

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DR 15

Autonomy, Public Housing and Andreas Hofer

Bozen (Bolzano)
Südtirol, Italy
23 June, 1959

Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Rogers:

"You must understand our history. In 1925 this people was put into a capsule and isolated from the world and from its progress. Now since 1945 they are very slowly taking a glimpse at the world. 'God, Faith, and the Emperor' were sufficient for them until 1918, and after that there was Fascism and another sort of authority."

This was Dr. Friedrich Volgger, editor-in-chief of the Dolomiten, and vice-president of the Südtiroler Volkspartei. And although, as one of the party's radicals he would surely disavow the conclusion, I thought that many of the problems that the South Tyroleans so bitterly lay at the door of the Italian Republic are in fact the results of this encapsulation and of a subsequent, stubborn refusal to look around quickly and catch up with the world.



The Eagle of Tyrol - In Public Again

The Italians admit the sins of the Fascists, and they say that times have changed. They appear honestly astonished and exasperated at the South Tyroleans for continuing to feel threatened and persecuted. The South Tyroleans say that, while methods are now democratic rather than Fascist, the Italian goal remains the same, and they fear the Romans, even bearing gifts. Of this difference of opinion the present impasse is made.

The debate rages around the question of whether or not the de Gasperi-Gruber Accord, as an annex to the Italian Peace Treaty of 1946, has been "fulfilled". The Italians maintain that it has. The South Tyroleans say it has not. In this they are supported by the Austrian government, which has been carrying on bi-lateral negotiations with Rome for many months

and has periodically threatened to carry the dispute to Strasbourg, the Hague, or the United Nations.

The Italians have resented this Austrian activity intensely, maintaining that the dispute with the South Tyroleans is an internal matter, and that Vienna is meddling in the affairs of another state. One can begin by disallowing this argument straightaway. As a part of the Peace Treaty, the Accord has a status in international law, and the Austrian government, as co-signatory of the Accord, certainly has every right to call attention to an alleged failure by Italy to honor an international obligation.

With this legal point out of the way, the question becomes: what are the Italians doing in the province of Bozen that they shouldn't?

The South Tyroleans say:

The Italians have not granted any real autonomy to the German minority, but only the shadow of it. "We do not have sufficient competence (in the provincial government) to protect our people," Silvius Magnago, President of the Regional Legislature and of the Südtiroler Volkspartei, told me. The sorest point, for reasons that will be clear later, is in the field of public housing.

The Italians have not granted "equality" in public administration to the German and Italian languages, as guaranteed in the Accord.

While the population of the Province is 66% German-speaking, among the state employees in the Province there are only 1800 South Tyroleans, but 11,200 Italians. Clearly the provision in the Accord for "equality of rights as regards the entering upon public offices, with a view to reaching a more appropriate proportion of employment between the two ethnical groups" has not been honored.

The Accord speaks of "special provisions to safeguard the ethnical character and the cultural and economic development of the German-speaking element," but the Italian government has instead adopted special provisions designed to promote a rapid influx of Italians (primarily from the South of Italy). The objective is the overwhelming and extinction of the German community.

And there is somewhat vaguer talk, more prevalent in Austria than in South Tyrol itself, of "oppression."

The first thing that strikes the foreign observer, coming to the South Tyrol, is that oppression, if it exists, must be of a very indirect sort.

When I arrived, the town of Kaltern, center of an important wine-growing area in the Adige valley south of Bozen, was preparing to celebrate its local hero in the Tyrol's anti-Napoleonic rising of 1809 - a Major Morandell who was a close friend and trusted lieutenant of Andreas Hofer, the renowned leader of the revolt and national hero of both the Tyrols. For this occasion the clans assembled: the militia of each village and valley in the South Tyrol, each in its ancient and distinct costume, with the proud flags preserved over the centuries. (These militia date from the time of Maximilian I, who excused the ever-independent-minded Tyrolese from service in the Imperial armies, but bound them to take responsibility for defense of their homeland without Imperial assistance.) Every house in Kaltern and the surrounding villages



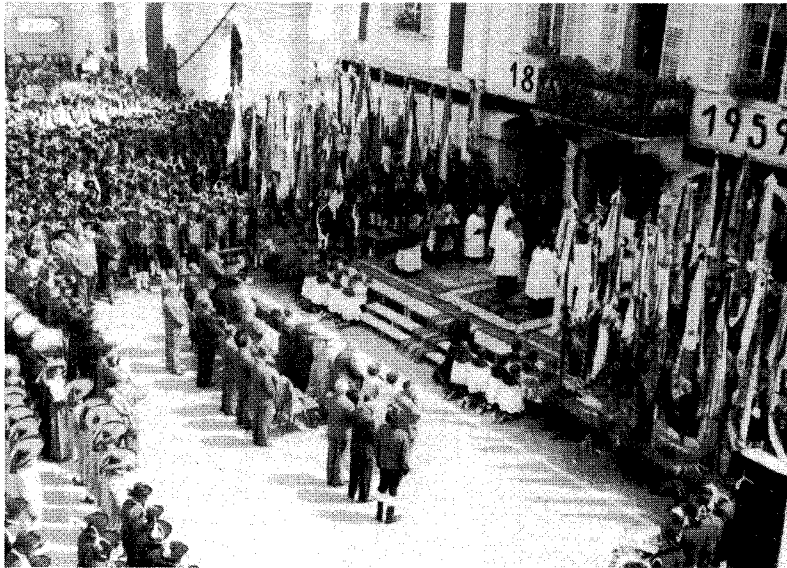
Guardians of Old Tyrol: the Militia.

was decked in the red and white flag of Tyrol and the green and white flag of the Gebirgsjäger, mountain troops who fought for Franz Josef and, more recently, for Adolf Hitler. Dignitaries were on hand from the South Tyrol government and, somewhat provocatively, from North Tyrol (including the Governor of the Austrian province, Alois Oberhammer, whom the Italians had banned from South Tyrol in February).

The speeches - by President Magnago at a demonstration in the castle courtyard on Saturday night and by Senator Luis Sand at a second assembly after a mass in the village platz on Sunday morning - were often provocative, and were so reported in the Italian press. (Magnago, in an interview two days later, complaining of the headlines in the Italian-language newspaper Alto Adige, admitted to me that "perhaps some polemical things were said," but added, "down there near the language border, feeling is strong.")

Said Magnago in Kaltern: "The battle of the South Tyrol people for their existence is no longer fought with guns, but it still requires courage, faith in God, pride and perseverance...

From the events of 1809 we must draw pride and courage to make us remember we cannot surrender. We, too, have our battle. (Applause) Our battle is against no one for whom right, freedom and the adherence to treaties has any meaning. (More applause) But without right and freedom there is no peace.... So long as we do not have genuine and effective self-administration, so long



MASS BEFORE POLITICS? For the Major Morandell commemoration in Kaltern, which lies within the Italian-language Bishopric of Trento, special permission had to be obtained for a German-speaking Suffragan Bishop from Bozen to conduct the field mass.



"Peasants were never nationalists, but the Tyrolean people have always protected their country's freedom from external aggression and preserved...the people's right to co-decision with the ruler of the country." Senator Luis Sand at Kaltern. The honor guard, prepared to place wreaths at the grave of the Hero of 1809, wear the decorations of another war - the Iron Cross with Swastika (forbidden in Germany and Austria).

as our mother tongue is not equally allowed with that of the immigrated Italians, so long can there be, may there be and will there be no peace. (Loud applause)...God preserved us our homeland in 1945, double would be our guilt if we let it go now."

And the demonstration, which had begun with a song about "the holy land in the mountains", ended with another, "The Red Eagle (of Tyrol), the Red Eagle, why are you so red?", and then with the Andreas Hofer Anthem, the national song of South Tyrol. The audience stood, the militia in their great plumed costume hats saluted, but by the third verse no one knew the words.

Senator Sand on Sunday was more cautious, and was more charitably reported by the Alto Adige: "We live in the tragedy of divided Tyrol and the struggle for freedom and our autonomy... The farmers were never nationalists, but only people who want to live in freedom with a share in their government. Today the thrice-divided Tyrol presents a testimonial to faith, homeland and people. Tyrol in 1809 set an example of freedom for Europe; South Tyrol in 1959 presents Europe with an example of the struggle against the revival of Fascism..."

Sunday noon there was a festive banquet for local dignitaries and their guests in the Kaltern hotel. There Dr. Walter Amonn, brother of the former president of the Südtiroler Volkspartei (now considered too moderate), spoke of the flags that had been hidden and rescued during dark days for this occasion, and offered a toast to "the land that will ever proudly bear the name, South Tyrol" (the official name of the region today is Alto Adige in Italian, or Tyroler Etschland in German). Governor Oberhammer then offered a toast from Innsbruck: "To the heroes, honor; to the Land, freedom; to the inhabitants, unity."

The South Tyrolers complained bitterly that the Italian authorities had forbidden the ancient militia to bear arms for this occasion, and had included ceremonial sabers in their definition, and that only a few months before the red-white flag of Tyrol had been banned from such demonstrations.

But to this observer it seemed that the entire festival might have been termed seditious, and that it had been held, complete with foreign flags, and basically anti-Italian speeches, under approval of the Italian Questura said something to the more extreme charges of intimidation.

"They allowed it, in preference to something worse," was President Magnago's comment when I questioned him.

In answer to a written query, the Questura said: "The celebrations on the occasion of the anniversary of the death (sic) of Andreas Hofer which, according to the intentions of the organizing committee, would limit themselves to 'manifestations of historical revocation, devoid of finality and of

political speculation' are taking place regularly in various localities of the Province, in accordance with a program set forth by the organizing Committee, presided over by the President of the Provincial Government, Engineer Alois Pupp.

"We might add, incidentally, that polemical suggestions, with reference to the well-known autonomist aspirations of the SVP (Südtiroler Volkspartei), have been made by protagonists of that party in the course of some of the Hoferian manifestations that have already taken place in Alto Adige.

"As for the display of the Tirolese flag (white-red), it should be pointed out that this does not represent per se a seditious symbol. Its display is held to constitute a seditious manifestation, and as such is denounceable to the A.G., only in a case in which it is accompanied by objective circumstances that in themselves carry seditious meaning."

(Andreas Hofer, by the way, was executed by Napoleon's personal orders in 1810. The celebrations in north and South Tyrol this year are in honor of the revolution he led in 1809.)

The most constant cry of the South Tyroleans is for "Provincial autonomy." Official visitors from the north may speak of this as "the first step" (and so alarm the Italians), but most of the local authorities are careful to say: "It would be sufficient."

Under the present Autonomy Statute (1948) powers delegated by Rome are divided between the Regional government in Trento and the Provincial governments in Trento and Bozen. Reserved powers (justice, security, taxation, customs, state employment and private employment administration, and the schools) are administered through a government Commissioner in Trento and a Vice-Commissioner in Bozen. The Region's powers are primarily in the economic field: agriculture, tourism, communications, some public works, mining, fire protection, property registry. To the two provinces, along with the powers normally granted provincial governments throughout Italy, are added special competence in the cultural field: vocational schools, agricultural protection, handicrafts, and also administration of the Tyrolean (and non-Italian) primo-geniture inheritance laws and of the low-cost public housing built in the provinces.

This is still a very considerable list. Complications arose, however, when the Rome government insisted that the granting of these powers in the Constitution was not, in itself, sufficient to authorize the local authorities to legislate. In almost every instance an "enabling act" by the Rome Parliament would first be required. These have come slowly and reluctantly. The Province, for example, has got control of its kindergartens, but not of any other schools. The picture is further complicated by the fact that the Autonomous Province of Bozen cannot deal directly with the Rome government, but must work through the government of the Autonomous Region in Trento, with its permanent (33 to 15) Italian majority.

The struggle for autonomy has centered for several years on the question of public housing. I have before me an Italian publication of 238 pages on the public housing problem, published last autumn and consisting almost entirely of documents: the relevant laws, the arguments that have appeared in the three newspapers of the region (two of them Italian-language, one German) and in the Austrian, German and British press, and various proclamations by political parties in the Region. The period covered is from September, 1955, to August, 1958. Even a cursory reading gives one an astonishing picture of the amount of passion that can be roused by the question of who should approve how many new apartment houses for whom.

The public housing issue was the immediate cause of the latest flare-up of the entire South Tyrol problem. In January the Fanfani government (which the most extreme Tyroleans in Bozen and Vienna admit showed "good will" toward South Tyrol) at last produced an enabling act in this field. The local authorities in Bozen discovered, to their horror, that this legislation, awaited for ten years, merely allowed them to be "consulted" in two-tenths of the public housing projects to be carried out in the Province. The remaining eight-tenths remained outside their competence.

The three Tyroleans in the Regional Government walked out, and in Rome the issue became a partial cause of the fall of the Fanfani government, when the three Tyrolean deputies in Parliament there left the Coalition. The demonstrations, bombs, closed borders and recalled ambassadors that stirred world interest followed.

To understand why the housing question has become a casus belli for the German-speaking inhabitants of Bozen Province, one must discover that it brings together in combustible form both the question of Provincial autonomy (because Rome will not grant the Province genuine competence in this field) and the question of South Italian immigration into the Province (because almost all of the housing has and, under existing circumstances, must go to Italian-speaking inhabitants).

"Granted that the immigration is not forced any more," Dr. Alphons Benedikter, one of the three South Tyroleans who walked out of the Regional government (he served the function of a Minister of the Interior) and their traditional spokesman on the public housing issue, told me. "But when it is not being done with a purpose (i.e., to encourage Italian immigration), why is public housing being pushed at a forced rate, and why is competence in this field not given to the Province?"

But is the amount of housing being built in Bozen Province disproportionate? South Tyroleans like Dr. Benedikter who, by virtue of their official positions, should know the facts, say categorically that it is. Dr. E. Richter, speaking officially for the Italian Vice-Commissioner in Bozen, said with equal firmness: "They are mistaken in the proposition that the quantity of popular construction in the Alto Adige is proportionately higher than in the rest of Italy." But both sides dodged my request for

specific and up-to-date statistics. Complete figures are available only for the first Seven Year Plan of the INA-Casa building program, which has responsibility for most of the public housing in question and which is the particular bete noire of the South Tyroleans. In this period, April 1949 through March 1956, the Region Trentino-Alto Adige accounted for 1.31% of the total INA-Casa housing built in Italy. The Region contains 1.55% of the population of the country, and 1.53% of those who, by reason of their type of employment, are eligible for INA-Casa apartments.

This does not seem disproportionate, but Bozen Province is not distinguished from Italian Trento in these figures and for the Second Seven Year Plan I know only that 3300 units are built or planned in Bozen (cf. 4100 in the period 1945-56 - no percentages available).

If the question of whether or not Bozen Province is getting more than its share of public housing remains open, there is no question as to who is living in the new apartments: Italians. Approximately 6% (the Tyroleans say 5%, the Italians say 7%) of the INA-Casa units in the Province have gone to Tyroleans who comprise 66% of the population. And that is what has given rise to the charge that the entire program is designed to encourage continued Italian immigration and so lead to the de-nationalization (or Italianization) of the South Tyrol.

The Italians and the Tyroleans agree for once as to how this has happened. The German-language newspaper Dolomiten wrote in a lead editorial on June 13th: "The Italian laws for public housing construction take account of the social structure in Italy, but not of the social structure in South Tyrol." And that just about sums it up.

The Italians are a town-dwelling people, the Tyroleans are peasants who prefer to live on the land. The Italians - at least those who have immigrated into the Alto Adige - are industrial workers and officials, the Tyroleans are farmers. The South Italians who have come to the Alto Adige had absolutely nothing at home in Calabria, and so are willing to live in caves or barracks around Bozen for a couple of years, until housing is available; Tyroleans who want to move to town will not leave the family farm until there is someplace to live, or, if they go, they will have arranged to live temporarily with a town relative.

So, under the rules of the INA-Casa, designed as an answer to the acute housing problem created by war destruction and the growth of industrial towns since then, Tyroleans almost never reach the top of the priority list.

Specifically, INA-Casa financing is based on a social security-type of payment (employees contribute 0.6% of their salaries, to which the employer adds 1.2% of the payroll), and eligibility for an INA-Casa apartment is based partly on the length of time a wage-earner has been contributing, partly on the length of time he has been on the waiting list for housing. Agricultural workers,

household workers, and pensioners are not covered by the scheme. But in Bozen Province (66% German-speaking), 54.3% of those employed in industry, commerce, tourism, finance and local government (total 41,975) are Italian-speaking, only 45.7% are Tyrolean. (The Tyrolean figure would be far smaller if tourism and local government were not included, and the former is only partially covered by INA-Casa.) In agriculture, on the other hand, 90.1% of the 17,172 employed on the land are Tyrolean, only 9.9% are Italian. These, and the 7,567 pensioners (56% Tyrolean) and 4,072 household workers (76% Tyrolean) are not included in the INA-Casa scheme.

The Italian willingness to put up with intolerable living conditions for a time is remarkable. In Bozen at the beginning of 1958, 200 families were living in barracks, 1000 in caves and other "unhealthy locations" (these figures are from a Communist source and may not be accurate). I was told of one cave whose departing occupants (departing for an INA-Casa apartment) received 200,000 Lire (over \$300) from their successors for squatter's rights on the cave. "But why not?" the editor of the Dolomiten and Dr. Benedikter both asked. "In Calabria they never would have had a decent place to live or a decent job. They come here, get a job right away (South Tyrol's 5.01% unemployment rate is the second lowest in Italy), live in a cave or barrack for two years, and then get a modern, low-cost apartment. No one can blame them."

But the South Tyroleans do not agree with the Italians that the German-speaking inhabitants have no housing problem. Because of the strong family bonds of the Tyroleans and their closeness to the land, it just doesn't show. The South Tyrol birthrate (11/1000) is equalled in Italy proper only in Naples and Sicily - breeding has been urged on the Tyroleans as a patriotic duty in the face of Italian immigration, and the farmers have responded with alacrity. As a result, 40% of the population is under 21 years old, possibly a West European record. "The mountain valleys are full, and the young people want to come to the cities," say the Tyrolean spokesmen, "but there is work and housing only for Italians." The situation is aggravated by strict observance of primogeniture in farm inheritance.

The Tyroleans argue that, whether the present housing laws are based on genuine malice aforethought in Rome or only on an Italian centralistic blindness to local problems, the situation can be improved only by giving the Provincial government full authority over public housing in the South Tyrol.

"What would you do then?" I asked Dr. Benedikter, who would be the official in charge of such a program, if it is ever realized.

"We would not stop building, but we would build for our South Tyrol children." This apparently means some construction

of housing for agricultural workers in the countryside, but Dr. Benedikter was a little vague on this point. "We are against a certain forcing of the pace." Does that mean that less would be built? Dr. Benedikter made an effort to dodge this question, then supposed that it would mean less total construction.

Dr. Hans Stanek, Director of the Sudtiroler Volkspartei, was more specific: no housing for any Italian not already living in the Province.

Underlying the housing problem is the more fundamental question of Italian immigration. The Tyroleans are eager to show this immigration as continuing at a virtually undiminished pace since 1923. They point out that the Italian-speaking community in Bozen Province has grown from 3% in 1910, through 8% in 1921 and 24% in 1939, to 34% at the present time. In the three principal towns - Bozen (82,000 inhabitants), Meran (30,000) and the Cathedral town of Brixen (12,000) - the percentage has grown from 5% in 1910 through 51% in 1939 to 72% today. (Bozen is now 80%, Meran is 61% and Brixen is 43% Italian.)

These figures ignore the fact that the percentages are virtually unchanged since 1946, and that the great changes occurred as a result of specific Fascist efforts before 1939 and of the Hitler-Mussolini agreement of that year. After 1945, an initial postwar influx of new Italians was balanced by the return of some 16,000 of the Optanten who had moved to Germany between 1939-1943. Since then the Italian birthrate in the Province plus the Italian immigration has not quite equaled the phenomenal South Tyrolean birthrate (which is several times the north Tyrolean!-

South Tyroleans asked me often, "How long can we keep it up?" to which I was tempted to reply, "until some other form of entertainment comes to the mountains.")

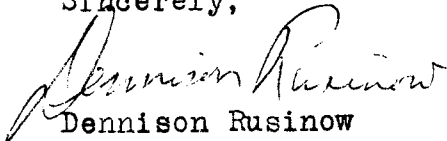
This is certainly a far cry from the "mass immigration" and the "Tyrolean death march" of which the locals have so loudly complained.

In Vienna I asked Dr. Franz Gschnitzer, the Under-secretary for Foreign Affairs who has made his political career out of the South Tyrol dispute and is the particular target of Italian hatred, about this issue. "It is very difficult to establish the facts exactly," he said, "but there seems to have been no great immigration in the last years."

Statistics do not, of course, tell the whole story. The basic problem is psychological, as I shall try to point out later. Here it is sufficient to notice that Bozen is the nerve center of the Province. And in Bozen, an ancient and proud German commercial town, the Tyroleans have found themselves within the last thirty years reduced to a minority of 20%, crowded almost entirely into the Old Town, still largely medieval, and completely surrounded by a teeming modern Italian city. It is small wonder that they feel they are being treated like an African colony.

As for the immigration that does continue, it is a problem that Bozen shares with Milan, Turin, Genoa, Venice and other prosperous centers in northern Italy - and with comparable areas in many other countries. The poor and jobless of Campagna, Calabria and Sicily are drawn to the labor-seeking, wealthy, industrial areas of Lombardy, Piedmont, Venetia, Emilia...and Alto Adige. It is irrelevant that the Bozen "industrial zone" was artificially created by Fascism for the specific purpose of Italianizing the South Tyrol; the industries are there now, and there are powerful local forces, as well as Roman ones, that would be reluctant to see them disappear. The analogy that springs most readily to the American mind is that of various neighborhoods in Manhattan, faced with the Puerto Rican invasion of recent years. But Manhattan is a larger country than South Tyrol, so here the pain is more acute.

Sincerely,



Dennison Rusinow

Received New York July 20, 1959