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## *Italy from the American Immigration Quota Act of 1921 to Mussolini's Policy of Grossraum: 1921-24*

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With a few exceptions, American scholars have always associated the phenomenon of immigration with their own national problems, viewing it only as a necessary layer of their socio-economic development. « As Americans », pointed out E. Schuyler, « we have only a platonic interest in the amount of emigration from Italy, the cause which produce it and the real or probable effects on the prosperity of that country ».<sup>1</sup> It would seem, however, that historians have neither analysed sufficiently the motivation of such an attitude on the part of the United States nor have considered the repercussions of anti-immigration legislation of the 1920's in the international arena with particular emphasis on the domestic consequences suffered by Italy.

The Quota Act of 1921, i.e., the « Johnson Bill », has been examined by American historians as justified merely on the basis of economic crisis. It has been said that between 1918 and 1921, the United States went through an economic crisis, followed by recovery, succeeded later by a second crisis during which prices soared higher; the cost of living went up 77 points to a high of 105, based on the index of 1914. Her exports dropped from the 8.2 billion dollars of 1920 to the 4.3 billions of 1921. The prices of farm products declined and production dropped seriously. In the industrial field, a low consumer demand was followed by a decline in production,

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<sup>1</sup> E. SCHUYLER, *Italian Immigration Into the United States*, « Political Science Quarterly » IV, Sept., 1889, p. 480.

which resulted in an unemployment total of 6,500,000 people. However, it must be said that the same phenomenon took place among all the nations that had borne the consequences of the war. Therefore, the American economic crises must be considered as a post-war phenomenon and not a result of immigration.<sup>2</sup>

#### RACIAL PREJUDICE OR ECONOMIC NECESSITY?

The passage of the « Johnson Bill » has been justified on the grounds of socio-economic problems facing the United States at that time. Historians have argued that between 1919 and 1921 a war boom economy followed by two economic crises justified the restriction of immigration. Such a conclusion seems unwarranted. From the last quarter of the 19th century to the first decades of the 20th century, no alarming symptoms of impoverishment had resulted from cyclical periods of economic depression. Oscar Handlin's conclusion from the report presented by Louis Dublin to the Commission of Immigration and Naturalization is that in periods of economic instability, immigration reached very low quotas and therefore was not a major factor in unemployment. The practical insight of potential immigrants prevented them from running the risk of coming to the United States during economic crises: others already had left the United States and returned home in time of low wages and depression.<sup>3</sup> Immigration was not instrumental in

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<sup>2</sup> J. J. DAVIS, *An American Immigration Policy*, « American Federationist » XXXI, no. 4 April, 1924, pp. 289-294; J. R. QUINN, *America and Immigration*, « American Federationist » XXXI, no. 4 April, 1924, pp. 295-299.

<sup>3</sup> O. HANDLIN, *Immigration as a Factor in American History* (N. J., 1963), pp. 202-203. Moreover, Italian statistical data from 1908 to 1916 show that for every 100 Italians coming to the United States, 412 of those who had resided in the American country for a period between 1 to 5 years were leaving. This was not a phenomenon restricted only to the war period, since the outward trend began in 1908. These are the indexes as early as 1908: 1908 (82.6%), 1909 (80.9%), 1910 (77.8%), 1911 (78%), 1912 (72%), 1913 (67.9%), 1914 (68.9%), 1915 (81.8%), 1916 (57.9%). Of course, many of those who left the United States, returned after a few months or within a couple of years. Between 1896 and 1908, about 244,236 returned to the United States. Presumably, out of every five immigrants who returned to Italy, two came back.

According to Gino C. Speranza, Secretary of the Society for the Protection of Italian Immigrants from 1901 to 1923, the total number of Italians admitted to the United States in 1920 through the Ellis Island Immigration Bureau was 95,145. The total number of those who departed was 88,909. In 1921, the total number of admitted was 222,260, while 48,192 departed. In 1923, the total number of admitted was 40,319, while departed 53,651, with a net loss of 13,332. See C. G. SPERANZA, *Correspondence and Papers, Society for Italian Immigrants, 1901-1923, Envelope, Jan.-June, 1923*. The New York Public Library, Manuscript Div., New York.

From 1906 on, as reported in the « Wheeling Intelligencer », daily newspaper published in Wheeling, West Virginia, many Italians departed, leaving the Virginian mines. « Their

causing or making worse the economic crises through which the American industrial system passed in the early 1920's.

The fact that the « Johnson Bill » favored the immigration of the northern population and kept at very low level the immigration from Southern Europe, the Middle East, and Asia suggests racial and national motives for its passage. The view that southern European races were inferior and would adulterate the Nordic race in America was widespread. So was the judgment that all Mediterranean races were inferior and morally far below those of Northern Europe.<sup>4</sup> This intolerance, connected with the rapid influx of foreign population, led to unjustified and exaggerated fears among both the American public and the Federal authorities. This prejudice was professed, organized, and directed for several years by the Immigration Restriction League, the American Legion, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and several labor organizations. And it was finally adopted as a banner by the nativist movement of the Ku Klux Klan.

Before the « Johnson Bill » was enacted in May, 1921, American hostility had openly expressed itself against Italian immigrants. In March, Federal authorities had imposed a quarantine of twelve days at the port of Philadelphia on the ships « Regina d'Italia » and « San Rossore », each carrying 1,600 passengers, and in New York a longer quarantine upon the

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main reason for leaving is they are afraid that the mills will be idle all winter and that hard times will be the result... At the present time, all the foreigners at New York cannot leave the country as the ships have their passenger capacity taxed to its fullest. The steamship agents hereabouts and in other towns have been informed to cease the selling of tickets, as there is no room left for the persons to be supplied with sleeping quarters on the various steamships ». « Wheeling Intelligencer », Nov. 20, 27, 1907.

<sup>4</sup> M. T. BENNET, *American Immigration Policies* (Washington, D. C., 1963).

The author provides probably the most explicit examples of racial arguments: « The citizens of northern Italy are superior to those of southern Italy... The southern Italian is virtually an illiterate peasant. Although industrious and thrifty, he is of a culture alien to that in the United States and shows no desire to adapt himself to American culture... Immigrants from southern and eastern Europe generally are not only ignorant but their low standard of living tend to depress the American wage standard and to create slums, unemployment and crime » (p. 32).

M. GRANT, *The Passing of the Great Race* (New York, 1916); *Id.*, *The Alien in Our Midst* (New York, 1930); *Id.*, *The Conquest of the Continent* (New York, 1933). E. A. ROSS, *Racial Consequences of Immigration*, « The Century Magazine », 1914, p. 619 ff. L. STODDARD, *The Mediterranean South*, « The Saturday Evening Post », May 10, 1924, 8, 198 and 206. In this article, Stoddard reaches the hasty conclusions that in all Italian movements from the Middle Ages on, the startling difference between North and South represents one of the most strikingly negative elements of Italy's socio-economic structure:

« The two halves of Italy are inhabited by very different breeds of men. The Northern half contains the best of the old Mediterranean stock, plus a strong Alpine element and a considerable leavening of Nordic blood. The Southern half is peopled by a racially impoverished Mediterranean stock, long since drained of its best strains and in places mongrelized by inferior Levantine elements ».

« Duca degli Abruzzi », which carried 1,500 passengers. This decision was caused by reports sent from Italy by two American doctors, Fama and King, which claimed that in Italy there were epidemics of bubonic plague and exanthematic typhus. According to the unpublished documents consulted in Rome's Central State Archives, the reports of the two American doctors, concerning the condition of health and hygiene in Italy in 1921, were inaccurate and of no serious account.<sup>5</sup> The American consular authorities located at the port of embarkation of the three ships had issued « clean » sanitary certificates, which proved and guaranteed that rigorous means of sanitation existed aboard, and that the passengers migrating to the United States had been deloused and washed before embarking.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, in the above-mentioned cases, although the American authorities had issued « clean » certificates, outsiders' tendentious denunciations affirmed the opposite. Alarming and unfounded telegrams were sent to the United States, and consequently the Italian vessels were treated with hostility in the American ports by the citizens and by the Federal authorities. This situation prompted an immediate and strong response on the part of the Italian consular authorities in Washington.

The Italian chargé in Washington, Dr. Saluzzo, in an urgent report cabled the Italian government (telegram n. 17515, dated March 14, 1921) and brought to the attention of Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti that those charges: a) were causing a decrease in the flow of well-to-do tourists to Italy, since the Americans thought Italy was plagued by exanthematic typhus; b) were discouraging Italian emigrants from coming to America for fear of long quarantines in the American ports and of possible difficulties in the disembarking process; c) were increasing the number of American demonstrations intended to limit the number of Italian immigrants; d) were harming the passengers aboard the vessels and were damaging the Italian maritime companies, because Americans who were planning a trip to Europe avoided taking passage on Italy ships.<sup>7</sup> On May 19, 1921, the American Congress, with a Republican majority, passed the Immigration Quota Act, which President Wilson had previously vetoed, and on May 11, 1922, it extended it for two additional years.

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<sup>5</sup> « The New York Times' » editorial on May 24, 1921 clearly stated that the new immigration policy was « an expression which is intelligently and clearly conceived and is held by a large majority of the American people and of their representatives in Congress ». « The New York Times », May 24, 1921, 14:4. See ARCHIVIO CENTRALE DELLO STATO, ROMA, *Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, Gabinetto*, 1921, fasc. 3/11 n. 385 and 3/16 n. 365. The Archivio Centrale dello Stato will be hereafter cited as A. C. S.

<sup>6</sup> State architect, L. F. PITCHER, who went to Italy to inspect quarantine stations at embarkation ports, paid tribute to the preventive measures taken by Italian Health Officials in Naples and Genoa. See « The New York Times », May 20, 1921, p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> A. C. S., *Doc. cit.*

CONSEQUENCES ON ITALIAN DEMOGRAPHY AND MARITIME BUSINESS.

Beyond any doubt the Immigration Quota Act had a damaging influence on Italian demography, maritime business, and political structure. The Italian government had always relied upon emigration as a safety valve to alleviate overpopulation and unemployment, especially in the regions of Central and Southern Italy. It now had to face emergent and serious difficulties. On May 1, 1921, Giuseppe De Michelis, Head of the Emigration Bureau, a division of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, delivered a memorandum to the Prime Minister, Giolitti, to inform him about the imminent application of the law restricting immigration to the United States of America. The memorandum pointed out the considerable reduction in the annual quota of Italian immigrants, which in the past had reached very high levels.<sup>8</sup>

In the first quarter of 1921, 100,000 Italians had emigrated to the United States; after the passage of the restrictive law only 42,000 Italians would be admitted to the United States between May 21, 1921 and July 1, 1922. This drastic decrease would be detrimental to Italian emigration, to

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<sup>8</sup> H. C. LODGE, *A Million Immigrants a Year: Efforts to Restrict Undesirable Immigration*, «The Century Magazine», 1904, pp. 466-467; F. P. SARGENT, *The Need of a Closer Inspection and a Greater Restriction of Immigrants*, «The Century Magazine», 1904, pp. 471-473; H. C. LODGE, *Lynch Law and Unrestricted Immigration*, «The North American Review», May, 1891, pp. 602-612.

*Should Immigration Be Further Restricted?* A Symposium, Boston, Feb., 1896, «Dunahoe's Magazine», Feb., 1896, pp. 125-133; W. D. FOULKE, *A Word on Italian Immigration*, «The Outlook», Feb. 20, 1904, pp. 460-461; G. C. SPERANZA, *Solving the Immigration Problem*, «The Outlook», April 16, 1904, pp. 930-931; L. VILLARI, *L'Emigrazione italiana negli Stati Uniti d'America*, «La Nuova Antologia», vol. 143, Sept., 1909, pp. 294-311; *L'emigrazione italiana vista dagli stranieri*, «La Nuova Antologia», vol. 257, Feb. 16, 1928, pp. 475-484; *L'opinione pubblica americana e i nostri emigrati*, «La Nuova Antologia», vol. 148, Aug. 1, 1910, pp. 497-517; P. H. DOUGLAS, *Is the New Immigration More Unskilled Than the Old?*, «American Statistical Association», no. 125, March, 1919, pp. 393-405; W. J. LAUCK, *The New Immigration*, «Review of Reviews», vol. 62, July-Dec., 1920, pp. 618-624; L. BLOCK, *Occupations of Immigrants Before and After Coming to the United States*, «American Statistical Association», vol. 17, 1920-21, pp. 750-764; J. J. DAVIS, *How the Immigration Laws Are Now Working*, «Review of Reviews», vol. 65, Jan.-June, 1922, pp. 509-511; J. M. GILLMAN, *Statistics and the Immigration Problem*, «The American Journal of Sociology», vol. 30, July 1924-May, 1925, pp. 29-48; E. WEARE, *Our Immigration Problems*, «America», April 21, 1923, pp. 7-9; April 28, pp. 31-32; May 5, pp. 55-56; A. M. ROSE, *A Research Note on the Influence of Immigration on the Birth Rate*, «The American Journal of Sociology», vol. 47, 1941-42, pp. 614-621; P. J. CAMPISI, *Ethnic Family Patterns: The Italian Family in the United States*, «The American Journal of Sociology», vol. 53, 1947-48, pp. 443-449.

C. E. SILBERMAN, *Crisis in Black and White* (New York, 1964), 25 ff. According to «The Catholic World» (vol. 116 Jan., 1923, p. 548), several anti-Catholic organizations were formed with the purpose of further limiting immigration. These organizations maintained that, on the whole, the immigration to the United States favoured Catholics, and for them this was a sufficient reason to limit it.

the internal economic and financial situation, and to the stability of the Italian government.

In a press conference with United Press International, on May 12, 1921, Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti pointed out clearly that since Italy was a thickly populated country with almost 400 inhabitants to the square mile and with no sufficient resources to sustain a «virile» population, the American Restriction Immigration policy had dealt a severe blow to that country. In fact, it should be taken into consideration that only one-fifth of the Italian land could be properly cultivated, that two-fifths could be partially tilled, while the remaining two-fifths were formed by barren mountain and rock. Before the war, the people leaving Italy for other countries numbered 600,000 each year. Italy had a deficit in her international trade balance of more than 200 million dollars. However, the deficit had been more than overcome by the wealth brought back into the country by emigrants, whose remittances amounted to over 200 million dollars, and the money brought into the country by foreign tourists, which amounted to 120 million dollars each year. Thus there was an increase in national wealth through these two operations: emigration and tourism.<sup>9</sup>

That the American Restrictive Immigration policy contributed to worsen the overall socio-economic situation of Italy is evident from the following analysis dealing with the conditions of Italy's stagnant and perennial backwardness. Unskilled labour in Italy formed the core of unemployment. Agriculture absorbed 50 percent of the labour force, industry 30 percent, and trade and commerce less than 10 percent. The expansion of the agricultural economy had suffered serious setbacks. For instance, the output of wheat and corn dropped from 52 and 25 million quintals respectively in 1911 to 38 and 22 million quintals in 1920. The overall economic crisis, which included inflation, labour unrest and growing unemployment, was intensified by a series of domestic incidents. General strikes between 1919 and 1921 had led to widespread looting of stores and to the workers' occupation of major factories (September, 1920).<sup>10</sup>

Owing to this unstable socio-economic situation, Italian governmental authorities were forced to apply drastic measures to reduce to a minimum the

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<sup>9</sup> «The New York Times», May 13, 1921, 4:6.

<sup>10</sup> It has been estimated that those who emigrated to the United States in the first two decades of 1900 and returned to Italy took back home an average 1000 to 5000 lire per person. In comparison, those returning to Italy from European countries brought a mere 300-500 lire per capita. The comparison brings out clearly the important economic and financial contribution coming from overseas. Vincenzo Tangorra, Finance Minister under Mussolini, gives the following assessment of Italy's financial situation from 1918 to 1922. In 1918, the deficit was 7 billion. In 1920, it was 20 billion. In 1921, it was 25 billion. During this period, the Government had to face severe unemployment in the «Terre Redente». See A. C. S., *Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, 1920-21, Gabinetto*, fasc. 7/2, n. 94, 1921 and 7/1, n. 290, 1921.

disadvantage produced by the American restrictive law. Commenting on it, De Michelis pointed out that « the American Restrictive Law was going to bear serious repercussions in Italy. The Italian government ought to take immediate measures to reduce the consequences to a minimum economic loss ». To this end, the head of the Emigration Bureau suggested a series of devices. First, passports should be issued with absolute preference for men able to work. Second, only those men who could send money back home immediately be sent overseas. These tactics were intended not only to alleviate the burden of unemployment but also to accelerate the flow of money from abroad into the Italian treasury, money which was so important for the government as well as for private enterprise. To prevent any decrease in the money sent home from emigrants in America, he urged that elderly persons, women, and children should not leave the country then but postpone to a future date their reunion abroad with their relatives.

At the time the effect of the restrictive law on the nation seemed very bound up with the effect on Italian maritime interests: « The most important problem », reported De Michelis, « is to find out how the Italian shipping companies can bear the consequences of the law ». Fourteen national ships were under contract for transportation of passengers to North America. The new law compelled these ships to limit the number of emigrants to 600 per trip, only half the number they had carried in the past. The financial loss would be too great for them to remain in operation. These companies, in a meeting held at the Emigration Bureau, suggested that half of the ships be put in 'moth balls', rather than operate at a loss.<sup>11</sup>

The suggestion, if accepted, would have deprived half the shipping personnel of their jobs and would have made unemployment even more acute. The Bureau as well as the Government thought that this move would be politically unwise. The Government supported De Michelis' suggestion that passenger and freight rates be raised to compensate for the loss of revenues. This solution would have simplified the task of the Government, which was more concerned with the problem of unemployment. Of course

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<sup>11</sup> The memorandum is in A. C. S. of Rome, *Pres. Cons. Min.* 1921, *Gabinetto*, fasc. 13/4 n. 687. The General Commissariat for Emigration was instituted by law in 1901 by Visconti Venosta, who was at that time Minister of Foreign Affairs. By royal decree, Nov. 13, 1913, n. 2205, which was converted into law on April 17, 1925, n. 473, the powers and functions of the General Commissariat for Emigration were clearly defined. It is worth mentioning Art. 8: « In those States where Italian migration is directed, will be instituted, in accord with other governments, offices of protection, information and possible employment. Cfr. V. DE MARTINO, *Leggi di Uso Generale e Comune* (Rome, 1958), vol. II, 14421.

As far as the indexes of prices is concerned, see the interesting essay by A. TENDERINI, *Analisi sui prezzi in Italia dal 1901 al 1932* (Padova, 1936) and G. A. TESORO, *The Bankruptcy of Fascist Economy Through the Eyes of Italian Economists*, « *Rivista Internazionale di Scienze Economiche e Commerciali* » XIII, Aug., 1966, n. 8, pp. 714-741.

the emigrants, who were already in financial difficulties, had to carry most of the economic burden. The normal cost of the voyage had been 1600 lire (over \$500). The suggested increase was to 2600 lire, which would compensate for company losses. Since the increase was considerable, the head of the Bureau urged the Government to persuade the maritime unions to share the financial burdens. If the increased cost were carried entirely by the emigrants, many, it was feared, would have to give up the idea of emigrating.

A third series of problems which made the situation more complicated concerned the foreign ships that had been involved in the transportation of Italian emigrants: five French and three English companies. Their presence, the eventual competition, and the refusal to withdraw «willingly» from the Italian ports made imperative an intervention by the Italian Government. Since those ships were operating under foreign flags, the Italian Societies of Navigation, «Transatlantica Italiana», «Navigazione Generale Italiana», «Transoceanica», «Lloyd Sabaudo», «Cosulich», «La Veloce», on May 4, 1921, presented a request to the Ministry of Industry and Commerce asking for immediate intervention by the Government.

They pointed out the considerable decline of emigration, the consequent economic losses suffered by the companies, and the competition created by the presence of foreign companies in Italian ports. To reduce the losses of the Italian Maritime Companies, as well as of the national economy, they recommended that they be given the exclusive right to transport Italian emigrants and the foreign companies be temporarily excluded so long as the «Johnson Bill» remained in effect. In evaluating the plight of the companies, the government gave serious consideration to the expenditures they had made in improving and expanding their fleet and port facilities, especially at Genoa and Naples.

At first the government suggested the companies compete in North European shipping markets, but the companies rejected the proposal. European shipping tonnage already exceeded the demand and little room was left for competition. Besides, the Italian ships would have been at a disadvantage. North European companies had the advantages of shorter trips, better supplies, and national protection.

On May 19, the Honorable Tommaso Tittoni, the Undersecretary of Industry and Commerce, sent an «urgent» request to Prime Minister Giolitti to take action concerning the practical consequences of the «Johnson Bill» for the shipping companies. The undersecretary urged the adoption of the following measures:

1. to grant the Italian Maritime Companies the exclusive right to transport emigrants from the Italian ports until the end of July, 1922;
2. to increase the price of freight for the next 12 months to compensate for the decrease of emigrants;
3. to increase the price for passengers travelling in first and second class;
4. to reduce maritime personnel;

5. to reduce the wages of the crew;
6. to abolish the 2% reduction of salary (established by the article 23 of the recruiting contract), in favour of the seamen.<sup>12</sup>

On May 21 the Chief Secretary of the President of the Council, Dr. Berio, presented these proposals to Prime Minister Giolitti with a personal note stating: « In my opinion, in the present situation we have no other choice but to accept the proposals of the Maritime Companies ».<sup>13</sup>

Prime Minister Giolitti agreed, adding: « I give my approval to these proposals, above all to the one which grants the Italian Maritime Companies the exclusive right of transporting emigrants. Nevertheless, we must find a way to prevent the emigrants embarking from foreign ports ».

Giolitti gave the impression that barring Italian emigrants from non-Italian ports would solve major consequences for Italy posed by the « Johnson Bill ». However, the serious consequences which the American decision would have on the political, social, and economic life of Italy could not have escaped a man of his political and parliamentary experience. Now that the safety valve for domestic unemployment was gone, the surplus of manpower had to be absorbed within the Italian semi-industrial system.<sup>14</sup>

#### GOVERNMENTAL CRISES AND ECONOMIC UNREST.

No solution would have been effective without a drastic governmental change. The Italian Liberal party drew its support from industrialists, the middle class intellectuals, and landholders who were interested not in radical socio-economic changes but in keeping the statu quo.

Moreover, such a programme would have required the support of the new political forces that emerged with the election of May 15, 1921, which had heavily shifted the political axis. In that election the Liberals, fearing the election of the Socialists and Populars who advocated radical changes, sought support from Fascists and Nationalists on the Right, through the so-called « National Blocs ». In spite of armed opposition, punitive expeditions, destruction, plunder, and murders on the part of the *Fascist Squads*, the Socialists and Populars together maintained their positions.

At the same time, having gained respectability from election, Mussolini strove to achieve parliamentary independence from this temporary alliance with the Liberals. After a serious evaluation of the political significance of the May elections, Giolitti realized that no government could be formed

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<sup>12</sup> A. C. S., *Doc. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> A. C. S., *Doc. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> A. C. S., *Dispatches of May 21, and 26, 1921.* The dispatches bore Giolitti's and Berio's signatures.

or could rule without Fascist support. The meteoric rise of the Fascist Movement proved that its ideas and style had touched a deep nerve in the Italian popular mind. On June 27, 1921, Giolitti submitted his resignation.

His successor, Ivanoe Bonomi, had to navigate in the stormy waters of a political and constitutional crisis and face, in some sectors of the peninsula, open civil war. The Bonomi Government did its best to heal, at least on the surface, these internal wounds. It tried to smooth over the political differences and tried to eliminate the competing political factions.

The Bonomi Government fell at the end of February, 1922, and was succeeded by the two Facta Governments (Feb. 26 to Aug. 1, 1922, and from Aug. 1 to Oct. 30, 1922) which proved to be the last two democratic governments of the constitutional regime in Italy.

The two Facta Governments were plagued with economic difficulties, including high prices and continuous demands to solve the problem of unemployment. The internal crisis, which undermined the foundations of Liberalism and the democratic institutions, prevented the application of any remedy to the social and economic evils by the Facta Governments.

Moreover, Facta's analysis of Italian political and economic problems and complexities paled into insignificance besides Mussolini's belligerent actions and violent oratory. « We want Italy », said Mussolini, « to become a Fascist country... Those who accuse us of aiming at an agrarian slavery should see now with their eyes the crowds of authentic labourers and genuine people with shoulders, legs and arms strong enough to sustain the future successes, the fortunes, and the sacred destinies of Italy. Only cowards and criminals could accuse us of being the enemy of the people, when we have been born of this very class and experienced with our own arms hard work. We want the redemption of Italian workers, at home and abroad... There is already a living and dramatic contrast between the Italy of weak liberal politicians and the healthy, strong, vigorous, uncompromising Italy which is preparing herself to give the *coup de grace* to all the weaklings, the potboilers, the old scum of Italian society ».<sup>15</sup>

Led by Mussolini, the Fascists ordered farmers, cafe owners, and shopkeepers to lower prices. In Naples, they imposed a reduction of 50 percent in food prices. In Florence, instead, the Black Squads threatened retaliation against shop owners who did not lower their prices. In the meantime, they forbade organized labour to strike. Union headquarters, cooperatives, Popular and Socialist clubs were destroyed or burned. When strikes occurred, the Fascists acted as strike breakers. They even ordered the Government led by Facta to enact ordinances forbidding and preventing strikes.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> « Il Giornale d'Italia », September 26, 1922, 1.

<sup>16</sup> « Il Giornale d'Italia », September 27, 1922, 6. On Fascist burning and destruction of cooperatives and Popular and Socialist associations see, *Fascismo, A Socialist Inquiry into Fascist Operations in Italy* (Milan, 1963), *passim*.

When in September, 1922, Giuseppe Paratore, State Treasurer, asked Facta to meet with the new Emigration and Unemployment Commission, which had just been named, winter was too close with its inevitable seasonal increase of unemployment. A long and detailed report sent by Paratore to Facta by the end of September casts light upon the unemployment situation in Italy.<sup>17</sup>

According to the National Employment Bureau, by June 30, 1920, there were 105,831 unemployed. By July 1, 1921, the number had risen to 388,744, and by September 30, 1921, to 470,542. These figures increased steadily until February, 1922, when the highest peak was reached, with 606,819 unemployed. But Paratore's report rejected these figures as misleading. In fact, the Employment Bureau limited the registration to unemployed men, considered the only source of family wealth and support. Therefore, the report pointed out, for every unemployed man in a family, at least three persons endured the consequences. The total number of people directly affected by unemployment, then, should be figured in excess of 2,000,000.

The industrial situation was even less promising. According to official reports of the Ministries of Finance and Industry, the general condition was precarious. International indexes showed that among the nations which had won the war, Italy alone had suffered an increase in the cost of living (« *Revue d'Economie Politique* », July-August, 1922). Yet, these indexes pointed out that Italy occupied the tenth position in the international indexes of prices, followed by Germany, Bulgaria, and Poland, which were desperately trying to overcome inflation. More important, between 1920 and 1922, the overall wholesale price index rose by 20 percentage points. The industrial commodities index and that for farm products rose strongly, signaling a key indicator of inflation. The following figures were reported in the major cities in mid-September, 1922 (1920 = 100):

Turin	=	113.80
Lucca	=	119.03
Como	=	118.23
Vicenza	=	119.30
Milan	=	114.69
Rome	=	130.17

In the meantime, the labour force organized in the *General Confederation of Workers* (2,150,000 members), the *Italian Syndicalist Union* (300,000 mem-

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<sup>17</sup> On Italy's economic condition, Paratore issued a report on March 1, 1922. The *Associazione Bancaria Italiana* followed with another report on August 2, 1922. Both reports are in A. C. S., *Presidenza Consiglio dei Ministri, Gabinetto*, 1922, fasc. 1/3-4, n. 578 and 185/5, n. 1362.

bers), the *Italian Confederation of Labour* (1,823,491 members), the *Italian Union of Labour* (200,000 members), the *Syndicate of Railroad Workers* (200,000 members), and numerous small organizations were a continuous threat. By the end of 1921, Italy was the European country where strikes caused the most serious consequences, resulting in the loss of over 16,398,227 working days that year.

In addition, the cooperatives, which had been of great help to the low-income classes and had indirectly contributed to the regulation of prices in the domestic market, had almost disappeared, destroyed or paralyzed by Fascist terrorism.

« The practical solution », Paratore insisted, « for the unemployment problem, in the present situation, has to be found in emigration ». Emigration was the necessary key to open the door to a better economic and political future for Italy. Emigration had saved southern Italy to a great extent before the war and now emigration was urgently needed to cope with the disastrous phenomenon of unemployment. Since Germany and Austria had eliminated all foreign workers from the labour market and because other European countries, such as Switzerland, because of their present circumstances, refused to accept any more foreign labourers, the « Johnson Bill » was creating enormous difficulties and, once enacted, made the unemployment problem in Europe in general, and in Italy in particular, not simply serious but catastrophic.

The Italian Government, through the Emigration Bureau, had to look everywhere to place as many workers as possible. Attempts were made to send emigrants to Peru, Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, and the rest of South America. Brazil, which already had a generous immigration policy, had agreed to accept many more Italian workers.

Regulations issued by Paratore prevented emigrants from making their own choice about their destination. He also instructed the Bureau not to be concerned about a country's sanitary, social, and juridical conditions.

By September, 1922, Italy badly needed « the safety valve » of emigration, which would have relieved the tense economic situation, solved the problems of unemployment, and put an end to class hatred. At that time Italy's internal deficit was 112,025,700,000 lire while the debt to foreign countries was 21,245,000,000 in gold, ten times higher than the prewar debt. This situation was outlined in the previously mentioned report by Paratore who warned the Prime Minister by telegram:

Dear Facta, I urge you to convoke the Commission of Emigration and Unemployment: winter is at hand, yours Paratore.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> A. C. S., *Presidenza del Consiglio, Gabinetto*, fasc. 2/29, n. 2474, 1922.

In response, on October 9, 1922, Facta sent a telegraphic message to the Ministers of Finance, Labour, Industry, Agriculture, and of the Liberated Lands that read as follows:

Please come tomorrow, Tuesday, at 4:00 p.m. to the first meeting of the Committee for the Study of the Problems of Emigration which will be held at the Palace of the Prime Minister,

/s/ Facta<sup>19</sup>

There is no record of the meeting being held on that date. A letter from De Michelis to Facta referred to an Emigration Committee Meeting scheduled for October 28, but owing to the sudden development of the political events, that meeting was indefinitely postponed. « I was notified by His Excellency Schanzer », De Michelis wrote, « that tomorrow I should have participated in the first meeting of the Interministerial Committee for Emigration, which was formed in one of the last sessions of the Council of the Ministers. But I was just informed that the meeting would not take place at the present ».<sup>20</sup>

A few days later, on October 31, 1922, Victor Emanuel III, King of Italy, appointed Benito Mussolini as Prime Minister and Minister of Internal Affairs. The same day Mussolini appointed all other ministers but reserved to himself the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Fascism was in power. The economic situation had been responsible for its final rise. Mussolini had the support of the agrarian middle class and the industrialists. He also organized young men between the ages of 17 and 25 into paramilitary black shirt units. Together they made disciplined and enthusiastic forces for opposing traditional politics of Liberalism, Socialism, and Populism.

Of course, the success of Mussolini depended on promises of social order, economic improvement, and, above all, upon the solution of unemployment.<sup>21</sup>

#### THE DOWNFALL OF LIBERALISM AND THE FASCIST STRATEGY.

The restrictive immigration measures approved by the American Congress intensified Italy's socio-economic crisis and led to the downfall of Liberalism. The whole Italian political system — which was based upon uncertain postulates — collapsed. The Liberal programme of slow reforms proved to be inadequate to cope with the post-war economy. In the past, the Liberal government had pleaded and solicited emigration to meet the consequences of a fast-growing population, especially in the southern regions. No sound reforms had been attempted to solve the structural imbalance and to eliminate

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<sup>19</sup> A. C. S., *ibidem*.

<sup>20</sup> A. C. S., *ibidem*.

<sup>21</sup> See note 15.

the permanent disequilibrium between upper and lower classes. Not even when the American restrictive immigration policy became effective did the Italian government resolutely introduce effective measures to limit to the minimum the consequences of the severe blow. Liberal leaders continued to think of themselves as the champions of democracy in Italy. Taking advantage of the dissensions and divisions which plagued other Italian political parties, Liberals pretended to be unshakable and invulnerable in securing law and order. But beginning in 1921, the governments, which were controlled by a Liberal majority, seriously troubled with economic and social unrest, collapsed one after another. On the other hand, Mussolini started making deep penetration among middle and lower classes.

Fascism, which between 1919 and 1921 had been « an aggregation of negative forces, men and ideals », took advantage of the situation, managing its own strategy. « Fascism », wrote Salvatorelli in 1923, « represents the struggle of the middle class bourgeoisie, wedged in between capitalism and the proletariat, as the third man between the two contestants. This strategy explains the apparent contradictory duplicity of Fascism ».<sup>22</sup>

In reality, there was only one Fascism. But, since it maintained a fight against two opposed groups of social forces (plutocracy, bourgeoisie, old ruling class, and profiteers, on the one hand; and Socialists, anti-clericals, Populists, and strikers, on the other), people believed Mussolini was sincere when he claimed Fascism would never allow the exploitation and the oppression of the working classes. Rather, it would fight for their welfare and prosperity. Thus, it happened that the class struggle he had prophesied became instrumental in rallying most of the unsuspecting working class around his programme. Rallying such forces together was possible only in the midst of an unstable economic situation.

According to G. De Maria, the Fascist events became historically relevant because of their importance in regard to a very serious economic crisis which struck Italy and Europe.<sup>23</sup> As has been well summarized by F. S. Nitti, from 1921 on, Italy needed capital, schools, serious industrialization plans, and, through emigration, an outlet for its unemployment and demographic « virility ». Any decision aiming at restricting Italian emigration abroad was going to produce damaging effects in Italy.<sup>24</sup> This explains, to a certain extent, why the American Quota Act brought good luck to Fascism. Fascism

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<sup>22</sup> L. SALVATORELLI, *Nazionalfascismo* (Turin, 1923), pp. 16-20. See on the programmatic « fluctuations » of Fascism, M. VINCIGUERRA, *Il Fascismo visto da un solitario* (Turin, 1923), 19, 27 and 28.

<sup>23</sup> G. DE MARIA, *L'Origine e la Genesi dei Movimenti Fascista e Nazista nelle Intuizioni di un Economista del Tempo*, « Rivista Internazionale di Scienze Economiche e Commerciali », XIII, n. 8, August, 1966, pp. 709-713.

<sup>24</sup> F. S. NITTI, *Bolscevismo, Fascismo e Democrazia* (New York, 1927), pp. 46-47; *Id.*, *The Decadence of Europe* (New York, 1923), *passim*.

acted as a centripetal force which successfully rallied industrial workers, teachers, students, farmers, landowners, state and private employees, and war veterans. By the end of October, 1922, at the Fascist rally in Naples (Oct. 25-26, 1922), the Secretary-General of the party, Pasella, reported that Fascism could count on more than 650,000 followers. According to Bolzan's speech in Naples, Fascism was «unitarian in its theoretical postulates and rural in its human expression».<sup>25</sup> Anna Kuliscioff, F. Turati's wife, was impressed by the disciplined militarism and daring courage manifested by Fascists, aged 17-25, at the Milan and Ferrara rallies. She expressed this by reporting to her husband in Rome that «the Fascist forces were regimented not for the destruction of Socialist cooperatives, rather their objectives seemed aiming at higher goals... They appeared to represent the mobilisation of unemployed to protest against unemployment and the central government».<sup>26</sup> The marxist historian Angelo Tasca has carried his analysis in this direction. Examining Italy's overall domestic situation, the author concludes that «the economic breakdown and a concatenation of negative circumstances altered the course of events... Moreover, industrial depression caused a vast amount of unemployment, aggravated by the slowing down of emigration».<sup>27</sup> Another Italian historian, G. Salvemini, rightly argued that unless the problem of Italian immigration into the sparsely-populated areas of the world were solved in a spirit of good faith and solidarity, all talk about peace and international cooperation (while Italian immigrants were excluded from the United States, Canada, and Australia) were «to play into the hands of Fascist propaganda».<sup>28</sup>

It seems clear enough that new demands for a modified social order increased with the deterioration of economic conditions. Italy's economic and social structure, including its agricultural and industrial unrest, must be held at fault. The influence of economic maladjustment played an important role in the Fascist coup-d'état. Though dissatisfaction and unrest had been features of Italian life throughout the entire nineteenth century, criticisms of the socio-economic structure became particularly bitter in the 1920's. The discontent which was felt previous to this period is difficult to explain because it had been inarticulate and voiceless. Indications can be seen in the facts of population movements, emigration particularly, and the constant antigovernmental manifestations led by workers, peasants, and commoners,

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<sup>25</sup> G. A. CHIURCO, *Storia della Rivoluzione Fascista, 1919-1922* (Florence, 1929), vol. 3, pp. 468-470.

<sup>26</sup> F. TURATI and A. KULISCIOFF, *Carteggio*, vol. 5 (Dopoguerra e Fascismo, 1919-22), (Turin, 1953), pp. 576, 582.

<sup>27</sup> A. TASCA, *The Rise of Italian Fascism* (New York, 1966), p. 89.

<sup>28</sup> G. SALVEMINI, *The Problem of Italian Over-population*, «The Contemporary Review», vol. CXXXIV, 1928, pp. 708-715; *Id.*, *Mussolini Diplomatico* (Bari, 1952), pp. 157-174.

described as « anarchic tendencies aiming at controlling private holdings ». On the contrary, public dissent and protest were open manifestations of dissatisfaction against intolerable conditions of oppression and exploitation. This explains why emigration assumed the proportions of a mass exodus between the last quarter of the nineteenth century and 1921. Because of the socio-economic situation and the perennial conditions of prostration, demoralization, and exploitation, peasants and commoners resorted to this kind of protest against usurers, deceitful lawyers, gabelotti, and avaricious barons (who returning back home wealthy some day. This explains too why Italian emigration abroad assumed, to a certain extent, a temporary character. Evidence of the practical aspects of these contingencies of Italian emigration can be seen in the fact that the emigrants with their remittances helped their families, improved their economic conditions, and contributed to countering Italy's deficit of exports and the unfavourable balance of payments. But the Quota Act struck a staggering blow to the hopes of those Italians who sought economic improvement through emigration. The restrictive law eventually determined and was in turn reflected in the political organization of the nation. As the situation of economic maladjustment persisted, the Italian people became more increasingly critical. In 1921 and 1922, groups of literary men, on the one hand, and political parties, on the other hand, expressed their concern. They offered different panaceas but none brought a practical solution to the problem.<sup>29</sup>

Fascism operated in the midst of this pandemonium. The peculiar character of Italian people, as far as crowd behaviour is concerned, exploded in indignation and open rebellion against Liberalism, its philosophy and its governmental system. Slogans, myths, programmes of immediate reforms, and

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<sup>29</sup> Highlights of these magazines are published in a set of volumes entitled *La cultura italiana del '900 attraverso le riviste* (Turin, 1960-1963). The following volumes are now available: vol. I, *Leonardo, Hermes, e il Regno* with an explanatory introductory note by D. FRIGESSI; vol. III, *La Voce* with an explanatory introductory note by A. ROMANO; vol. IV, *Lacerba e La Voce Politica* with an explanatory introductory note by G. SCALIA; vol. V, *L'Unità e La Voce Politica* with explanatory introductory note by F. GOLZIO and A. GUERRA; and vol. VI, *L'Ordine Nuovo*, with an explanatory introductory note by P. SPRIANO. On the crisis of post-unification Italy, see the analysis by R. DE MATTEI, *Dal Trasformismo al Socialismo* (Florence, 1940), especially chapter I and appendixes I and II: « Cultura e letteratura antidemocratiche dopo l'unificazione ».

As far as the position held by the Socialist and Catholic parties during the downfall of Liberalism is concerned, a vast literature exists. Nevertheless, it seems that the majority agrees on the issue of Socialist-Catholic collaboration as the only valid alternative to Fascism. But the two parties were divided by heterogeneous ideologies.

On the advent of Fascism as consequence of a « crise de paresse », especially on the part of the Socialist Party, see R. MONDOLFO, *Il Fascismo ed i Partiti Politici* (Bologne, 1922), pp. I-XXV.

catchwords started circulating widely and purposely. Utopias were looked for around every corner. Violence, economic unrest, indignation, and dissatisfaction were the order of the day. It seems very dubious to infer, as American scholars have recently done, that Fascism was « another revolution » or that « a revolt of the declassés » triumphed in this period.<sup>30</sup> Fascism, in fact, never triumphed as a revolution. It never abandoned the *laissez-faire* doctrine which had always held an important role in the agrarian and industrial arrangements of the Corporate State.<sup>31</sup> Hence, it seems more appropriate to think of Fascism, especially between 1922 and 1924, as a *rivolta ideale* (ideal protest) that succeeded as a direct consequence of the post-World War I crises in Italy. The inability of Fascism to become a revolutionary ideology explains, to a certain extent, the rise of dissent (*dissidentismo*) among Fascist *gerarchi*, primarily C. Forni's, A. Padovani's, G. Calza-Bini's, and A. Misuri's groups.<sup>32</sup> The party struggle, along with anti-Fascist opposition, eventually led to Rocco's Fascist Laws (*Leggi Speciali*) and to the police state after 1924. It can be said with Chabod, therefore, that the origins of Fascism cannot be reduced to rigid historical formulas. Rather, they should be projected against the background of economic unrest, unemployment, and apparent class disequilibrium. Thus, the origins of Fascism cannot be made *monocausal*. As far as the American restrictive law of 1921 is concerned, it can be clearly seen that it did much to add to Italy's critical socio-economic situation and did nothing to relieve the population pressure.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> E. R. TANNENBAUM, *The Goals of Italian Fascism*, « The American Historical Review », vol. LXXI, n. 4 (April, 1969), pp. 1183-1204. On the *lost generation complex*, it seems that Tannenbaum's analysis reflects Anna Kuliscioff's interpretation that she gave of early Fascism almost fifty years ago. See note 26.

<sup>31</sup> C. GIGLIO, *Mercantilismo* (Padua, 1940), pp. 119-122; F. CARLI, *Le Basi Storiche e Dottrinali della Economia Corporativa* (Padua, 1938), *passim*.

<sup>32</sup> On the matter of Fascist dissent (*dissidentismo fascista*), see the A. C. S., *Ministero dell'Interno - Direzione generale di P. S. - Div. aff. gen. e ris.*, 1924, busta 86. Especially the enclosed *buste* Pavia (C. Forni's dissent), Naples (A. Padovani's dissent), Rome (Gino Calza-Bini's dissent, and the committee led by Luigi Reni and Fossi Camillo), Perugia (A. Misuri's dissent) and his programme *Per la Ricostruzione Nazionale* (Rome, 1923). Moreover, for a national outlook on the situation of Fascist dissent, see the well documented letter that the Prefect of Naples, D'Adamo, sent on March 9, 1924, (*Ministero dell'Interno - Direzione Generale di P. S. - Div. Affari gen e ris.*). The letter deals with « Gruppi ed associazioni effimere in margine e contro il partito fascista ».

<sup>33</sup> « Il Cannocchiale », nn. 1-3, 1966, pp. 85-113. The review publishes the proceedings of the Symposium held on the occasion of the publication of AQUARONE's book *L'Organizzazione dello Stato Totalitario* (Turin, 1965). The participants R. Romeo, F. Gacta, P. Ungari, R. De Felice, C. Paone, A. Aquarone, and A. Riosa seem to agree that Fascism never sustained a revolution. Rather, it established in Italy a police state ruled by a self-appointed leader, Mussolini. F. CHABOD, *L'Italia contemporanea, 1918-1948* (Turin, 1961), p. 63.

THE AMERICAN IMMIGRATION RESTRICTIVE POLICY AND MUSSOLINI'S CONCERN.

For several years after coming into power, Mussolini made every effort to cope with the American restrictive law on immigration. Once every week from 1922 to 1924, he met with his advisers to study and discuss the interrelated problems of unemployment and emigration. In a speech delivered in Milan, on April 2, 1923, he defined emigration as a « physiological » need for the Italian people,<sup>34</sup> and at a dinner given for the American Ambassador in Rome, R. W. Child, he affirmed: « It will not surprise you if I insist on a problem which concerns us directly: I mean the problem of emigration. I limit myself to saying that Italy would be happy to see a relaxation of the Immigration Bill, which would allow an increased flow of emigrants to North America, and the use of American capital to finance Italian industries ».<sup>35</sup>

The American Congress reacted to Mussolini's request through Samuel Davis McReynolds, a member of the House of Representatives. On April 8, 1924, he declared that « no foreigner has any vested right in the United States of America. We have the right to pass such laws as we may see fit for the protection of our country ». Moreover, reviewing the content of a press conference held by Ludovica, an Italian deputy, who had criticized the immigration restrictions, McReynolds exploded in this kind of remark on Italy:

It is sufficient to say that Ludovica's interview would have been in better taste and more thoroughly appreciated by the American people had he made some statement as to when the Italian government intends to pay the United States the \$ 2,000,000,000 which it owes for borrowed money. This is the gratitude which they seem to express... This question (of immigration restrictions) should be decided from an American standpoint. (Applause). It is not what is best for foreign countries, but it is what is best for America, her civilization, her refinement, her social conditions, and her Government.<sup>36</sup>

On May 15, 1924, at the International Conference on Emigration organized by Italy with the participation of fifty nations, Mussolini stated that emigration was a necessary instrument for the solution of the Italian economic problems. Mussolini's goal was to persuade the American government, with the support of other countries, to remove the restrictions. After he had failed to convince the President of the United States, Warren G. Harding, through the Italian Ambassador in Washington, Gelasio Caetani, that the immigration restrictions were discriminatory against the Italians, who had

<sup>34</sup> B. MUSSOLINI, *Discorsi Politici* (Milan, 1928), vol. 1, p. 154.

<sup>35</sup> B. MUSSOLINI, *ibid.*, p. 318.

<sup>36</sup> *Congressional Record, Proceedings and Debates of the First Session of the 68th Congress*, vol. LXV, part 6, pp. 5855-5857.

greatly contributed through their work to the development of the American nation,<sup>37</sup> he complained in a speech to the Italian Senate, on November 15, 1924:

We have been rudely struck by the Immigration Act. It is enough to say that *we cannot remain idle, because we do not know where to send our surplus of humanity*. The year 1924 has caused us serious concern on account of this restrictive and almost prohibitive law which America has issued against Italy.<sup>38</sup>

Mussolini was one of the people astute enough to see how plainly Italy's economic future was threatened by American restrictive laws on immigration. Therefore, when the American Quota Act became fully effective, Mussolini's Italy started striving to find work for its surplus population, which was no longer absorbed by foreign countries. Mussolini thought that this problem and its practical consequences could be solved by acquiring new colonies. In embarking Italy on the adventure of the colonial *Grossraum* Mussolini was not only pursuing one of his dreams of grandeur. Rather, he knew that Italy needed « sun and earth » for its surplus of humanity. Mussolini was deeply concerned about Italy's imperative « for... new colonies and the strength to conquer them ». As he stressed in an interview with the « Daily Express » on January 12, 1927, Italy, after the American restrictions had become effective, had been left with the alternative: « Either expand or explode ».<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Telegram Gab. S. 1011-188 from Washington, July 3, 1924, 19:40 p.m. in *Documenti Diplomatici Italiani, Settima Serie, 1922-25* (Rome, 1959), vol. 3, pp. 207-208.

<sup>38</sup> B. MUSSOLINI, *Discorsi Politici, 1924* (Milan, 1924), vol. III, p. 584 f.

<sup>39</sup> C. A. TESORO, *op. cit.*, pp. 730-732; E. DI NOLFO, *Mussolini e la Politica Estera Italiana, 1919-1933* (Padua, 1960), pp. 139-206; G. SALVEMINI, *op. cit.* See note 28.

