

Is Tokio Ready for Fascism?

The Background of the Military Revolt

JOSEPH BARNES

THE comic opera denouement of the most recent incident in the struggle of Japan's military fascists to consolidate their control over the government in Tokio has already taken its place with cherry blossoms, hari-kiri and the tea ceremony, stock properties of those who preserve the illusion that the Japanese are men of a different planet motivated by traditions and customs which are not to be understood by foreigners.

But the spectacle of a Prime Minister hiding for two days in his maid's room while rebel soldiers stood guard over the murdered body of his brother-in-law, who had run out into the early morning snowstorm to save the family's honor, somehow overflows even the capacious formula of *bushido*, the spirit of Japan's feudal samurai, so often used to explain away what other peoples have learned to call imperialist aggression or simply private thuggery.

For in spite of the inadequacy of the news reports, it has already become clear that the latest outbreak of the military rash in Japan is not too occult for diagnosis, although the list of its victims who really were dead under their blanket of snow indicates that its cure may be slow and painful. Censorship and the difficulties of the Japanese language have given both the rebels and their victims the speech and gestures in American newspapers of characters from *The Mikado*. But bankrupt farmers, battleships, munitions factories and compound interest at 6 percent are realities in any language.

It is these realities, with their overtones of war and social revolution, which explain the pattern in which the attempted coup d'état took place. The pattern itself is not peculiar to Japan. Wherever monopoly capitalism, entrenched against depression, revolt and the other consequences of its own fatal contradictions, begins to substitute for parliamentary democracy a more naked use of force, through mass hypnosis of the petty bourgeois classes in a fascist movement, substantially the same results have followed.

The incidents of the blood bath which followed a national election considered damaging to the army's power in domestic politics in Japan are as romantic and as unimportant as the mists which shrouded Mount Fuji on the morning of the assassinations. But there are three aspects in which peculiarly Japanese conditions have made the development of fascism significantly different from Western experience. The first is the position of the Emperor, Hirohito; the second is the peculiar role of the army in Japanese life; the third

is the predominantly liberal and democratic nature of the threat to monopoly capital which has called forth this newest answer.

The Emperor, besides being a diligent student of black beetles, is notable in Japanese life as the head of the family which outranks even the Mitsui and Mitsubishi (Iwasaki) in its industrial and banking wealth. No estimate has ever been made of the Imperial Household's fortune. It is commonly assumed to be greater than that of the Mitsui family, which handles about one-half of Japan's total export trade.

At the same time, Hirohito is himself a substantial landowner. As the Emperor, who is also God, he is the special representative of the feudal landowners who ruled Japan until 1868. In himself he represents the merger between finance capital and a landholding aristocracy which still exacts 50 percent of the rice harvest of Japanese farmers as its rent. A similar alliance existed between the East Prussian Junkers and the industrialists of the Rhine valley before Hitler was called on to buttress their respective positions. But in no country of Western Europe has the landlord class survived with the same relative weight in such an alliance as in Japan.

Karl Radek has written that this factor gives Japanese fascism "a powerful fist on flabby muscles." But it explains the predominantly rural and agrarian nature of the discontent arising in Japan from the increasing bankruptcy of the small farmer class, still numbering more than half the population. High taxation, usury, crushing rents and typhoons have steadily depressed the Japanese farmer. He has gained nothing from the industrial boom built on armament expansion in recent years. The dream of Manchurian colonization has gone glimmering in the four cold winters since the empty plains were first offered as an answer to the growing overpopulation trying to make its living on the rice paddies of Japan.

The young army officers, for whom Japanese school children will shortly write letters to the judge in blood drawn from their own veins, are recruited largely from this class. The constitution of Japan, like its cultural traditions, gives them a power and an authority unknown in western countries since the first burghers in some Hanseatic town felt themselves strong enough as a class to defy their freebooting soldier knights. In its famous pamphlet issued in the autumn of 1934, the War Ministry itself announced a national program of "collectivist" economics, reading like the early treatises of Alfred

Rosenberg or Otto Strasser, which showed the deep current of unrest and discontent among this military caste.

Even this army clique has a striking similarity with the von Schleicher group of Steel Helmet veterans who were no less opposed in Germany to the Weimar politicians than Hitler's Storm Troopers. But when they secured power in Germany, as a cabinet headed by General Araki may secure it in Japan, they found themselves dangling in air, with no mass support of fascist organization to make real either their threats or their promises.

Finally, there is the opposition to Japan's ruling classes which exists outside the ranks of the army as well as outside the peculiar limitations of the military mind. How large this is has been unknown for some years because of the suppression by police of all radical activity and the systematic terrorization campaign against all liberals who have dared to raise their voices.

It is safe to say that it is not the working class, incompletely organized in Japan even in trade unions, against which the industrial rulers of Japan may be forced in the next few months to organize an open military-fascist dictatorship. The revolution which threatens monopoly capital in Japan is still a democratic revolution, directed by small entrepreneurs against the stranglehold of five big banks and by exploited farmers against the parasitic battenings of their landlords.

There are other indications besides the recent elections that this next step may not be long in coming. The Seiyukai, traditional big business party in Japan, has been louder in recent months in denunciation of parliamentary government than the army officers themselves. There have been signs that the "positive policy" in North China and in Mongolia, although little less successful in absorbing the energies of a restless army, has found at home a somewhat jaded public. Increasing deficits have threatened to check the armaments-fostered industrial boom, and the agricultural depression has grown worse instead of better.

A military oligarchy, led by General Araki or Doihara, would have as little chance of translating the fine phrases of the young army officers into rice and honor for the Japanese people as once Schleicher had in Germany. But there are already organized fascist movements, led by men like Baron Hiranuma or Toyama, which could complete, with army support, a new rampart for the threatened monopolists and landlords of Japan.



Is Rome Ready for Peace?

CARLO ZUCCA

ROME.

HARASSED by military setbacks in Ethiopia and pressed hard by the increasing economic crisis at home, Premier Mussolini is making serious efforts to end the African war, it is reported in well-informed quarters here.

Italian emissaries, according to these reports, have attempted to obtain the services of a Cairo lawyer and politician prominent in the Coptic church to sound Emperor Haile Selassie about peace terms. These efforts were unsuccessful, but similar moves toward a peace which would save Italy's face are being made through British intermediaries.

It is said here that Francis W. Rickett, the British oil promoter who almost cornered a large oil concession in Ethiopia last fall, visited Mussolini several times in recent weeks. In the course of their conversations, Il Duce is said to have emphasized the economic difficulties to which he is subjected. Italy must import most of her raw materials and is forced to pay for everything she purchases abroad with foreign exchange. Lires are not accepted.

Mussolini is said to have made it clear to Rickett that he would like to terminate the war in some manner that would maintain his prestige both at home and abroad.

It is believed here that Rickett will soon be on his way to Adis Ababa to assume his duties as confidential mediator between Mussolini and Haile Selassie. The choice of a private emissary is partly due to Mussolini's bitter suspicion of Great Britain and his conviction that he has nothing to gain through official channels.

Rickett's diplomatic technique will probably consist of trying to convince both the Italian and the Ethiopian governments that they will soon face a deficiency of war materials, food supplies and money and that the best thing for both parties would be to settle the dispute before ruin overwhelms them.

The government continues to prepare for a long war, but the sanctions and the failure to make any real headway in Ethiopia have increased the strength of those Italians who want to terminate the conflict.

Although Il Duce floods the press with stories of Italian victories, it is becoming increasingly obvious that the military conquest of Ethiopia is not the simple thing it appeared to be last autumn. The Italian army is modernized and well-equipped with bombing planes. But these planes are effective only where there are strategic places to be attacked. Ethiopia contains few cities and to hurl bombs from the air at guerilla troops on the ground is like shooting fleas with howitzers.

Opposition to the African adventure is

spreading in Italy. Many are now conscious of the fact that Mussolini blames sanctions for conditions which existed before those sanctions were applied. Last December, for example, the number of bankruptcies among middle and small businessmen in Rome was 120 percent higher than the average during the preceding three months.

Discontent is increasing among the middle-classes as well as among the workers and peasants. In the restaurants and cafes of Rome, people now talk more or less openly about the hundreds of "volunteers" who refuse to be shipped off to Africa. Forty peasants were recently arrested in Sardinia for demonstrating against the war. In Caccamo the Podesta and the local fascist secretary were killed.

The situation here was dramatically illuminated by the alleged suicides of the banker Feltrinelli and the Viscount di Modrone. These high figures of finance and of the fascist regime were panic-stricken by the economic crisis created by the war. They feared the collapse of the fascist regime and decided to transfer their fortunes abroad.

Feltrinelli shipped out of Italy 765,000,000 lire. This included 140,000,000 lire of his own; 380,000,000 belonging to the Viscount di Modrone, former mayor of Milan; and 240,000,000 belonging to the city council.

When this was discovered, Feltrinelli died. The *Corriere de la Serra* reported that the banker had "committed suicide." But another newspaper, the *Regime Fascista*, attributed his death to an "accident while hunting." It is common belief that the industrialist Motta and Mussolini's brother-in-law, Mattaloni, were mixed up in the affair. Soon afterward, the Viscount di Modrone "committed suicide" under equally curious circumstances.

The profoundly pessimistic mood current among the bourgeoisie and even among high officials, is reflected within the Fascist Grand Council. Here the old conflict between Il Duce and Farinacci, former secretary of the Fascist Party, is more acute than ever. The immediate crisis within the Grand Council is due to the economic calamities of Italy and to the widespread discontent of the people. There are even many highly-placed fascists who believe that Mussolini committed an unpardonable blunder in embarking upon the Ethiopian war. The general insecurity has further been intensified by the problem of supplies. Italy's gasoline reserves for aviation purposes, for example, cannot last more than about a year and a half, if that long.

Some of Il Duce's closest collaborators and rivals now feel that as long as he is in power it will be impossible to end the African war in time to avoid complete catastrophe

and in a manner that will save Italy's prestige. Mussolini has been making frantic efforts to out-argue his discontented lieutenants. He personally writes almost daily for the *Popolo d'Italia*.

But Mussolini can no longer conceal that the prospects of the African adventure grow darker from day to day. Last fall, he embarked upon the conquest of Ethiopia with the boast that the war would be over in a few months. The recall of General de Bono was an admission of failure. This was followed by General Graziani's "advance," again accompanied by bombastic predictions. Victory was to be achieved before the rainy season set in. Then came the almost complete annihilation of the Legion of October 28, the crack regiment of hand-picked fascists. This catastrophe further dimmed Mussolini's prestige and lent weight to the faction within the Grand Council which is anxious to terminate the war now.

The fall of the Laval cabinet, which had supported Mussolini in the councils of Europe and the debacle of the Hoare-Laval plan, further compelled Il Duce to look for a graceful way out of the war. With growing tension in Europe and the Far East, peace in Africa becomes indispensable.

Mussolini himself blames the British for his orientation toward Germany. It is reported that he recently told a foreign correspondent here: "England is forcing us into the arms of Germany and Japan." At the same time, a bitter campaign against the Soviet Union is being carried on by semi-official government organs like the *Giornale d'Italia* and leading fascist newspapers like the *Popolo d'Italia*. These attacks are coupled with suggestions for an Italian-German rapprochement.

The reported conversations between Mussolini and Francis W. Rickett mean that Il Duce is beginning to feel the full consequences of his gamble for colonies. The internal economic crisis has been intensified by the sanctions approved by fifty-four countries and this may lead to a serious political crisis unless Il Duce acts promptly. The bourgeoisie itself feels increasingly that Mussolini's policy is endangering its own future and there are financiers and politicians for whom his removal from power may soon become a practical political necessity. This makes the termination of the African war advisable for Mussolini who appears to be looking for the favorable opportunity and the proper intermediaries. Actual negotiations will no doubt be heralded in advance by inspired reports in the press of smashing Italian victories which will enable Mussolini to pose, both at home and abroad, as the generous conqueror who knows when to stop.