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Italy

Open letter from the Secretariat of the Action Party of Northern Italy to the Executive Committee of the Action Party in Central and Southern Italy

Dear Comrades,

We take this opportunity of sending you an Open Letter; will you please publish it in full in liberated Italy. In this letter we are stating our views regarding the main problems of democratic reconstruction in Italy, which we suggest should be accepted by the Action Party throughout Italy.

I. The Problem of the Reconstruction of the Italian State.

We are in complete disagreement with the way in which the reconstruction of the Italian State has been initiated. It has been done in the worst possible fashion: As authoritarian procedure has been used for the reconstruction of an authoritarian apparatus. The Coalition Government has appointed all the administrative bodies, and the prefect and mayors, without having any organic link with the people. Whatever the intentions of the ministers may be - by such a method an over-centralised State of an unhealthy kind will be produced. The over-centralised State was developed to perfection by fascism, but it existed before the advent of fascism and is certainly not a model to which we should turn.

The degree of authoritarianism which prevails is shown by the fact that up to now the government has not found it necessary to call a Consultative National Assembly representing the popular forces of Italy. Such an Assembly would be something entirely different from the Assembly of personalities prominent in the cultural and political sphere - which you advocate as we understand from reports which have reached us - as the latter would be but a Government appointed body.

The question of how to create a true democracy, i.e. a genuine republic, has not even been touched upon; instead, attention has been concentrated upon the unimportant issue of who should become the head of the State. What is the use of having a President instead of a King if the whole of the State apparatus is devoid of true republican spirit and is based entirely upon the principle of authority, of rule from above?

We understand that Southern Italy, since it was transferred almost directly from fascist rule to Allied occupation, had no representative self-governing bodies. But it must be added that nothing was done to create these. Why did the National Liberation Committee, which was able to hold its Congress, not declare this Congress a permanent institution? Whilst you challenged Anglo-Saxon traditions by demanding the abolition of the monarchy you did not

begin to build up local government bodies which would have been regarded by the Allies as an attempt to build up a State on the same lines as their own, and would thus have had possibilities of success.

We are definitely opposed to the extension to Northern Italy of the methods of authoritarian reconstruction. We hope that the experience of German occupation will revive the all-too-weak forces of democracy in Southern Italy.

In Northern Italy the old Italian State has collapsed almost completely. It must not be allowed to rise again. The bodies which have taken on to guide the Italian people through this terrible year are the National Liberation Committees (C.L.N.), which have constituted themselves in each district, each town and each workshop.

The C.L.N. will be the corner-stone of the new Italian democracy. After the liberation of Italy they must change their present structure - which still represents the original coalition of the five parties - by including the representatives of the mass organisations and by assuming the functions of regional and town councils. They will appoint prefects and police presidents, establish provincial committees for the cleansing of the administration, convene regional congresses and call a provisional National Assembly which will control the Government.

Although election committees cannot be established before the end of the war, and these autonomous democratic bodies will therefore not be able to speak for the entire Italian people, they will none the less represent the active forces of Italian democracy.

This is the only way of creating democratic self-governing bodies which will later receive the sanction of the Constituent Assembly.

Thus a new and genuine democracy arises from the ashes of the past wherever peoples rise in defence of their honour. This is how the new democracy rises in Yugoslavia and France, that is how she must rise in Italy.

The Action Party of Northern Italy - without any sectarian motives - strives to secure for these self-governing bodies the greatest possible influence. They should no longer have the character of an alliance between five parties; they should become conscious of being the representatives of the masses, and above all, they should with increasing energy assume the functions of local, provincial and regional self-government.

In the course of this work we experienced that the so-called alliance between the parties - which was an artificial union unrelated to a practical problem - was actually an obstacle to our work. We do not want to act like a disunited Left against a disunited Right but we want to co-operate with all those who want to create a true democracy, a democracy which progressively rids itself of authoritarian institutions and creates new and liberal ones. The Communists have adopted the same point of view, and our relations with them are therefore very cordial; but we do not exclude the other political forces, quite on the contrary, we seek a close understanding with them.

We hope that after the liberation of the whole of our country you will do your best to help to erect a true republican democracy over the whole of Italy. Our aim is to extend to Southern Italy the method of reconstructing the State from below, and not to introduce into Northern Italy the method of building up the State from above.

II. Change of Government

After the liberation of Northern Italy the Government Bonomi must be replaced by a government representing these persons and forces who have fought against the German occupation.

The Bonomi Government has, in our opinion, not seriously tackled any of the essential problems of Italian reconstruction.

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We shall leave aside minor problems, though they are not unimportant, and shall concentrate on those issues whose immediate solution is essential. On those we shall have discussions with the other parties with a view of drafting a programme for a new government which the C.L.N. as a whole, and not merely individual parties, can support.

a) The Ministry of the Interior must be entrusted to a Minister and an Under-Secretary who are convinced of the necessity of rebuilding the State not on authoritarian lines but based upon the direct participation of the mass of the people. They must be able to direct the C.L.N. - which will have been transformed into local self-governing bodies - in such a way that, on the one hand, these will not be stifled, and on the other, anarchy will be avoided.

At the earliest possible moment the Minister of the Interior must issue provisional decrees concerning the powers of local government and thus provide the administrative bodies with a basis for judging whether power has been abused or not.

The Minister of the Interior must be a man who has taken part in the struggles of the C.L.N. A Minister with the mentality of a prefect would be considered by us as an enemy of Italian democracy, even if he were a man of the "Left".

b) The decrees and all measures which the C.L.N. of Northern Italy have taken must remain in force. We shall not tolerate cancellation of these, or interference by the government in Rome through orders - usually belated and inexact. As regards the punishment of traitors and the economic purge we can certainly not allow things to move at the slow pace which prevails in Rome. The provincial tribunals for the purge, which will be established by the C.L.N., must immediately set to work.

c) The government must give people the impression not of living from day to day but of preparing the future of the country. They must therefore immediately appoint commissions for the preparation of reform schemes to be presented to the Constituent Assembly.

The commissions which must be established first are:

- a) Commission for Agrarian Reform.
- b) Commission for Industrial Reform.
- c) Commission for Fiscal Reform.
- d) Commission for the Reform of Public Administration.

These reforms cannot all be carried out in the course of the war; but by preparing the drafts for the Constituent Assembly the government will show its determination to break with Fascism and the Giolitti era.

III. Foreign Policy

We ask ourselves with great anxiety what is the foreign policy of Italy and what are the suggestions of the Action Party in this respect?

Two ways are open to our government. The first is that of "Sacred National Egotism". In view of the failure of Mussolini's megalomaniac imperialist policy one might turn towards a policy of petty nationalism which strives to exploit international conflicts for its own ends without any regard for international stability and understanding. Such a policy fosters the nationalistic spirit of people and creates feelings of hatred and revenge.

Trends in the direction of such a policy are already apparent. The hope of exploiting the tension between the British and Americans on the one hand and the Russians on the other, the petty spirit in which the question of colonies is raised - almost as though the real interest of Italy would demand not free access to all the colonies of the world but the possession of three barren patches

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in Northern Africa - these are among the symptoms of the revival of Italian nationalism. We are very alarmed that there is no determined opposition to this unhealthy nationalism of the defeated, and that even parties who for years have fought nationalism now tolerate it in this new form within their own ranks.

Such a policy would not only favour - as far as that depends upon Italy - developments in the direction of a third World War. It would mean disaster for Italy. Although she might derive some temporary advantages she would be used as a pawn by mighty rivals by whom she would be crushed in the end.

We must demand most emphatically that the government should adopt no form of the policy of "Sacred National Egotism". Nationalism has brought us so many evils that we should never allow it to raise its head again.

We must have a totally different foreign policy. Our government should definitely liquidate every trait of fascist and pre-fascist foreign policy. Our contribution must be to further the spirit of co-operation between the peoples, so that it will overcome differences which exist. We must arouse the interest of the Anglo-Saxons and the Russians in the birth of true democracy in Italy. We must solve the problem of our frontiers with the Yugoslavs; admitting that for twenty years the Italian government has behaved unjustly towards the Yugoslavs, we must find a solution which will perpetuate friendship and not hatred between these two neighbouring countries. As regards the colonial question we must not insist upon being given this or that patch of colonial territory - to give away colonial territories is in any case dangerous - but demand that all civilised peoples should have access to all colonies. This is the spirit in which all international problems should be approached.

The Action Party must recognise and declare that an attitude of international co-operation is not a sufficient guarantee of the peaceful development of the peoples, and in particular of our own people. We demand such a policy because we want our government to help towards overcoming the insistence on national sovereignty and to put no obstacle in the way of international understanding.

But a true European Federation - which is the only way to save Europe and the World - will only be established if the peoples of Europe preserve the solidarity born out of the common fight against Fascism and Nazism, and create a democratic European

movement which will demand from each national government not only the renunciation of a nationalistic policy but also a positive decision to join the Federation.

We in occupied Italy have therefore followed with interest and approval the efforts of the "Italian Movement for European Federation" which were directed towards bringing about agreement between the various forces of resistance. We want to join this movement as soon as this is possible. We want to be in contact with the forces of a democratic revolution in Europe and to work out together with them a common federalist policy. Although it appears that the Action Party of Central and Southern Italy has not yet risen to such a level of European consciousness or taken advantage of the opportunities of linking up with the federalist forces of Europe, we feel confident that you will follow us in this direction without hesitation.

With fraternal greetings,

The Secretariat of the
Action Party of Northern Italy.

October, 1944.