

State of the Sicilian Civilian



—“From *The Honored Society*.”

Sicily—“a message of anguish.”

Waste: An Eye-Witness Report on Some Aspects of Waste in Western Sicily, by Danilo Dolci, translated from the Italian by R. Munroe (Monthly Review Press. 352 pp. \$6.75), and ***The Honored Society: A Searching Look at the Mafia***, by Norman Lewis (Putnam. 318 pp. \$5), chronicle the tragedy of a society scarred by fear, ignorance, and brutality. Gabriel Gersh has devoted many years to the study of Mediterranean history and politics.

By GABRIEL GERSH

ITALY's postwar economic miracle has underscored the desperate plight of Sicily, and many people who associate the island with the Idylls of Theocritus, Mt. Etna, marvelous Greek and Roman monuments, and tourist hotels are now beginning to realize some of its stark realities. Behind the facade of Sicily's attractions lies a long history of feudal traditions, bitter violence, and unbelievable poverty. Despite the reforms initiated by the government, the island is pervaded by what Giuseppe di Lampedusa in *The Leopard* calls “the sense of death which even the frantic Sicilian light can never dispel.” Sicily

survives as a medieval anachronism in the European era of the Common Market, and these two books by Danilo Dolci and Norman Lewis, both marked by excellent reportage, devastating statistics, and moral indignation, chronicle the tragedy of a society scarred by centuries of fear, ignorance, and brutality.

Danilo Dolci's work in western Sicily as a social reformer is widely known, and *Waste*, the third and best of his surveys of Sicilian problems, sums up both his method and his diagnosis of Sicily's ills. He came to Sicily from Trieste in 1952, and was so appalled by the conditions of the poor that he decided to stay and help alleviate their suffering by making himself a nuisance to Italian officialdom. Mr. Dolci's program has been a mixture of agitation (for which he has twice gone to prison), examination of the real causes of Sicilian poverty, and a plea for resolute action. He has sometimes been accused of being an exhibitionist; others, including Aldous Huxley, have called him a saint. This book should correct the excesses, for it reveals his sheer competence. Its form is exactly what the subtitle says: “an eye-witness report on some aspects of waste in western Sicily.”

Dolci divides the book into three sections: “Waste of Human Life,” “Waste of Resources,” and “In Search of a Common Meeting Ground.” In the first two

he reports, entirely in their own words and without any introductions, the personal histories of many Sicilians, among them shepherds, housewives, convicts, fishermen. Their vivid, heart-breaking yet often lyrical accounts all tell the same story of waste—waste of life by vendetta-murder and disease, of land and resources by ignorance and greed, of fish by dynamiting and poisoning, and, underlying all this, waste of spirit and initiative through superstition.

In the third section the author transcribes the recordings of meetings, held under his chairmanship, at which some of the peasants discuss such questions as: Is it wrong to kill? Men and women, how ought they to be? What does it mean to die? Unfortunately, this last and deeply moving exchange is still available verbatim only in the Italian edition. Even so, in these transcriptions we learn how the Sicilian poor confront their fate, and how they react to challenges to the values and traditions by which they have always lived. Out of this dialogue comes an understanding not only of poor Sicilians, but also of human nature itself.

If *Waste* probes the depths of Sicilian misery and despair with telling effect, Norman Lewis's *The Honored Society* adds a new dimension to our understanding of the Mafia and its impact on Sicilian life. The author, a novelist and travel writer who is particularly skilful at evoking the color and atmosphere of exotic places, demonstrates that, despite its Robin Hood-like beginnings, the Mafia is a ruthless criminal organization with a stranglehold on the island. It exacts tributes from landowners; it corrupts politicians, many of whom are beholden to it for their election; it engages in all kinds of shady activities, from the control of food markets and water supply to drugs and prostitution; it commits vicious crimes against those who defy its authority.

Nowhere do the highlights of the Mafia's history emerge more clearly than in Mr. Lewis's narrative. The author rightly believes that its darkest days belong to the era of Fascism, when Mussolini, blundering into action against it, jailed a few hundred small leaders and at least compelled the big bosses to leave Sicily. But a golden age of power and prestige followed with the Allied occupation of Sicily. Presenting themselves as devoted anti-Fascists, the “men of honor”—as the author often ironically refers to them—wormed their way into the good graces of the occupation authorities and were soon in business again. Their urgent task was the undermining of the new agrarian reform laws that gave land to the peasants, and this they accomplished with bloody efficiency.

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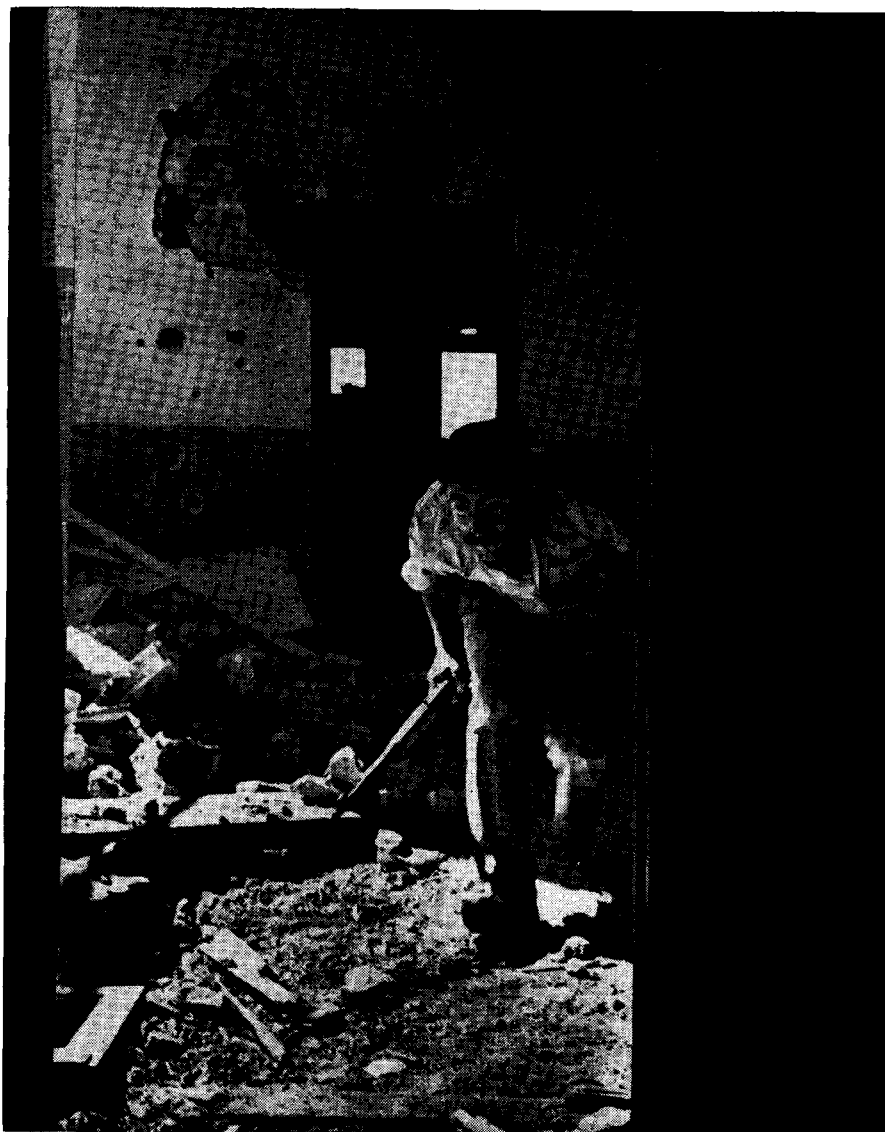
A WAR MEMORIAL

Recording a personal vision in pictures, a combat photographer revealed the many faces of battle.



—Ruth Orkin.

Robert Capa.



Israel—Sniper, rifle, a home in ruins—unholy symbols in Holyland warfare.

By MARGARET R. WEISS

ROBERT CAPA's *Images of War* (Grossman, \$15) could appropriately have been subtitled "In Memoriam." For it serves not only as a tenth-anniversary memorial to the young photojournalist who died while on assignment in Indo-China, but as a lasting reminder that war is the least gainful of man's occupations.

No one knew its wanton wastefulness better than Capa; no one recorded it at closer range. His camera was on active duty in the Spanish Civil War, in China, on the beachheads and battlefields of World War II, in Israel, and in Indo-China. From 1936 to that May day in 1954 when he was killed by a land mine in North Vietnam, he documented his personal polemic in pictures that revealed the mingled bravery, bravado, and boredom of men at the front, the terror and the tears that flowed through the ravaged villages in the wake of each campaign.

Capa sought truth and found it in the center of combat—the deadly truth of hate and destruction; the stark truth of bereaved families, the homeless, those humiliated by surrender; the strange truth of valor born of fear. All these were his "images of war," the photographic record of insights gained from staying close to the front lines. "If your pictures aren't good," he argued, "you aren't close enough."

Not even a quick, glossy Magyar wit and the relaxed bohemianism that was part of the Capa legend could mask his sympathy for human suffering, nor hide the intense loathing he felt for