

ANTI-SEMITISM IN ITALY

by Angelica Balabanoff

NEITHER the social background of the country nor its historical and mental traditions are compatible with any kind of discrimination against the Jewish population of Italy. Like everything else in fascist Italy, it has been imposed by decree.

That the proportion of Jews in Italy is negligible (a total of 47,825) is demonstrated most emphatically by a province like Calabria, where, in a population of one and three-quarters million there are only eleven Jews. In the province of Sardinia, out of a population of about 900,000 only fourteen are Jews. In Umbria there are only 112 Jews in a population of 700,000 or less than two-tenths of a percent. About the same proportion prevails in the province of Abruzzi, where there are in all only 81 Jews. But even in provinces where the Jewish population is greater, their proportion to the preponderant Italian population is likewise negligible. Besides, the Italians as a people are utterly devoid of racial or religious prejudices. As a psychological current of public opinion, let alone as a sentiment or instinct of hostility, anti-Semitism is utterly incompatible with the character and mentality of the Italian people. In no country of Europe did the Dreyfus Affair or the Russian pogroms arouse as much passion, as much indignation and as much solidarity for the victims, as in Italy.

Nor is anti-Semitism compatible with all the previous pronouncements of the Fascisti themselves. As recently as February 16, 1938, a mere five months before the first Fascist Anti-Semitic Manifesto of July 14, the world was officially informed:

The Fascist Government has never thought and is not now thinking of adopting political, economic or moral measures against Jews except, of course, in case of elements hostile to the Fascist regime.

Shortly after the Fascists consolidated their power, they published a new encyclopedia which was designed to eradicate all vestiges of democratic liberal ideology and was to become the one and only source of authentic Fascist information for all Italians on all questions of life. For that encyclopedia the article on Fascism was written by Il Duce himself. The article on anti-Semitism was entrusted to the pen of Signor Pincherle, a full-blooded Jew. That in itself was measure enough of the Fascist attitude toward anti-Semitism. Here is what the highest authority of Fascism, the Fascist Encyclopedia, not yet revised, states about the Jewish problem:

There is no Jewish race or Jewish type. There are no physical characteristics exclusively Jewish.

The various groups of Jews represent a mixture of races and elements which have been instrumental in forming other ethnic groups as well, both European and non-European.

As for anti-Semitism in Italy, the Fascist Encyclopedia states:

The spread of anti-Semitism among us has been made impossible because of the traditions of our Risorgimento, contrary to what has been the case in Germany, in Italy the emancipation of the Jews and their incorporation into the State does not run counter to our national interests. Italy moreover does not have the economic and social motives which might, if not justify, at least explain in part the development of anti-Semitism, as in other countries. There are very few Jews in Italy, nearly all of them have been established in the country for centuries and have become completely Italianized. The tradition of peaceful relationship between Jews and Christians is a long one . . . and there is no specifically Jewish financial oligarchy.

As recently as May 29, 1932, Mussolini wrote about mixed marriages between Jews and Catholics, as follows:

Those statistics are of real interest, and are at the same time proof and reason for the non-existence of an anti-Semitic movement in Italy. The frequency of mixed marriages in Italy will be welcomed by all those who truly are good, sincere, reliable Italians, because it demonstrates the absolute social, political and especially moral equality of all Italians, whatever their remote descent might be.

Further Mussolini wrote:

The high percentage of mixed marriages in Italy shows that the number of Jews who, having left the physical ghetto, do not want to lock themselves in a moral ghetto, is on the increase . . . They want to be more intimately fused with the nation to which they have belonged for centuries and in whose history they are destined to live on.

Who does not recall Mussolini's sarcasm in dealing with Hitler's race theory and with race discrimination in general on the very eve of the consummation of the Italo-German axis? Was not this attitude of the chieftain of Italian Fascism exalted by his Jewish and liberal admirers? And was it not triumphantly proclaimed to a startled world by Mussolini's eulogist and bio-

grapher, Emil Ludwig, himself a Jew? Consider these oracular declarations of Mussolini's:

There are no pure races left; not even Jews have kept their blood unmingled. Successful crossings have often promoted the energy and beauty of a nation. Race! It is a feeling, not a reality; 95% at least is a feeling. Nothing will ever make me believe that biologically pure races can be shown to exist today. Anti-Semitism does not exist in Italy. Italians of Jewish birth have shown themselves good citizens and they fought bravely in the war. Many of them occupy leading positions in the universities, in the army, and in the banks.

Such statements by Il Duce himself over a period of years and almost from the very inception of Fascism might seem to be sufficient guarantee of the utter impossibility of anti-Semitism in Italy. The fact that even anti-Semitism has not only become possible but is actually today one of the leading policies of Fascist Italy is added proof that the very essence of Fascism is its utter unreliability. Fascism is, first of all, thoroughly adventurist and opportunistic in character. It adapts itself to various emergencies without any regard for consistency.

Anti-democratism, clericalism, militarism, totalitarianism, imperialism, cruelty and terrorism are as alien to the Italians as anti-Semitism. They all seem inconceivable in Italy. Yet here they are. In a country where it is possible with impunity to impose currents of thoughts and sentiments upon an entire population, without any possibility for it to express disapproval, anything is possible, no matter how reprehensible. The first rule of Fascism is expediency. That must be thoroughly understood if one is not to be caught unawares by the next turn of events in Fascist Italy and in the world in general as far as war and peace are concerned.

One of the reasons why the race problem suddenly arose in Italy is to be found in the Fascist attitude toward Palestine and its responsibility for the tragic events there. Signor Orano, turbulent spirit and a typical Fascist, who once pretended to be the most revolutionary of syndicalists, the most violent of atheists, the most intransigent of revolutionary Marxists, and who now emphasizes his being a strong Catholic and Fascist, in 1937 wrote the following about the Italian Zionist movement:

The Italian Zionist movement must be considered from the viewpoint of the Empire's political interests. Have our Zionists asked themselves whether Italy can afford to favor the formation of another State in the oriental part of the Mediterranean basin which is so full of complications and dangers? Born and consolidated under the sponsorship of Great Britain, this State

of Israel consolidated even more the Mediterranean position of England, which has to have its way barred by Fascist Imperial Italy . . . Besides, have the Italian Zionists asked themselves whether it is convenient for Italy, with her imperial colonial position in Africa to be hostile to Arabs and Mussulmen generally?

That should have been warning enough, more warning than Fascists usually give, of the possibility of a new turn in Italy.

Apart from that there is the critical situation of the country, due to the adventurist policies of the Fascist Government in general and particularly due to the additional strain put upon the Italian economic structure by the adventures in Abyssinia and Spain and by the feverish preparations for the forthcoming "Great War." Always an extortionist, Il Duce thinks that this intimation of anti-Semitism may help him to obtain financial support from well-to-do Jews in Italy and beyond its borders. Blackmail has always been an authentic Fascist method and a very efficient one. Further loans to Italy having been proven by experience to be utterly unfeasible, Mussolini hopes to get the needed money by extortion from the Jews.

The number of Italians who disapprove of the "conquest" of Abyssinia grows from day to day as the economic conditions of the country become increasingly worse. The number of workers and soldiers dying in Abyssinia grows constantly because of the devastating climate and the unbearable conditions of life. Italians are seriously balking against sacrificing their lives for the sake of building an empire in Ethiopia. Yet that empire must be built, to save Il Duce's prestige. Why not use the Jews? Are they not a defenseless minority? Will anyone seriously object if the road to the prosperity of the future generations in Ethiopia is paved with Jewish corpses? Somebody must pay for Mussolini's very serious blunder in launching the Ethiopian adventure. Why not the Jews? They are an exceptionally enterprising people, excellent businessmen, and far abler organizers than the general run of Italians. Have they not converted the old land of Palestine into fruitful gardens? If they can rear a Tel-Aviv for Zionism, why not for Fascism? They cannot be induced to try it voluntarily. But Fascism has its own chosen means — compulsion. Baited in Italy, unwelcome elsewhere, the Jews of Italy may be only too glad to seek refuge in Ethiopia and there begin life anew. That may seem ruthless and cruel to sentimental humanitarians; but from the Fascist viewpoint, it is brilliant statesmanship.

But over and above all that is the bargain with Hitler. Mussolini has been deeply humiliated by Hitler's supremacy. Hitler achieved his aim, in swallowing Austria and in coming dangerously close to the Italian frontier. A typical coward, arrogantly violent with

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those he is in a position to threaten, Mussolini is weak in the face of a threat against himself.

A mere few weeks ago the man in the street was wont to offer as his clinching argument against the possibility of an anti-Semitic turn in Italy the fact that many of Mussolini's friends and benefactors were Jews. Among the Fascist Government's financial backers was a renegade as prominent among American Jews as the late Otto H. Kahn, banker, art patron and philanthropist. Mussolini's most trusted Minister of Finance was Count Volpi, a Jew. Another Jew in the same post was Jung.

Indeed, Jews figured prominently even among the "Fascists of the First Hour" — that is, among those who presumably took part in the early gangsterism whereby the enemies of Fascism were eliminated. Since there was no discrimination among Fascists, as among all Italians, between Jews and non-Jews, many a Fascist of the anti-Semitic era now dawning would be startled to hear that such-and-such a "founding father" of Fascism was a Jew. A member of the Government in pre-Fascist Italy, Signor Shanzer, for example, remained a Minister of State under Mussolini. And it is no secret that among Mussolini's closest collaborators and most trusted advisors is the Jew Olivetti, the originator of the so-called Corporative State and Secretary of the Fascist Confederation of Industry. 174 among the university professors are Jews. So is Signor Del Vecchio, the first Fascist Dean of the University of Rome. Many members of the Senate (appointed by the King of Italy) are Jews and so are quite a few leading figures in the Army and Navy.

One of the most intimate friends of Benito Mussolini in his pre-Fascist and early Fascist era was a certain Signora Sarfatti, author of his earliest official biography. His first foreign biographer was also a Jew, the German writer Emil Ludwig.

No less naive than the surprise of those who expected Italian Fascism to be immune from anti-Semitism, is the assumption that the Vatican and the Pope would oppose seriously these newfangled "racial theories" of Fascism in Italy which have suddenly been propounded by a group of more or less anonymous professors of Italian universities at the dictation of the Fascist-Nazi alliance. Whatever may be the Pope's reasons for disapproving the new persecution of the Jews, these reasons are secondary to the motives behind the relationship between the Vatican and the Italian State. Mussolini the atheist had attained a concordat with the Vatican, something which neither Liberal nor Catholic governments had been able to attain. That has been possible because of the identity of their purposes: the enslavement of the masses and the lack of principle on both sides. The violent and vulgar

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this, after Caballero is supposed to have lost favor because of the removal of the government to Valencia — "The government's greatest element of strength is the hearty support of the population".

Thus the reasons assigned by the Communist spokesman for the downfall of the Caballero cabinet are exploded by Louis Fischer's own statements. Only once did Mr. Fischer even hint at the truth, and that was when he wrote cryptically: "His (Caballero's) relationship to Russia wavered." The truth is that Russia's relationship to Caballero had wavered, and it was for that reason — not for any alleged incompetence — that Caballero was ousted. The premier was removed, not by the presidential palace, in Valencia, not by the will of the Spanish masses, but by the Kremlin in Moscow.

Now, you might wonder why I went to all this trouble. I will tell you. I think it is about time the NATION did one of two things. Either throw you out for your evident bias and your services to the Communists *while posing as a fair and impartial reporter* or state above your articles "By Louis Fischer, a Communist Propagandist."

Sincerely,

SAM BARON.

atheist Mussolini is ready to support the one institution he had despised and abhorred most in the world, so long as it aids him in maintaining his stranglehold on the Italian people. On the other hand, the Pope deemed it a good bargain to add the Fascist physical terrorism to the moral spiritual oppression, by the Catholic Church. The complicity created by this, culminating in the Lateran accord, has tied the Pope and Il Duce so closely together that neither of them can seriously fight the other.

It would therefore be utterly naive to expect serious aid from the Pope on behalf of the persecuted Jews of Italy. Only those who have a very bad memory can do so. A mere seven years ago, at the very beginning of the reconciliation between the Vatican and the Italian State, a deep conflict arose between the Pope on the one side and Mussolini on the other, both of whom claimed the exclusive right to educate Italy's young generation. A compromise was found. So it will be this time too. Whatever may temporarily divide the Vatican and the Fascist Government, the conservative character of both those institutions overshadows their differences. There can be no insurmountable difference between them in practical matters.

As for anti-Semitism, that will endure so long as Mussolini requires it, or until the people of Italy repudiate it along with all the other political perversions that constitute the Fascist system.