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Picked Sharpshooters Patrol Genoa Streets

Genoa.—Italy realizes the danger of inviting the Soviet delegation to the Genoa Conference, and has brought fifteen hundred picked military policemen from other parts of Italy into Genoa to crush any Red or anti-Red disturbance as soon as it starts.

This is a farsighted move, for the Italian government remembers the hundreds of fatal clashes between the Fascisti and the Reds in the past two years, and is anxious that there should be as little civil war as possible while the conference is in progress.

They face a very real danger. Sections of Italy, principally Tuscany and in the north, have seen bloody fighting, murders, reprisals and pitched battles in the last few months over communism. The Italian authorities accordingly fear the effect on the Reds of Genoa when they see the delegation of eighty representatives from Soviet Russia amicably received and treated with respect.

There is no doubt but that the Reds of Genoa—and they are about one-third of the population—when they see the Russian Reds, will be moved to tears, cheers, gesticulations, offers of wines, liqueurs, bad cigars, parades, vivas, proclamations to one another and the wide world and other kindred Italian symptoms of enthusiasm. There will also be kissings on both cheeks, gatherings in cafes, toasts to Lenin, shouts for Trotsky, attempts by three and four highly illuminated Reds to form a parade at intervals of two and three minutes, enormous quantities of Chianti drunk and general shouts of “Death to the Fascisti!”

That is the way all Italian Red outbreaks start. Closing the cafes usually stops them. Uninspired by the vinous products of their native land, the Italian Communist cannot keep his enthusiasm up to the demonstration point for any length of lime. The cafes close, the “Vivas” grow softer and less enthusiastic, the paraders put it off till another day and the Reds who reached the highest pitch of patriotism too soon roll under the tables of the cafes and sleep until the bartender opens up in the morning.

Some of the Reds going home in a gentle glow, chalk up on a wall in straggling letters, “VIVA LENIN! VIVA TROTSKY!” and the political crisis is over, unless of course they meet some Fascisti. If they happen to meet some Fascisti, things are very different again.

The Fascisti are a brood of dragons’ teeth that were sown in 1920 when it looked as though Italy might go Bolshevik. The name means organization, a unit of Fascisti is a fascio, and they are young ex-veterans formed to protect the existing government of Italy against any sort of Bolshevik plot or aggression. In short, they are counter-revolutionists, and in 1920 they crushed the Red uprising with bombs, machine guns, knives and the liberal use of kerosene cans to set the Red meeting places afire, and heavy iron-bound clubs to hammer the Reds over the head when they came out.

The Fascisti served a very definite purpose and they crushed what looked like a coming revolution. They were under the tacit protection of the government, if not its active support, and there is no question but that they crushed the Reds. But they had a taste of unpenalized lawlessness, unpunished murder, and the right to riot when and where they pleased. So now they have become almost as great a danger to the peace of Italy as the Reds ever were.

When the Fascisti hear that there is a Red demonstration on, and I have tried to indicate the casual and childish nature of ninety-seven out of every hundred Red demonstrations in Italy, they feel in honor bound as the preservers of their country in time of peril to go out and put the Reds to the sword. Now the North Italian Red is father of a family and a good workman six days out of seven; on the seventh he talks politics. His leaders have formally rejected Russian communism and he is Red as some Canadians are Liberal. He does not want to fight for it, or convert the world to it, he merely wants to talk about it, as he has from time immemorial.

The Fascisti make no distinction between Socialists, Communists, Republicans or members of cooperative societies. They are all Reds and dangerous. So the Fascisti hear of the Red meeting, put on their long, black, tasseled caps, strap on their trench knives, load up with bombs and ammunition at the fascio and march toward the Red meeting singing the Fascist hymn, "Youth." The Fascisti are young, tough, ardent, intensely patriotic, generally good-looking with the youthful beauty of the southern races, and firmly convinced that they are in the right. They have an abundance of the valor and intolerance of youth.

Marching down the street, the Fascisti, marching as a platoon, come on three of the Reds chalking a manifesto on one of the high walls of the narrow street. Four of the young men in the black fezzes seize the Reds and in the scuffle one of the Fascisti gets stabbed. They kill the three prisoners and spread out in threes and fours through the streets looking for Reds. A sobered Red snipes a Fascisto from an upper window. The Fascisti burn down the house.

You can read the reports in the papers every two or three weeks. The casualties given are usually from ten to fifteen Reds killed and twenty to fifty wounded. There are usually two or three Fascisti killed and wounded. It is a sort of desultory guerrilla warfare that has been going on in Italy for well over a year. The last big battle was in Florence some months ago, but there have been minor outbreaks since.

To prevent any Fascisti-Red rows happening in Genoa, the fifteen hundred military police have been brought in. They are none of them natives of Genoa, so they can shoot either side without fear or favor. Italy is determined on order during the conference, and the carabinieri, as the military police are called, wearing their three-cornered Napoleon hats, with carbines slung across their backs, with their fierce upturned mustaches and their record as the bravest troops and the best marksmen in the Italian army, stalk the streets in pairs, determined that there shall be order. And, as the Fascisti fear the carabinieri, when they have orders to shoot, as much as the Reds fear the Fascisti, there is a pretty good chance that order will be kept.