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DR 35  
South Tyrol Again:  
BAS, Bombs, and the One-Party State

St. Antony's College  
Oxford, England.  
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Mr. Richard H. Nolte,  
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Dear Mr. Nolte,

In Bolzano-Bozen the dust is still settling after the United Nations debate on the South Tyrol question. Tyrolean radicals who were in New York, like Friedl Volgger of the Dolomiten, are hailing the debate itself and the resolution that came out of it as "undoubtedly" an Austrian victory, and Italian Neo-Fascist deputies in Rome have angrily agreed with this analysis. Tyrolean moderates also in New York, like Senator Luis Sand, protest that any attempt to name a victor in such a debate is "senseless", but they seem moderately pleased - or slightly relieved. All reported "disillusionment" with the American attitude, viewed as placing the interests of a NATO ally (Italy) ahead of the demands of justice. Italians are generally annoyed that the debate took place at all, and resulted in the acceptance of a compromise resolution, but they are generally satisfied that the Tyroleans received so little support from the uncommitted nations, and none from the Soviet block.

Such were my impressions after a Christmas visit to the disputed area. The date of the visit is important, because it meant that most of the people one wanted to talk to were out of town and unavailable. (I even pursued one of them by cable-lift and horse-drawn sleigh deep into the Dolomites, but failed to catch him. Pity. If successful, such a chase would have been a pleasant story; unsuccessful, it merely looks odd on an expense account: "Hire of sleigh, horse called Mitzi, and peasant - \$1.60".) Therefore the impressions must be more fragmentary even than usual.

Meanwhile, more recent and dramatic events have come to force the after-play of the UN debate off the front pages of local journals. On December 10th another homemade bomb, a crude and ineffective affair made of three handgrenades, tore up the inside of a freshly completed Bolzano apartment building destined to house 13 Italian families, but still unoccupied. No one was injured, but the explosion echoed in the pages of Der Spiegel, the German weekly that imitates Time in format and style and pursues an active, crusading editorial policy that sometimes borders on the irresponsible.

While responsible newspapers like the Neue Zürcher Zeitung writes only of the mysterious South Tyrolean underground organization known as "BAS", said Der Spiegel, informed Vienna journalists speak of "The Fleischmarkt Free Corps" - so-called after the headquarters of Vienna newspaper publisher Fritz Molden at number 3, Fleischmarkt, Vienna I.

"Since the winter of 1958," Der Spiegel continued, "the 36-year-old publisher of the "Presse"-family ("Die Presse", "Die Wochen-Presse", "Abend-Presse" and "Express") has reportedly worked in secret to recruit a small, powerful band - on the pattern of Eoka, the successful Cypriot underground movement of the Greek Colonel Grivas - for the future partisan war south of the Brenner. It should stand ready for 'X-Day' and hasten the return of the South Tyrol to Austria, in case all possibility of a peaceful agreement with Italy should one day be exhausted. Now Fritz Molden, ex-son-in-law of American spy-chief Allen Dulles, calmly demurs: 'I would never play so dilettantishly at war.'

"And: 'If I have fought for years journalistically for the right of self-determination for Italy's 230,000 German-speaking citizens, it does not necessarily follow that I have delivered weapons to them.' It is absolutely untrue, the Vienna 'Presse'-chief added, that he stands at the head of the South Tyrol resistance movement."

This last may now be so, the German magazine suggested, since Molden traveled to Innsbruck on 9 December "to resign his military functions." These then passed to the Tyrolean provincial head of the Austrian People's Party and head of the Tyrol government's South Tyrolean Bureau, Dr. Aloys Oberhammer ("nickname for South Tyrol: 'Oberhammertal'"). The double leadership had previously been necessary, Der Spiegel said, because Dr. Oberhammer has been banned from Italy by the Italian government for two years. (Not quite correct: I met Oberhammer in South Tyrol for an Andreas Hofer celebration in June, 1959.)

In Bolzano, as in the German press, talk of an Eoka-type terrorist movement has grown since I first reported the catchphrase "a second Cyprus" eighteen months ago. The mysterious "BAS" (Der Spiegel guessed that the letters stand for "Befreiungs-Aktion Südtirol" - South Tyrol Liberation Movement) made its first public appearance with leaflets broadcast to the Sigmundskron rally of the South Tyrol People's Party in 1957, when the party's moderate leadership was overthrown by the present junta headed by Silvius Magnago (DR 18). In the past year and a half the number of bomb outrages credited to BAS has increased, and recently there has been a rash of threatening letters to individuals accused of collaboration with the national enemy, signed by the underground movement. I saw one of these, sent to Benno Steiner, an engineer and former Provincial Inspector of Vocational Schools, who now edits the German-language page of Bolzano's Italian newspaper, the Alto Adige. It was a crude effort, calling Steiner a Judas, warning him to protect his family if he could and to prepare for

violent death. So far, however, no one has been killed or seriously injured.

The Alto Adige reprinted the article from Der Spiegel while I was in Bolzano, first in Italian and then in German. It purported to give details about the Molden-backed terrorist organization, which should consist of 320 trained and armed men, largely recruited from among the under-employed younger sons of the German mountain farmers. Eoka in its successful four-year struggle in Cyprus employed a total of 763 men, Der Spiegel pointed out, but never more than 200 at a time; yet it held a British force of 60,000 on the island and achieved a republic. Molden was reported to have invested some six million Schillings (\$240,000) of his personal fortune in arming and training Eoka's Tyrolean imitator, and to have employed the skills he learned as a youthful leader of Austrian anti-Nazi Resistance in 1944-45.

On the other hand, while they were happy enough to reprint the article, both Benno Steiner and Dr. Luigi Cavazzani, editor of the Alto Adige and an old acquaintance, do not personally take Der Spiegel's claims very seriously. Senator Luis Sand, for the South Tyroleans, scoffed at the whole idea: Cypriots, like others who suffered under Turkey, were trained in terrorism for generations, while South Tyroleans are notoriously peaceable. Even during the years of Fascist oppression they almost never resorted to violence and, in contrast with Sicily, the South, or even northern Italy, they have no history of attacks on Carabinieri or officials. Sand himself met Molden for the first time at the UN debate in New York, and "I did not have the impression he is a bomber."

But when I pressed him about BAS, Senator Sand said, with a smile that might or might not have been significant, "You must talk to Friedl Volgger."

Friedl Volgger is the editor of the Dolomiten, the German-language newspaper of the South Tyrol. Unlike some of his colleagues in the present leadership of the People's Party, he has a sound anti-Nazi record and is a veteran of Dachau. He is one of the "extremists" in the party, and in January, 1957, was arrested by the Italians after being implicated in a bomb plot against the Brenner railway. When I visited Bolzano in June, 1959, we had several pleasant chats with good local wine for company - it was Dr. Volgger who told me the story of Waschtl Mayr and Churchill's silver fox (DR 21) and similar anecdotes - but now I found the times and Friedl Volgger changed. He has risen with the fortunes of the extremists of his party, is now a Deputy to the Italian Chamber and to the provincial legislature and was in New York for the UN debate. While I was in Bolzano this month he assisted at another "extremist" triumph, the election of radical spokesman and Party president Silvius Magnago as governor of the Province, to succeed the moderate Ladin, Alois Pupp. Magnago I was unable to see, but I was told that his health, precarious enough in 1959, has deteriorated until he is hardly able to conduct a meeting. Is Volgger, vice-president of the party, dreaming of succession?

Whatever the reason, Friedl Volgger is now acting like a politician on the make. He was cautious and evasive and official, speaking of "South Tyrol and the Party never more unified," dodging a specific statement on BAS. Fritz Molden, with whom he has close personal ties, is "surely our best friend in Vienna. He is too eager and brave, in a land where nothing ever happens. Perhaps he has sometimes said, 'Someone should take action if South Tyrol wants its freedom,' but this does not mean that he has taken action himself by buying us arms."

The unity of the South Tyrol People's Party is a theme which also interests Dr. Cavazzani and the Italians, who use the party's tactics to document their thesis that the German Alto Atesini are Nazi-inspired and Nazi-led. (It is a case of the pot calling the kettle, and the kettle responding in kind. In New York the Italians were repeatedly accused of neo-Fascism, and Senator Sand told me more specifically that the Alto Adige is "a real Fascist newspaper".)

If BAS and threats of terrorism are really marginal so far in the South Tyrol story, valuable chiefly as headline-catchers for the Italian side (even the London Observer inaccurately titled a report in its October 30 issue, "Tirolese Ex-Nazis Turn to Terror"), the attempts of the People's Party to behave rather like a totalitarian organization are not.

The matter is one of very real significance, since it casts doubt from a thoroughly unexpected quarter on the merits of the basic Austro-Tyrolean claim: that the province of Bolzano (the South Tyrol) should be granted provincial autonomy with wide powers. Italy is cursed with an over-centralized bureaucracy, and nearly all her regions would like to have autonomy; awareness of this fact is undoubtedly one reason why Rome is so stubborn in the South Tyrolean case. But the Tyrolean claim has two special arguments in its favor, one moral and the other legal: 1) the district was never Italia irredenta and alone among the present regions of Italy was included in the Kingdom against the express and virtually unanimous will of its population, which subsequently suffered vicious Fascist efforts to Italianize it by force; and 2) autonomy was promised through an Austro-Italian agreement (the Gruber-de Gaspari Accord) appended to the Italian Peace Treaty of 1947.

Against the second of these arguments the Italians have a strong, if purely technical, legal case (hence the Austrian reluctance to take her complaint to the International Court at the Hague); against the first the Italians at the United Nations invoked the ghosts of Pan-Germanism and Nazism, still capable of frightening most of Europe and much of the outside world. In its simplest form, this invocation is invidious and liable to boomerang. If there are former Nazis in the South Tyrol People's Party (including Party Secretary Hans Stanek, who is probably an unrepentant one), there are enough former Fascists in the Italian and regional (Trento) administrations to balance brown shirts with black ones.

All of this, however, begs the most interesting question of all:

who would run a genuinely autonomous South Tyrol, if it were created, and to what ends? The Italians answer simply, to the end of re-incorporation in Austria. I do not believe this is so. It may well be what the Innsbruck government and Fritz Molden have in mind, but it seems most unlikely that the bosses of Villa Brigl (headquarters of the People's Party in Bolzano) want freedom from Rome, only to deliver themselves up to Vienna. It is absolute non-interference by any outside power that they precisely desire.

When they say this (and they often do, in fact), it is put in terms of traditional Tyrolean love of freedom and democracy, of the mountaineers' stubborn independence. The mountaineers have rallied behind this slogan, which seems indeed a fair description of their aspirations. But the tactics of the People's Party tell a somewhat different story. The Alto Adige proclaims this daily, but the mountaineers do not read Italian newspapers, especially when their leaders say they are Fascist.

German-speaking South Tyroleans make up about 66% of the population of the Province of Bolzano. They all vote for the South Tyrol People's Party (SVP), which polled 132,346 in November's local elections, or 63,88% of the provincial total. (Since a higher proportion of the Tyroleans are under 21, it is fair to assume that almost no Tyrolean voted for an Italian party.) They control 15 out of 22 seats in the provincial legislature.

The SVP brooks no opposition within the German-speaking community, arguing that the community is fighting for its existence (phrases like "Tyrolean death march" are frequently used) and cannot tolerate the luxury of internal differences of opinion. This is part of the "hard line" of the "extremists" who took control of the Party apparatus in 1957 (under circumstances described in DR 18). It is in this context that Dr. Volgger's emphasis on Party and country as "never before so united" is to be understood. He and his colleagues hold in their hands the Party, the German-language press, the German-language publishing house, the Provincial government and provincial patronage. If autonomy is achieved, the Provincial government will assume control of schools, public housing, provincial civil service, and employment offices.

"Totalitarian" is a dangerous label, not to be used lightly. Any Tyrolean is theoretically free to vote for one of the seven Italian parties active in the province. In practise, however, it is abundantly clear that he will tolerate almost anything from his own leadership before committing such an act of "national betrayal". It is therefore more relevant to examine the fate of opposition movements within the German community.

One example was given to me by Dr. Cavazzani - an obviously prejudiced source, but I had no opportunity to confirm it (an hour with the newspaper files when I am next in Bolzano should suffice). Brixen (Bressanone) is the third-largest town of the South Tyrol, and seat of the Bishopric. The largest towns, Bolzano and Merano, already have Italian majorities as a result

of Mussolini's forced immigration, and in Brixen the Tyroleans are down to 57% of the total; it is therefore a sensitive point. About five years ago - i.e., before the 1957 change in SVP leadership - local dissatisfaction with People's Party mismanagement in the community crystallized in the formation of a purely local German-speaking opposition, called the White Tower (Weisse Turm). The new group took five seats on the town council away from the SVP, which was reduced to ten seats out of twenty. Deadlock followed until a second, special election produced an eleventh seat for the orthodox party. This year the White Tower offered no candidates and the SVP had the field to itself again. Dr. Cavazzani claimed that economic sanctions were applied - White Tower had been a shopkeepers party in a market town, and boycotts could be effective - and that children of rebel leaders were subjected to inspired bullying in school, while BAS sent threatening letters.

Benno Steiner uses himself as an example of the fate of individuals who differ with the SVP establishment. He lost his official post in 1953 and says he could not find another job in the South Tyrol, although there is no surplus of trained engineers in the province. He then emigrated to Vienna, where he worked until 1958, when Cavazzani picked him up to edit the Alto Adige's "page for German readers". Steiner is no journalist, but is the only man willing to risk the job. He is also a bitter man, so his story must be heard with some reservations.

Whether such stories are true in all their details or not, it is certainly the case that the SVP has created a one-party German state in the South Tyrol, in which the Italian minority is free to play its own political game without significance or meaning except in the four communes (two of them villages) in which they are a majority. It is also the case that this Party's bureaucracy - although not yet its policy-making bodies - is in the hands of a Nazi.

Confirmation of this - but also hope that all is not as lost as the Italians would like to pretend - comes from the SVP moderates, increasingly powerless but not yet to be discounted. Dr. Toni Ebner, Director of the Dolomiten, rival of editor Volgger, and Stanek's predecessor as Secretary of the Party, is still a force to be reckoned with. The Tyrolean Senators, Breittenberg and Sand, are moderates, and Senator Breittenberg spoke openly in June, 1959, of his misgivings about Stanek and the party's new course. Senator Sand told me he had been "ashamed" of some of the radical things said in election speeches of the last two years - but spoke also of the need for absolute unity in the party.

A close personal friend and keen observer of the Bolzano political scene ventured the opinion that the Tyrolean electorate remains moderate in its own views, that the present party leadership is uncomfortably aware of this, and that their awareness does and will continue to inhibit them. Caution was reinforced last April, when Fritz Molden hired the Allensbach Institute, a West German Gallup poll organization that has done startlingly well forecasting the last two German federal elections, to come down to the South

Tyrol and conduct a survey. Some 12% of those asked were in favor of "opening the attack immediately", and an additional 14% said they would support such a struggle if it came. But 35% were opposed to radical action in any form, and 39% would wait and see. Although publicly pleased, Molden and the SVP are said to be privately discouraged by these results.

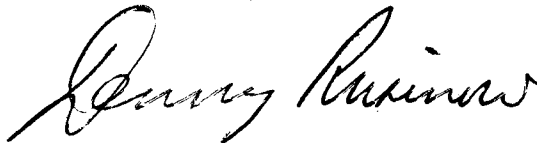
On the other hand, the November provincial elections saw a change in a significant tactic of the party's radical leadership, which had continued to put forward well-known moderates as candidates at election time. Now they offered more of their own number, and the appearance of these - headed by Dr. Volgger - in the new provincial legislature that gathered last month is a sign of growing confidence.

In this same spirit of confidence, Silvius Magnago was led to make a speech promising the Italian minority in the province "every guarantee of good treatment" after autonomy. The Italian reaction to the idea that they should need such guarantees in their own country is easy to imagine, and Senator Sand muttered to me that the speech had been "tactless", adding that Magnago was not a well man.

I do not mean to imply acceptance of the Alto Adige label "totalitarian" for the People's Party. The most that one can say with certainty is that the South Tyrol is effectively a one-party state, and that control of the party apparatus has fallen into suspect hands. Add that the party's program is economically and socially anti-progressive, and all of this suggests only that provincial autonomy has some practical aspects that have been little noticed outside the province. None of this was untrue eighteen months ago, but the tendency has become disturbingly clearer.

My winter trip to Bolzano was primarily for the purpose of historical research, and conversations about contemporary politics were a sparetime activity. The November elections having produced no significant changes locally - the Communists and the Neo-Fascists each moved up about one per cent (to 3.13% and 7.08% respectively), but no other party gained or lost more than half a point and the composition of the legislature was unaltered - it seemed that BAS-bombs, the fun and games of Fritz Molden, and the tightening grip of the radicals on the SVP were the only news worth reporting. They should not be given more weight than that.

Yours sincerely,



Dennison Rusinow.