

THE FASCISTI

BY A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

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CERTAIN recent events in Italy echo curiously in British and Irish ears: D'Annunzio's adventures in Fiume, for example. This adventure and Sir Edward Carson's Ulster "rebellion" had, it is true, very different endings. But both rebels professed to be more loyalist than the King; both counted—one of them rightly—that the Army would not be moved against men who made such a profession. You have only to wave your country's flag more vigorously than the rest, and you will be immune against the law: so ran the argument in each case. The analogy, again, between the present war in Ireland and the shooting and bomb-throwing which have accompanied the struggle between Fascisti and Communists in Florence, Modena and other Italian cities is, superficially, equally striking, and more than superficially for those who regard the Black-and-Tans as "a class-weapon forged in Ireland for use in Great Britain." There is quite an absurd similarity between the discussions at Westminster on reprisals and the sorts of charges and counter-charges that are flung to and fro daily in the Italian Chamber:

BOMBACCI. The Chamber should occupy itself with the indirect policy of Giolitti, who is responsible for the deeds of bloodshed that have occurred. The object of Giolitti is to destroy the youthful Communist party which is now affirming its power in the life of Italy. I deplore the acts of barbarous violence committed at

Florence and Empoli, but these are only episodes in the policy of violence which the Government has adopted against the Communists.

SAZZOCHI. At Florence three wounded Carabineers were carrying in their arms the mutilated corpses of their companions, and they invited the passers-by for assistance. These replied insolently, "One the less." It (the reprisal of the Carabineers, who then shot a passer-by) was a melancholy occurrence, but we must allow for the state of mind of those police, and their access of wrath. (Subsequently the editor of an Anarchist journal was murdered at his desk.)

At Florence, the cause of the reprisals was the firing from an allegedly "Socialist" quarter upon a procession of students and Fascisti who were being escorted by police. At Siena, shots were directed at the Fascisti from the Casa del Popolo, whereupon the Government troops accepted the aid of the Fascisti in bombarding that building with two field guns. More recently, a Socialist deputy of the Right has been found with his throat cut, and a political crime is suspected. The Socialist interpretation of these events is that the Fascisti are, at worst, *agents provocateurs*; at best, secret allies of the Government in the struggle against the Communists. The view of the average *bourgeois*, on the other hand, is that, although the Fascisti may be a "morbid phenomenon," their rise is

an inevitable consequence of the "weakness" which the Government displayed towards the Communists during the revolutionary crisis of last autumn.

But who and what are the Fascisti? The description commonly given of them in the foreign Press as "extreme nationalists" or "ultra-patriots" is not a satisfactory one, but Italians themselves find considerable difficulty in providing a precise description of the movement. The Fascisti do not represent one of those movements in political ideas of which Italy was so prolific in pre-war days. It would be an error to regard them as the inheritors in action of those doctrinaires of a new Italian Imperialism, with their seat in Florence, whose clever writings created a considerable intellectual stir ten or fifteen years ago. Were they that, the recent rapid and formidable development of their power would be inexplicable; for Italy of to-day is in anything but an Imperialistic mood. Italian patriotism to-day is sane to the point of canniness; no other belligerent country is so ready to forget the bitterness of the war. In any event, the original ideas of the Fascisti are of little importance in comparison with their present actions; it has been hinted, indeed, that those ideas, whatever they were, have vanished under not altogether creditable circumstances. "The unexpected and grandiose rise of the Fascisti within the last few months," says a Republican periodical, "is not spontaneous. The large funds of which they dispose have not fallen from the skies, nor are they the product of individual or collective sacrifices. It is difficult to believe that their proselytising work tends to establish a new conscience; too many queer people have emerged suddenly in the dress of the Fascisti."

Thus it is that we should look to the present social conditions for the real origin and *raison d'être* of the armed volunteers, most of them ex-soldiers, the *fasci dei combattenti*, who have been carrying out reprisals on the Communists of the northern Italian cities. This violence has achieved some success, the Communists are, temporarily, "on the run;" in effect, the Fascisti are becoming a self-constituted police force, hitting wildly at all that savours of revolution. It is for this reason that the project for merging the legionaries from Dalmatia, now unemployed, into the Fascisti has been forcibly opposed by D'Annunzio, for whom the latter are no more than the protectors of the interests of that degenerate *bourgeoisie* which would "not forego its Christmas greediness" when the super-patriots of Fiume were undergoing bombardment. Nationalism in Italy (the theories of D'Annunzio, Marinetti, Corradini) has never been, as in France, a disguise for mere reaction; it is revolutionary and anti-clerical, and if its programme were carried out, vested interests at home, the Church, Parliament, bureaucracy would fare little better than such foreign races as might stand in the way of the "historical aspirations" of Italy. So long as the Communists were in the ascendant—so long as "Lenin ruled in Italy" (this, according to the affrighted *bourgeoisie*, was the situation last year)—so long could D'Annunzio and the militant Conservatives whose arm is the Fascisti co-operate. Each hated one aspect of Leninism. D'Annunzio its international aspect, the Fascisti its social revolutionary aspect. But D'Annunzio—whose proposed Constitution for Fiume was of an extremely radical character—has no intention of putting his fanatical

idealism at the service of the people who stand for nothing but the maintenance of the *status quo* and have indeed fallen under the suspicion of being the tools of the Government of his arch-enemy, Giolitti.

The Government has rested more and more in recent months upon the support of the parties of the Right; even Croce—who has proved that a philosopher can be an able administrator—is accused of favouring Clericalism in his new education proposals. But the suggestion that it has subsidised the Fascisti has not been substantiated, nor is it likely to be. Its attitude of apparent complacency towards their acts of violence can no doubt be traced, in the last resort, to an impotency such as other countries besides Italy have to confess to be fundamental in their Governments. The Coalition over which Signor Giolitti presides includes many able and distinguished men, as Croce, for example, and Giolitti himself (whom I have heard described as a statesman of the stature of Cavour), but it suffers from the faults that are inevitable in Coalitions, and having no mandate except to “carry on” and to postpone as long as possible any encounter with the realities of the post-war situation, it is not surprising that it should have been accused, first, of weakness towards the Communists and, now, of weakness towards the Fascisti. Nor does Italy offer anything unique in the spectacle we now witness here,—the condonation of unconstitutional action by those very parties whose chief *raison d’être* is the preservation of the Constitution. It is regrettable, say the apologists of the Fascisti, that such a movement should be necessary, but whoever condemns these private police of the *bourgeoisie* sympathises with the ex-

cesses of the Communists and condemns men who were heroes of the war—all of which has a sufficiently familiar sound!

Although the Fascisti do not possess direct representation in the Italian Chamber, their rise has had its influence on Parliamentary politics and is one of the things precipitating the general election, which, it is now expected, will be held in the early summer. If Signor Giolitti had fallen into the ambush which a week or two ago the Socialist Parliamentarians had carefully prepared for him, it would, say the reactionary organs, have amounted to an anti-Fascistist victory. On the one hand, the success of the Fascistist activity has convinced the Socialists that the Cabinet has drifted into a definitely anti-proletarian policy; it has determined them to overthrow Signor Giolitti’s Cabinet, if they can do it, even though this should be to the profit of the intrigues of Giolitti’s predecessor, Signor Nitti—who assisted the Socialists in preparing the ambush. On the other hand, the present weaknesses of the Socialists seem to the Liberal anti-Socialist *bloc* in the Chamber to indicate the desirability of an almost immediate appeal to the country, the result of which, it is hoped, will dispose of the Nitti faction, render the Coalition independent of the Clericals or popular party and enable it, at the same time, to pursue Socialism with severity.

The weaknesses of the Socialists are evident; they suffer, on their own admission, from “a crisis in programme, in method, in personalities.” The ambiguities of the results of the Congress of Livorno have not yet been cleared up. It is true that the proceedings there amounted in effect to the abandonment of the

idea of direct action, the conquest of proletarian power by violence, but the fact was not acknowledged in the resolutions or the voting. The Centrists brought forward formulae to disguise the real sense of the Congress, but failed, on the one hand, to prevent the formation of a new Communist party, and, on the other, to lift the "stigma" of Bolshevism from the Italian Socialist movement as a whole. There is, therefore, little question of the Socialists being able to increase their representation in the

Italian Chamber as a consequence of an election; all they can hope for is the substitution of another Ministry for that of Giolitti, a more "benign" Ministry, as one of Turati's organs *Il Lavoro* puts it, one to which their opposition will be "formal" rather than absolute. These declarations in themselves seem to justify those who have prophesied that, as a result of Fascisti violence, the "reformist" tendency in Italian Socialism (probably at this moment the genuine one) would become more open and explicit.

A FRENCH OPINION OF GERMANY

BY GEORGES, BLUN

[The following article is by the Berlin correspondent of the Paris Journal, a popular daily having an immense circulation and championing the interests of French industry.]

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OUR suffering continent faces another dismal Easter. The question of reparations, which dominates the foreign policy of the Western powers, and particularly of France, is still unsolved. More than that, the controversy which rages around it has now entered a new phase, where it is proposed to employ force to collect from Germany what that country is unwilling voluntarily to pay. We may characterize the present stage in our relations as a stage of punitive measures and duress. The German government will not pay what the Allies demand, and the Allies will not accept what the Germans offer. The Germans find these demands exorbitant; the Allies regard Germany's offers as an insult, and a proof that the country does not intend to meet its obligations.

One can hardly dispute the fact

that Germany's leaders have settled down for the time being to a policy of obstruction. We may properly characterize the present situation as a crisis in carrying out the Peace Treaty. But it is simultaneously a crisis for the German Republic. Never has nationalist sentiment in that country risen higher than today. It looks almost as though we were back in August 1914, when the public mind was captivated with dreams of military glory and the people followed meekly the guidance of pan-German adventurers,—back to the days when the German Reichstag approved anything, even the brutal invasion of peaceful and defenceless Belgium. That old spirit seems to have become again ascendant. The people deny with affected indignation Germany's war guilt; they will concede nothing to their opponents. They are determined