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Italy

A few days ago we received a report from Northern Italy, from the districts still under German occupation, on the political and economic situation. We publish below an abridged version of this report.

Problems of the Rebirth of Italy

In order to become a liberal and civilised nation the Italian people must face and solve the following fundamental problems:

1. National Liberation;
2. The future democratic structure of the State;
3. Economic and Social Reconstruction.

The Fight for Liberation

After the complete dissolution of the Italian Army following the armistice, the Italians did not wait passively for the liberation of the peninsula by the Anglo-American armies, but wanted to recruit armed forces of their own. The difficulties were immense. After the general breakdown the Italian Government only managed to save the remains of the fleet which they put at the disposal of the Allies. A military Liberation Corps could only be in the territory occupied by the Allies if they were willing to permit such a force to be recruited, supply it with arms and admit it to the frontline. This permission was not obtained for some time, but the bravery with which small Liberation Corps fought has been recognised by the British and Americans who have consequently decided to permit the formation of an army of greater numerical strength.

The major contribution to this struggle for liberation has come so far not from liberated Italy but from occupied Italy. Whenever a handful of courageous people could somehow procure arms - by abstracting them from former fascist army stores before the Germans could lay hands on them, by stealing them outright from the Germans, by buying them in the Black Market, by receiving them from some British aircraft - a nucleus of fighters for freedom arose. Frequently officers of the former army succeeded in keeping their soldiers together instead of surrendering to the Germans and took refuge in some valley or mountainside. They regrouped their formations, thus creating the first nuclei of partisans whose ranks were then joined by other fighters. Quite often they were militant anti-Fascists of many years experience who had formerly fought in the International Brigade in Spain, others had no military experience whatsoever. Around them there grew up groups, brigades, divisions of partisans, who called themselves `Garibaldi' **[1]**, `Giustizia e Liberta' (Justice and Freedom), or `Matteotti' **[2]**, according to whether their organisers were communists, democrats of

the Action Party, or Socialists.

The first formations appeared late in the autumn of 1943. By spring 1944 partisan formations were in existence in all the important valleys of the Alps and of the Apennines up to the province of

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Umbria. Partisan groups also came into being in the major cities. In spite of the character of guerrilla warfare which makes it necessary for every formation to be almost exclusively self-reliant, the partisan groups were united under a unified command from which they received general strategic directions.

The contribution made by the partisans is by no means unimportant. Improvised activities against Germans, Nazis and Fascists are an every-day occurrence. Many German and fascist troops have to be diverted from military operations at the front for reprisals against partisans.

Terror and promises were alternately employed against the partisans; but neither shooting nor amnesties produced results. Throughout 1944 the numbers of partisans continued to grow, reaching in the end more than a hundred and fifty thousand. When one locality was combed out the partisans, instead of accepting open battle, "dissolved into thin air", in order to reappear soon afterwards in a neighbouring valley to resume their guerrilla activities. The local population talked of them with sympathy, helped "the boys" in every respect, supplying them and hiding them whenever necessary. From summer 1944 onwards the partisan formations began to descend from the mountain valleys and to occupy a village here or a district there. The liberation of Domodossola was only one outstanding example of a constantly recurring event. Whenever some place of major importance is liberated the Germans send troops to reoccupy it and, as a rule, the partisans withdraw after some skirmishes. But the invaders do not dispose of sufficiently strong forces to chase them from every village. If one were to draw a map of the areas held by the partisans it would be astonishing to see how numerous and wide-spread they are. In Piedmont, where partisan formations are stronger than elsewhere, liberated villages are to be found within a few miles from Turin.

The partisans had hoped to join up with the Anglo-American troops some time in autumn 1944; they are now, however, faced with the difficult problem of lasting out the Winter. The cold and the snow which gives away their tracks have forced them to abandon their alpine refuges and to descend into the plain. The increasing difficulties of food supply and the scarcity of ammunition supplied by the British are forcing the partisans to reduce the numbers of their formations. All who are in a position to return to a legal existence - particularly peasants and artisans from the alpine valleys - are given leave of absence until spring. But guerrilla warfare knows no end. If it has to be stopped in the mountain valleys it must be carried on all the more intensely in the towns themselves.

The importance of partisans' guerrilla warfare does not consist solely in supporting regular military operations. However important, it cannot be decisive, particularly in view of the shortage of ammunition which does not allow the partisans to become an army capable of large-scale strategical operations. "The Volunteer Army of Liberty" - that is the official name of these formations - is above all a proof that the Italian people have not been completely brutalised by twenty years of fascist despotism. Even when they had reached the lowest depth of humiliation and oppression the Italian people were

still able to summon strength and courage to send countless of their sons to the fight for Liberation.

The Future Democratic Structure of the State

From its very beginning the Italian State has had a centralised and authoritarian structure in which liberal institutions were more of a superstructure than an organic part. After Fascism was overthrown by the monarchical coup d'etat and the King and his Government appeared on territory liberated by the Allies, the authoritarian structure was rather quickly reconstituted. Thus the starting point

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for a democratic revival in liberated Italy was not very favourable. Owing to its unhealthy social structure the population is rather indolent and has always more or less passively tolerated the domination of the capitalists. After the occupation of Rome the leaders of the various parties could have used their moral standing to assert a deciding influence on Policy and begin the cleansing of the State machinery. Compared, however, with the French or the Belgian State the Italian State is still completely lacking representative institutions, central or local. This is due to the fact that under Fascism there existed no representative assembly of any kind, and that owing to the speed with which the invasion followed upon the fall of Mussolini no representative militant organisations could come into being. The lack of political participation by the people gives events in Rome the appearance of a pantomime performed by a few party leaders distrustful of each other, none of whom really knows his own strength and what support he can actually expect from the country.

The issue at stake is to keep power from the hands of the reactionary forces which held it with the help of fascism and who are now eager to hold it without fascism. We must not permit the creation of a pseudo-democratic facade behind which everything remains as it was; we must transform the Liberation Committees into provisional institutions which are to prepare the people for the future elections. A purge alone is not sufficient. It is too easily sabotaged and it will not of itself change the structure of the State. Moreover, the anti-democratic forces are in a hurry to reconstitute the old State and then to call on the people to sanction the resurrection. - It is therefore not surprising that in such a situation the two most sincerely democratic parties, the Socialist Party and the Action Party, have refrained from taking part in the Government, restricting themselves to the functions of an opposition. This step most probably constitutes a mistake; they should not have excluded themselves from the only political centre from which to-day the democratisation of the country can be promoted. It is, however, indicative of the deadlock which has been reached.

Northern Italy has so far not taken part in such developments, as she is still occupied. In Northern Italy the expulsion of the Fascists took little less than a month. With the German occupation the whole of the State machinery slipped back into the hands of the Fascists who did not hesitate to employ it for the subjection of the country. Whilst in Rome the State is the co-ordinating centre of the struggle for liberty, in Northern Italy the State is the principal centre of repression at the service of the German authorities. The struggle for liberation aims directly at its destruction and consequently has a revolutionary character which it completely lacks in the South. In Rome the Government rests on the old machinery of the State; in the North the Rome Government has delegated extraordinary governmental and administrative powers to the Committee of

National Liberation.

In occupied Italy the Committees of National Liberation (C.L.N.) do not restrict themselves to organising resistance. They have also started to assume administrative functions. They are preparing the formation of Police Corps for the liquidation of fascist resistance, the creation of purge committees, and the convocation of consultative assemblies. They are thus preparing the country for the reconstruction of a legitimately democratic State and for the work of a constituent assembly. All the time, however, the bitter Nazi-Fascist repression is daily exacting its victims amongst the best fighters for Freedom and Democracy. A great anxiety is felt throughout Northern Italy lest the henchmen of Hitler and Mussolini should succeed in wiping out the flower of the new political class.

The military contribution of the partisans will retain its value even if not a single partisan should survive the day of Liberation. But Northern Italy is like a house built on a powder dump. - If it

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explodes the political contribution which it can make to the democratic revival of the country will be exactly nil.

Economic and Social Reconstruction

To assist her out of her present misery Italy can count on the traditional frugality and diligence of her workers and peasants, but certainly not on an abundance of capital. The Allied air-raids and the destruction caused by the Germans have swallowed up an enormous amount of capital invested in buildings, factories, hydro-electric installations, railways and bridges. Nor is the process of destruction concluded; it is indeed at present only reaching the flourishing regions of Northern Italy. If we were to rely on the country's capacity to save in order to reconstitute the value of what has been lost, the standard of living of the people would have to be kept so low as to render a vigorous democratic life almost impossible. Free institutions cannot prosper in a country threatened by the spectre of famine. -

Consequently, it is essential that the Italian economy should be integrated into the world economy as soon as possible, if there is to be any revival of democracy in the country. Italy, however, can only play a passive role in this sphere, by opening her gates to foreign merchandise and capital. Countries of minor political importance are dependent for their economic prosperity on the decisions of the major economic world powers, particularly the United States and Great Britain. If they decide to promote international commerce by economic collaboration and exchange facilities, the smaller countries will also benefit from it. The investment of foreign capital, of which Italy stands in particular need, may for some time to come be decided on other than economic grounds. If the capital exporting countries continue to refuse aid and loans to Italy, as they have done, on the grounds that she is an ex-enemy country, the prospect of a return to normal conditions is very remote.

Side by side with the integration of Italian economy into world economy, the democratic and Socialist forces in Italy are faced with the problem of transforming the economic structure of the country. Fascism consolidated the power of the industrial and agrarian class. These classes have always been the strongest supporter of fascism and are now trying to survive its collapse. They are absolutely incompatible with a

democratic regime in Italy.

The programme of the democratic and socialist forces in Italy is the same as that of other European countries: Socialisation of the monopolies and agricultural reform. This programme has in no ways been tackled. So far the Rome Government lacks both the authority and the clear democratic vision necessary to carry out such reforms. The fact that the areas of the Po-plain are still severed from the rest of Italy is a great misfortune. For the popular will to put an end to economic feudalism is far greater in Northern Italy than it is in the areas so far liberated.

The large industrialists, financiers and agrarians of the Po-valley who for twenty years had courted fascism are to-day showing an extremely servile attitude towards the Germans and are therefore despised by all patriots. It becomes ever more obvious that nothing restrains them from co-operating with the Germans nor impels them to try to save the factories from destruction. These duties have therefore fallen exclusively upon the National Committee of Liberation. The C.N.L. has therefore the right and the political power to plan the future of the large factories and to dispose of those who are their official owners.

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The demand for the temporary requisitioning of the largest enterprises of the country is being put forward with ever increasing determination in Milan, in Turin, and in all other Italian industrial centres. Just as it happened in France, it is highly probable that after the liberation of the North strong pressure will be exerted on the Government to start a reform of the economic structure and the C.L.N. of Upper Italy will take the initiative in the requisitioning of the principal factories. Such requisitionings must, however, not necessarily be considered as the prelude to nationalisation. They will essentially serve to deprive the privileged classes of the possibility to manoeuvre and sabotage the necessary reforms.

One part of Italian big industry will be liquidated without much ado, because it existed solely thanks to protectionism and autarchy. This is, for instance, the case with the iron-ore-industry. Those big cartels which owed their existence to the corporative order promoted by the fascist movement will be dissolved, and the industries, in part at least, [will] be restored to private initiative in an atmosphere of free competition. This is the case with the chemical industry. A third of Italian industry will definitely be nationalised. This affects enterprises which would in all circumstances retain a monopolistic character as for instance the hydro-electrical industry, or industries likely to assume dimensions which would turn them into an instrument of political power incompatible with democracy - this is the case with the large insurance companies.

Proposals for agricultural reform are so far less developed, because the peasants are always rather slow in making their voices heard. During the present period when agricultural products are much in demand the peasants have been in a position to put aside some savings. This fact will certainly strengthen their desire to own a piece of land. If agricultural reform is carried out with courage and in favour of the peasants it will, together with the industrial reform, doubtless be a contribution to the democratic foundations of the country.

In spite of all the forces which can be harnessed from the democratic and socialist currents in Italy it will not be possible to arrive at a positive result unless international policy and European policy in particular, abandons decisively the traditional game of

balance of power and alliances.

The wish for an international policy of federal unification is most strongly felt by the most sincerely democratic forces. They know that should in the years to come their country once more pursue a nationalist foreign policy, they will inevitably be beaten by reactionary currents. They know that the democratic development of the country is absolutely dependent upon international order in Europe.

A policy of European solidarity can only prevail if it is supported by great democratic European countries, which then can count on the ardent and faithful support of Italian democracy.

January, 1945.

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Germany

We reprint below a report on condition in Germany which was published in the Swiss socialist paper „Volksrecht" **[3]**.

Total Misery

Again and again people in Germany describe their position in the following words: "We have as much money as we like but we can't do anything with it." This might sound very attractive to outsiders, but in reality it sums up the whole misery of our lives.

Every man - even in the public administration - has to work at least 60 hours a week. The working day in factories is twelve, fourteen, even sixteen hours. To that one must add the time spent in reaching one's place of work; owing to dislocation of traffic many people have to walk the whole distance. It is not considered impossible for a worker to walk two hours every day from home to work and two hours back again. It often happens that workers on their way home are caught in an air raid (especially in the evening) which means that they return home later still.

Those who have not shared such experiences cannot imagine what they mean. I spoke to women of fifty who were obliged to go out to work although they were running a home. One woman, who told me that she had a two hours walk to work everyday showed me her shoes; I can only say it is astonishing. In the morning she takes a piece of bread with her, her food during the day. When she was preparing a meal in the evening there was very often an air-raid alarm and she had to go to the cellar.

The people all look terrible. There is a widespread opinion to-day that the German people must be punished. To that I can only say: they have already been punished.

Corruption

On the left bank of the Rhine, near the battle zone, I saw red posters headed: "Appeal to the Soldiers! You are at present in a frontier district inhabited by religious people who also went through the experience of very heavy bombing and stood up to it ..." there follows an admonition to the soldiers to behave well and to treat the population decently and not regard them as their enemies.

I was told, however, that this poster was urgently needed as the Nazis, and especially the Gestapo, have become so used to crime that they know no bounds. I heard reports

on the retreat from France. The first to arrive back in Germany were the Gestapo officials from France and Belgium. They came in lorries and cars which were loaded with all sorts of goods which have been unobtainable in Germany for a long time. They were the first to bolt and were not checked by anyone.

Whereas the ordinary privates were stopped and were sometimes sent back to the front by the military police, and many of them were shot for desertion, the Gestapo officials could do as they liked. They grabbed everything they could lay their hands on. Nobody stopped their flight. What was, however, characteristic of these gentlemen was the fact that most of them took along a French sweetheart who to-day is living a parasitic life in the German frontier districts. I spoke to French prisoners of war about these compatriots of theirs. No French-man ever speaks a word to them.

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Missed Opportunities

When the German armies collapsed in France there was a general opinion throughout Germany that the end of the war had come. Happy faces were to be seen everywhere, and the Nazis looked miserable. The Gestapo officials hid their party badges and wore them inside their jackets. They were often laughed at for it in public houses, but they never spoke about it themselves. When the military communiques announced that enemy tanks had pushed forward near Eindhoven many people on the Lower Rhine were very pleased and hoped that these tanks would soon arrive in their district.

It is quite unimaginable what chaos and confusion prevailed in Germany at that time. There was practically no defence line. The West Wall was not occupied during the retreat from France. The Rhine bridges were not mined. An unceasing stream of retreating troops arrived, intermingled with evacuees. There were fantastic rumours in circulation and the general panic was enormous.

Well-informed people assured me that had the Allies at that time pushed from the Aachen district to the Rhine they would not only have reached the Rhine but could have crossed it without difficulties. The arrival of the Americans there was expected every hour.

Whence Came the German Reserves?

Observers abroad often have a wrong conception of German reserves. Everybody who was at all in a position to do military service and not absolutely essential to the war industry was called up. I want to illustrate by two examples what this meant in practice: In a provincial paper of Western Germany I read an obituary notice in which a family announced the death of their two sons who were killed at the age of fourteen and sixteen while serving as "Luftwaffenhelfer" (air-force assistants). I saw a girl of nineteen or twenty in uniform who was called up to the Luftwaffe; she is a searchlight operator during air-raids. The casualties in this service are very numerous, too. The "Volkssturm" in the Rhineland has not yet, however, been put into operation.

Himmler's SS Army now included millions of A 1 men. Five hundred thousand of these SS-men are stationed inside Germany; theirs is the task to stave off a collapse like that of 1918. Their ranks have been swelled by hundreds of thousands of SS-troops from France, Belgium, the Balkan countries, Russia, and other countries from which the Germans had to retreat. They were the first who sought safety for themselves while the regular army was bleeding to death; this has created a mood of great bitterness inside

the army which is secretly smouldering.

Some of these SS-units have now been used in the West. This solves the mystery as to how Germany could suddenly produce new motorised combatant divisions. But these reserves are, of course, limited. The Nationalsocialist leaders are fully aware of that. But they know, on the other hand, that they can no longer win the war. All they can do at present is to play for time. In conferences of district and area officials and even in local meetings, this subject is thoroughly discussed. They constantly repeat the statement that in the not very distant future the Allies may fall out. Germany must carry on up to that juncture. The time would then be ripe for a negotiated peace which is urgently desired by the rulers of the Third Reich, to save their lives and their power to which they cling more than any government before them has ever done.

End of January 1945.

Editorische Anmerkungen

- 1 - *„Garibaldi“, italienische Widerstandsgruppe, benannt nach dem italienischen Freiheitskämpfer Giuseppe Garibaldi. [Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882), volkstümlichste Persönlichkeit im Italien des 19. Jahrhunderts, Anschluss an die Bewegung „Giovine Italia“ von G. Mazzini (1833), im meist südamerikanischen Exil (1834-1848), Kampf gegen Österreicher (1848-1849) und führend beteiligt an der Verteidigung der 1849 ausgerufenen und von Mazzini geführten römischen Republik, danach erneut Exil (bis 1853), unter Viktor Emanuel II. Mitwirkung an der italienischen Einigung (nach 1853), Führer eines Korps im Krieg gegen Österreich (1859), mit C. Cavour's Eroberungsversuch von Sizilien und Neapel (1860), erneut am Feldzug gegen Österreich beteiligt (1866), gescheiterte Versuche, Italien den Kirchenstaat einzugliedern (1862 und 1867).]*
- 2 - *„Matteotti“, italienische Widerstandsgruppe, benannt nach dem italienischen Politiker Matteotti. [Giacomo Matteotti (1885-1924), führend in der sozialistischen Bewegung Italiens tätig, Generalsekretär der „Partito Socialista Unitario“ (PSU), Abgeordneter (ab 1919), flammende Rede in der Abgeordnetenversammlung gegen die Faschisten (30. Mai 1924), Entführung und Ermordung durch die Faschisten (10. Juni 1924). Die so genannte Matteotti-Krise war Wendepunkt in Mussolinis Politik und gilt als Anfangspunkt seiner Diktatur.]*
- 3 - *„Volksrecht“, seit 1898 erscheinende sozialistische schweizerische Tageszeitung, herausgegeben in Zürich, offizielles Organ der Sozialdemokratischen Partei in der Schweiz.*