HOW STRONG IS MUSSOLINI?

Mussolini In Distress

Mussolini has apparently complete control over the whole of Italy. But a close study of conditions in that country shows that his power is not so strong as it seems to the uninformed superficial foreign observer, and that the policy which the Duce can pursue in internal or external affairs is deeply influenced by factors over which he has not full control. Among these factors we can mention the mood of the Italian people and forces which have been curbed but not destroyed, which center round the Roman Catholic Church and the Monarchy.

Mussolini's influence over the masses has had during the last few years considerable ups and downs. On the whole the enthusiasm of the masses has been cooling and in order to maintain his prestige the Duce must have more and more frequent successes.

Reports from Italy indicate that a deep scepticism dominated Italy at the beginning of 1936. The conquest of the whole Ethiopia became a necessity. An enormous wave of enthusiasm swept the country when Addis Ababa was occupied, and Mussolini reached the peak of his popularity. It took only a few weeks to bring about a complete change; soon the Italian people knew that the new Empire was a complete economic failure. The Duce hopes that a success in Spain would move the nation. Instead of that, the long duration of the war and the heavy casualty lists further decreased his popularity. During the last few months Italians have been receiving the news of continual victories for the rebels with increasing scepticism.
More facts have of late provoked an unfavourable reaction in the country. In spite of the difficulties which Italians necessarily have of forming a clear idea of the international situation, there has been a feeling that the Anschluss belied all previous declarations of Mussolini. The dissension between Fascism and the Vatican is also slowly becoming known to the public in spite of strict Fascist censorship. Nobody seems to understand in Italy the causes of the new anti-Semitic campaign, and persecution of the Jews does not appeal to a country which had never known anti-Semitism and where nobody believes in the Jewish Peril.

Fascist papers tried very hard during the summer months to stir up public opinion on the rights of the Sudeten Germans. Italians, who are very uninformed on the various aspects of the question, were on the whole favourable to Hitler's claims. But the Czechoslovakian problem did not arouse any great emotion and did not seem important enough to justify, in the eyes of the Italian people, a war in alliance with Germany. One result of the crisis was that Mussolini, who had preached war for years, who had prepared for war, was obliged, through the lack of enthusiasm of the Italians and the hostile attitude of some influential circles, to exert pressure on Hitler and to try to convince him that war should be avoided. The nominal withdrawal of "legionari" from Spain also aims at satisfying the desire for peace of the Italians, and further intervention in Spain will very much depend on Mussolini's capacity to shake Italian opinion from its present anti-war mood.

The weakness of Fascism is recognized not only by those who are antagonistic to the Fascist regime, but also by its friends. It was Von
Hassel, the German ambassador in Rome, who first and firmly-informed his government about the internal predicament of the Fascist regime, thereby provoking the wrath of Mussolini who, last February, caused Von Hassel’s downfall. These reports found confirmation later in the opinions of representatives of German army officers, as also of the Nazi Party.

The generals pointed out that Italy’s scarcity of raw materials is far more disastrous than the Reich’s, so that in case of war Germany’s ally would be but a burden; that, despite the conquest of Abyssinia, there is ground for scepticism on the military strength of Fascism, as proved by the Spanish venture. In an important memorandum Heinrich Himmler called attention to the fact that the Fascist Party’s influence upon the masses has diminished no less than Mussolini’s own prestige within the Party; that the ONRA (Italian Secret Police) is exceedingly ineffective as its instrument; that a dangerous ferment is in progress and that laxity towards Jews and Catholics is responsible for the situation.

Recent developments have shown the weakness of the fascist regime. Abyssinia was a Pyrric victory. Constant uprisings have made that country an open wound. It is an open secret that in the “quadrilatero” Addis Abeba–Lekempti–Gondar–Hakalle*, Italians occupy only a few military posts and during the dry season part of the main routes. The losses are considerable and Abyssinia has already cost the Italian people nearly two billion dollars. Colonization is out of the question. In Spain, fascist intervention has not been able to bring about Franco’s victory and Italian losses have been increasing steadily. Relations with Franco have worsened because the Generalissimo...
has been for a long time unwilling to accelerate the tempo demanded, nor to intensify air-bombardments. The conflicts between Spanish and Italian officers have increased and mutinies have occurred.

Italy has been unable to oppose the swift German advance in Central Europe. The influence which, after many years of strenuous efforts, Mussolini had been able to establish over certain Danubian or Balkan countries has either disappeared or is seriously jeopardised. Mussolini's plan of an understanding between Italy, Yugoslavia, Hungary, and Poland which should limit German ambitions does not seem to have any chance of withstanding the capacity for expansion of the Third Reich; Mussolini is so tied up with Germany that the possibility of an independent action is practically nil.

Neither has Fascist policy been very successful in another field. Six years have passed since Mussolini initiated his intensive propaganda campaign among the Arabs with the object of inducing the inhabitants of territories controlled by France and England in North Africa and in the Near East to revolt against the two Western Powers. The revolt was to have facilitated Italian penetration. However, in spite of the financial and military support given to Arab terrorists in Palestine, the Fascist pro-Moslem policy has yielded relatively few results. This is due to the natural diffidence of the Moslems towards a government which is responsible for the massacres of thousands of Arabs in Libya. Egypt is not yet showing signs that it would prefer Italian to English protection; the Arab revolt in Palestine has remained a local affair and the outbreaks which, inspired and directed by Fascist agents, should have overthrown French power in North Africa have been rapidly suppressed by the French Government.
Italy's economic position is far from brilliant. The various adventures have blighted the country white. The rise of the cost of commodities, shrinkage of exports, huge deficits, scarcity of food-stuffs and foreign exchange, grain shortage, lack of credit provide problems which are difficult to solve. Fascist propaganda is able to hide many facts from the Italians and tries to impress on their minds the belief that after all conditions are even worse abroad than in Italy, but no propaganda can for a long time hide the economic decadence which has taken place during the last few years and which is made manifest by a decrease in the per capita consumption of staple food-stuffs and by an increase in the death-rate.

2) Fascist Foreign Policy

In order to understand Italy's foreign policy, it is necessary to bear in mind the aims of Fascism. As shown in innumerable, although not always very explicit, speeches and writings of the Duce, Fascism wants: a) the annexation of territories which are geographically part of Italy, or which have in the past belonged to Italian States; b) hegemony in the Mediterranean; c) the formation of a huge colonial empire which should include as much as possible of North Africa, the valley of the Nile and some Near Eastern countries. The game of politics has sometimes obliged Mussolini - who, first of all, wants to remain in power - to act in a way apparently in opposition to the above mentioned aims. But wherever he gets a chance, he tries to foster them.

Intervention in Spain is due to the fact that no hegemony over the Mediterranean can today be achieved without control over that country. With the exception of the Balearic Islands, Fascism does not want to annex any part of the Spanish territory. The aim is the establishment of a Spanish Fascist
State, strictly linked to Italy. There is also a rumour that Mussolini would like to see as King of Spain the Duke of Aosta, a cousin of the Crown Prince, at present viceroy of Ethiopia and whose grandfather had been for a short time King of Spain.

The relations between Italy and Germany should be examined in the light of the above mentioned Fascist aims. England is not yet disposed to abandon without a struggle her position in the Mediterranean, nor France to give up territories which geographically are part of Italy. Moreover England and France are not willing to give away, without strong pressure, the territories which they control in North Africa and the Near East. Therefore, as Italy is not strong enough to threaten by herself England and France, the only way to achieve a territorial expansion is by alliance with Germany.

There is no mutual sympathy between the German and the Italian nations and there is no mutual sympathy between the two dictators. But as long as there is Fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany, the two countries will keep together as only by mutual support can they attain their aims. The two rulers also realize that they must help each other in order to maintain, through continual successes, the internal solidity of the two regimes: the weakening of one would also weaken the other.

Fascist and Nazi aims conflict in the Danubian and Balkan countries. There is no doubt however that since Mussolini's visit to Hitler in September '37, an agreement has been reached between the two governments: Germany renouncing to a drive towards the Mediterranean and Italy renouncing to her influence over the Danubian countries. The agreement is certainly precarious, but responsible people in Italy are convinced that it will last as long as the two dictators are in a position to gain more, at the expenses of other powers, by keeping together than by fighting each other.
Another point on which Fascism and Nazism come in conflict is South Tyrol. We are informed that, at the beginning of this year, Berlin, which previously had directed the Germans of South Tyrol along illegal paths, ordered them to be ready for action as soon as Italy consummates a binding agreement with England. It is known that Mussolini, upon receipt of evidence in substantiation of this, was so enraged that he hesitated to receive S.A. and Fuhrer Latte, Explanations followed the later on Berlin advised the South Tyroleans to be loyal to the Italian Fascist State. This episode shows how strongly the two dictators feel that, for the present at least, they must sink all differences which could prevent cooperation between the two countries.

III) Il Duce Without Rivals

Contrasting subordinating leaders in the Third Reich and in Italy, one comes upon an interesting difference. It is true that Hitler stands indisputably at the peak and that Goering himself can hardly dare to compete openly for the position, though he may at empt, in the background, to build for himself great and inviolable powers in order ultimately to support his claims when another may contest his right to succession. Yet there are a number of ambitious underlings seeking to insure their own spheres of influence with Hitler and to assert themselves despite such rivals as Goering and Goebbels, Hess and Himmler, Ribbentrop and even Rosenberg, Ley and Baldur von Schirach. The situation in Italy is quite different.

Mussolini knew how to maintain himself without rivals for more than a decade. Leading figures in Italy were taken away from the limelight. There
was no one in a position to carry on intrigue against him. Mussolini made certain that their roles were confined to keeping all threads in his hands so skilfully that their names were scarcely known abroad. Therefore, in the plots and counter-plots of today, now that Fascism has passed its apex, these men figure inconsequentially. Nevertheless, we record their names here in order to make the grouping understandable.

Internally the strong man was Federzoni, who may be characterized as the Italian Hugenberg. When he merged his own Nationalists with the Fascists, he became the leader of the conservative section of the Party; he represented the interests of the upper classes and enjoyed the support of the monarchists and the clericals. Federzoni's rival was Farinacci, a Fascist from the very first moment, who took up the cudgels against the new members who were in favour of a conservative policy. Farinacci may well be linked to Rohm, who refused to sit by idly in the face of social conditions, or to tolerate that the Führer drifts more and more into the arms of the powers that were. In Italy things moved with less commotion than in Germany, because of the greater weakness of the working classes who could have supported the Leftists of the Fascist Party. If the terror was relatively lighter in Italy than in Germany, it was not because Fascism was more humane, but because terror was not needed. For a number of years Farinacci was kept in the background as well as the anti-clerical and anti-semitic influences of which he was the spokesman. Today he is again of importance and his radicalism in foreign policy finds expression, together with the views of Virginio Gayda, in "Regime Fascista", in "Vita Italiana" (the editor of which is a rabid anti-semitic, Profi Preziosi), in "Tevere", and in the "Giornalissimo" (the Italian "Sturmer").
In the economic field, Mussolini’s chief adviser was Volpi, one of the most eminent Italian financiers, together with the Perrone brothers, Ansaldo, Pirelli, Uccelli, Beneduce and Suarnieri, all of them representatives of the interests of big capital. Complete different views on the economic problems were held by Rossoni, who used to have a great influence. He hailed from the syndicalist camp and had charge of the labor syndicates. Rossoni and Volpi were opponents, but their quarrels never troubled Mussolini, who was strong enough to direct the conflicting forces of which his two lieutenants were the exponents.

IV) The Ruling Clique - The Brown Cell of Italy.

We have seen that many different tendencies exist within the Fascist Party and the favour which Mussolini shows to one or the other is a clear indication of what policy he intends to follow. Under his watchful eye and following his instructions, the clique now in power is composed of the following personalities: the two Cianos (the daughter of the Duce and her husband, the Minister for Foreign Affairs), Bocchini (who is rarely mentioned but who, as chief of the police, is one of the most powerful men in the country and has direct access to Mussolini, Starace (the Secretary of the Fascist Party), Alfieri (the Propaganda Minister), and Farinacci. All these people are strong supporters of a policy which should give to Italy hegemony in the Mediterranean and a vast colonial empire. They believe that such aims can be attained only through friendship with Germany; they are all anti-semites. Moreover they are known to be great admirers of National Socialism and they aim in Italy at a totalitarianism much more ruthless than the one which existed in the past. In this effort to bring about a greater similarity between Fascism and Nazism, personal relations between Madame Ciano and Joering, as well as between Starace and Himmler, play important parts.
This strange alliance is fraught with consequences. Just as Himmler and Goering, who despite their otherwise mutual hatred are advocates of the "lightning thrust" (Blitzkrieg), so too are Ciano and Starace in Italy. A united attempt is made by them to win over Mussolini to their plan. In union with Ciano and Starace there is also Pariani, head of the Italian General Staff, and Marshall Balbo, who, as governor of Libya, favoured the anti-semitic riots which broke out there during the last two years. Balbo has no sympathy for Starace, is ready to stand up against Mussolini, has ambitions of his own and hopes that a violent clash in Europe would enable him to satisfy them.

The strong desire of the Fascist ruling clique to establish close ties between Italy and Germany, has enabled National Socialist leaders to meddle in Italian affairs. They made plain that the German Government could not consider a strict alliance between the two countries, if the Fascist regime did not establish more firmly its control over Italy. Without beating about the bush, Himmler declared that the CVRA is in need of reform, that Fascism is still too liberal, too tolerant, too inconsistent. Moreover, according to him, this cannot be undone until steps are taken against political Catholicism and against the Jews, who are bottom foes of the Fascist regime. The aloofness manifested by a section of Catholics during the Abyssinian and Spanish wars, the revived activities of Italian Catholic emigres, the Vatican opposition to racialism, were taken as proofs of the animosity felt by Catholics against the Fascist regime.

The anti-semitic policy, which had been advocated by Farinacci for a number of years, was fruit of cooperation between Himmler, Ciano and Starace. It was easy for Himmler to convince his friends that Jews are leaders in the anti-Fascist front all over the world, that the dispossessio
controlled by Jews would bring to the Fascist Government some much needed cash, that an anti-semitic campaign would win over completely to Mussolini the Moslems whom the Duce wants to urge to revolt against England and France.

Anti-semitism was at first resisted by a section of the Fascist Press, such as "Popolo" and "Piccolo" in Trieste and "Lavoro" in Genoa. However with the appointment of Race Commissar Interlandi, the rehabilitation of Farinacci and the measures adopted at the meeting of the Grand Council of Fascism in October, it has now been introduced all along the line.

The aim of Germany is to make Italy a vassal of the Third Reich. The presence of German troops on the Brenner is enough to prevent Mussolini from turning against his "friend". On the other hand the new clique, ready to behave a la Seyss-Inquart, because it believes that through this drastic course and reckless policy it can maintain itself in power as well as satisfy its ambitions, is the appropriate instrument for ensuring Italian dependence. It is a noteworthy development that, parallel to Mussolini's, a new power should be rising in Italy which is not maintained exclusively by the favour of the Duce, but which can count on German support to stay in power. This development is bound to make very difficult, perhaps impossible, those changes of policy of which Mussolini was a master in the past. The Duce used to make periodical political changes in the higher posts; having called in power a pro-Nazi clique, he finds that, whether he wants it or not, he cannot dismiss them.

V) Church and Crown

The most important development in Italy during the last few years has undoubtedly been the increasing opposition of the Roman Catholic Church to Fascism. The Lateran Treaty attempted to deceive only the uninformed as to the relationship between Fascism and the Church. Mussolini had never been a friend
of the Church. His anti-clerical ideas do not belong only to his revolutionary past, they were also adopted in the Fascist programme of 1919 and were never forgotten even if for long periods they were kept in the background. The Lateran Treaty was an act of cold calculation which aimed at enlisting Catholic support for the plebiscite of 1929, and Mussolini does not need to change any of his views if he decides on an anti-church campaign similar to that of the national-Socialists.

Because of its activities during the Abyssinian war, the entire high clergy found itself tragically ensnared and conscience stricken as a result of allegations that the Church is in Babylonian captivity and that a day of tragic conflict is unavoidable. Some predict that the clash will occur when the present incumbent of the Holy See dies. A strong faction in the Vatican, headed by the Secretary of State, Cardinal Pacelli, is working for the election of a Pope who will adopt a strong attitude towards the totalitarian states. Mussolini is said on the other hand to be determined to secure his own position, after the death of the present Pope, by exerting every effort to launch the candidacy of a pro-Fascist successor. A certain name is mentioned in connection therewith. Should Mussolini's choice prove to have a slim chance of victory, it would but accelerate the conflict.

German-Italian relations have contributed no little to widen the abyss which is separating Fascism and the Catholic Church. For a time it seemed as if Mussolini were eager to effect reconciliation between the Vatican and the Third Reich, but that impulse has now subsided entirely. The attitude of progressive Catholics in France, Belgium, Poland, Hungary, Switzerland and Spain, particularly among the Basques - in addition to intensified activities by Catholic political emigres - have aroused Mussolini's anger; this has been increased by the attitude of the Catholic Action and by a clear cut opposition to racism.
In her conflict with anti-clerical Fascism, the Church has found the most important allies among these, the Royal Court. In response to Mussolini's threat of a pro-Fascist Pope, the Crown Prince promises to liberate the Church from her bonds. Special significance is given to a meeting, held not long ago in Rome, between Crown Prince Umberto, State-Secretary Pacelli, Prince George von Wittelsbach, Marchese Persichetti (nephew of the Pope), and the Duke of Orsini.

The latent opposition of influential Catholic or military groups, would be greatly strengthened were the Court to assert its own independence from Fascism. For a long time the King had resigned himself to the position of phantom ruler. But there have been signs of late that he is not willing to let Mussolini go to the extremes required by his Nazi friends. It is rumored in Rome that at the end of September the King refused to sign a mobilization order which would have involved Italy in a war against England, thus contributing another fact which obliged Mussolini to support a peaceful solution of the Czecho-Slovakian crisis.

It is an open secret that certain members of the Royal family do not agree with Fascism: foremost are the Crown Prince, who has contracted many an enmity and a wide popularity because of his attitude, and the Queen, who has bolstered her son's resistance. Within the past year Umberto has become the soul of the opposition and it is felt in Italy that he will not follow his father's passive policy. What do the Queen and the Crown Prince object to? they disapprove Italy's present foreign policy. The enmity with England and France, the ties with Germany, the course of reckless adventure, the hazardous gambles, the imperial dream, the Abyssinian exploit, Spanish intervention, the pro-Moslem policy...... all of these are criticized.
Umberto opposed the sending of Badoglio or Graziani to Spain. He tried to establish direct relations with Franco in order to dissuade him from following Mussolini's advice. He recognizes the dangers of Italy's internal policies which no anti-semitic course, no Gestapo a la Himmler and no intensified terror can ward off. In the face of discontent in cities of Northern Italy, he recently undertook a journey through Piedmont and Lombardy in order to appease the populace, thus proving that the dynasty has a will of its own. Mussolini could do nothing against it. Umberto condemns of course the anti-clerical course. And behind the Crown Prince stand the court circle and the socially eminent, who hold all the strings which lead to the army officers and, above all, to the Church.

Mussolini has recently posed as a Republican, a memory of his former attitude. He holds forth sharply against the Queen and the Crown Prince and, having failed to link the Crown Prince to the regime and thus to compromise him, he now seriously considers the possibility of obstructing Umberto's path to the throne. These plans are closely identified with creation of the Empire as envisaged by Mussolini. The quarrels with Franco have strengthened in him a decision to place the Duke of Aosta on the Spanish throne. Should the Italian throne also become available to him, then, through a personal union between Spain and Italy, Umberto would be ousted. The anti-clerical and anti-monarchists forces of the Fascist Party, led by Ciano and Steraco, support Mussolini in this objective.

\[\text{(V)}\]
\[\text{V) The Clique of Generals}\]

What is the attitude of the generals to Fascism? There are certain similarities to the situation in Germany. But first we should like to recall an anecdote, to which an Italian phrase is especially applicable: Se non' vero,
e' ben trovata! (If it is not true, it is well invented!). An officer of the Fascist Militia accosts an army officer demanding to know why he had not saluted him, finally slapping his face with the remark: "That is Il Duce's answer!" Thereupon the army officer shoots the Fascist, saying: "And that's my King's reply!"

That story has been going round for approximately fourteen years. It illustrated the relationship, and hatred, that exists between the Party Militia and the Army. Unwittingly one is reminded of the relationship between the Reich Army and the Schutzstaffel (SS) and of the opposition between Fritsch and Himmler. Similar is the hatred between Russo, General of the Militia, and Marshal Bardoglio. Russo takes the place in Italy of Lutze, head of the Storm Troops, and of Himmler, chief of the Elite Guard (SS). Most Italian generals are sympathetically closer to the Reichswehr generals. Among the exceptions is Perianni, whom we have already mentioned as chief of the General Staff, and who, like Ciano and Starace, is enthusiastic about the Blitzkrieg idea. Thus we see that not all the generals are in accord. The same disunity prevails in the Reich, where very different tendencies are represented by Reichenaue, Keitel, Fritsch, Blomberg, who has been estranged and Schleicher who was executed.

In Italy, De Dono, who was promised Abyssinia but who was supplanted by Bardoglio, carried on with Mussolini through thick and thin, since the day in which the Fascist Party was founded. He may be characterized as the Italian Blomberg and has the closest ties with the Fascist leaders. Perianni has no kindred past, but his ambitions keep him an adherent of the regime; in this he parallels Reichenaue.
Graziani's case is different. During the suppression of the Senussi uprising in Libya, which was accomplished with extraordinary ruthlessness, Graziani became one of the chief matadors of Italian imperialism. Recently he has come in conflict with Il Duce. He is not in agreement with the methods adopted for destroying the insurgents in Abyssinia, and makes no secret of it. He is also opposed to the policy of adventure; and he reacted wryly to the announcement that he was to go to Spain. In the same way reacted Badoglio who may be regarded as the actual head of the clique of generals. He views with disfavour the alienation of England, as also the close ties with Germany, the intervention in Spain, the Mediterranean policy, and the heedless course, based upon bluff which, while destroying the financial and economic structure of the country, seeks to erect with efforts beyond Italy's strength a Roman Empire stretching from Portugal to Yemen and from Spanish Morocco to Somaliland. Behind Badoglio stand many generals actuated by the same outlook. During the Abyssinian war, when the danger of trouble with England was imminent, these generals conspired to forestall such a menace. We regret that we can not give any details about the activities of this group of generals.

Moreover, many generals are in close contact with the Crown as well as with the Church. The antagonism between Crown Prince Umberto and Mussolini, who had mainly thought of involving the former in the Abyssinian adventure, in order to compromise him, has contributed nothing, nor has the anti-clerical course, to rendering Fascism more palatable to the Generals.

There are likewise sceptics, alarmists and secret opponents in the diplomatic corps who, while not altogether affiliated with the Church, are at least loyal to the Court. Typical of this set is Dino Grandi, Ambassador to London, who is opposed to the policy of affront, to the methods that discard all chances of friendship with England and which would deliver the country to Hitler. Similar sentiments against a catastrophic policy are to be found among
the big landowners, industrialists and the higher civil servants.

VI.

VI) The Activity of The Police

Various groups exist in Italy which are conducting clandestine activities, mainly propaganda, against the Fascist regime. Their influence on future political developments in the country is not to be compared to that of forces which had compromised with Fascism but which have been drifting away during the last few years like the Church or the Monarchy. These groups have been able however to undermine the hold which Fascism had over certain sections of the population and the intensification recently of their activities as well as the increase in the numbers of their members is indicative of a mod of hostility against the regime. These groups are representatives of the most varied political tendencies, the most influential being those formed by liberal or Catholic intellectuals. For years the secret police has directed all its efforts against "giustizia e libertà", a democratic organization founded in 1929 by Carlo Rosselli, a former professor of Economics at the University of Genoa. In the opinion of the police, "Giustizia e Libertà" was responsible for a number of actions which seriously endangered at times the security of the regime; in order to stop these activities, it was found expedient to kill Rosselli himself, who was murdered together with his brother, a well known historian, in June '37. This only redoubled the activity of Rosselli's friends.

The aggregate membership of the clandestine anti-Fascist groups must be considerable if one takes into consideration the number of people who have been arrested in recent years for acts of opposition to the Fascist regime. During the past 12 years, more than 15,000 persons altogether have been denounced to the Special Tribunal which deals with political offenders. Moreover the Police has sent nearly 20,000 people to the small penal islands off the coast of Southern Italy, where are situated the Italian concentration camps.
The opposition and therefore the repression have increased considerably since the Abyssinian war. We know that the number of anti-fascists interned in the penal islands was nearly three times higher in April '38 than it had been at the end of 1936. The police has lists of people who must be kept under continual watch because they are known to have expressed anti-fascist feelings and are likely to be involved in active opposition; these lists contained 180,000 names at the end of 1936 and 280,000 names in April '38.

The weakness of the clandestine anti-fascist organizations does not derive from lack of membership but from the fact that the various groups act independently one from the other and there is no collective drive to achieve one particular aim. There is no doubt that if they were better organized and had large funds at their disposal they would be able to stir up the masses and, by provoking troubles which would weaken the Fascist regime, open the path to a moderate government.

Conclusion.

Of all European dictatorships, Italy is today undoubtedly the one in which a movement hostile to the present regime would meet with the greatest possibilities of success. Discontent is rife among the masses and the dictator no longer knows the pulse of the people. Were he aware of the real situation, he would still be unable to adapt his policies to the changing mood of the country because the regime now lacks elasticity. Moreover, an abyss has grown between Fascism and the forces which had tolerated it in the past and which Fascism had been in no position to destroy. And these forces are now adopting a policy of determined opposition.

We do not mean to convey by this that a change can occur overnight. All political change is the result of many contributing factors and some of these can be little influenced by the will of those who favour a change.
However, were the materialization of certain of these factors possible, as might well be the case, the political situation in Italy is ripe for the change. Comparing Italy and Germany, it is obvious that a change could take place in the former country earlier than in the latter. In Germany the political problem is extremely complex and it is very difficult to answer the question: "What next?" Uncertainty with respect to the future prevents a large number of persons from showing any signs of opposition.

In Italy it is different. Forces exist today which could take over the succession and in the hands of which the succession would fall, even if the downfall of the Fascist dictatorship were brought about by factors over which these forces had little or no control, such as the sudden death of the Duce, violent outbreaks of popular dissatisfaction, internal quarrels in the Party, or a war.

As we have said already, these forces center around the Roman Catholic Church and the Crown. Mussolini recognizes the danger and will probably heed to the advice of the pro-Nazi clique and try to establish a more ruthless totalitarianism through the destruction of the influence which the Church and the Crown still enjoy in the country. It is likely, therefore, that the conflict between Fascism and its opponents will become more and more bitter, but the situation in Italy makes very doubtful a complete victory for Fascism. The already bitterness of the conflict will on the contrary weaken the dictatorship and prepare the ground for political changes.