

Mussolini in Power

Errico Malatesta

1922

At the end of a long series of crimes, fascism finally took over the government.

And Mussolini, the *Duce*, just to distinguish himself, began by treating the parliament deputies as an insolent master would treat stupid and lazy servants.

Parliament, what was supposed to be "the palladium of freedom", has shown its true face.

This leaves us perfectly indifferent. Between a bully who vituperates and threatens, because he feels safe, and a gathering of cowards who seem to delight in their abjection, we don't have to choose. We only note-and not without shame-what kind of people are those who dominate us and whose yoke we cannot escape.

But what is the meaning, the scope and the probable result of this new way of reaching power, in the name and in the service of the king, violating the constitution that the king had sworn to respect and defend?

Apart from the poses which would appear to be Napoleonic and are instead only *operetta* poses, when they are not the acts of a brigand leader, we believe that basically nothing will have changed, except that for a certain time we will have greater police pressure against subversives¹ and against the workers. A new edition of Crispi and Pelloux. It's always the old story of the brigand who becomes a gendarme!

The bourgeoisie, threatened by the rising proletarian tide, incapable of solving the problems made urgent by the war, powerless to defend itself with the traditional methods of legal repression, saw itself lost and would have greeted with joy any soldier who declared himself dictator and drowned in blood every uprising attempt. But in those moments, immediately after the war, that was too dangerous, and could precipitate the revolution rather than abort it. In any case, the savior general did not come out, or nothing came of it but the parody. Instead, adventurers emerged who, not having found sufficient scope for their ambitions and appetites in the subversive parties, thought of taking advantage of the fear of the bourgeoisie by offering it, for adequate compensation, the assistance of irregular forces which, if certain of impunity, could indulge in all excesses against workers without making directly responsible the alleged beneficiaries of the violence committed. And the bourgeoisie accepted, solicited and paid for their collaboration: the official government, or at least a part of the government agents, took care of supplying them with weapons, of helping them when they were about to get the worst of an attack, of assuring them impunity and of preemptively disarming those who were to be attacked.

¹"sovversivi". The term by which the Italian revolutionary left was referred to at the time. (translator)

The workers were unable to oppose violence to violence, because they had been educated to believe in the law, and because, even when all illusions had become impossible and the arsons and murders multiplied under the benevolent gaze of the authorities, the men they trusted preached them the patience, the calmness, the beauty and the wisdom of letting themselves be beaten "heroically" without resisting-and therefore they were defeated and offended in their possessions, persons, dignity and the most sacred affections.

Perhaps, when all the workers' institutions had already been destroyed, the organizations disbanded, the men most hated and considered most dangerous killed or imprisoned, or in any way reduced to impotence, the bourgeoisie and the government would have liked to put a stop to the new praetorians who by now aspired to become the masters of those they had served. But it was too late. The fascists are now the strongest and intend to charge usury for the services rendered. And the bourgeoisie will pay, naturally trying to repay itself on the shoulders of the proletariat.

Bottom line, increased misery, increased oppression.

As for us, we have only to continue our battle, always full of faith, full of enthusiasm.

We know that our road is strewn with thorns [seminata di triboli], but we chose it consciously and willingly, and we have no reason to abandon it. So let all those who have a sense of human dignity and compassion, and want to devote themselves to the struggle for the good of all, know that they must be prepared for all disappointments, all pains, all sacrifices.

Since there is never a shortage of those who allow themselves to be dazzled by the appearances of strength and always have a kind of secret admiration for the victors, there are also subversives who say that "the fascists taught us how to make a revolution".

No, the fascists haven't taught us anything at all. They made the revolution (if you want to call it a revolution) with the permission and in the service of their superiors.

Betraying one's friends, denying everyday the ideas professed yesterday, if this is to one's advantage; placing oneself at the service of the bosses; ensuring the acquiescence of the political and judicial authorities; having one's opponents disarmed by the *carabinieri* and then attacking them as ten against one; getting militarily prepared without the need to hide, indeed receiving weapons, means of transport and barracks objects from the government; and then being called by the king and placing oneself under the protection of God ... it's all stuff that we couldn't and wouldn't want to do. And it's all stuff that we predicted would happen the day the bourgeoisie felt seriously threatened.

Rather the advent of fascism should serve as a lesson to the legalist socialists, who believed (and alas! still believe) that the bourgeoisie could be overthrown through the votes of half plus one of the electors, and didn't want to believe us when we told them that if they ever achieved a majority in parliament and wanted-just to make absurd hypotheses-to implement socialism from parliament, they would get their butts kicked out!

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