

Italo-American Fascism

By ARTHUR LIVINGSTON

MUSSOLINI'S Fascism has some original roots in the Italian "colony" in the United States. One might think at once of Dumini, prominent in the Matteotti affair, who hales from St. Louis, is actually the son of an American mother, and constitutes an unforgettable link between the Fascist "gang" and the "gang" so familiar to urban life in America.

But I prefer, for the illustrative value of the case, to recall the figure of Edmondo Rossoni, who soars in the loftier regions of fascism, where that movement, as a regime, is most original and is striving to be most reconstructive. Rossoni also had his day in America.

As a Fascist Rossoni is perhaps a more authentic, and, at any rate, a more coherent embodiment of fascism than Mussolini himself. It requires a debater of considerable agility to find any continuity in the convictions of Mussolini, who was willing to ride any horse, black, white or red, that seemed headed for Rome, and who has been very ungrateful toward discarded nags. Rossoni has always been Rossoni. An underworld "intellectual" and outcast publicist like the *Duce*, he has risen to power as organizer of the fascist syndicates, through the fortunes of the syndical idea alone.

Tired liberals of the present, whose memories go back to pre-war radical movements in New York, will probably remember the *Proletario* of which Rossoni was editor, and how hard it was to fit the "tendency" of that radical newspaper into the scheme of an American labor agitation dominated intellectually by Marxian socialism, practically by the philosophy of Gompers, and, in terms of color, by the adventures of Haywood. Rossoni stood aloof from all those movements, nursing a magic formula which he affirmed with pitying condescension toward all other expressions of the proletarian revolt. If, in the atmosphere of those days, amateurs could grasp the antithesis between socialism and syndicalism, it was not so easy to conceive of a revolutionary spirit that was ardently patriotic. To me, for one, the tactical strength of the nationalist-syndicalist formula was not apparent till much later, when it had been put forward by a full fledged party in Italy—the *Unione Italiana* of Alceste de Ambris (a Fascist, as they say, "of the first hour," but subsequently a d'Annunzian, and now an exile).

It is not that there is anything American about Rossoni. He is not to be classed even in Italy among the so-called "americani"—a type worthy of much further research than it has had—emigrants who, after making their fortunes or their failures "in Cincinnati," have returned to Sicily, to the Basilicata, to the Puglie, to the Abruzzi, installed bathrooms in *case coloniche*, dotted the historic countryside of Italy

Few Americans know Italy as intimately as Arthur Livingston; few have so incisive an acquaintance with the forces and personalities astir among Italian groups in this country. Professor Livingston had an extraordinary part in making Pirandello and Ibanex known in this country; he has been interpreter of the Latin cultures; he is a friend of Italy no less than a critic of Fascism in analyzing its repercussions over here.

with bungalows, barns, silos, in American style, and otherwise ditsinguished themselves as innovators worthy of a new noun in the Italian language. Rossoni is interesting rather from a purely American point of view. He is an example of the "Italian in America" as distinguished from the Italo-American. And unless we bear men of his sort in mind, we cannot sense the difference between a type of fascism which is, one may say, native to Italian

America, and another which has status among us merely as a foreign propaganda of a long familiar type.

II

IN the days of unregulated immigration, when the rate of accretion was far in excess of the rate of "americanization," counterparts of Rossoni would be counted in all the immigrant groups in our country—they were particularly virulent among the Poles, the Czechs, the Scandinavians, the Finns, the Slavs. They were, and still are, numerous among the Italians. The picture is that of the political agitator—in his Italian village perhaps a party leader or a party editor—who has gone into exile, whether from police persecution or through loss of his place to some rival, and tries to get on in New York, Cleveland, Chicago, by practicing the profession he had followed at home.

No adequate effort has ever been made to describe and explain, or even to list, the host of newspapers, weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, that were born and have died during the last thirty years in America at the instance of such Italian "intellectuals." Among those that still survive, the *Martello* of Carlo Tresca is as good a specimen as the *Proletario* of Rossoni was in its day, and somewhat better than the new Socialist *Nuovo Mondo* or the Nationalist *Carroccio*. For fully fifteen years now, Mr. Tresca, a lonely survivor of the old anarchist *Unione del lavoro* of Italy, has been lampooning Italian celebrities and Italo-American *prominenti* in a debate of issues framed for an ever dwindling clientele of wholly foreign-minded immigrants. Arturo Giovanitti, to keep to names most widely advertised by brushes with the American police in our days of unrest and nervousness, was also at one time associated with Ruotolo's *Fuoco*. The complete roll call of such men would include a Petillo, a Valentini, a Campora, a Righi, a di Giura, a Macaluso, a Trombetta, a Fama, two or three de Biasis, and so on to scores. The foreign agitator-journalist, as a type, is fast disappearing in America for lack of a market. A decade ago one could find thousands of Italians in New York who knew no English and had never exchanged a word with an American. Now they are so few that even the great Italian newspapers of national circulation, the *Progresso* or the

Corriere, have difficulties in holding their own.

Under the best conditions there was always competition among such "intellectuals" for the scant livelihoods their restricted audiences could afford—rivalries which would seek some theoretical basis, "Syndicalism versus Socialism," "Anarchism versus Socialism," "Socialism versus Catholicism," or even, on rarer occasions, "Protestantism versus Catholicism." Probably too much weight was given to these wholly academic issues, which readily descended to personalities and not infrequently stirred rumors of blackmail. The fact that most of these foreign papers were of the Left was merely incidental. Before the war what political consciousness existed in the Italian masses was due to the Left. During our bolshevist panic just after the war, the Du Pont Americanizers went to the trouble of buying up many radical Italian sheets, which were only too willing to sell. These and less ephemeral journals fall within the web of the foreign language information service sustained by socially minded Americans.

III

IT was among such "leaders" and "intellectuals" and the groups of immigrants under their influence that a native and spontaneous "fascism" arose in America even before the "March on Rome." Here, as in Italy, the Italian ex-soldier stood apart from the Italian who had not gone to war, and the immigrant influenced by Italian patriotism from the immigrant who remained a Socialist. Italian groups throughout the country saw Fascist leaders rise in opposition to the old Socialist leaders, who, for their part, were not dissatisfied to have at last new antagonists to make new copy. Both Mr. Tresca and Mr. Giovanitti, for example, did publicity for fascism by creating the myth of a countrywide Fascist organization bent on subjecting the republic to a capitalist tyranny. There was little to this. The usual Fascist group consisted of a president, a secretary, and a second-hand typewriter, much as did the Socialist group from which it was to "save" America, as the *Duce* was saving the world. The "president" was probably an ex-Socialist, as also the *Duce* had been. The typewriter could do wonderful things. It could issue grandiloquent proclamations, write insulting letters to "unpatriotic" *prominenti*, keep Mussolini "informed" as to events and people in America. To the typewriter, a restaurant, a dance hall, perhaps a regularly rented room, or "headquarters," would be added, and a Fascio would exist.



ROSSONI

By Ruotolo

Edmondo Rossoni was born at Trasillo Ferrara, forty years ago, a son of the people. At twenty his travels began: Switzerland, France, South and North America. Wherever he went the problem of the Italian workman's lot engrossed him.

In the United States he tried to organize a national federation of Italian workmen. As editor of the syndicalist newspaper "Il Proletario," he initiated the campaign to save Giovanitti and Ettor from the electric chair, following the Lawrence strike.

No sooner had Italy declared war in 1914 than he returned to fight in the ranks. In 1918 he organized the Italian Labor Union to fight communism. It was the fore-runner of the present Fascista syndicalism. Today he is the general-secretary of the "Corporazione Fascista," with its two million members, director of its official organ, "Il Lavoro d'Italia," a daily, and deputy for parliament.

Carroccio, Mr. di Silvestro of the Sons of Italy, and Mr. Menicucci, a descendant of the old Rossoni radicals. Each of these gentlemen, in fact, had *prima facie* claims. The de Biasi publication had embraced fascism at an early date, at the date, to be exact, when, after his "retreat" from d'Annunzio's Fiume, Mussolini "sold" his movement to the steel men of Turin. Mr. di Silvestro took the first boat to Italy and presented the new *Duce* with the allegiance and support of three hundred thousand Italo-Americans. He was never able, however, to validate his credentials. His action precipitated a split in the organization of the Sons of Italy which is still being aired in the American courts. Meantime Mr. Menicucci, who seems to have had an authentic and self-conscious devotion to the early ideals of radical fascism, and to have been one of the few who sought nothing for himself, came forward with an actual

Few as they were and such as they were, these Fascists have remained the authentic Fascists in America. It is they who do the scuffling, when scuffling is done, in Newark, Jersey City, Meriden—a form of amusement of a Sunday for the picnics, weddings, funerals, and other "affairs" that feature life in the "colony." Fascism in this sense remains a colony affair, like the Socialism of which it is an offshoot and a competitor. The typewriter is still at work. The Socialists threaten to haze Mr. Volpi, the Fascists threaten to haze Mr. Salvemini. Sometimes such threats are passed on to the police, with the result that a few otherwise innocent detectives have been invited, with no more urgent cause, to one or two Italian banquets.

In New York, this Fascist-Socialist antithesis may be stated as between Mr. Vacirca, an ex-deputy in the Italian parliament and now of the *Nuovo Mondo*, and Mr. Trombetta, editor of the Fascist bi-weekly, the *Grido della Stirpe* (The Call of Race). The two papers are very much alike. The one ridicules *prominenti* in the name of Marx and solidarity, the other ridicules *prominenti* in the name of Mussolini and "discipline."

IV

With the "March on Rome," Italo-American fascism passed into a new phase. It became respectable and gained a status in more elegant society. It also "organized."

In the first place dozens of the old "intellectuals" saluted the *Duce's* advent to the throne by proclaiming themselves "founders" of fascism in America, thereafter seeking official legitimization as leaders. Outstanding among these aspirants "of the first hour" were Agostino de Biasi, of the

organization and a certain record of fascist action, undertaken in conjunction with one of the first fascist emissaries from Italy, Mr. Bottai.

The *Duce*, far away in Italy, was puzzled. Most of these applicants for investiture were unknown to him. Besides, important questions of policy had to be decided. To what extent could Italian residents in foreign countries, especially if they had taken foreign citizenship, be organized in a society obedient to his personal orders? As for the question of policy, Mussolini set up a special bureau in his home government to deal with the question of Fascism abroad. Its manager, Mr. Bastianini, announced a flying trip to America to settle all disputes; though his voyage was called off in favor of Mr. Sardi's Parliamentary Mission of Deputies. When the Italo-American factions could not find a basis for consolidation by a distribution of offices, the *Duce* entrusted the delicate task of arbitration to the Embassy in Washington; and Prince Caetani, in his turn, formed a Fascist General Council guided primarily by men like Dr. Previtali, Mr. Bertelli, the Counts Facchetti-Guiglia and Revel for New York, Mr. Montrezza for Philadelphia, and Mr. Botrero for Boston.

The "pinks" eventually carried the day. Successful business men, for the most part, of good repute in the American world, they looked, as they in fact were, "safer and saner," better qualified to handle fascism without creating embarrassments with the American government, more likely to give sound advice to the embassy at Washington.

And the problem was indeed delicate. On the one hand, it seemed impossible to prevent Italian sentiment in America from finding expression through some manifestation of fascism. On the other hand, any formal and serious organization of the fascist type would surely be viewed with alarm, as in fact it seems actually to have been vetoed, by the American Department of State.

Though the situation may, in American terms, be described as a tempest in a tea-pot, its echoes in fascist circles in Italy were loud enough to cause the downfall of the former Ambassador, Prince Caetani, as holding a too strongly "American," and a too lukewarmly Fascist, point of view.

However, a compromise was effected between conflicting ambitions and contrasting points of view. A constitution, carefully avoiding any offense to possible American susceptibilities, was indited, and Count Ignazio Thaon de Revel was named president of the Fascist Council and organizer of the American Fascio.

During the last eighteen months the Fascio has made some progress. There are at present seventy-three locals scattered about the country, with a dues-paying membership of between six and seven thousand. The Fascio has taken over two publications as official, Mr. Trombetta's *Grido* of New York and Newark and Mr. Maccaluso's *Giovinazza* a monthly published at Boston. More recently Dr. Previtali has proposed a Digest of Fascist Information, to be issued, under American editorship, as a publication of the "Italian Institute" at Columbia University.

The function and purposes of the organization still remain in the blue-print phase, and there is no great unanimity as to the course events should and will take. Some refuse to consider the movement seriously, and believe it will die out. Count Revel himself foresees for it a development along the lines of the Knights of Columbus or the Y.M.C.A. "From the great protestant association," says Count Revel, "our young men are estranged as Catholics: and from the

Catholic Knighthood as Italians." From this point of view there would be room for a chain of societies to stimulate intellectual and especially athletic activities among Italo-Americans, within the scope of their traditional ideals of faith and nation. It is understood, of course, that the organization, should it have a future, will be kept closely in touch with Italian ideas and Italian public policies, of which it will be a defender and apologist before the American public. The American Fascio has but tenuous connections with the Italian dictator, who has other and better sources of information from America and shows a merely fraternal interest in his American following by sending an occasional "inspector" (Mr. Sardi or Mr. Freddi) on a junket to New York.

V

UNIMPORTANT, even elusive, as Fascist organization in America proves, on examination, to be, the interest with which Americans, within or outside the press, are inclined to follow so-called fascist activities has a sound basis in instinct. For fascism is many times more powerful as a sentiment among Italo-Americans than it is an organization.

As to the diffusion and especially as to the varying intensities of this sentiment no exact information is available, nor is it indeed obtainable by any trustworthy method of research. In such matters one must depend upon impressions of the most general kind. One may, nevertheless, indicate the element of the situation.

There are a certain number of our Italians, not necessarily of the American born generation, who have entered wholly into the rhythm of American life, who think of themselves as Americans, and resent attempts to bring them back into the orbit of the foreign mind. This was the response actually made, a few months ago, by the Italian students of an American university, who recoiled against a fascist effort to organize them into a "club for Italian culture."

There is also the Italian "of the older generation," as one might say, who has been an American citizen for years, and has entered American political life under the conditions and limitations normally experienced by citizens of foreign language and foreign birth. This man is essentially American in outlook. He has built up peculiar institutions adapted to his peculiar needs. On fascism he probably holds impersonal points of view—approving it as a movement which has done something for Italian prestige, and in view of its antithesis to bolshevism, but suspecting it in its violent methods and in its antithesis to democracy. On the other hand he resists any disposition of Fascists to meddle with his affairs, and he protests when the Fascist issue is raised in his own organizations. As a type, he is sensitive to that arrogation of superiority which the Italian at home and the newly arrived Italian here have for the "colonial," a patronizing tendency to which he retorts with his own Americanism. One might describe the attitude of this average Italian as one of indifference to fascism. It is largely in Masonic, and to a lesser extent in Protestant, circles, that he is actively anti-Fascist.

That "Americanization," if we may use the term without offensive connotations, is the solution for the Italian immigrant most in harmony with his interests, is recognized in the more responsible Italian circles without distinction, and the conviction (Continued on page 750)



Italy sets out for the world

Travelogues

By BARTOLI



The world sees Italy