed was our national credit before the advent to power of the Fascist Government and how remarkable has been the subsequent revival. The 3.50 % Government Rente, which after and in spite of the war was quoted in December 1919 at an average of 82.78, had dropped in October 1922 to 72.46; a month after «the taking of Rome» we find that this serious event, far from causing a further decline, brought about an improvement of over 5 points, raising it to 77.92 (average for December 1922); the general restoration of confidence caused it

to rise still further to 82.02 in November last. The 5 % Consolidated Loan, which is the most widely distributed basic security (in November last there were 35,998 millions of it in circulation, including the 4.50 % and 5 % redeemable bonds), which was quoted in December 1919 at 89.54, had dropped to 81.08 in October 1922; it rose to 86.84 in December of the same year, and to 99.08 in November last (after having overtopped parity in June 1924). I need not overburden you with figures concerning private securities but shall keep them at the disposal of anyone who wishes to consult them at leisure in order to realize the significant progress which has been achieved also in this field.

There are other features of great significance as indications of the general public tranquillity of the economic and industrial situation, to which I feel I must call your attention, viz. figures for unemployment and strikes. During 1920 there were no less than 189 agricultural strikes with 1,045,000 strikers, involving a loss of 14 million working days, and 1881 industrial strikes with 1,267,000 strikers involving a loss of 16,500,000

working days. In 1923 we have only one agricultural strike, with 110 strikers and a loss of 540 working days, and 200 industrial strikes with 66,000 strikers and a loss of 265,000 working days. From millions of strikers and lost working days there is a sudden drop to almost negligible figures.

As regards unemployment, we find that in December 1921 the unemployed, according to official figures, amounted to not less than 541,000; a year later they were still 381,000; in December 1923 they had dropped to 258,000; and finally in October 1924 (these are the latest official statistics) they were only 117,000. Unemployment is thus reduced to absolutely normal proportions, which existed, even in pre-war periods of the most satisfactory economic prosperity. It is indeed a matter of common knowledge that in many branches of industry there is an actual shortage of labour, and that all branches are working full time.

If you scan the « Bulletin of Economic Information » issued by the Confederation of Industry and the Italian Bankers' Association, you will not fail to receive a most

favourable impression. No industry is in a state of crisis, all are in full or almost in full activity, many are filled up with orders for many months ahead, internal trade is very active, export trade is expanding in a remarkable degree.

I must now bring this long digression to an end, and say something of the spiritual disturbance with which men's minds were afflicted in Italy before November 1922.

The violent and scandalous street demonstrations were by no means the most serious aspect of the situation; the chief danger lay in the unsound and unwholesome ideas which had so deeply penetrated into the whole administrative organism of the country. Lawlessness could always have been dealt with by means of the law, but the trouble was that the organs whence the orders should have emanated and on whom the execution of the law devolved no longer responded; legislation itself was indeed being deformed to such an extent as to jeopardize the whole economic structure of the country.

The most astounding anti-social proposals were ac-

cepted and supported by the very persons who should most strenuously have resisted them, and we find them brought up for discussion in administrative bodies, proclaimed in the speeches of Cabinet Ministers, in Parliamentary bills, not to mention the Press, in which there was a regular competition, inspired by the most deplorable levity, to keep up with what was described as «the spirit of the times».

The theory of «the land to the peasants», put forward by the extremist parties as a bait to attract the agricultural masses, was seriously considered by the classes who should have made every effort to repel this insidious proposal; and, as a result of constantly talking about it, in many areas regular usurpations of land took place, and the State, i. e. the Government, far from promptly intervening, at first adopted an attitude of culpable tolerance, and subsequently enacted measures (the notorious Visocchi, Falcioni and Micheli decrees), which actually sanctioned and, with the pretext of regulating these violations of the rights of property, legally extended them.

Then, as there was no reason why, if the peasants are given the land, the workmen should not own the factories, the tenants the houses, public servants the various public undertakings with which they are connected, and so on, these other proposals came up for discussion and were more or less put into practise, although it was evident that such a movement was bound to result in that disastrous suspension of economic life of which Russia had already provided a tangible demonstration.

Thus we have had proposals embodied in Parliamentary bills and actually voted by municipal councils, whereby all increases of rent should be paid into the State or the municipal treasury, in order that houses might be built which would be collective property and reserved for the proletariat. A resolution in this sense was, for instance, submitted to the Rome Municipal Council in April 1921, and reported in the press not as a preposterous fallacy to be uncompromisingly rejected, but as a serious proposal, almost savouring of genius. You will likewise remember what was said at the time about the «railways to the railwaymen»; only at a certain

moment, as the railways were not paying their way, the railwaymen appeared no longer anxious to own them, and the claim was opportunely altered; instead of « the railways to the railwaymen », it was to be « the income of the railways to the railwaymen », which was more convenient and safer, because it would have enabled the railwaymen collect the revenues without bothering about the expenses.

We have a typical instance of the manner in which the State itself contributed to organize disorder in the fact that no less than 546 railway servants, members of the Red Syndicate (notoriously a revolutionary body) had at that time free passes, were exempted from all duties and drew their regular salaries and allowances, although it was wellknown that they themselves were the organizers of the daily suspensions of the service. This circumstance was denounced in the Chamber, and the Minister not only took no measures to put an end to the scandal, but did not even utter a word of protest, so that the only result was to arouse the ironical laughter of the Socialist deputies!

Furthermore, the so-called «little railway Parliament» was created by law; it was an emanation of the railway servants and constituted neither more nor less than the chief source of insubordination and of the subversion of every sound administrative rule.

If this occurred in the most important and delicate branch of the public service, it is easy to see how, with these tendencies predominating, a scheme for the control of industry should have matured, and how organs should have been evolved constituting a beginning of the introduction of factory councils and of those other conceptions calculated to ruin industry, trade and every form of productive progress. Here too it was not a case of isolated ideas, but of initiatives emanating from Parliament and passed on to the Government, so much so that a definite plan and a Commission existed for studying the details of execution of this marvellous system of workmen's control over industry.

The Socialists had got possession of a large number of municipal administrations, and the manner in which they squandered the public funds was indescribable.

Their extravagance was due incompetence, to their professed contempt for the bourgeois classes which were expected to pay for everything and also to dishonesty. Things reached this pitch with the culpable connivance of the Government. If some Prefect denounced these irregular practises, he was ordered not to trouble about them; if the exceptional seriousness of the facts or the complete insolvency of the local administration rendered the intervention of the State imperative, the official reports, instead of being transmitted to the public prosecutor, were jealously hidden away. These are not fantastic stories, but facts which have occurred very near to us, viz. in Milan. The Milan municipality ostentatiously violated the law, arbitrarily indulged in unlimited expenses subsidized party congresses, paid for electoral propaganda out of municipal funds, created jobs for Socialists; in one commune of the the province of Milan gratuities were given to the employees on the undertaking that half of the amount was to be paid over to the Socialist club; the local political authorities called the attention of the Government to these irregularities, but the order came from Rome to hush the

matter up. It was this same Government which amnestied deserters wholesale, advised officers not to go about in uniform, recognized the right to strike in the public services, which is tantamount to the right to starve and ruin the citizens. If Ministers could go so far, it is easy to imagine how far the zeal of officials anxious for successful careers went. A judge, holding high rank, maintained in a juridical review that, as the right to strike was recognized, those who dissented from the strike, that is to say those who wished to work, should be punished because they endangered the public peace. In other words, from the right to strike we had reached the duty to strike.

A mob of maniacs went about the streets of Milan shouting « Down with the Army, hurrah for Caporetto! », and forced their way into private houses to remove the flags from from the windows and tear them to pieces. This disgraceful cortège was preceeded and flanked by Royal Guards and soldiers, who escorted it as it were to protect it. But when in Rome a group of students organized a patriotic demonstration, then the police and troops in-

tervened, opened fire and killed several of the demonstrators. This national demonstration was evidently a crime, and as such must be severely repressed.

It was in this atmosphere of general degeneracy that the new Government had to act. While it immediately devoted its attention to the definite problems of finance, economy, education, justice and foreign affairs, it also had to reorganize the central and local administrations, nay more, it had to reconduct public opinion on to the right path and re-establish the proper sense of realities and of social necessities which had been so grievously weakened. I might almost say lost, to such a degree that even the ruling classes, through inaction or renunciation, seemed doomed to suicide.

Fortunately for Italy, things are now profoundly changed, and this is one of the greatest merits of the Fascist Government; I have dwelt on this point because without this widespread reconstructive action in the spiritual field it would have been impossible to secure the other advantages of a more material nature which have been secured, or to consolidate these benefits for the future.

I have already pointed out some indications of restored prosperity as shown by the progress of industry, the assured continuity and tranquillity of labour, and the restoration of the State finances. To these data some others now may be added.

The budget of 1920-21 showed a deficit of 15,760 millions of lire. In that of 1922-23 the deficit had fallen to 3,029 millions; in that of 1923-24 it had again fallen still further to 418 millions; according to the estimates for 1924-25 the budget will be balanced, while according to those for 1925-26 there should be an actual surplus. It should be noted that, according to the original estimates, the budget for 1924-25 should have shown a deficit of 1335 millions, whereas on December 31, 1924, viz. half way through the financial year, the deficit had been reduced to 185,447,000 and by the 30th June next, the budget should certainly be balanced or may even show a small surplus. These figures are the result of the magnificent tenacity of the Finance Minister Sig. De Stefani.

The internal public debt, which on June 30 1923 amounted to 95,544 millions, on June 30 1924 had been

reduced to 93,163 millions, and on December 31 1924 to 91,988 millions. Here too we have not only no further increase of indebtedness, but a tendency towards an actual reduction.

In addition to the inter-Allied debts, amounting on December 31 1924 to 23,056 millions in gold, which constitute a suspended political operation, we had some foreign debts of a commercial character, i. e. debts owed by the State for supplies, foodstuffs, etc., and these debts must not be confused with the inter-Allied debts. On June 30 1922 they amounted to 278 millions in gold; they are now reduced to 51 millions, and will have been completely paid up by next February.

The ruinous output of paper money, which is the cause of inflation and the chief, if not the only, cause of the depreciation of the currency, has been strictly contained, and as all further issues have completely ceased since 1922, fiduciary circulation, save for small oscillations due to commercial necessities, has remained steady at about 20 milliards (to be accurate, on December 31 1922 it was 20,560 millions, and on December 20 1924 at 20,302 millions).

Commercial activity has likewise improved. Imports in 1922 amounted to 15,320,000,000 as against 9,292,849,000 lire of exports. In the first ten months of 1924 the figures were 15,245,605,000 for imports and 11,120,478,000 for exports. There is still a difference between imports and exports, but it is being reduced. Furthermore, it is notorious that this difference is fully covered by freight charges, investments abroad, emigrants' remittances and money expended by foreigners in Italy, and it is certain that these sources of income not only cover the deficit of the commercial balance, but must even provide a certain margin, because during the last two years neither the Italian State nor Italian private economy has contracted debts abroad, but on the contrary there has been a certain export of capital to foreign countries.

Savings also show a progressive increase. The Postal Savings Banks contained deposits in December 1922 amounting to 8,722,500,000, in December 1923 to 9,110,858,000, in December 1924 to 9,574,700,000. The deposits in the ordinary Savings Banks in December 1922 were 9,294,689,000, in December 1923 10,575,969,000,

in November 1924 12,007,200,000. The total amount entrusted to the Postal and ordinary Savings Banks, Banks and Monti di Pietà amounted approximately in December 1922 to 50 milliards, in December 1923 to 55 miliardi, and by the end of 1924 had reached 60 milliards.

Each of these figures has its own importance, but the concomitant and parallel improvement in all the indices of the economic and financial situation is peculiarly significant.

We can verily heave a sigh of relief as we look back on the dangers which we have escaped, and we should indeed be grateful to the captain who has piloted us through to safety; but let us not forget that the voyage is not yet over, that fresh difficulties arise from hour to hour, and that it would be an unpardonable sin to obstruct his action while the ship is still sailing in insecure waters.

We have now set forth the situation and its satisfactory features. But let us not ignore the criticisms which are being made. These are of diverse nature. There are those made by the enemy, i. e. by parties hostile to the

present social order, and by those who, having become their followers, have willingly placed themselves on the same footing with them; with these people it is difficult for us to come to an understanding, because we do not speak the same language.

Those who wish to strike down the loyal Sovereign who embodies the unity and majesty of Italy; those who ignore the ideal grandeur of the sense of patriotism which unites the people in a community of language, interests and aspirations, and urges us to affirm ourselves in the world for the higher destinies of our race; who wish to break up this social order which, with all its defects and its not irremediable deficiencies, represents a mechanism which has secured for humanity the widest measure of moral and material progress — all these persons are naturally trying with all weapons, including illegal ones, to overthrow a Government and a party richly endowed with strength and will power, and they refuse to compromise or let themselves be overawed. All these men, is easy to see, regretfully look back to the not distant days when the vision of the nation's destiny had been

obscured, the sense of responsibility forgotten, conscience, discipline and devotion to duty depreciated, and through a Parliamentary policy made up of compromises, intrigues and renunciation, they had ended by dominating the situation. While they still thought themselves the undisputed masters, they found their path blocked one fine day by a solid barrier; after a moment of bewilderment they attempted systematically to break up their opponents.

The efforts made from November 1922 onwards to graft the new order on to the old, so that, while the stimulating and reconstituent action of the new forces was maintained, there should be no solution of continuity in the governance of the State, were wilfully ignored and underrated. The more the process of adaptation progressed, the more the enemy attacked the Government and demanded that it should go. The more concessions were made, the more this opposition, just because it had very different aims, regarded this policy as a symptom of weakness, and therefore took further courage.

However we may define the seizure of power in

November 1922, as a revolution or otherwise — the terminology does not matter — it was certainly a fact wholly outside normal and legal lines, a fact which was only possible owing to the support of the overwhelming majority of the nation, which, at least at that moment, was, as all agreed, absolute and unquestioned.

But while this event, fortunately for our country, took place almost without bloodshed, the stream overflowing the crater inevitably left rubbish behind it, and even the magic art of a more than human wizard could not suddenly calm the stormy sea. It was fortunate indeed that the Chief, as soon as he had assumed the government of the country at once set to work to discipline these forces and turn them into legally constituted bodies which were to be gradually absorbed by the regular organs of the State. *Squadrisimo* was enrolled into the *Milizia*: the *Milizia* was given a military formation in order to discipline it, its casually selected leaders were replaced by officers, preferably, in the great majority of cases, ex-Army officers; the Government undertook to make the whole force swear allegiance to the King, and

the undertaking has been duly carried out. That the revolutionary parties should express contempt for these measures is not surprising, but that those who profess respect for properly constituted order should adopt a similar attitude is a deplorable form of political degeneracy, because the oath is a bond of honour binding all loyal citizens to the preservation of the State, and it is the self-same oath sworn with sacred solemnity by the soldier, the official or the magistrate.

The party trustees (*fiduciari*) created in an early phase of the Fascist movement in the provinces, were soon done away with, and the prefects re-integrated in their functions and responsibilities once more.

The few political officials who were entrusted with administrative functions, for which there had been numerous precedents in the past, were subsequently almost entirely eliminated.

The increasing rowdiness was gradually repressed, and individual enterprises not only discouraged but legally proceeded against in the criminal courts. If, in spite of all this, regrettable episodes still occurred, the

vast extent of the movement and the shortness of the time that had elapsed must be borne in mind. No impartial observer can deny the visible effort and will to reach a normal state of things, in spite of the resistance provoked by the violence of the enemy's attacks, so that the task of those whose duty it was to restore order was rendered far more difficult. We must consider the shortness of the time. Two years, less than an instant in the life of a nation, and yet in this short space how much work has been accomplished, what important results achieved!

The whole structure of the State had to be rebuilt. The nation's finances had to be restored — you remember that party leader and ex-Minister of Finance who declared that a budget deficit was inevitable for an indefinite number of years.

The Army had to be spiritually and materially reconstituted — you remember that the Prime Minister Giolitti justified the occupation of the factories on the pretext that it was impossible to count on the troops.

The bureaucracy had to be reorganized — you

remember the demonstrations of civil servants in the courtyards of the Ministries, and the Ministers themselves besieged in their cabinets for not having immediately granted some demand, or for having dismissed a hall porter.

The judicial administration had to be re-established — the creation of a single Court of Cassation (in the place of the existing four) and the reduction of the number of inferior courts had been studied and voted a hundred times, but never carried out.

The reorganization of taxation — you remember the congeries of disastrous laws and decrees inspired by the purest demagogy, which crushed the luckless and patient tax-payer, the capital levy, the super-tax, the infinite series of additional taxes of the most inequitable and vexatious nature, the confiscatory death duties — all this has either disappeared or has been reorganized and co-ordinated by the admirable and tenacious efforts of the Finance Minister De Stefani.

I shall not speak of the educational reforms, which are magnificent, even though requiring partial revision, but which, to mention but a single detail, have called

upon fresh sources of enterprise for university organization; the example of what has been achieved in Milan and by our mayor, Senator Mangiagalli, will suffice.

Then we have the telephone service entrusted to private enterprise, which means a service at last withdrawn from the State. Who would have dreamt of this barely two years ago? There is an undertaking to invest many tens of millions in the lines, the central stations, the plant. At last it will be possible for a citizen to ask for a connexion in another city without putting in an application from father to son, and we can dare to hope that even in Italy the telephone will become a really useful instrument for a business man and no longer a distributor of bad temper.

Railways and the postal services are going ahead, and their budgets are well on the way to being balanced. The budget of the railways, which in 1821-22 showed a deficit of 1257 millions, in 1922-23 of 906 millions, and in 1923-24 of 298 millions, will probably be balanced in 1924-25. The Post Office budget for 1921-22 showed a deficit of 502 millions, which was reduced to 67

millions in 1922-23, and according to the estimates will be balanced in 1924-25.

Who remembers now — and it is regrettable that it should be so soon forgotten — the disorganization of these services, the insubordination of the personnel, the disastrous losses suffered by the Treasury and the country? How has it been possible to achieve these results if the staff is the same? By means of a very simple recipe: discipline. The agitators and the politicians have been got rid of, the authority of the chiefs has been re-established, the staff have been made to feel that they must carry out their duties with loyalty and diligence, and that the Minister is their chief and not their servant.

While this was being accomplished, other grave problems of an international character had to be faced: from the thorny Fiume problem, which was finally settled with the annexation of the town to Italy, to the Corfu incident, which was not without its use in proving that Italy refused to be brow-beaten or intimidated; from the complicated liquidation of Italy's relations with the Austro-Hungarian succession States to our vigilant par-

ticipation in the periodical international conferences no reparations and war debts; from the creation of an international institute for the unification of private law to the laborious preparation for commercial treaties, of which seven have already been concluded and others of great importance, including one with Germany, are being negotiated.

All this constitutes a vast mass of work of great importance on account of the exceptional circumstances in which it had to be carried out, and such as should suffice to create a title of legitimate pride for any statesman. The country has indeed promptly responded with admirable and satisfactory spirit to this policy of reconstruction.

This, I repeat, is the satisfactory reality. Should we then shed tears if a few tons less of paper, which is often a corrosive stimulant like absinthe, are printed?

But, you will say, what about freedom, freedom crushed by reaction? Who of us has ever discovered that he was not free in this fair land of ours, where everyone is free to come and go, to discuss, work, live, suffer and enjoy, earn and lose, according to his humour and his

luck? Who feels enslaved or crushed, among those who quietly mind their own business, who attend to public affairs, applauding or criticizing, but without any thought of sedition? Absolute freedom is a philosophical or anarchical abstraction; the whole social structure constitutes a series of limitations of freedom, and the problem is one of measure and of social convention. There is no absolute criterion in this field, because this measure has varied and continues to vary according to times and circumstances.

Even the State is an organism which must provide for its own defence, and no one can deny its right to take such measures as circumstances render necessary for its own preservation. Did not Bismarck keep Parliament closed for seven years, did he not introduce exceptional restrictions into the laws dealing with the press and the right of association? History, which studies and judges facts in their general lines, outside and above the particular circumstances of the moment, has indeed recognized the greatness of the man who laid the foundations of German power. Time has also rehabilitated the per-

sonality of Francesco Crispi, imbued as he was with the spirit of the country's greatness, whereas the little men who with so much acrimony fought his ideals, have been completely forgotten. Who now remembers Brofferio, who in the Sub-Alpine Parliament hurled his bitter invectives against Cavour? Who remembers that little man who in those days managed to fill the papers with his outeries and who appeared in the guise of a defender of freedom crushed by the aristocratic Cavour?

The opponents of the present Government, who regard themselves, I know not why, as the spiritual successors of Cavour, tell us that he would have disapproved of the present state of things. This method of making the dead talk is indeed too convenient and somewhat childish. I certainly do not profess to know what Cavour would have done or said in the present circumstances. He could not, however, have failed to observe the work accomplished by the Fascist Government in two short years for the reconstruction the country, nor how much has been achieved to revive national idealism, nor to note that, whereas on the one side men are acting with a sense of rectitude

for constructive objects, on the other are leagued together all the enemies of constituted order, associated with other individuals whom unsatisfied ambitions, personal resentment and political failure have linked together in a hybrid and unholy alliance. On the one hand we have productive activity for the reconstruction of the country, on the other negative and impotent criticism. Let us then not allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by a torrent of rhetorical declamation; let us rather consider the situation in relation to the objects to be achieved and accept the means which are necessary for their achievement.

The press is certainly a powerful weapon, but for this very reason it must be regulated. If it degenerates, if factiousness jeopardizes the security of the State, the peace and credit of the country, it is the right, nay more, the duty, of those who are in power and on whom the responsibility for the fate of the nation devolves, to undertake this task, even though it be a thankless one, on the condition, of course, that their action be based on legitimate rules, i. e. on the law, because it would not be admissible that in order to repress one abuse they were to commit another.

But, the critics observe, the Constitution is being violated. It is difficult to conceive of a more inconsistent charge, or one which is, moreover, based on more inadequate good faith. It is strange indeed to find those very people — Socialists and such-like — who want to destroy the bourgeois State and subvert far more than the Constitution, filled with touching tenderness for that same Constitution! Even among the Parliamentary Oppositions this pretended scandal is but an insincere pretext, for you will remember that it is from that very quarter that after the war some of the most radical proposals of Constitutional reform emanated. It was these same Constitutional zealots who then proposed that the King should be deprived of the prerogative of declaring war, that the composition of the Senate should be reformed by suppressing the King's right to appoint the Senators and making them elective. The proportional system was introduced into the elections, thereby radically altering the existing representative system based on majority elections, that is to say, substituting for a system based on a majority governing independently of and if need be against the

minority, the creation of groups which contributed so largely to the dangerous instability of the Government. I need not trouble you with a list of all the Constitutional rules which have fallen into disuetude or have been definitely reformed by new laws since 1848, as you will find them in any text-book of Constitutional law.

But what are these pretended changes in the Constitution, about which so much commotion is being made? A Commission has been appointed composed of men known for the soundness of their views and who are certainly not likely to subvert the world. In any case it is merely a committee of study, and its terms of reference are to make proposals. When it sends in its report we shall examine these proposals; they will then have to be submitted to the Government, and before they become law Parliament must vote them and the King give his Royal assent to them. Even if we wished to judge not facts but intentions, there is nothing more definite to go upon than the repeated assurances of the Prime Minister that he intends to respect the main features of the Constitution, even if certain changes might appear worthy of

consideration in order to harmonize with new conditions a system which, we must remember, was evolved 76 years ago, when the suffrage was limited to a very restricted class, the economic development of the country was in its infancy, industrialism did not exist, the masses took no part in politics and the press was in swaddling clothes.

With regard to the points where reforms might be introduced, I have already mentioned them: the establishment of some form of press regulation, an alteration in the composition of the Senate by providing for the participation of expert elements and the limitation of the numbers of Senators — all of which proposals were considered even in the past by such men as Tommaso Tittoni and Emanuele Greppi.

A reform has also been proposed with the object of giving greater stability to the Government, for we have all deplored and suffered from the evils of the so-called rotative system of cabinets, and no one will deny that even a mediocre Government, capable of developing a programme with continuity of action, is more useful than

a series of Governments more meritorious in the abstract but following each other in quick succession, thereby keeping the country in a state of perpetual unrest, to the detriment of the orderly course of administrative activity.

All these reforms, when they have received definite shape, will be discussed and approved or rejected, but it is absurd to seize upon them as a pretext for going into hysterics and trying to subvert the whole life of the country. As a matter of fact the whole history of the Parliamentary people *par excellence*, the British people, represents a continual evolution, a continual adaptation of institutions to new conditions, even to the introduction of female suffrage and the abolition of the Lords' veto, and the transformation of the United Kingdom into a Government in a certain sense of a federal character, by the creation of the Imperial Council on which representatives of the Dominions sit.

Have not the United States, the nation which is regarded as the most democratic, a Cabinet nominated by the President independently of Congress? Had not Imperial Germany a non-Parliamentary Government,

in order that in the life of the Empire should not be subject to the excessive mobility of Parliamentary vicissitudes? Under the pressure of external events Germany has now modified this system, but I have just returned from Berlin, where I was impressed with the disastrous consequences already produced by the change. A crisis dragged on for a long time and the President of the Republic was unable to form a Cabinet, until he was at last forced to have recourse to the makeshift of a Cabinet of affairs, in which no less than five members, including the Chancellor, were not political men, but officials or private citizens. All these complications are gradually convincing the German people that it will be advisable to return to the former system.

The restored confidence of foreign countries in Italy is indicated by the tourist traffic returns. According to recent and careful statistics compiled by the Ente Nazionale Industrie Turistiche, it is estimated that 700,000 foreigners visited Italy in 1923, spending approximately about two and a half milliards of lire. On the other hand the libellous propaganda of the last few months, actively

carried on and exploited abroad, has sufficed to reduce the traffic. People are blinded by political passion and the country suffers. Recently, owing to various duties with which I have been entrusted I have had frequent occasions to discuss the situation with foreigners, and I am bound to admit that in consequence of this malignant campaign there is a certain bewilderment abroad in judging Italian conditions. Those who live out of Italy have to form their their opinions on the newspapers, and the Italian newspapers which are sent abroad are the very ones which most contribute to defame Italy. Whereas in other countries, when it is a question of relations with foreigners, internal dissensions are put aside in order to present a united front, we unfortunately have the habit of blackening ourselves. Owing to the same factious spirit, which in the past drove Italian cities to call in foreign aid to crush their neighbours, the Oppositions, impotent at home, appeal for help to the foreign press which asks for nothing better than a good occasion to attack us. A sort of class solidarity also comes into play. The press tends to form a power within the State; if you dare to touch this power

there a general cry of alarm: « Newspapers of all countries unite, the Ark of the Covenant is in danger ».

Then we have the professional politicians whose attitude towards Italy is generally based on a non-benevolent suspicion. The causes are of various nature. Seen from outside and through the papers, the policy of the Fascist Government may appear to be based on an anti-Parliamentary spirit; it is easy to see that Parliamentary politicians do not want the example to be followed, as they have no wish that the field in which they gather their laurels should become sterile. Furthermore, they judge us through the preoccupations of the internal situation of their respective countries; it is easy to understand why Mr. Mac-Donald and the Labour party or M. Herriot's Radical-Socialist coalition of the Left groups should be against us. But there are other reasons. A people that works, grows and expands, that knows its own measure and demands a place in the sun, comes into conflict with the interests, aspirations and susceptibilities of others. All have some reason to fear something: emigration upsets the monopoly of foreign labour our commercial

competition is making itself felt and disturbs the interests of other countries; the feeling that also from the point of view of international politics Italy is no longer a negligible quantity, but carries adequate weight, comes as an unpleasant surprise to many non-benevolent rivals.

Fortunately journalism and politics are not everything. Even in foreign countries there are large masses of people representing production and work, and in these circles the outlook is more objective. They know that Italy has conducted a great war with honour and at the cost of terrible sacrifices; that she had been seriously stricken by the tide of madness coming from Russia, so much so that, after Hungary, she was regarded at a certain moment as the country most deeply infected with Bolshevik poison; that the Italian people found in itself the strength to react, vigorously and that its recovery was rapid and complete, and the results of this recovery are appreciated not on account of the good or evil which is said of them, but on what people, even abroad, really see and feel.

Manufacturers, merchants and bankers have posi-

tive data on which to base their opinions. Italy buys and is an excellent and sought-after customer. She must secure her supplies of wheat, cotton, wool, coal, metals, etc., abroad and she orders and pays punctually. Our goods reach foreign markets, and our competitors appreciate their quantity, quality and price; they realize the importance and progress of Italian trade with an accuracy which no amount of mere words, even if put into print, can contradict. There are many branches in which our productive organization is admittedly of the first class. I need only mention textiles, natural and artificial silk, motor cars, the electrical industry, felt hats, etc. With a territory insufficient to support the population, rich in sunshine and natural beauties, but lacking in raw materials, we have yet managed to overcome these drawbacks and to counteract our unfavourable situation by a magnificent effort to turn our labour to account. Both the intelligence of the leaders and the virtues of the people have contributed to the result; let us be properly proud of this effort, but we should not forget that we may not rest on our laurels. We live on the margin as it were, in a

state of constant tension in order to be able to meet competition. In Italy, even more than in other countries, order and political stability are indispensable for economic life, for we have no reserves to exploit, and every disturbance affecting the productiveness of work places us at once at a disadvantage as compared with foreign countries.

Those who sow discord and promote disturbances and disorder, jeopardize the country, render general conditions more difficult, bring misery to the workers, and operate against the well-being of Italy. Such conduct in no wise differs from that of the men who fomented sedition among the troops in the face of the enemy and depressed the national spirit of resistance during the war.

I must now sum up my arguments and come to a conclusion.

I have set forth the admirable work accomplished by the Fascist Government and the merits of its collaborators and supporters. Let us now look towards the future.

To exercise power presents yet greater difficulties than its conquest. To govern is to act, and action inevi-

tably implies errors. It is one thing to consider problems in the abstract, it is quite another to face them in their concrete reality. Even success has its dangers, for together with the faithful followers, occasional friends who do not despise the material advantages of success throng round the chariot of victory. It happened that many who for one reason or another followed the banner of redemption with ideal fervour, have now to some extent drawn aside, and not all those who have remained or who joined up subsequently appear to be animated by the same disinterested considerations, This has created a certain sense of uneasiness, which must be eliminated. All men of good will, who realize that above party dissensions is the supreme interest of the Nation, should contribute to the work of consolidation and selection. We must not leave the Government isolated, not because it requires help, but because he who is at the head of affairs should not appear, even if he is not, a prisoner in the hands of a party, and should have a broader basis of support and a wider freedom of manœuvre. It is not enough to expect salvation from heaven; to leave all

initiative and all responsibility to others, to keep on one side in order to profit by all advantages, and to criticize what others do, is too easy; everyone should voluntarily contribute his own share, inspired by a healthy spirit of co-operation and giving an example of toleration and discipline.

Discipline: that is a virtue which is absolutely necessary at the present time, even more so than in the past. The country realizes that in a transition period exceptional ways and means are necessary, but it is determined that these powers should be exercised in a legal manner by the responsible authorities; it mistrusts, not without reason, anonymous actions, subject to no control, which are carried out to-day in one sense and to-morrow might provoke reaction in a contrary sense, with the effect of destroying that tranquillity which we wish to consolidate, of compromising the results and advantages already attained.

When the State machine was in a condition of dissolution it was necessary that outside forces should come into play, but as the machine was gradually repaired this

necessity disappeared, and outside forces, even if inspired by the best intentions, may become elements of weakness. Let us grant all the necessary powers, but let them be at the disposal of the head of the State, within the accepted limits. He who goes counter to this principle renders a disservice to his own cause and, far from increasing, tends to diminish the prestige of the leaders.

I speak openly, because I know I am speaking to men who feel the discipline of duty and the spirit of devotion to the country. By following the straight path of legality we cannot fail to reach our goal.

In less than half a century Italy has risen from an age-long oblivion; she has paid for the redemption of her frontiers with her blood. She does not aspire to dominate, but wishes to live with dignity, subject to no external rule. Her people have but one praiseworthy aspiration: to work.

If the Fascist Government, after having eliminated the threat of Bolshevism, succeeds in securing for the people peace to work, it will have accomplished indeed the greatest and worthiest feat. Let us hope that a clearer

vision will allow of the effective union of national forces to bind together all the elements which are soundly working for the good of the country. May this union have a high ideal, because idealism is that great force which achieves great results, and may this ideal be the greatness and prosperity of the country.





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