

# Fascismo—The Reaction in Italy

By CARLETON BEALS

Milan, March 24

LAST night the windows of my room overlooking the Porta Venezia in Milan puffed inwards with a mighty roar. The Diana Theater a block and a half away had been wrecked by a bomb. For the next hour the hospital guards carried out the dead and the horribly mutilated. Later two other bombs were found unexploded in different parts of the city, the new Socialist Party headquarters were attacked with hand bombs and subsequently burned, one of the union headquarters was raided, and the police stopped a rush on the anarchist paper *L'Umanità Nova*. Four days ago on the same Porta Venezia the fascisti (White Guards) and Communists battled. Two days ago a bomb exploded in the midst of a socialist meeting in the Via del Greco. Yet Milan, they say, is practically untouched by the White Guard terror; nearly every other city and every farming district in Italy has witnessed more terrible disasters.

These scenes of violence occur at a time when Italian industry is threatened with panic; when the metal trades are paralyzed; and the textile mills are expected to close their gates. They occur at a time when the liberal Government of Giolitti is marching to a fall, when that Government has itself acknowledged its own impotency, and has declared that with the present Parliament "it is no longer possible to govern."

This wave of reaction is the partial outcome of the disintegration and lost prestige of the Socialist Party, which began with the failure of the revolution of last year, when the world watched breathless while Italy trembled on the edge of bolshevism. There is little doubt that the spirit and the means were at hand for a proletarian revolution. But the very mildness of the Government disarmed the Socialists, and led to a limitation of the "occupations" to the metal trades and the signing of a compromise agreement, guaranteeing a large measure of workers' control in the industry. That agreement has yet to pass through the tedium of parliamentary action.

The revolutionary ardor has had time to cool. An apparent victory is rapidly turning to actual defeat. From Moscow came the thundering charge of betrayal of the Italian revolution, and after it the bomb of the twenty-one conditions. In the ensuing national congress those conditions were rejected, the door was shut upon affiliation, and the weapon of armed revolution cast aside. The Communists bolted.

This spirit of internal dissension infected the Confederazione Generale del Lavoro, the Socialists and Communists fighting for control at the recent Leghorn Congress. Both won a Pyrrhic victory. The C. G. L., hitherto subordinate to Socialist Party direction, will perpetuate the union, but with a certain degree of autonomy which augurs approaching independence of action. The C. G. L., numbering 327,000 members at the end of 1913, today has over 2,000,000, or double the number of adherents to the Socialist Party. The Communists effected the separation of the C. G. L. from the Amsterdam International and the passing of a resolution favoring the creation of, and affiliation with, the new red, syndicalist International being promoted by Moscow. Obviously this is a temporary encampment. Moscow

has just recognized the Communist Party as the only revolutionary organization in Italy. Will it recognize a confederation of labor affiliated with the Socialist Party? Thus the C. G. L. faces the probability of being cut off from Amsterdam because of international considerations and from Moscow because of national affiliations. The C. G. L. has been further debilitated by the conditions in Italian industry; non-production, lockouts, widespread unemployment, the breaking of strikes by fascisti and federal troops.

This waning of revolutionary spirit, the demoralization and break-up of the Socialist Party, the internal struggles to establish a new orientation have given heart to the frightened heads of industry, to the reactionary wing of the Government, and the newly created bands of fascisti who are carrying war into the disorganized camp of the revolutionists. These fascisti are supposedly organized groups of patriotic citizens saving the country for the king and maintaining its prestige before the world. To what extent their lawless acts are directly inspired by the industrial heads, as the Socialists charge, it is impossible to say. In any event a large part of their ferocity is the aftermath of that war fanaticism and brutality which is easier to arouse than control.

The acts perpetrated are everywhere similar to those in Milan: the burning of socialist and union headquarters, the disruption of radical and union meetings, the destruction of the radical press, armed attack on radical manifestations and parades. In addition they undertake to break strikes and labor contracts, and to guard private property. To their attacks the Socialist Party and the C. G. L. have been unable to offer any effective resistance beyond public denunciation and futile parliamentary bickering. The Communist Party, on the other hand, has scarcely had time to perfect its organization. In spite of that fact it has been obliged to bear the greater share of the persecution, and has opposed the greater resistance. Impromptu conflicts have usually taken place between armed groups of fascisti and Communists. About the first of March the aggressions of the fascisti led to three simultaneous communist uprisings in Florence, Trieste, and among the farm-workers of Puglia respectively. In Florence the assassination of the communist leader, Spartaco Lavagini, and the throwing a bomb into a procession of "pacifist students" resulted in street fighting and barricades. In Trieste the burning of the labor temple resulted, not only in street fighting but in the destruction of millions of dollars' worth of property. Thus in a few months Italy has been precipitated into a whirl of lawless terror where violence has answered violence and death has paid for death.

In front of this hurricane of hate the Government announced its strict neutrality. All violators of the law, all perpetrators of outrages will be punished, whether Socialists, Communists, or White Guards. Yet in spite of such declarations the civil war continues, and apparently the fascisti are immune from punishment. Daily in Parliament the demands of the Socialists that the Government explain fascisti outrages become more pressing; daily the reactionaries arise and shake condemnatory fingers at Giolitti because of the cannon thundering in Florence, or the riots of the Communists. Is this violence, asks the outsider, due to

governmental weakness or intention? If it is weakness the strong man must arise—there are few in Italy these days—who will restore the country to orderly methods, or the fire which perhaps may still be trodden out will be quenched only in rivers of blood.

If it is intention, the Government is wielding a dangerous two-edged weapon. There is always the possibility that some such uprising as that in Florence might be successful, and if so might easily precipitate a general revolution. Nor is it exactly the method to reestablish the financial credit of Italy, or to reorganize its railways and factories. But according to the Socialists the Government knows how far to go—just far enough to break the backbone of radicalism and make possible the nullifying of the agreement reached last year in the metal trades. With the failure of those trades, capital insistently demands that the Government quit its position with regard to workers' control. Some of the officials who helped to write that agreement are already announcing their change of front.

Apparently, however, this is part of the general undermining of the Government, which has announced its own impotency in face of a turbulent tripartite Parliament of Conservatives, Liberals, and Radicals. The violence throughout the country has precipitated the bitter attacks of the Conservatives and the Radicals, which have been followed by constant, stubborn opposition. Giolitti is daily attacked by the Socialists for his secrecy regarding the London Conference and his refusal to report upon the actions of Count Sforza, and at the same time by the imperialists because of his weak foreign policy. He is attacked by the anti-Germans and the indemnity adherents for his indifference to Germany's refusal to pay. The final slap in the face has come with the appointment of a commission to investigate the bureaucracy of Giolitti, empowered to reorganize the whole administrative machinery and effect desirable economies. Because of these onslaughts Giolitti has declared,

"With this Parliament it is no longer possible to govern."

In calling for a new election he has in turn aroused powerful opposition. Nitti, pro-D'Annunzio, pro-war, imperialist, and reactionary, was expected to lead the revolt and perhaps return to power on a program of strict repressive measures, but his attacks on Giolitti degenerated into such personal abuse as scarcely to arouse confidence. Besides the followers of Nitti, at least seventy of the Socialist Deputies are behind Turati in opposing an election at this time.

These last see in all this a coup d'état on the part of Giolitti, who is surely intelligent enough to realize that a new election would scarcely under normal conditions do anything but cut down his own liberal following in favor of the two extremes. In the eyes of the Socialists, to whom yesterday he was an enlightened statesman, he has now thrown his lot in with the forces of reaction. With some justice they declare that no election can be conducted at the present hour without the gravest scenes of disorder. It would be an election of, by, and for the fascisti, and indeed one paper in Rome has gone so far as to advocate putting this nefarious organization in charge of the polls. The Socialists declare that the result of an election will be a "Turkish Parliament" with Giolitti as "Supreme Sultan," at best an enlightened despot.

Certain it is that reaction is fighting hard in Italy, the one country in Europe that for two years has pointed the way toward a liberal, enlightened policy. Nor is this reaction that of a clever statesman, a Bismarckian reaction of opportunist compromise, which might still have led Italy back to a period of capitalistic reorganization. It is a reaction of brutal lawlessness and murder which has not yet reached its culmination. While this will further break the Socialist Party it will swell the ranks of the Communists. Terrorism has never terrorized. The reflection occurs, Will not the pendulum swing but the more violently to the other extreme?

## Germany's Dwindling Radicalism

By S. MILES BOUTON

*Berlin, April 2*

THE Communist uprisings in Central Germany will have been put down long before this is printed, but as I write railway bridges, government buildings, and villas are still being dynamited, banks and post offices are being robbed, factories seized, and honest workmen terrorized. A large part of the loss could have been prevented and the movement practically crushed by this time if two or three regiments of the *Reichswehr* (the 100,000-man army) had been promptly sent into the disaffected districts. Instead of this, however, the Prussian officials called on the *Schutzpolizei* (protective police), who, with but one machine-gun to every dozen possessed by the Communists and without artillery, found themselves pretty regularly outnumbered as well as outgunned by their enemies, and were frequently obliged to retreat and await reinforcements. That they accomplished as much as they did was due to their superior leadership and quality as soldiers and to the fact that the Communists included in their number some vicious and criminal elements, with no appetite for fair fighting, and many half-grown boys.

But why was not the *Reichswehr* thrown in? Why were

the members of the *Schutzpolizei*, with their armament cut down below the extreme limit of effectiveness, called on to take up the unequal struggle? The answer is simple. Herr Hörsing, president of the Province of Saxony, where the trouble began, and Herr Severing, Prussian Minister of the Interior, are Socialists, and the experiences of the last two and a quarter years have been unable to overcome the training and traditions of a lifetime. Not that they have any fondness for the Communists as such, or that they did not earnestly desire to put down the uprising, but they and the party leaders behind them cannot shake off the feeling that those responsible for such outbreaks as the present are merely "misguided idealists" from the ranks of the "class-conscious proletariat." It is bad enough to use force against them in any guise, but the army must not be called on; that might look like counter-revolution.

For the first day or two of the revolt there was reason to believe that those responsible for putting it down had learned by sad experience that even proletarians must not be permitted to violate all penal laws with impunity. Not only the Majority Socialist organs, but even the Independent Socialist papers, at their head *Die Freiheit*, denounced