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

Dear Mr. Rogers:

If the German-speaking inhabitants of Bozen Province are united in a desire to preserve the Tyrolean character of their land, they are less united in their views as to how they should behave toward their Italian overlords. The stranger in their midst quickly becomes aware of at least three rival factions among their leadership, often hardly on speaking terms with one another.

The most vocal, not unexpectedly, are the politicians and journalists now in control of the SVP, who view relations with the Italians as a sort of cold war and who behave accordingly - the more moderate of them advocating a containment policy that is to be achieved through provincial autonomy and control of housing, civil service and education. Their leaders are Party Chairman Dr. Magnago, Party General Secretary Dr. Hans Stanek, Party Vice-Chairman Dr. Friedrich Volgger, who is also editor of the Dolomiten, and most of the present South Tyrolean representatives in the Regional government and the Roman Parliament - of whom the outstanding is Dr. Alphons Benedikter. It is the views of this group, for the most part, that I have been examining in these letters.

Some of these men are more radical than Dr. Magnago, who is accused of weakness in the face of the enemy. One charge of heresy brought against him is that he continues to sponsor allocation of funds from the Regional treasury for support of a football club that is purely Italian!

The second faction is largely composed of South Tyrolean business men, "the older generation of moderates," as an Austrian journalist describes them. They believe that there are definite economic advantages in the link with Italy, that stability and cooperation with the Italians will increase these advantages, that immigration from south Italy - a problem shared with the rest of northern Italy - is an unfortunate but unavoidable part of an industrialization that is for the good of all. Among their spokesmen are Senators Raffeiner and Breittenberg and Dr. Walter von Walther, President of the Bozen Chamber of Commerce - a group dismissed disdainfully by the politicians as "more interested in their own pocketbooks than in the welfare of their people."

For Sen. Breittenberg the central problems are economic and solutions must be sought in cooperation with the Italians. If his own pocketbook is his driving force, he makes a good objective case for it.

"Non-cooperation is a blind alley," he told me. "which will only make the Italians firmer, by confirming their suspicion that our objectives are irridentist." He talked frankly of the change in SVP policy after the Sigmundskron demonstration, which marked the eclipse of his own faction. "The extremists learned Nazi methods of influencing public opinion - I do not mean that they are Nazis, mind you, but only that they have profited from Nazi techniques in propaganda. So today the farmers are behind the extremists. But business people, who are better informed about the real circumstances,

see non-cooperation as a blind alley. One man," he added somewhat bitterly, "has, in my opinion, far too much influence in the party just now, and that is Dr. Stanek." (Dr Stanek, it may be worth noting, was Mayor of Brixen from 1943-45, the years when the Germans actually occupied the South Tyrol.)



Senator Breittenberg

Dr. von Walther, a prototype Chamber of Commerce president with a rosy complexion, a mane of white hair, more energy than his years should allow, and a better command of Italian than the Senator, protested that he is a lawyer, not a businessman. He belittles the importance of Provincial autonomy. "It would mean very little change here," he said. "It means something for Trento Province, which is poorer and would suffer from the separation. It would mean a few advantages, of course, especially in running our own agricultural schools to suit local conditions. But the restriction of immigration is no advantage to us. The Industrial zone (in Bozen) was artificially created since 1935, but some of the concerns there are on their own feet now - although Lancia is probably still artificially supported by government contracts, and aid. You must realize that Bozen is now a city of 80,000, and if the Italians are restricted it might well return to being a small town."

Why are Italians so important to the industries? "We have frightfully few people of our own at our disposal here. The politicians boycotted industry in 1946-47, and it got them nowhere. Instead we must encourage our own people to industrialize their farms and to develop their native tourist industry. To counter the Italian influence German industry here might be useful, but where there is permanent unrest, no foreign investments can be

expected. A 'second Cyprus'? Cyprus is out in the ocean, South Tyrol is in the middle of Europe; the same methods will not be useful. We could start with better relations with Trento..."

With the third faction I was able to establish less contact. It centers around the person of the present Bishop of Brixen, Dr. Joseph Gargitter, and differs from the politicians in favoring more cooperation with the Italians and in taking offense at a certain anti-clericalism in General Secretary Stanek, with his German (if not Nazi) leanings, and in other SVP leaders. The political leader of this group had been the famous Canon Gamper (DR-14), founder of the Dolomiten and of the Catacomb schools, and since the Canon's death four years ago his mantle has fallen, at least partially, on his nephew-in-law, Dr. Toni Ebner, now Director of the Dolomiten and arch-rival of Editor Volgger.

But when I talked with Dr. Ebner, little of this alleged moderation showed through and the views he expressed were very close to those of Dr. Volgger. The major problem is civil service employment, for which the South Tyroleans do not apply because "the language disadvantage is decisive". The "basic principle is denationalization of the Tyrolean people. Fascism and democracy are opposite in principle, and we have democratic freedoms now, so the Italians say, 'Why are you worried about 100,000 more Italians,' but with ever more Italians the land will no longer be Tyrolean. The weaker element will be absorbed. Provincial autonomy would not be enough unless the immigration is ended and the top posts in administration are reserved for the South Tyroleans... We are not against free labor movement in Italy, or in Europe, nor against industrialization, but only against an artificial immigration."

Was this not also a problem in Milan and Turin? "There they have only the social and economic problems. Here we have the ethnic problem on top of that."

If the difference in viewpoint seems vague here, one must remember that personal animosities play an important role in the closed atmosphere of South Tyrol politics. Two years ago Dr. Volgger spent some time in an Italian jail after a bomb plot against the Brenner railroad was discovered, and he still believes that Dr. Ebner was responsible for his being implicated. Under such circumstances, working conditions in the Dolomiten editorial offices can hardly be described as ideal.

It is absurdly typical of this sensitive and petty atmosphere in Bozen that the permanent foreign press corps there, which consists of a young correspondent representing three Vienna newspapers on intimate terms with Dr. Volgger, has decided that he does not dare date the sister-in-law of Dr. Ebner (and niece of Canon Gamper), although she is probably the most attractive girl in town. Of the same genre is the conviction of all hands that any political conversation in a Bozen restaurant or bar is being spied upon by agents of the other factions - and, it goes without saying, by agents of the Italian Questura. A standard prologue to any discussion in a public place is a furtive glance at neighboring tables.

It makes for an exciting - if somewhat Graustarkian - conspiratorial atmosphere.

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After the smoke-filled intrigues of Bozen, the air of the South Tyrol countryside is fresh and welcome. In the distant valleys one sees so few Italians or politicians that it is almost surprising to find that the people do echo the fears and complaints of the provincial leaders. Sometimes these gripes were naive - typical of this sort was the opinion of a school-teacher, asked what problems Italian rule brought, who replied that the South Tyroleans are exploited in taxation by the Roman government and "pay far more than they do in Italy". (In fact, Italian tax levels are rather lower than Austrian - although so are Italian social services.)

But conversations with village mayors and tavern-keepers can be very instructive. Here is an undigested sampling.

The township of Schlanders has 4000 inhabitants and is 90% South Tyrolean. Of five employees in the post office, one is South Tyrolean, and all 28 policemen are Italian. Up until a few years ago the postal service here had remained in Tyrolean hands - a rarity in the Province - because the postmaster had been a Nicht-optant in 1939 and had kept his job. But when he retired, his daughter competed for the job, lost it to an Italian from the south, and within a short time the entire office had been Italianized.



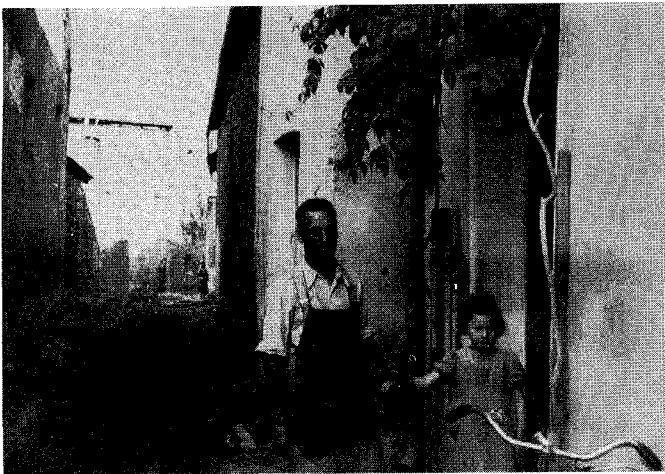
The Countryside - A Vintschgau Village

I had a talk with Herr Wielander, one of five employees (two of them Italian) in the town hall. When I asked him about problems with Italians, he looked around quickly and went over to close the door before speaking, although there was no one else on the floor at the time. He had been an Optant at age 13, had had one year of school in Germany, but could not go on because he did not know enough German, and then had been taken into the Wehrmacht when he was 17. After the war he came home, because "this land, however poor, is my homeland." "What we demand," he said, "is work for all, the right to speak German and the right to keep our own ways. I would like to see South Tyrol a part of Austria." The local priest had been a bulwark of Tyroleanism, but now the higher Church officials are inclined to go hand in hand with the Italian Christian Democrats in seeking a solution. Herr Wielander

did not agree. "We want no compromise. I speak for all the poorer folk here, but the business people are happy with Italian rule because their sly deals work better under the Italians."

He reached in his desk and pulled out a passport. "I'll show you what they do that infuriates us. This pass is for Karl Gamper from this village, but it is issued by the Italian authority here, and you see how they write his name: 'Carlo Gamper'! That hurts!" He looked in another record-book. "So you see, in 1958 104 young people from Schlanders moved to Switzerland."

The township of Laas, with 3500 inhabitants, has 350 Italians. This is one of the highest proportions in the Vintschgau, but that is because there is a large marble quarry outside town, employing 230 workers of whom one third are Italian. The INA-Casa has built four new units here with 18 apartments; 17 of them are inhabited by Italians. The Quarry, which used to be operated by a German-Egyptian-American firm, but passed into Italian hands as expropriated German property after the war, also built a settlement with 20 apartments, and here all 20 went to Italian employees.



Mayor of Laas and Daughter at Home

Ernst Muther is Mayor of Laas, and I caught him in the midst of haying. "I'm sorry," he apologized, "if you could stay a few days, I could entertain you properly, but we've finally got some decent weather and we've got to get the hay in. I'm one of the few mayors who are farmers around here," he added, "most of them are the Gasthaus owners."

Italians in Laas? The police, half the school teachers, three out of seven employed in the town hall, and the quarry-workers and their families. "I know the Italians well, and here we have a certain amount of cooperation. We get along well, but our connections are all specific, not social. They have their own church, their own closed community, their own cafe...there are no mixed marriages here now. There were two or three, but they have gone to live in Old Italy....There are no Italians in agriculture, and no fear of them there. The fear is in industry. Already 20% of our people commute to Switzerland to work. As for civil service, the problem is the schools - the nearest high school is in Meran (40 kilometers away), and only 20 of our young

people go there, out of 300 in the elementary school. That's why no Tyroleans here get state jobs. We want a high school in a nearer town."

Mayor Josef Baer of Burgeis (DR-17), besides his school problems, also complained of the "hidden" employment problem, which does not appear in Italian statistics because it is covered by the tedious business of commuting to Switzerland - 90 out of a total village population of 500 work across the border.

Mayor Fritz del Lago of Eppan, in the Bozener Unterland where the wine is made, has a different commuter problem. His township is only eight miles from the Bozen industrial zone, and some 1100 out of 7600 inhabitants are Italian factory workers. "There is a social problem, but all the property is owned by the Germans (sic), so they have little to do with the Italians and the Italians have no financial power in the township. There is no danger for the farmers. We get along with the Italians, but it is no friendly relationship."

What would Provincial autonomy mean for Eppan? The Mayor shrugged: "Tax money would stay here and be used locally, more Germans would get public jobs." But the problem in the civil service, he thought, arose mainly from the small number of Tyrolean children going on to high school. "That's because the Italians live in the towns, where the schools are."

Then Mayor del Lago made what might have been the most profound analysis of the South Tyrol problem, as it is in the countryside, that I heard: "The Italians are the overlords (Herren), but they are not the owners (Besitzer), and so there is resentment in both directions."

Without pretending to have taken a poll of South Tyrolean public opinion, I got the general impression that everyone was in favor of "Autonomy", vaguely equated with more freedom and less interference by Italian-speaking foreigners, but that only a small number actually have feelings about reunion with Austria. A generation has passed since South Tyrol paid allegiance to Vienna, those who served in Austrian armies are old men now, and in the pre-1918 days the allegiance had generally been of a personal sort - to the Old Emperor - and not of a national sort. It is not insignificant that most of the German-speaking inhabitants of Bozen Province are not quite sure what to call themselves - "German", "Tyrolean", or "Austrian" - but that generally only the more sophisticated, aware of the bad name "German" still has in the world, are careful to say "Austrian".

This is not the impression cultivated by Tyrolean irridentists north of the Brenner. During a celebration of the fiftieth birthday of the Great Dolomite Highway from Bozen to Cortina d'Ampezzo - built by the Austrians in 1909 - I talked with Lieutenant-Governor Joseph Mayr of the Austrian province of Tyrol, down for the occasion as an honor guest. "Provincial autonomy," he told me, "is the first step for these people." I was mildly surprised; this was something even the extremist leaders in Bozen had carefully

avoided saying (Dr. Stanek, for example : "One thing must be quite clear to the Americans, we are fighting only for fulfilment of an Italian law, for Provincial autonomy"), Does that mean Anschluss with Austria? Dr. Mayr answered more vaguely, spoke of European unity and the falling of all national borders, including the Brenner, and of "righting the wrong done in 1918". Is that the feeling of the Tyrol government? "It is." Is it, in your opinion, also the feeling of the South Tyrol provincial government? "Yes, although they do not often say so directly, and must concentrate on the nearer questions."

Editor Volgger, faced with the same question, shrugged his shoulders and ordered more wine: "What is the answer? 99.9% of the South Tyroleans would rather be under Austria than under Italy. But how? I asked this question of an Italian friend some weeks ago. 'You should tell me that' he said. 'All right,' I answered, 'there is only one way: the Bundesheer (Austrian federal army) must drive the Italians to Verona. Since that is unlikely, the whole thing is impossible.' This Brenner border doesn't interest me in the slightest."

That seems to be the answer of most of Dr. Volgger's countrymen. The South Tyrolean farmer cares about the "South Tyrol question" under three circumstances: when the old customs he holds dear are forbidden him, which happens only rarely now; when he must speak to officials who speak a foreign language, which happens almost daily; and when his sons go in search of work or a place to live in town, which will happen more frequently as time goes on and the sons grow up.

Otherwise he is content to sell his fruit and his brown cows to the Italians, who pay higher prices than the Austrians.

Sincerely,

Dennison Rusinow

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