

Taccuini Mussoliniani - The Mussolini Notebooks

by Yvon De Begnac

edited by Francesco Perfetti

translated by Adam Victor

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Mussolini is quoted directly, throughout these Notebooks gathered by Yvon de Begnac during ten years of interviews with the Italian dictator and published only after de Begnac's death, in 1990. It is not known when and in what order these paragraphs were spoken.

Preface by Renzo De Felice:

Pages which should, to a large degree, be read "in context", and far more with reference to the time in which Mussolini was talking, as opposed to the time to which he was referring, regard the "Captains of the South" and "Lieutenants of the North", which, in our opinion, may only be understood and assessed correctly with reference not so much to the situation in 1921-22 (when the role of the "Lieutenants of the North" was far more significant and decisive than that of the "Captains of the South", as Mussolini knew full well), but rather to the reality of the regime (and the nature and limitations of *consensus*) and Mussolini's growing impatience with the rebellion and criticisms levelled at him by men such as Balbo, Grani and Bottai. This explains his exhortations to the "Captains of the South" (of whom, after the death of Aurelio Padovani, not a single man was a leading figure in the fascist movement) to demonstrate "absolute loyalty" and "affectionate deference", and his attempts to attribute the shortcomings and failures of the regime to the "realism" and social insensitiveness of the "Lieutenants of the North".

The many -- and frequent -- statements concerning Count Volpi and Alfredo Rocco should also be read "in context". Taken at face value, the comments on Volpi are wholly unreliable; but if they are read "in context" they take on a specific meaning. On one hand, these passages are an implied but nonetheless animated dispute with the most modern and forward-looking component of Italian business, focused more on developments in international capitalism than on fascism (it is interesting to note the stark distinction Mussolini draws between the "two differing conceptions of the nation's economic health" which, as he says, are embodied by Volpi and Agnelli); they are also an attack on the *fumisterie* of a certain brand of corporativism deemed to be left-wing or overly organicist. At the same time, he reiterates his condemnation of "super-capitalism", a feature of which was Mussolini's elevation of Volpi into a symbol of an "enlightened" mercantile capitalism, aspiring not to profits at any cost, but to the winning of national economic independence and, at the same time, the "dissemination of culture". As regards the comments on Rocco (a man who had quit the scene and was associated more with the history of fascism and the regime than its present and future), looking closely, they reveal how much -- though praising him and making use of him to tackle the aftermath of the Mateotti crime -- in his heart of hearts Mussolini felt far removed from Rocco's ideological realism, and how he had mistrusted the position of the deceased

Justice Minister excessively static and conservative when measured against his own conceptions of fascism and his own plans for the future.

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Rocco did not perceive revolution as an event suited to implanting a new method of human society within the far from shakeable context of capitalist civilisation, just as by that time Count Volpi was already considering contact between "us" and "them". Besides, Rocco did not consider revolution to be a force with which to promote capitalism, as the last of the true revolutionary syndicalists continued to believe. Along with De Ambris, they had missed their appointment with history. In the winter of 1924, Rocco kept repeating that the real revolution had begun on 29 October 1922, and that now, nobody should be allowed to fall back into positions of surrender or, worse still, entertain the idea that everything had been achieved.

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In 1914 I did not share the thesis of my friend Agostino Lanzillo, developed in an admirable article in "Utopia", my review of socialist thought. The goal of absolute neutrality, which the monarchy and Giolittians wished to espouse, did not boil down to wishing to keep in power Di San Giuliano and his gilded diplomatic corps, his ambassadors in Berlin or Vienna, and the Balkan businesses of *Commendator* Volpi. Application of the provisions of the triple alliance really did prevent the Latin portion of the West from completing its own civilisation and its own economy. But that was not the result of the economic triplicism practised by the Banca Commerciale, as my friends Preziosi and Gray would have it. It was down to the absence of a cultural will, in Italy and in France, to bring back to the Latin tradition not the charm of Cicero's common sense, but the concreteness of Titus Livius's unitary thought. Senator Pais told me he was of the same opinion.

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Chapter 12

The Last Doge and the Adventure of the Lira

The 1929 Crisis

The 1929 crisis was a long time coming. Its prehistory was too protracted and too entwined with the past for men and nations to care about finding its causes. The crisis broke when it had to break. Nothing could have averted it. To almost everybody, it seemed impossible to head it off in time. Foolishly, people had believed that what was possible and what was likely stood in opposition to one another. We heard the rumble of the far-off storm. To avoid its horrors, we had constrained our economy to the minimum of autonomy permitted by events.

Father Hegel had dared to shout that the Machiavellism of the "end justifies the means" type was a trivial, or at least improper expression, in the sense that the right means is that which is solely designated to achieving the right end. Now, the crisis of 1929 was the finishing line at which, exhausted, people seemed condemned to arrive. We did not consider it inevitable that it would end this way. We did our best to contain the increase in unemployment; we asked those in work to make sacrifices, and we capped what had until then been a disproportionate growth in profits. We adopted the right means to reach the right goal.

The crisis of 1929 was not a crisis of growth in the capitalist method. It did not depend on industrialisation outstripping a sufficiently expanded potential for consumption. It was the price paid, the punishment imposed by society, for considering land as space to be used for factories and building sites, in the process removing it from agricultural use.

Count Volpi realised in time, and he explained to me and all supporters of the capitalist method in Italy, that the forthcoming crisis, of which too many people, in too many places, were wholly unaware, would not be a question of overproduction, but rather of under-sociality. Alongside the savings of Italians, Count Volpi was relying on revaluation of the lira as the only way of protecting the world of wage-earners from the impending crisis.

He understood that salvation of the capitalist method depended on preserving the purchasing power of wages, saving it from the grip of inflation which would have brought about a recession. Italian manufacturers reacted in different ways to Count Volpi's moves. But fascism acknowledged him as possessing the wisdom and farsighted direction of a financial policy which was the precursor of state control over the entire domestic Italian economy.

Count Volpi 1919

It was Piero Marsich, noble companion in the initial battle of the fascist movement against an Italian leadership proud of the stagnation in the country's history, who first introduced me to Count Volpi, the brilliant Italian plenipotentiary who had led Turks and Italians to peace many years earlier in 1912. The same Count Volpi who, then simply known as *Commendator* Volpi, was hesitant about the 1919 fascist programme. He told me it was necessary to soften a dozen or so anathemas, in order to achieve the consensus without which any victory would have remained a mere Utopia.

Way back in 1920, *Commendator* Volpi had faith in us, as we tackled the slapdash politics that threatened to overwhelm President Nitti's grip on reality. I was struck by the unpopular thesis he openly supported, namely that the Great War, which had ruinously upset the balance in Middle Europe, as well as spawning immediate chaos, would have led to far more serious conflicts than the one which had only just come to an end.

At the "Danieli" in Venice, Count Volpi told me what he had been saying to Marisch for some time: "revolutions need time to mature". Count Volpi had personally learned of the ancient Greeks from the modern descendants of Socrates and Plato. Every change in society is an act of maieutics on the flourishing body of history. Everything issues from the roots of the world. And it is we, with too many vices and too few virtues, who are the leaves of this forest.

To my knowledge, in October 1929 Count Volpi was the only European financier to survive the Wall Street earthquake unscathed. In the years before, exhorting me to impart a revolutionary impetus to the nation's finances by revaluating the lira, he had said, "Dear President, do not concern yourself with the cries of small-time industrialists. If we cannot export, we

shall make sure that we return a profit on domestic labour through domestic consumption. We shall mobilise our labour force on immediately remunerative fronts. We shall leverage the labour which until recently had been destined to the slave market of emigration."

Count Volpi always demonstrated friendship towards me, without ever seeking favours in exchange. His masterpiece is Marghera. But he was responsible for more than just Marghera. His view that Europe encompasses the Balkans, and his belief that Turkey was one of the leading nations of South Eastern Europe, have an historical originality whose roots lie in his past as a major negotiator of trade agreements which he himself drew up. Count Volpi intended to oppose the petty Western-forged agreement which laid the entire Balkan region at the service of France and England, replacing it with a Turkish-Greek-Romanian-Yugoslavian-Hungarian agreement that would have fully confirmed Italy's Mediterranean vocation.

One legend must be cleared up. Count Volpi was in every way - I must say, to my enormous surprise - the strongest proponent of the policy which, with his grounded and explicit assent, led to a rate of 92.46.¹ Bravely in favour of free movement, he wished for an exchange rate with the pound and the dollar that would be capable of breaking the cycle of exports which exploited wage earners. He knew that I was weary of making Italy grow and suffer by applying the compress of direct or indirect emigration: the emigration of men and work applied to low-cost goods which foreigners would have continued to consume without paying any toll, duty or tax. Count Volpi told me one should not listen to the complaints of the few, while ignoring the suffering of the many.

Count Volpi has more information than culture. Through a critical filter that at all times is wise, and at all times is germane, I would say that within him information permanently turns into culture. He spoke of this on the occasion he introduced me to Ettore Tito², the "last Tiepolian", as he used to call him. I went to meet him at his house in Rome on Via delle Quattro Fontane. This is the only home of a lieutenant to which I have been. I have a grateful souvenir of that day and that time: books on Venetian history by Pompeo Molmenti³ which he gave me.

Count Volpi is the only financial powerhouse upon whom fascism can count unconditionally. Though he may not be the nation's greatest businessman or organiser of production, he is most certainly the man best

placed to supervise economic efficiency. He runs the bank with illustrious sagacity. He uses credit to encourage savings not so much to protect personal wealth, or that of his caste, but, through the savings of the masses, to protect the purchasing power of currency without which no economic recovery programme would be possible.

Count Volpi willingly accepts, almost with a smile, the epithet "the last doge", which the people's voice of Venice has unanimously awarded him. I too have done so, when, as he traditionally does, he begins addressing me with the words, "My dear President", and I surprise myself by calling him "Most Serene Doge". He breaks into a smile. I do likewise, and immediately he retorts, "Ah, but I have no council of 10 to advise me."

Count Volpi believes in the dissemination of national culture, though, as he openly states, without humility, and with clear awareness of his own unblameworthy ignorance, he has no idea of its dimensions. He is ready to support any initiative to promote it. I believe he has spoken with Piero Parini⁴ about popularising the magnificent set of volumes published as part of the praiseworthy collection, "Italian Genius Abroad".

Just before I set sail for Libya, in April 1929, a few hours after being attacked in Piazza del Campidoglio by that silly old Englishwoman, Miss Violet Gibson, Count Volpi was keen to express his personal abhorrence for that "stupid act" which could have caused incalculable damage to the country. At the end of the telephone call, he told me to look up his old friends from Misurata, the Muntassers, who in 1911 had been our loyal adversaries, but who were now looking with confidence at the African policy of which Volpi had been one of the initial architects.

Though a shrewd man of war during the first retaking of Tripoli, Count Volpi did not approve of certain immediate intervention activities which, under the De Bono and Badoglio administrations and the military guidance of General Graziani, had been conducted out there. When, with my approval, the drama of Omar el-Mukhtar⁵ unfolded, Count Volpi advised me that avoiding this situation altogether would have benefited our political position on the "fourth shore".

Count Volpi has maintained and cultivated friendships with major figures in Libya. He has most cordial relations with the Caramanli of Tripoli, who runs the local municipal administration with dignity. These relations are

not limited to the religion of remembrance, or the preservation of the heritage of reciprocal acknowledgement which enabled the Caramanli, Turks of Tripoli, and Count Volpi, to build a peace between Rome and Byzantium in Ouchy, which should stand as an example of the common sense and respect due to those men who, at a given moment during the international tragedy, together uttered a resounding "yes" to ending the war.

Carlo Galli,⁶ the diplomat who allowed occupation of the port of Tripoli in autumn 1911, making reparations for the unpreparedness of an Army General Staff which was risibly attempting to conquer the fourth shore, is a sagacious friend as well as political adviser to Count Volpi. Minister Galli's culturally significant sphere, and the economically vibrant world which Volpi has helped to build, seem, in a Venetian way, to set one another off. From a political point of view, they stand shoulder to shoulder with Count Cini's industrial modernism, which does not fear an appearance of hereticism in the face of certain capitalist practices from which the monied classes stubbornly draw inspiration.

I cannot say if Count Volpi has ever read Pareto or attempted to take on board the rationalism of my economics mentor. When I pointed out to him the concept of marginal utility, of ophelimity, as a means of distinguishing the various stages of the exchange value of a commodity based upon the usefulness the owner perceives at the moment he yields it in exchange for another commodity, the Count's face took on an amused look. His comment: "The price is set by the need of the purchaser, not just the owner's willingness to sell."

Count Volpi is not a man divided: a generous gentleman, living alongside a man who is economically bent on achieving wealth at whatever cost. He is an enlightened Venetian merchant, who conquers independence and propagates civilisation. He has not discomfited his customers or groups among the populace. He has not exploited markets awaiting a miracle. He has not entered into alliances with the holders of power, nor handed to them the means to pass power on to lieutenants or henchmen. Concern for his own well-being have not estranged him from concern for his country. The legendary Cathay is still, for him, the well-being of a *gens* that shares his birth and fate.

The General Confederation of Industry has always been a clique of interests in conflict with the nation's true destiny. Count Volpi has done his

best to transform it from a body estranged from Italian history into a healthy and bounteous element of our economy. The Honourable Gino Olivetti, with whom I have sincere political relations, has found Count Volpi to be a leader aware of the urgency of harnessing Confindustria as an element -- preferably the dominant element -- of economic recovery. True history is not laid down by crushing the impetus for increased wage purchasing power, and hoarding the ruins of workers' savings.

I am not familiar with the real relationship between Count Volpi and Senator Giovanni Agnelli, but I do know that these two men subscribe to two differing approaches to the nation's economic health. Count Volpi displays the utmost disinterest for growth engendered exclusively through protecting exports by sacrificing workers' pay. Senator Agnelli views the domestic market for his product as the essential foundation for its expansion beyond national borders. Monopoly is his God, and he is not afraid of proclaiming himself to be its undisputed prophet.

Count Volpi deserves gratitude for protecting Gino Olivetti's Confindustria ideas. Count Volpi deserves gratitude for the organisation's falling back from control over national production to positions founded upon understanding the need to consider work as the greatest, if not to say the only, component of the value of an Italian commodity, which is not given by the heavens, and which the sources of raw materials do not autochthonously feed. Marx should not be denigrated without admitting the logic of his claims. A little bit of Marx does no harm to the capitalist world -- to the Italian capitalist world -- which does not attribute any importance to crises. These crises are, in actual fact, perhaps a sign of its greater humanity.

As my friend Piero Marsich told me twenty years ago, and as I have learned through much profitable collaboration, Count Volpi does not harbour great fondness for my lieutenants. He hated Michelino Bianchi, whom he never forgave his revolutionary syndicalist background. He smiles at Emilio De Bono's apparent bonhomie. He does not rely on Cesare Maria De Vecchi's moral austerity. He feels affection for Balbo, the young adventurer of the revolution. With a smile on his face, he parts company from the ideologists. He distrusts the practical men, such as De' Stefani. He displays loyalty partly because he shares my views: either savings are protected, or we sink into total misery.

I do not know how much religious issues weigh upon Count Volpi's resolutions regarding national matters. I do not know how much materialistic rationalism, or poetic idealism, contribute to the decision-making process in his mind, from whence each initiative proceeds towards its creative realisation. I have never heard Count Volpi say anything like "it is fate", "thus it was written", "one cannot stand against destiny". And yet, despite his open smile, I think there must be a slow, placid wave of melancholy within him, ready to lap at the shore of disappointment. The fact is, at the heart of the issues that keep him admirably busy and operative, lies Venice, a city whose origins are as mysterious as the piles which, for a thousand years, have been holding up the city of the "last doge".

Formally speaking, there is something of D'Annunzio about Count Volpi. But when it comes to actions, the events which he provokes, Count Volpi is completely different from the *Comandante*. D'Annunzio is a man who dreams of the glorious episode before making it happen. Count Volpi causes something to occur and then idealises its causes. In his doge-like way, he is proud of what destiny -- a destiny which he looks in the eye -- has allowed him to achieve. He does not have a court to which he can recount his own achievements. He does not seem to be touched by what lies around him. I repeat, melancholy lurks under the cover of his smiling eyes.

I have been informed that Count Volpi's greatest friend in the Balkans was the Lord of Cetinje, Nicholas Petrovic, father of our august queen. He continued to treat him with kindness even after the Karageorgevic of Serbia ate up all of Montenegro on the invitation of Pašić. Count Volpi does not forget those who helped him in the economic "Volpisation", the process whereby he succeeded in taking over Balkan trade.

Count Volpi's conversations about various political topics are an endless tale of a vanished world, about which, sometimes, we no longer have any close recollection, and of which some visible vestiges remain. The men he met, not all of whom had the stature of Basil Zaharoff⁷ or Venizelos,⁸ were a piece of the mosaic of history which was in place until the world war broke out. In those days the Greeks adored the "last doge", even though they knew he was friends with Abdul Hamid⁹ and the young Turks for whom Enver Pascià¹⁰ was the cutting revolutionary edge.

How many times, during these passionate years, must Giuseppe Volpi have read the nationalist writings of his first master, Piero Foscari?¹¹ What

resounded in those passion-filled speeches was not the nationalism -- for the ears of men of his rank alone -- of the steel and iron factory owners who had appropriated private savings as their own raw material, but rather nationalism conceived as a way of expanding trade, as a way of achieving an osmosis of civilisation, a doctrine long practised by Venice's seafarers. The intelligible hero of an intelligible doctrine of true civilisation, Giuseppe Volpi seems to have leapt out of Foscari's pages.

At the end of the war, Volpi reserved strong criticism for everything that upset a certain equilibrium in the Adriatic. Territorial expansionism has never been a topic close to his heart. Only yesterday he told me that an economy based on the debasement of the domestic power of wages does not conquer any place in history, just as expansion founded upon unusable conquered territory only serves those who are financially committed to make whatever they can out of a venture lacking any future.

Senator Volpi told me in Venice, in 1921, that the industrialists would be behind me as soon as -- after coming to power -- I had guaranteed them peace on the factory floor, through offering a wage exposed to the power of the employer and not undermined by workers' organisations. This was not something I had ever expected to hear from one of the leaders of Italy's capitalist economy. Right then I realised that Volpi was not a captain of industry for internal use, but a proconsul of civilisation truly aware of the potential evolution of national history.

Count Volpi is perhaps the only Venetian who truly loves his home town. He does not limit himself to glorifying its history, nor to resuscitating its past. His wish is that Venice lives its own new age, the age of Italy, an age which, with conspicuous realism, is looking towards Europe and the world. He flies in the face of tradition when he insists that Venice is a projection, and not an unusable appendage, of the Italian and continental hinterland. He does not want the gondola to stand as Venice's emblem. It is his desire that the city's symbol be the ship, Dannunzian or otherwise. He wishes to counter local decay with a vital force capable of becoming a mover in history, rather than being a hostage to events.

Count Volpi told me he had met you at the book fair, and had already read your book. He repeated what he had said to you: that the pages against the Italian nationalists, though documented, were unfair. I replied that not all nationalists are called Piero Foscari, and that, in 1914, if the constitutionally

Germanophile monarchy had given greater heed to the nationalists and the General Staff, in 1918 we would have suffered the same fate as Germany, Austria and Hungary. Count Volpi responded that the end of Mitteleurope, and the end of the imbalance in the Balkans, coincided with the end of a centuries-long peace in Europe.

Count Volpi is the voice of sincerity. He is not afraid of me. He is not afraid of anybody. It could be ventured that he is much more powerful than the head of the fascist regime. He is an enlightened power-broker with a great love for his own city. A love which is not blind. He is wholly committed to a future which brings his city renewed vitality, renewed prestige. If, at a certain point in my life as the man in charge of state policy, I had to pick somebody to whom I would delegate part of my duties, in the certainty that what still required finishing would be done, I would not hesitate for a moment. Count Volpi is the only statesman on whom the nation and I can count.

Between 1929, the year when Count Volpi stepped down from running the country's economic and financial policy, and the next decade, which saw him in the role of moderator of the hoarding greed of big and medium sized entrepreneurs, I have found only praise for the loyal acts of my eminent friend. A power apart in the mosaic of Italian power-brokers, he brooks no relationships with any rebellion, with any party dissent, with any revisionist movement of any degree of substance among the fascist fauna. Venice is not his own fief, it is his paradise. For him, that is enough.

The only link running between the Quirinal Palace and Palazzo Volpi is the devotion he declares for the favourite daughter of his friend Nicola Petrovic of Montenegro; it is also the respect, in many ways filial, which Queen Elena expresses for the last doge. Count Volpi does not take things any further than this. He is not interested in palace wrangles. He does not suffer from the hunger for honours that devours prospective nominees for the *Collare dell'Annunziata*. Once I almost told the last doge I would be happy to support his candidature for this much sought after honour. His reply was written in his eyes. The gilded ornament named for the woman who listened to Archangel Gabriel can add nothing to the dignity of this Venetian lord.

I have found one aspect of Count Volpi's character particularly intriguing: his fondness for recounting the revolutionary events in which I

have played a direct role. One day he told me he had very much hoped for violent opposition from Nenni and myself against the Libyan exploit. If we two little political agitators from Forlì had carried the day, he commented, the war sought by his friend Giolitti would not have been a prelude to the Balkan wars, and would not have paved the way for the Great War, the real reason behind the end of all continental political equilibrium.

Count Volpi has always asserted that the power of a regime, the ability of a given policy to govern the country without trouble, is dependent on the approval the head of the regime manages to inspire. According to Count Volpi, and in my own modest opinion, approval is not the applause rising up from a sunny piazza or shadowy theatre hall. Approval lies in the certainty that we succeed in guaranteeing the purchasing power of salaries, thereby defending the moral and material values of saving.

Many people have asked me why I forwent the collaboration of Count Volpi during the world crisis of October 1929. It was not I who forwent him, it was my eminent friend who begged me to relieve him from direct responsibility. He explained to me that he would have been more incisive if unleashed from the officialdom of governmental responsibility. The doge would have been more useful to the President from Venice than he could have been in Rome. The Confederation of industrialists had to be brought back to the fold. The claims of capital had to be scaled back. It was then, for the first time, that I heard him speak sacrosanct words: "Profit must move into a new era, where risk is rewarded."

In 1929 the fascist regime most certainly did not sack Count Volpi. On the face of it, it replaced him as the real head of the Italian economy. What actually happened was that he was freed up to work as the real controller of all Italian business. At no time in the history of a people do men like the Count of Misurata abound. When, like him, one is beyond any powerplay (in other words, when one does not depend on the strength of anybody other than the state), and when one has a sense of the real changes society is undergoing, one has the right to stand at the centre of history, and not at the margins of events, where one's interest is limited to repercussions on the individual.

Count Volpi has unconditional admiration for just one Germanic statesman, a man who was killed in 1924. His name: Walther Rathenau. It is said that Volpi had cordial meetings, as well as rather bitter clashes with this

man. They had different visions of the Europe of the future. Rathenau would not have stopped at a Europe overseen by German-inspired liberalism. Governance controlled by well-defined economic guidelines would have solved the problems in his view of Europe. Volpi's Europe would have been a continent where the economy developed outside, and not against, ideology. Politics would have been downgraded to pure administration, renouncing its role as protagonist, custodian and usufructuary.

I asked Count Volpi if he believed that there was any relationship, either of cause and effect or else of dramatic collaterality, between the killing of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, in January 1919, and Rathenau's murder in 1924. Count Volpi was forthright in his answer. All three of them were Jewish. In both cases, the killers were overexcited pupils of the militarist right -- *Wehrmacht* or *Kriegsmarine* in the background of both tragedies. A minority radically obsessed by programmes seeking power put the weapons into the hands of the young killers. That, said Volpi, was where it ended. It was absurd to leap to any comparative examination of the two episodes. Rathenau's killers, if it really was inevitable that he had to die in this way, should have been friends of Rosa Luxemburg's, rather than military academy cadets.

Count Volpi continued that Rathenau's killers reproached the unfortunate politician (it is not clear how they could back up their accusations) for not wanting to undertake a fundamentally pan-German policy. The killers of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht criticised the Spartacists for following a policy of international proletarian revolution which would have led to the dissolution of the underlying ideals of Bismarck's pan-Germanism. The world revolution sought by Rathenau's killers was, in a military sense, much less vague, and yet at the same time more desperate, than the armed party revolution Russia was undergoing.

Count Volpi told me that he had followed the Rapallo conference with great interest. Thanks to Rathenau, foreign minister for the Weimar Republic, at Rapallo Germany was almost welcomed back to the heart of Europe, prior to rapprochement of the defeated country with a Russia clearly indifferent to the problems of continental peace. This diplomatic masterpiece put Rathenau's homeland within reach of a sufficiently well-outlined prospect of European peace. Yet this peace did not suit the dominant caste in Germany, nor the classes which were to continue controlling its military. The vanguard of the most frightening right-wing radicalism preferred the

death of Rathenau, the prophet, to the freedom he sought to resurrect. Volpi concluded that this was why Rathenau was killed like a mangy dog.

When, around 1925, Volpi spoke to me of Walther Rathenau, he did so with the warmth of a politician who laments the harsh destiny that cut short the existence of an ideologist of value to civilisation the world over. When he recalls the assassination of Rathenau today, 15 years on, he remembers the friend, and I hear in his words a hint of anger so unlike his usual good-natured way of speaking. He clearly dates from the moment of Rathenau's violent death the strengthening of a political system to which his own ideas are poles apart. [1939]

For the fascist revolution, Count Volpi has been and continues to be an example of experience at the highest political level that voluntarily placed itself at the service of modernising Italian habits. The fascist movement has produced many lieutenants, some of whom have unjustly been called "ras", or petty despots. Count Volpi and Professor Gentile are the only men representing the regime to have completely escaped the mire of political patronage during the first 15 years of the revolution. If I did not fear prompting to silent yet justified indignation professional literary critics and philosophers, I would venture that Professor Gentile, who is the supreme regulator of the system of exalting logic, in the name of the most acceptable idealism, has a corollary in the system of exalting practice, of which Count Volpi is aware he is Italy's foremost exponent.

On many occasions Count Volpi has enlightened me about the mortification which the European social body is inflicting upon itself, rather than merely suffering. With few equals in his knowledge about economy and finance, he is aware of the reasons for this change, namely the assimilation into a very specific area of the middle-class of vast numbers of the working classes who have emerged from the shadow of low wages. For Italy, Count Volpi wishes to see an advancement of how we weigh up the balance between the fair claims of civilisation and the actual abilities to implement these claims with some degree of urgency. He often repeats that this advancement is the only revolution possible in Italy.

When, partly for political reasons which could no longer be put off, the regime was forced to take a stand on the Jewish and Zionist issues, two men, in the appropriate locations, expressed their bewilderment at the content and decisions taken by the Grand Council. I have already mentioned what Italo

Balbo had to say. Now I will tell you of Count Volpi's opposition. Many years earlier, he had been informed of the meeting between Dr Chaim Weizmann¹² and myself, and of his rejection of my offer to use the far side of the Jubba valley as a potential home for the new Israel.

Count Volpi had lauded my proposal, though retaining reservations that Dr. Weizmann would receive it favourably. On that occasion Volpi talked at length about the real characteristics of the religiously institutionalised desire of the Jewish people to ceaselessly oppose law to power, consensus to excessive power. The constant resurgence of anti-Jewish movements, said Volpi, accentuates the clash between Mosaic law and the internal and external power of Israel, from which law always emerges victorious, whether the *pogrom* was successful, or deportation had become a common practice. I ruminated at length on the rather nonconformist words of my eminent friend.

Cordial relations of reciprocal consultation still ran between us in October 1929, when Count Volpi told me what, in his opinion, the immediate and more distant reasons were behind the Wall Street crisis, at that time threatening every European currency. "Waste" -- Count Volpi uttered this word a number of times: "Waste, destruction of useful things, overproduction of useless things, people rushing into cities, urbanisation, a diminishing desire to work, get-rich-quick mania, gambling away the future, intelligence subjugated to fortune, a middle-class turned stupid, and workers resigned to their fate: there's your crisis!"

In 1926 and 1927, when he persuaded a private American bank to rescue the public works programme which was to guarantee occupation for hundreds of thousands of Italian workers, Count Volpi asked me to put a brake on the activities of the North American fascist league, and to the programme which Count Ignazio Thaon di Revel¹³ had conceived. He also asked me to call off government protests against the rulings of the Boston penal judge regarding Sacco and Vanzetti. This was to facilitate the end of the Morgan negotiations.¹⁴

I have always been struck by Count Volpi's thorough knowledge of French naturalism. He is most familiar with Zola and Flaubert. He said that Lucio D'Ambra told him at length of the time Zola spent in Rome. Volpi is less interested in Italian naturalist literature. This he attributes to the quality of vividness of events and fully-rounded characters. All kinds of symbolism are foreign to him, distant from him, though he has a great liking for rhetoric

and rhetoricians. He flees decadentism and takes refuge in his love of Tiepolo and his followers. Of course, crowning Volpi's greatly achieved dreams of glory, as both phantasm and reality, Venice is always the focus of his conversation.

I am not completely sure what Count Volpi understands by the term "intellectuals". I believe that rather than defining them through subjectivity, he wishes to locate them among the people he calls "producers", for the specific service which, in his opinion, "they must" provide to society. When Count Volpi thinks of "intellectuals", he is referring to Ettore Tito, Pompeo Molmenti, Isidoro Del Lungo, D'Annunzio or, perhaps, Ugo Ojetti. In no wise are journalists "intellectuals", but rather simple "practicians" of news. He places "merchants" above intellectuals. One day, noting that he cared little for what philologists might have to say on the topic, he opined that "merchants" are people who, beyond their own moors or marches, are capable of reproducing the semblance of their civilisation.

Count Volpi deeply mistrusts those who are in conference with their ancestors, or who weigh up the present by referring to what these ancestors may have thought about it. He does not pursue his conscientiousness beyond the borders of the day that has just begun, or the yesterday just concluded, of which the memory is still fresh. His recollections are not of men, but of a city. And for him, Venice is the universal city. If the world became one big Venice, the site of the foremost of human sentiments, he would deem himself to be a happy man. His melancholy hinges upon the knowledge that this dream can never be realised. His melancholy, on the surface of which his smile skips: the thoughts that lies behind it, and the ideal that provides its impetus, are both tangible.

Count Volpi has had nothing to ask of fascism. But fascism has had much to ask of him: from the front line of consensus to the trenches of the Council and the barricades of direct assistance (backed up by dedication to the cause of our society). Associated with winning back the eastern coast of Tripolitania, his name was, for us, an instant guarantee of a strong desire to consolidate national unity notwithstanding any political disagreement. I believe he was never in favour of the 1911-12 war: I said as much last time. He was also one of the first to realise that any territorial claim, won at a cost of blood, would have to be defended at the cost of more blood.

Count Volpi believes in the power of intelligence. Not in that of intellectuals. In the end, as far as he is concerned intellectuals do not exist, if not as the issuers of confirmation of the truths that the masses are unaware of or refuse to acknowledge or wish to see championed. When an intellectual closes in on himself, convinced that his problems are those of the masses, he rejects his own function and returns to the greyness of the masses. Count Volpi looks upon intellectuals as an emanation of the thought deployed by the publishing world, whose aspirations the publishing world highlight. Count Volpi has faith in books: a faith which seems unshakeable.

I have never asked myself what influence Count Volpi wields over Italian journalism. He directly respects the managers of public information. His concern is that the problems affecting Venice are always in the public eye. According to Volpi, any intellectual power who failed to echo through journalism clearly active support of Venice's right to live would be failing his principal undertaking.

One odd thing about Count Volpi is his predilection for a peasant civilisation which is, in actual fact, completely foreign to his origins, upbringing, culture and innately cosmopolitan outlook. On several occasions he has spoken to me of the difference between the seafaring and dry land people of Veneto. He concluded: "Bergamo is not Venice"; for he knows that St Mark, having arrived at Bergamo, left behind legates and proconsuls, proxies of authority, undisputed seigniory. Giuseppe Volpi went to the Balkans perhaps in some way to reassert the dominion of the Serenissima. For no other reason. Gold does not leave a mark and does not rewrite laws.

I spoke recently with Count Volpi of social, asocial or antisocial elites, however you wish to describe them. Once again he surprised me with his knowledge of several chapters of Pareto's *Cours* and *Sistemi Socialisti*. He recalled that many years earlier he had discussed such topics with Piero Marsich, and reached the conclusion that "The elite is man. Everything else looks on, is subject to and is channelled through the text which has been handed down, as law, from the mists and dunes of the Sinai." For Volpi, the elite is not a template if, *a priori*, one does not stand before it to command.

More on the appeal of elites, on the subjection, the almost religious order which they impose. More, speaking with Count Volpi, of the historical necessity of elites, which would teach the masses how selfishness for internal use should be substituted by a morality for external use. It is odd for

a financier to attribute such historical weight to morality, and that this morality, often unfeasible for the majority, be not the morality underlying the calculations of the powerful, but a force which has been left free for too long, and whose reclamation would seem difficult indeed.

Very few people will ever know how closely I have listened to the words uttered by Count Volpi. If he ever wrote down, in black and white, the ideas he has expressed orally, we would have a treatise, a "production of memorable sayings" worthy perhaps not of Montaigne's pen, but certainly the pen of a Rivarol or Chamfort. There are some men who do not trouble themselves with going back over speeches already pronounced, in order not to fall into the trap of repetition: or, even worse, into the opprobrium, if not to say diabolicalness, of lying, retraction, an unnatural public request for forgiveness.

Count Volpi is one of many democrats who recognise the irreplaceable nature of the moderating effects of the middle classes. He is also one of few democrats who know how this moderating effect is induced, reflected by mental laziness, by protecting what one has, by the desire to placidly reconquer what one once had but lost to rapacious minorities. Volpi adds that these minorities should be distinguished from the elites that press the middle classes to claim rights which are then brought to bear treacherously in another fashion. Caught between acknowledgement of the existence of the middle classes and the hope of seeing them take on the wishes of the elite, Volpi's democratism tends more towards getting away from undiluted humanism than towards a new way of administering the potion of freedom.

The words of very few men have been etched into my memory: Volpi, Gentile, Soffici, Prezzolini, and Pantaleoni. Everything else seems to me to be rhetoric, though rhetoric can be the vehicle for wisdom. Volpi is practice cast into philosophy. Professor Gentile is logic cast into morality. Soffici is poetry beckoning life. Prezzolini is the world brought forth through synthesis of the witty line. Pantaleoni is science condensed in the long war against error. But Count Volpi is the one who comes closest to my personal thirst, to translate the sometimes concrete data of the imaginary into reality. D'Alembert's *Encyclopaedia* is not his model for conceiving life as the conclusion of history. He is in favour of an existence -- individual or collective matters not -- which is the prelude to life, in a perennial raising of hopes into feelings, and of feelings into reality.

When Count Volpi talks of examples to follow to give a direction to history, which is human events, or to give history a meaning, which is a matter for the eternal, he goes no further than recounting the episode, describing the events, measuring the contribution of this man or the innovation of that man, leaving the listener free to judge, to draw his own conclusions from the traces that episodes and events leave of themselves. This is where Count Volpi's optimism truly lies. He believes we are all busy seeking that vague good which is, in the final analysis, the unknown soldier, though one can never know if this is an alliance worth seeking.

Count Volpi has had much to tell about Giovanni Amendola, "a minister of the colonies unlike any other in the history of this country." Set off by the events at Montecatini,¹⁵ whose horror will never leave him, his monologue had nothing of the inquisitorial about it. My relations with Amendola go back to the years just before the World War. As I told Count Volpi, the dispute around Amendola had made me forget the sincerity of that period, when Amendola had taken on the prerogative of the young teacher. Later I was a little upset by a tendency to excessive verbalism in my former friend who, sheltering behind a sea of words, perhaps wanted to place his democratic dream of protecting democracy before a parliament that was, more or less openly, raping that dream.

When Giolitti died, Count Volpi came to me to recite a funeral oration in memorium of his old mentor and friend. It seemed to me that I was hearing once more, paragraph by paragraph, that model of political oratory which Dronero's speech had embodied. To this day Volpi continues to find qualities in Giolitti which I have difficulty in ascribing to him. I do not forgive Giolitti's thinking that I could be useful for his designs. I am well aware of what Cardinal Gasparri said to those who asked him, even in 1000 years time, who might succeed Mussolini: "Giolitti" was his answer. When I questioned him, Volpi said that he had been of the same opinion.

Those in positions of public responsibility should listen a little more often and a little better to what Count Volpi has to say. Not one piece of advice he has given regarding development of our financial policy does not deserve to be followed. And yet unfortunately, in certain grave moments for the country, we have failed to take advantage of his advice. In politics, one does not have the right to seek forgiveness from fate. One must react, not overreact, with logic, and await the right moment to make up for any lack of perspicacity one has perpetrated. So often, this moment never comes. Count

Volpi has a sense of fate. His world is built upon forecasts which never fail to meet reality.

Count Volpi is unique in Italian and European capitalism. He does not seek alliances, and does not expect assistance. He does not allow that any Lloyd's of London or similar could insure him against the blows of misfortune. He does not hold out an empty hand to the survivor, he extends it with the air of obeying to a natural sense of humanity. Once the dying man has been brought to dry land, a pause is required. Two paths open up to the man who has escaped death: the first is to speed up reintegration into life; the second is slower, and is the salvation he himself can achieve with his own strength. Volpi methodically unravels this dilemma, without suffering the torture of having to decide before it is too late.

Count Volpi does not conceal his lack of sympathy for understanding the problems of high military command. During the retaking of Misurata (I was told this by some veteran colonels), he set aside many professional soldiers and took upon himself some of the responsibility for the more obviously strategically uncertain initiatives. He does not like to dwell on issues regarding the not overly felicitous events of the autumn of 1917. He is happy to talk of Caviglia and of his personal friend the Duke d'Aosta. He does not lavish, nor waste, many words on the others. In 1935 he was immediately in favour of conquering Ethiopia. Immediately after the triumphant campaign he began to fear the operation of colonial policing.

Count Volpi does not demonstrate excessive fondness for the younger generations. It's not that he adores the men and women of the prytaneum. Rather, it is his opinion that middle age is the most suited to taking on positions of responsibility governing the country. Like Einaudi, he distrusts experts. He only seeks and finds practical people to carry out his programmes.

When we were considering whether the crisis was somewhere in the system or if it was the system itself, Volpi did not hesitate to answer. He said it was in the terrible way the system worked. He attributed the almost irreparable leak in the vessel more to incompetence than to bad faith. But, he added, everything had to be done to repair the damage. His criticism was fierce: "I would never ask a gondolier to run a state bank. To forestall is not to plan blindly. The four walls of a house cannot be left without a roof in the

savage grip of a storm. Competence is not an optional extra. Economic policy is much more than just bartering butter for guns."

On another occasion Count Volpi acknowledged that when a system is working poorly, it is fatal to live in terror of the day that it stops working altogether, without any chance of allowing the victims to recoup from its collapse even a small part of what has been lost. "*Bene perduto*", he said, for Volpi firmly believed, and continues to believe, that the system is irreplaceable. Anything which, as a collective, may be attempted to save the generality, is to his mind utopian, demonical, and destined to destroy what is left of history.

On the topic of corporativism, Volpi is for the annihilation of union practice: arbitration, collective contracts more or less imposed by the strongest contracting party, the magistrature open to justify entrepreneurial claims and to humble the worker's requests. This is not out of hatred of a social peace worthy of the name, but out of the honest conviction that every Italian company is run on the basis of criteria adopted by a good *pater familias*.

When the terrible summer of 1924 was beginning, two pronouncements went against me. They did not issue from anti-fascist circles, but from the centres of power which owed the most to fascism for retaining the right to freedom of speech and action. Industrialists raised rebellious lamentations against me. Gino Olivetti vainly attempted to explain to them that at that time only the monarchy could have brought down fascism. Count Volpi was more explicit. As he later explained to me, he told them, "one cannot bring down a government that draws strength from the consensus of the generality if not through even more strength." The other pronouncement? The one made by the MVSN consuls.

In the months following the death of the Hon. Matteoti, when fascism was suffering its crisis, political leaders, and not just the antifascists either, thought that by abandoning parliament, rejecting the exercise of political responsibility, fascism would have stood before nothing, on the age of the abyss from which it would have to fall. Count Volpi stood alone in advising the industrialists against an Aventino which would have undermined their power even further.

When the question was asked as to whether the crisis was in the system or of the system, to which even Senator Einaudi declared his willingness to

acknowledge that, fortunately, there was a man called Mussolini protecting the system, Volpi did no more than smile. He wanted the system, his system, to survive the fury of the storm that was heralding its end. His faith in fascism was this, and this alone. To our own good fortune, it reduces to his laudable special interest. But within these limits, his sincerity is unshakeable.

Count Volpi considers "proprietary corporation"¹⁶ and the unorthodox fascist dialectic of the left-leaning Gentilians to be an unnecessary diversion for the regime, but "useful" for an extreme defence against an uncontrolled and uncontrollable assault on private property, such as the one that capitalism generates, structures and innovates, in the sense of taking it to the top of the power exercised by the elite indiscriminately in a position to make use of it.

Count Volpi would like to see us maintain a balance between a syndicalism with clipped wings and a home-grown communism liberated from the Bolshevik high command and internationalist outlook. "Neither fish nor fowl." In good faith, this is how Count Volpi would like to see fascism. Take the legs out from underneath ideology, fill the head with love of the practical, uproot it from the land of dogma, and project it onto the terrain of sterile dispute. Paradise in the shadow of the stock exchange: this is the genial political technique of the last doge.

One day Count Volpi told me that during the summer of 1921, the attempt to establish a truce between the Socialists and fascists which was pitilessly allowed to fail, would have led to the fall of fascism as the heir to liberal, Giolittian Italy. I told him that the calamity hanging over fascism was precisely the desire to perceive it as the continuator, rather than the demolisher, of an approach to policy on which clean hands continued to cast doubt. Once again Volpi smiled, as if to say, "My dear President, one day you will be free of this strange notion too."

The humorous branch of the secret services of the Italian home affairs Ministry passed on a witticism made by Count Volpi a little before the Pesaro speech: "Scratch the President and you will find a maximalist socialist." Volpi does not know the history of Italian socialism. He believes that the Mussolini of those days was more a revolutionary socialist than a maximalist. The faction led by Costantino Lazzari, which appropriated the Congress at Reggio Emilia, was counterrevolutionary, anti-conformist in

deed and Hegelian/Marxist in the abstract. I'm still part of that defunct faction, in the guise of the liquidation office.

Count Volpi approved of the Europeanist stance we took in July 1934, against the threat of an *Anschluss* which I considered to be wholly anachronistic. Well-informed as he was of the perennial German desire to expand its own economic and military interests to the East, he commented that the impetus for unification between the Reich and the former base of the Austro-Hungarian empire could not be halted. Slowed down, perhaps, but not halted. A brief moment of disagreement. Europeism to Italy's cost was an absurdity from which I quickly fled.

Immediately after the 1923 Munich putsch, when I ordered a team of Venetian doctors to tend to the wounds suffered by Commander Goering, after he escaped death and the Bavarian State police, in an amicable way Count Volpi took pains to create around that noble exile an atmosphere of cordiality which was both reserved and full of human warmth. Friends of General Ludendorff's had persuaded our consul, Renzetti, to lend a hand to the Hitlerian plotters who had suffered during the Munich putsch. A fraternal friend of Goering's, and also a friend of Count Volpi's, Renzetti was to all intents Goering's saviour.

On many occasions Count Volpi has talked to me of his hope for a state guaranteed by order, a state that is the guarantor of liberty. I have wondered if he sees his ideal realised in the fascist state. Sometimes I behold him as a total believer in this situation which -- allow me this act of pride -- I have personally helped to bring about. At other times I see him as the good-natured critic, all caustic comments, demolishing the truth and tending the sickly plant of heresy.

In Count Volpi's opinion, the "Pact of steel" did not offer benefits and would not have resulted in economic complementarity between the two parties, comparable to the political side of the Italo-German pact. I believe that Volpi has never made a single speech without reading out statistical tables. I too was recited figures, lists of raw materials, and heard of the irrecoverable deficit of fresh supplies brought about by the economic and military blockades which the pact would inevitably have produced. I told him that the voice and call of destiny and honour are worth more than debatable figures, which can never offer the measure of the age.

Do not believe that my decisions are formed in silence, in the anguish of a desperate solitude. I listen a great deal. I ask questions. I do not entrust myself to the egocentric technique of "answering oneself", the melancholy and unfailing conclusion of the highly opinionated "asking oneself". Within the limits of what is possible -- and the infiniteness of the impossible should not frighten us -- I listen and ask the right men at the right time. I would not dream of asking Count Volpi for an opinion on the Gentile reform, just as I would never dream of asking Professor Gentile his opinion on the revaluation of the lira championed by Count Volpi, bearing in mind the noted relationship between our currency and sterling.

It is my belief that Count Volpi's greatest political concern is his belief that the crisis of capitalism is irreparable, and the irreparable nature of the crisis is tolling for our fascist society. Not as an attempt to console him, but out of the duty of clearly describing the situation as it is, I have never ceased to advise the last doge that fascism is proud of being the moderator of capitalistic excess power, and following this, of being its implacable executioner.

I have always had to reckon with two general industrial confederations that could most definitely not be described as displaying a supportive attitude: Count Volpi's and Alberto Pirelli's. The former reproaches me for being downgraded from a focal point of independent desires into an organ directly serving the dominant policy. The latter assembles what little feeble economic liberalism we have allowed to persist. Of the two industrialist confederations, it is Volpi's that I prefer. One knows what it stands for, and what needs to be done to send it to the pyre.

One day we will have to tell the tale of the relationship between Senator Salvatore Contarini's¹⁷ brand of Europeism and the one dear to Count Volpi's heart. Contarini's Europeism focuses on bringing Russia back into Europe. Volpi's version seeks the debalkanization of the economy, looking to and competing for South Eastern Europe. Contarini wants to see a decommunisted Russia made responsible in Europe. For Volpi, continentalisation of the European economic process is posited upon acquiring the entire Balkans and achieving a level of real political autonomy for the continent.

Just before the Pesaro speech, Count Volpi said to me: "It is not a question of debating whether there is too much or too little money in

circulation. It is a matter of diverting it to useful production and necessary consumption. You, President, are oriented towards agriculture, but there is a swathe of medium-sized industrial manufacturing firms ready to resolve and cater to the hopes of hundreds of thousands of unemployed people. The problem today is that there is too much money in circulation and not enough opportunity to invest. This produces inflation and a flight from the rational economy."

On that occasion, Count Volpi also advised me that either the state took on the task of protecting savings by squeezing production costs to the point of agony, or we would never create enough space for new entrants to the labour market. For it is this, and almost solely this, that we should be attending to. He added that the ministries responsible for running industry, the economy and agriculture should transform themselves into bodies resolutely committed to tackling the issue of employment alone.

I recall everything that Count Volpi told me on that occasion. I seem to remember that he cited a number of writings by an Italian journalist, a pharmacist in who knows which state of the American Confederation, a man who had introduced into his articles the term "recession", as if to define the slippage of production immediately following a crisis in the state economy. Amerigo Ruggiero was the émigré journalist in question. The America he was describing in his writings was the real America of the 1929 crisis.

Paradoxically, Count Volpi had faith in production which would both derive from the mechanics of technical invention, and at the same time be produced by a labour associated with the traditional way of creating objects, "the projection of individual will on previously inert materials." To this day I believe Count Volpi to be against excessive engineering, against technology that acts outside the human hope of keeping men within the realm of self-love, without which every selfishness is possible, and any type of altruism is problematical.

The Count makes a distinction between the immediacy of subversion and the content of the revolution. He fears the acts of a limited number of violent men, and maintains that the task of the state is to find out the secrets of at least 49 of the 50 rebels who, at any one time, could throw it in jeopardy. I have trouble persuading him that the security services work to perfection. He replies that the service which does not function perfectly in Italy is the service for protecting good relations between capital and labour, and this on its own is enough to destroy the country's peace.

To Count Volpi's mind, the Leninist NEP lies somewhere between the forced construction of the pyramids, and the no less slavery-driven erection

of the Great Wall of China. He states that with its sacrifice of the living, the pyramids defended a not always worthy peace of the dead. He adds that with its sacrifice of contemporaries, the Great Wall of China protected the life of those yet to come.

Count Volpi is wary of overspecialisation in the workforce. In his opinion, this reflects a reduction in the natural versatility of Italian workers. During every transitional phase in civilisation, particularly in the passage from agricultural to industrial civilisation, according to Volpi, one must measure out the transformation of man inevitably required by his changing position in society. Nothing of the past dies suddenly. Nothing of the future should be sundered from this truth.

Every now and then, Count Volpi returns to something that is very much on his mind, perhaps a little too much so. Is fascism a revolution because it is the destroyer of what attacks the best of civilisation created by capitalism? Or is fascism a revolution because it embodies the social power that can withdraw from capitalism its privilege of being the custodian or, better still, the guardian of modern-day civilisation? Volpi does not lead a tranquil life between these twin question. Doubt knocks continuously at his door.

Volpi asserts, with justification it seems, that the Rocca delle Caminate has for a long time been a worthy masterpiece of Veneto dominion on dry land. He has never been to visit this house, restored by my wife into a decidedly liveable state. When Volpi talks of a "home for man", he takes on an attitude which only a seasoned Latin *pater familias* may rightfully consider pertinent to the function of supreme regulator of the existence of a *gens*.

This man Volpi, whom everybody imagines busying himself in the regulation of international trade, is the man most closely attuned to the basic problems of the younger generations. His disagreement with those who mourn the advent of the American anti-immigration laws could not be stronger. He has never believed, as he told me once before, in the image of the emigrant who lays golden eggs. This traditional immigration disgusts him, while political immigration fills him with horror. He has remained friends with many political refugees. He says it out loud, he shows it openly. He gives assistance to the families of some enemies. I cannot say that he does wrong.

Count Volpi draws a subtle distinction between classes and categories. One is born and dies within a class. One gains access to categories. Class exists. Categories "become ". A class lives on in the survival of the current civilisation. Categories increase in the new civilisation, inventing the new man rather than being invented by him. Class produces types. Categories mould prototypes. One vegetates in class. One progresses through categories. With an eye on categories, one moves into the future. Condescending to class, one hangs on to the past. I must inform Professor Gentile of the flurry of Count Volpi's observations.

For him, the state as God, the state as everything, is not beyond common comprehension. One should at all times belong to it. With Volpi one talks in terms of subjection to the administrative Moloch above everybody and everything. The term "subordination" to the logic of the general will does not break the surface of his discourse. "Subordination" means obedience in the time of the interlocutor. One is never free of "subjection", one may not cast oneself adrift. One is continuously in the act of escaping from "subordination" in the sense of "obedience", until a proof to the contrary presents itself. Count Volpi ponders over some of my remarks. Pondering over is, for him, akin to rejection.

Like all men of action, every day Volpi is writing the chapters of his own philosophy. He knows he comes from a world of experimentalists incredulous at the opportunity of changing the world. This saddens and moderates him, that is to say, it confirms his smile over time. He maintains he has always worked in the moment, the father of every forthcoming season. He also says that he does not know if this is right. He is uncertain about the validity of his example. Success is always achieved against something, against somebody. Every now and then this statement makes him grow sad. And then he is brought back to the reality of things, with the thought that everything can be changed his smile returns.

I would not say that he has a sense of the family in the common meaning of the term. His religion is, and is not, paternalism. *Proteggere* is his insignia, just as *vincere* is his habit. I could not picture him in the role of beggar of fortune. Even without property, Count Volpi would still embody the supreme dignity of the doge of Venice. A similar adventure is impossible for anyone else. When he looks back at the happy times of his life, he talks as if they belong to somebody else. This is what is so appealing about his

tales. For him, the Cathay ended at Constantinople. It never went any further.

Count Volpi is always talking about restoring the values of the people, as something that should be placed at the head of our ideal tension. I consider this petition vague or, at the very least, limited to concepts which, in what the Count of Misurata says, sound like a desire for preserving a relationship of subjection between the leadership of the old power and the audience that the revolution has left just as it was before its dawn rose.

Count Volpi recognises that fascism did not come to bring peace, but to make war on what is unfair and unjustifiable and comes between the social rights to living and the desire to exclude producers from the general and specific benefits of freedom. As ever in debates of this kind, we first had to define the distance between social justice and the enslavement of a people: What is the social right to life? What do we understand by producer, he who directly takes part in making the product or he who, for whatever reason, makes use of the product?

Though retaining power in the class that has traditionally held it, Count Volpi obeys the rule of an internationalism whereby those who take part in the exercise of power and the risks taken to protect it, share in the benefits earned from protecting it. For Volpi, fascism intent on this objective should profess all-out internationalism. But today, in 1935, we see two political internationalisms. A Western one, which is strangling every one of our social aspirations; and a socialist one, which would turn us into the gendarmes of capitalism, all the better to fight and attack it.

Many times Count Volpi has reminded me of my professions of liberalism, resoundingly countermanded by the subsequent fascist line. I must always reply to him, good-naturedly, that the greatest happiness in economic policy would be liberalisation of exchanges without liberalising consumption. Count Volpi does not seem to be overly interested in the fact that between 1922 and 1936, where we are now, the political reality has changed enormously. The alliance between liberalism and capitalism is buried forever. Now they are involved in a race to be "more conservative", which threatens to endure until the death. Liberalism is indeed dying. Capitalism is on its deathbed. In their last tremors they find an echo of their remote spring days.

Count Volpi fears that a separation of the bodies of state is prevailing over the administration's need for unity, which in his opinion is the only guarantee of sound government of the common weal. He who would have all power in politics concentrated in the hands of a single head, declares that any form of alternative exercise of power among those who are the custodians of the dogma of transition, and those who consider themselves prophets of revisionism, is dangerous for the revolution, or at least, for what he believes our revolution to be.

In 1918, through friends who held a position of some standing in the administration of the Banca Commerciale, Count Volpi expressed to me his disagreement with my theory of the anti-history represented by czarism, which should be destroyed, either directly through continental socialism or, even more directly, through Lenin's brand of communism. At that time, before the peace of Brest-Litovsk had been signed between the Germans and Bolsheviks, I let him know that I would even have preferred the Germans in Moscow to the czar being returned to the head of Holy Russia.

Still on the topic of czarism, Count Volpi pointed out to me that even revolutionaries such as Sorel had invested their own savings in imperial public debt bonds. I answered that we can all make mistakes. What counts is not to take them as a model. One does not betray logic by making a choice between somebody else's error and our own good reason; the latter should always win over the former. Intervention in favour of the czar by the West against a Russia keen on a revolutionary society was a far greater mistake than that committed by Sorel in buying imperial Treasury bonds. With the return to the Middle Ages, nobody is casting light on the present.

Count Volpi is said to have jumped for joy on hearing of the socialist congress at Leghorn when the split occurred between Socialists and Communists. At that time he believed it to be the end of socialism; he did not consider the problem of how to tackle the armed party which would undoubtedly have risen from that split. Later he seemed to want to believe that the only armed party in Italy would be our own. In such a seesaw of hopes and fears, Count Volpi ended up attributing to my -- and not yet his -- revolution the role of guarantor of the calm and stability capitalism requires to prosper.

It seems to me that Count Volpi wanted fascism to take power immediately after the failed factory occupations. He wanted this against the opinion of his own friend and mentor, Giolitti. Giolitti was keen to use any

war of religion that may have broken out between Italian fascism and bolshevism to restore the authority of the state. Once the central authority had been restored after this dispersal of energy, he would have got rid of the fascist movement by disarming the legions and sending the banners to the pyre.

Many years ago, Count Volpi told me that the strength of fascism lay in its desire to go all the way down the path towards a utopia/reality which other political movements travel in the opposite direction, from the concrete to the abstract.

I already possessed a passing familiarity with the text of the appeal launched by the Paris Communists towards the young fascists, which you pointed out to me. The author or authors of that extraordinary appeal seemed to echo some of the ideas heralded in my Milan manifesto of 23 March 1919. Only yesterday Volpi told me that he already knew of the Italian Communist appeal to the younger generations and that as far as any libertarian ideas it contained, he considered them to be anti-liberty because, outside of the civilisation whose benefits we are enjoying, no real liberty exists.

Count Volpi returns to the September 1936 Communist appeal to young fascists, workers in black shirts and the soldiers in Africa. He considers it to be more passionate than political. He asserts that the Communists felt themselves to be outmanoeuvred by the social reforms of fascism, which between maximalism and communism, is something they have talked about in Italy for the last decade as part of their own programme. He says that the danger is precisely having removed the hot potatoes of the basic reforms of the new system from the frying pan of Communist hope. In a hundred years time perhaps, when fascism is in crisis, the red state will be far more totalitarian -- but thankfully more possibilist -- than a revolutionary black state. I point out to Count Volpi that we are talking of things which may come to pass in a hundred years time. Volpi replies that in the face of history, a hundred years pass like bolt of lightning.

Count Volpi is not happy that fascism has turned a blind eye, and even opened the way to, statements that there is no appreciable conflict between the reality of the Soviet economy and how the Italian economy is structured. He says that when one allows a political comparison of this kind, one has already embarked on going down the path of breaking up the system. He is

more interested in the "how much" of property and then in the "how". The possibility the masses have of tapping into the heart of existing resources in order not to be downtrodden or die, depends upon this "how much", either broken down into averages or left whole.

I do not have the same faith in the market economy as that vested by men like Volpi, who consider it to be the eternal medicine against the threat of the disease called misery. The market economy requires producers willing to churn out consumer goods and tools and services made with ever-reduced labour costs. It requires domestic consumers willing to pay more for the product than foreign consumers would be prepared to do. It needs a state that allows the first of these disgraces, and acknowledges the second. More than merchants, it requires slaves. Count Volpi smiles on.

As I have already said, Count Volpi does not believe in europeanisation of the new Russia. Senator Contarini tells me that without Russia, Europe is a truncated continent, lacking an essential part of its make up. I limit myself to stating that Mr Lenin has done his utmost to keep Russia outside the continental contentious procedure, and his successor is doing likewise. This is not out of economic motives, but for ideological reasons. If it was in contact with communism, however, Europe would not turn pink; on the contrary, if this occurred, all of new Russia's standards would turn a lovely romantic pink hue.

In his view of Russia, Count Volpi bases himself principally on the judgement provided by Ambassador Cerruti. This is a markedly Conservative appraisal, associated with the idea of a possible collapse of the Bolshevik regime following a continental, even Napoleonic, war. Russia may lose a marginal war such as the Crimean War, but it will never be defeated by armies attempting to strangle its heart.

Count Volpi knows that a commercial rapprochement with Russia is possible. But when he talks of Russia's behaviour in Geneva, he doubts the good faith of the Bolsheviks in reciprocating the desire for relations with the West. He is aware that Litvinov,¹⁸ a Bolshevik with western leanings, will not last long as standard bearer of a Europe-sympathetic approach within the Kremlin. Volpi said something worth remembering: "Moscow's Europeism does not extend any further than Berlin."

In the wake of the *Anschluss*, Count Volpi said to me, "Germany is heading towards Moscow, with the Kremlin's consent." Immediately after

Munich, he had said, "Berlin is moving towards Moscow, offering a morsel to Warsaw. Poland will chew on the morsel, but we all know who will gulp it down."

When I told Volpi that fascism was building the only possible form of socialism, confederal socialism and Turatti's brand of socialism still survived in Italy -- survived in the nominal sense, as they had been dead for some time. Wage protection had been espoused by national trade unionism. Corporations were on the verge of dictating the real expense of production and consumption. Count Volpi accepted this situation as the lesser evil: he accepted it in the name of that enlightened branch of Italian capitalism which acknowledged him as its guide.

Count Volpi loathes the libertarian side of fascism. I can picture him reading out the names of my comrades one by one, comrades still smacking of anarchy: Arpinati, Capoferri, Malusardi, Mazzucato and many others who hope to see me destroy what remains of old-style Italian capitalism, and the significant elements of new home-grown capitalism too. I reckon that the image of good old Malatesta must haunt him during the few nights when his sleep is disturbed by sudden insomnia, when he returns home to Palazzo Volpi from the Caffè Quadri in Venice, after listening to Ambassador Carlo Galli regaling him with the magnificence of Carraran anarchism.

Count Volpi looked at me with disbelief when I told him that, in my early youth, Luigi Federzoni had been a fervent anarchist, a cadre in the Milan branch. He seemed to be gripped by sudden aphasia. He had only just digested the news of Leandro Arpinati's anarchist past, and he did not expect this new attack on his congenital calm. He told me he preferred the company of the devil to that of my ex-libertarian friends. And that when push comes to shove, he would only trust Federzoni's fascism. A type of fascism which is more nationalist than social.

Count Volpi apprised me that the political situation in 1921 had resulted in the industrialists' benevolent attitude towards fascism; that in 1924, there was no reason for this attitude to diminish; that the revaluation of the lira, though it affected "protected" exporters, the unprotected had a means of absorbing the impact by considerably cutting wages and salaries. Whether this kicked the employment machine into action needed to be proven. According to the Count, it would still take a long time to replace old-style capitalism with a new form of capitalism. This explains the

increasingly benevolent attitude industrialists have shown towards what fascism has been doing.

Count Volpi has expressed to me his great appreciation of what fascism has done and is continuing to do for the good of the nation, but he fears a recrudescence of the leftist tendencies which, as indeed was the case, presided over the birth of the movement. He still talks of what happens in Italy with the distance of the patriarch who casts his gaze over the present with one wary eye on the past. I have tried to explain to him, I cannot say with what degree of success, that every movement in history has risen out of the conflict between what was and what is. The rebellion of new generations does not derive from a desire to change things, but out of the desire to innovate. So be it if this has a whiff of leftism about it. The future will offer justice on what we are building today, in those areas where the foundations rest upon error. In that case it will be another type of left which has the job of healing the wounds which, without doubt involuntarily, we may have inflicted.

Count Volpi is aware that the country must transform its economy. He would like to see an industrial future for Venice. When this is enacted, he says, there will be enormous problems. A Venice which is re-establishing links with the hinterland from where it derived its origins would, he asserts, seem to be a distorted Venice. And yet Marghera should become its lungs. The bridge which will link Venice and the continent, removing the city from the rules of an archipelago, will for a long time appear to be an offence against history. But the bridge will ultimately cease to be the symbol of a rebellion, and be accepted as part of the logic of which history is both mother and continuator.

I have often informed Count Volpi my view that the affection for fascism expressed by major industry and medium-sized companies cannot be much relied upon. He listens to my tirades against this or that major or middle ranking businessmen. Then he lists the occasions on which state intervention has benefited sectors which did not deserve assistance, to the detriment of taxpayers who did not deserve being plundered by the tax office. Almost always the episodes denounced by the Count correspond to names of people whose affection for fascism has little of the praiseworthy about it.

Yesterday, Count Volpi told me of his concern for what has now become a platitude, whereby fascism is alleged to be a non-extreme form of communism. He would like never to hear communism mentioned in the same breath as fascism. I do not wish to be a social democratiser of maximalist socialism, which is the only communism I know. Neither do I wish to maximise my fascism, which is the only brand of fascism worth its salt. I do not wish to kill off capitalism. From the carcass of the whale I intend to extract all the fat I can, allowing the carcass the opportunity to return, under its own power, to what is still vital, to what it can still be.

The Count would welcome a fascist reformism, that is, a reform of my political creature, in order to demaximalise it, supposing that fascism has a maximum and minimum programme to which it remains faithful, rather than a single imperative to be obeyed: restoring dignity to the nation. We have weathered the storm of a form of revisionism anchored in the recent past of early fascism, we have been through the tempest of a process of normalisation which threatens to be the executioner of the armed party. Now we have rounded the Cape of all doubt, we are sailing towards the archipelago of all alternatives.

Count Volpi expresses satisfaction at Farinacci's sound judgement. He has the greatest respect for big industry in general, and electricity companies in particular, and with great politeness and plenty of political independence, lawfully looks after interests which are not always in line with the demands of the proletariat. I have told Count Volpi that one may always trust Roberto, trust him until death, even though his attitudes, his quirkiness and his dislikes all irritate me, and oblige one to be strict with him. If Count Volpi praises his moderate stance, does that mean that Roberto is no longer the revolutionary of yesteryear? The question does not bear asking, Roberto is as he ever was.

I have discussed with Count Volpi the ideas that are occupying political critics in Italy. Much is being said in favour of replacing the government set up by the Albertine statute with a German-style chancellorship. The powers of the Grand Council derive from the principle of providing a consultative body for the executive, not just for the government, but also for the reigning house, considered as it is to be part of the present and future of the monarchy. Count Volpi looks favourably upon a chancellorship invested with full powers in the realm of attributing rights and duties, vested in this office as a material and moral centre of endeavour. I believe that a

chancellorship presupposes an Italy divided into autonomous regional states. A chancellorship would encapsulate all its prerogatives, without overpassing or overturning any of them. A chancellorship could well be a goal to be achieved, but only in the long-term.

I had not been aware of the deep friendship between Count Volpi and Count Ciano. I knew of Volpi's unselfish cordiality towards the *Whithead* torpedo factory at Fiume, over which the Ciano family exercises notable influence. But I had no idea that Count Volpi would feel such grief, such intense grief on the death of my son-in-law's father. Costanzo Ciano had told me long ago of his faith in Volpi's ability to bring stability and security to our currency. Costanzo knew of Volpi's concern for the shipbuilding industry. Just like Costanzo Ciano and Luigi Rizzo, Count Volpi wishes to see our specialist workers and shipyards become a driving force in the economy. Immediately after Ciano's death, Count Volpi begged us to proceed with his programme, his code of the sea.

Count Volpi mistrusts the small-time intellectuals Bottai is keeping at his mercy. He is wrong. There is no point worrying about scribblers, the insignificant clerics who consider their incomprehensible language to be the keystone to the intelligence of the age. I far prefer the skilled workers of the south, the farmers of Italy's centre and North, to the men of the revues with circulations not exceeding the number of people whose articles they contain. I really couldn't be bothered to worry about the fake Tiepolo, the fake Tintoretto, the fake Goldoni, the fake Gozzi, the fake Barbarani, the fake Papafava, of whom Count Volpi seems to be afraid. Time will mercilessly crush those little poets and poetasters, who would sell Bottai, Bargellini, Papini and Soffici to the lowest bidder in exchange for the humblest reception at Palazzo Venezia.

Count Volpi would like to see the Venice Biennale stand for the value that Italy attributes to art. He does not like modern painters; he says that they must mature in years to grow in stature. The cinema does not appeal to him, for to his eyes this form of art offers an increasingly less individual contribution and vision of the things of life. Star worship, which has taken root even at middle levels of politics, does not attract him. What he appreciates most is straightforwardness. Even if the straightforwardness, of which he is an example, seems to me to be a form of isolation, a faithful awareness of one's own moral abilities. With the exception of music, the

representative arts do not draw the interest of a man who declares himself to be the high protector of the fruits of intelligence.

I have told Volpi -- who is always asking me about the brand of anarchism which in my youth I wished to serve as a lay member -- about my time in Geneva, at the School of Luigi Bertoni, a printer and publisher in rue des Savoises, 6. I did not go to the lake shore to commemorate the tragic death of Empress Elisabeth, to see what light glinted at that moment on Luccheni's dagger, but to fix in my mind the memory of Amiel, walking alone on the edge of silence. This memory surprised Count Volpi, so I told him who Amiel was, what his *Diario* meant to me, and how much I owe to his poetic ruminations, which softly tell the deaf the value of which they too are sons.

I told Count Volpi a parable. A man is running through a forest, lost. A storm begins to blow up. Thunder and lightning strike down on the centuries-old trees. There is no refuge. The fleeing man stops in his tracks. Terror has given him courage. Fear has transformed into the will to survive chaos. His imagination turns to the world which must rise, serene, above those trunks, overgrown hedges, and rocks, overturned by the turmoil which must come to end. Everything seems to die, then, silence follows the thunderous roar, the deluge. The death of things has made the forest into a clearing. The man is still alive when everything thought he would give up and die. This, I concluded, is a definition of my own experience. From the ruins and debris I have had to build that thing which, at last, we are living. Count Volpi was moved.

To Count Volpi's repeated exhortation, "Let's be liberal again", my answer is, "We have only just saved ourselves from the black magic curse of false liberty, and this magic, my dear doge, wants to return us to the Stone Age, so dear to the distinguished politicians from whose clutches, with such a struggle, we have freed ourselves. What would what would they say, my fallen, our fallen, the soldiers who died to return Misurata to Italy, what would they say to me and to you (as ever I address Count Volpi as "lei", the only term of address I use with him), if we made an about-turn, if we delivered ourselves back into the hands of his friend Giolitti, to whom I have respect mixed with abhorrence for the falsity he imposed as the solution to the mess Italian politics had been in for a century? Not exactly Sonnino's *Torniamo allo Statuto*... In the name of liberty, I have accepted his invitation, not to mobilise the champions of liberalism of the past, but to take

from their hands the expedient called constitution and turn it into an organ of power of the people who have entrusted the armed protection of true liberty to their own party.

The Count has had an opportunity to discuss with extremely high ranking Russians the conditions under which it would be possible to have relations such as those existing in the distant epoch of Marinotti¹⁹ and Gualino²⁰, although at that time the initiative was not followed with sufficient interest by the Italian government. Count Volpi feels that the only reason the Bolsheviks hate fascism is because we have only part of the West against us, we succeed in achieving what Russia cannot achieve because it has the entire world against it. Count Volpi does not say so, but one sees that this halfway type of Bolshevism, which we are purportedly building in Italy, is not something he appreciates. It seems to me that at the very heart of capitalism a great confusion is brewing over state socialism, state capitalism, a socialist state and the totalitarian state.

The most serene doge is worried that I may become a prisoner of the system I have created. I have not created the system, I have tried to change the situation I was left in the wake of the October 1922 uprising. I have demolished pointless blockages between administration of the state and the working masses. I have removed authority from disorder and imposed order on great swathes of the state. I have imbued the executive with true authority, removing power from the political cliques which had illegitimately appropriated it. There was no more I could do. Nobody is under the illusion of wreaking a revolution from nothing, in a state reduced to a pile of rubble. The system lives on: a vitality must be impressed upon it, making sure it does not fall into a vegetative state, as would happen if all of its functions were immediately annulled. As I said to Volpi, "This not the same as becoming a prisoner of the system."

Just before the first fascist elections, Trotsky said to Gorky that mine was a true revolution, the revolution enacted by a Mussolini who was one of the best pupils of the men Corrado Alvaro would one day refer to as the "masters of the deluge". Well aware of Trotsky's appraisal, Count Volpi is afraid of the danger he considers fascism faces in allowing itself good-naturedly to be perceived as Italian style Bolshevism. To reassure him, I try to explain that the reverse is true, that Bolshevism is a Russian-style version of fascism, a fascism created without any remains of the monarchy or

Conservative associations. I can tell from the way that Volpi takes my explanation, that his concern is reaching alarm levels.

It is apparent from the reports Volpi receives from Italian entrepreneurs, from direct collaborators among certain communities of workers, or among unspecified groups of wage earners who have not yielded to fascism, that there is the working class antipathy towards the regime. These core groups, these communities appear to be more under Bordighist influence than that of the Communist agitators whom the secret services shall never silence. It seems that we are disliked more for not making workers the bosses of their factories, than for cutting them off from the wielding of state power. Now, why not acknowledge that within factories unions have far more power when they are capable of dealing with the factory and the owner on issues of planning and employment, rather than in the old days when they were led to believe they had sovereign power only because a strike had sent a minor tremor through the protective walls of the fortress called "Profit", without ever threatening to knock them down?

Count Volpi has passed on to me a slim book by a friend of his: *Quando eravamo sovversivi*. It is written by Silvio Maurano,²¹ a fascist of the earliest hour. An interesting little book, and an interesting little title. We were subversive in 1920, 1921 and 1922. Our subversion was not in the name of a war against the state built upon the foundations of capitalism, but in the name of the proletariat, which never in a thousand years would have achieved victory by mimicking the Bolshevik party. With us, the proletariat did not make a choice. We obliged the proletariat to pick between the tragically useless and the logically possible. We knew that a decision of this sort had a cost: a cost in terms of temporary independence, and in terms of provisional freedom. Count Volpi gives his assent to this, my interpretation of our history.

On a number of occasions between 1925 and 1929, I laid out my views on a system that bases its will to survive on hoarding and gold. More as an empirical than a practical man, I said that states such as the Union of Soviet Republics, capable of massively expanding production of the precious metal, are careful not to open themselves up to the privileged markets, the leading markets, as they make themselves increasingly strong and control the world economy to their own advantage. Count Volpi and I predicted the collapse of the traditional gold standard system, which the winning nations of the World War had imperilled by claiming gold rather than products and services from

debtor nations. We set ourselves at 92.46, a level that the potentates of gold will never forgive, a level that, by reducing imports, has forced home-grown talent to produce for the domestic market what the foreign market had been denying us for so long.

As early as the end of 1926, Count Volpi was worried that with a drastic revaluation of the lira against the sterling and dollar, there could be a rather unnatural flight of Italian capital towards shores considered more hospitable than our own. I told him that the labour of our specialised proletariat, and of our artisans, would protect the financial commitments of Italian savers in areas which they had ignored until then. Because of the realigned purchasing power of the lira, this would reduce the cost of labour, allowing us to destine sufficiently safe margins of profit to businessmen to dissuade savers from uselessly hoarding gold, and fleeing the Italian production market. In the meantime, by increasing productivity and specialising seeding and growing methods, farming would have completed defence of our currency, the first of all guarantees of peace in the country, providing the minimum conditions for Italian well-being.

On one of our first meetings in Venice, when fascism was still far from power, Count Volpi was surprised when I told him it was pointless speaking in defence of the capitalist system in a world, and at a time, when free trade was becoming an increasingly rare economic condition. At that time, and for some time afterwards, the Count was gambling on liberalism, even though this was losing value and pertinence. He did not want to admit that liberalism was founded on the disqualification of the savings of one of the two parties, and on the strangulation of the purchasing power of wages.

It is my belief that Count Volpi was one of the first of my friends to learn of my ideas regarding the useless emigration from one country to another of the gold ingots stupidly entrusted with the task of balancing currency exchange relations. The nations holding large quantities of precious metal wanted to resolve a moment of grave worldwide economic crisis with this game of sending and receiving gold, and with the far more despicable game of paying the wages of hunger to labour in poor countries, either in their home environments, or after coercing labour to the most miserable areas of emigration.

Count Volpi has pointed out to me on many occasions that the rich nations pay more heed to the flight of gold from their banks than to

conquering new markets, legitimised by fair export prices and fair import revenues. What matters most for conventionally rich countries is to maintain poor purchasers and retailers in economic subjectivity, to perennially prevent them from being able to live without getting into debt with banks, whether these banks are public or private.

I sometimes wonder if Count Volpi was perhaps not born on the wrong side. He gives nothing away to any partner or competitor, but pursues methods which are not far removed from the morality of negotiation and striking deals. The political exile press promises him the noose and the blade of the guillotine. Italians are not yet aware of how much we owe him. Living outside, and above, the dominant hierarchical system, he keeps himself free of connections which would in any way threaten the sovereign nature of the independence he knows he embodies.

Between 1925 and 1927 I received urgent appeals to speed up the presses of the royal mint. I did not pay any heed to the wizards of unreal finance. Nor did I take advantage of the possibility within my power to use the crisis in employment and economic relations with other countries to launch a treacherous attack on the security of small and medium Italian savers. In a word, Count Volpi and I were in agreement about silently protecting Italy from induced inflation, that is to say, inflation that would have forced us to consume reserves of raw materials and destroy the will to produce, which in the economy is equivalent to a seed store in farming. We were against inflation of any sort. And this was flying in the face of the elites which, to their last lira, were in a position to contest the decision of fascism to be on the side of the people until our last drop of blood.

Count Volpi and myself had on our side a man who was to become a worthy defender of the Italian issuing bank, Mr Bonaldo Stringher,²² an expert with few equals in Europe in the art of defending a national currency threatened with being turned into a producer ofagio through the violence of foreign gold. Did we want to engage in a little stockpiling of our own to tackle the massive hoarding underway by each of the three gold powers? Mr Bonaldo Stringher guaranteed that there was a way to succeed.

Count Volpi used Mr Bonaldo Stringher to get from all financial powers an exact account of their credits, commitments and links with extra-Italian interests. At my specific behest, every bank had to begin to consider itself as part of the load-bearing structure of Italian finance which was not at the mercy of the winds and storms of individual predators. Banking secrecy

would have to go, in order for the state to truly understand the *quantum* of her true strength, expressed in real internal and external faith in our currency. Scialoja and his ilk had plenty to say about economic and legal deafness. I was violating their rights by curbing their excessive power. I was firing a broadside at the cultural edifice of their economy, demonstrating the non-existence of the economic man, and coming down on the side of the masses, which consists not of economic men but of workers.

One fine day, I began to feel that I had it fully within my power to declare a holy war against everybody who was rigging the market against Italy. I could have nationalised the institutions. But this I did not do. I could have cut back to the roots the method for launching indiscriminate assaults on the lira. This I did not do. I followed Count Volpi's sound advice. I set up structures for state surveillance of the profits reaped from Italian pastures. I followed all of their manoeuvres in trying to lay the lira low on the Rome and Milan bourses. The advantage of surprise gave me an idea of the area of freedom we could play with. And I gave the doge of Venice instructions to set off on the brief march towards a rate of 90.

¹ The "battle of the lira" which ended in late 1927 with an alignment at "level 90 ", raged for two years, passing through various stages during which the political, as well as economic dimension of deflationary measures emerged. The idea of a revaluation of the lira was generally favourably received, but in some circles it was thought that it should be conducted within lower limits. Volpi, for instance, contrary to what may be inferred from the text, was hoping for a pegging around 120 and, between the second half of 1925 and the end of 1927, the government was unsuccessfully approached with this in mind. Mussolini did not give in because "level 90 " had become a slogan, as well as because reaching that exchange rate, corresponding more less to the level it had been in Italy before fascism, appeared to him to be a not insignificant political success, and lastly, because his rigidity on this matter enabled him to reassert his dominance over those around him. On this topic see R. De Felice, *I lineamenti politica della "quota novanta" attraverso i documenti di Mussolini e di Volpi* in "Il Nuovo Osservatore Politico Economico Sociale", May 1966, and also R. De Felice, *Mussolini il fascista. L'organizzazione dello stato fascista, 1925-1929*, Turin, 1968, pages 221-261.

² Ettore Tito (1859-1941), painter and illustrator, executed paintings on mythological subject matter blending Veneto emphasis on colour with the atmosphere of Northern expressionism.

³ Pompeo Gherardo Molmenti (1852 -- 1928), writer and historian, a deputy from 1890, Senator from 1909, author of *La storia di Venezia nella vita privata dalle origini alla caduta della repubblica* (1879).

⁴ Piero Parini, journalist, editor of "Il Popolo d'Italia".

⁵ Omar el Muktar, head of the guerrilla forces in Cyrenaica, was hanged in his seventies, 16 September 1931.

⁶ Carlo Galli (1878 -- 1966), diplomat, was a minister in Tehran (1924 -- 1926), Lisbon (1926 -- 1928) and Belgrade (1928 -- 1935), as well as Ambassador in Ankara (1936 -- 1938). In the first Badoglio Cabinet he held the portfolio for popular culture. His book *Diari e lettere* (1951) is of considerable interest.

⁷ Basil Zaharoff (1894 -- 1936), a Greek businessman, funded Greece during the Balkan war, helped the allies in the First World War, and secretly wielded enormous influence during the 1919 peace conference, thanks to his relations with Lloyd George, Clemenceau and Venizelos.

⁸ Eleutherios Venizelos (1864 -- 1936), Greek politician, a democratic nationalist, he fostered union between Crete and Greece. Prime Minister several times, he laid the foundations of modern Greece. He was forced into exile in 1935 for attempting to avert Metaxas's dictatorship through rebellion.

⁹ Abdul Hamid II (1842 -- 1918), 34th Ottoman sultan, who in 1876 proclaimed a constitution establishing a parliamentary monarchy and guaranteeing individual and religious freedom, but the following year returned to a despotic government entrusted to members of his family and supported by the Moslem clergy. The 1918 revolution by the "young Turks" forced him to reintroduce the 1876 constitution. After an attempted counterrevolution, repelled by the military, he was forced to abdicate in April 1909.

¹⁰ Enver Pascià (1881 -- 1922), politician and Turkish military man, headed the movement of the "young Turks" and led the 1908 and 1909 coups which forced the abdication of Abdul Hamid II. Minister of war in 1914, he led the nation to war alongside the central empires. Exiled following defeat, he was killed in a clash with the Russians, while supporting the revolt of Turkestan against the Soviet regime.

¹¹ Piero Foscari (1865 -- 1923), nationalist politician. A warship captain, in 1896 he bombarded Mogadishu to avenge the killing of a number of Italian sailors. After leaving the Navy, he turned to politics and administration in Venezia. A deputy from 1909 to 1919, he was undersecretary for the colonies in the Salandra and Boselli cabinets. He became Senator in 1923.

¹² Chaim Weizmann (1874 -- 1952), chemist and politician, was President of the world Zionist Organisation (1920 -- 1930 and 1935 -- 1946), and the first President of the State of Israel.

¹³ Paolo Ignazio Maria Thaon di Revel (1888 -- 1973), Senator from 1933, was Minister of Finance between 24 January 1935 and 6 February 1943.

¹⁴ This refers to negotiations for a loan to Italy of hundreds of millions of dollars by the Morgan Bank in 1925 -- 1926. See also C. Damiani, *Mussolini e gli Stati Uniti 1922 -- 1935*, Bologna, 1980 and G. G. Migone, *Gli Stati Uniti e il fascismo*, Milan, 1980.

¹⁵ On 20 July 1925, at Serravalle Pistoiese, along the road between Montecatini and Pistoia, Giovanni Amendola was savagely attacked by a fascist squad from Lucca. He never recovered from the beating and died in France the following year.

¹⁶ "*Corporazione proprietaria*" was theorised by Ugo Spirito during the second Congress of union and corporative studies in Ferrara. For the debate this aroused, see F. Perfetti, *Ugo Spirito e la concezione della "corporazione proprietaria" al convegno di studi sindacali e corporativi di Ferrara di 1932*, in "*Critica Storica*", 1988, 2.

¹⁷ Salvatore Contarini (1867 -- 1945), diplomat, general secretary for foreign affairs between 1920 and 1925, chairman of the commission for the Rapallo pact (1920), and was in favour of Italy signing up to the Locarno pact. A Senator from 1921, he retired to private life in 1926.

¹⁸ Maksim Maximovic Litvinov (1876 -- 1951), diplomat and Soviet Foreign Minister (1930 -- 1939), supported a policy boosting the collective security system.

¹⁹ Franco Marinotti (1891 -- 1966), industrialist, president, managing director and director-general of Snia Viscosa.

²⁰ Riccardo Gualino (1879 -- 1964), industrialist, had a leading role in the cement, chemicals and confectionery industries. He was interned on Lipari in 1931 for bankruptcy.

²¹ Silvio Maurano, journalist, editor of "*L'Impero*", author of *Ricordi di un giornalista fascista* (1973).

²² Bonaldo Stringher (1854 -- 1930), economist, prepared the banking law of 1893. In 1900 he was appointed head of Banca d'Italia, a position he held until his death.