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Terrorism in the South Tyrol, 1961
II. Responsibility and other Speculations

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Dear Mr. Nolte:

Four immediate questions are raised by the events of the summer in these mountain valleys on Italy's northern border and peace or war in the South Tyrol will depend on the answers: Who is organizing and paying for the "South Tyrol Freedom Fighters", and what are they after? How much support, passive or active, can they look for from the South Tyrolese peasantry, if they attempt to continue their terrorist campaign? What effect are these events having on the "inner circles" of the South Tyrol People's Party? And does the Italian Government really intend to undertake a substantial revision of the Trentino-Alto Adige Autonomy Statute to meet legitimate South Tyrol grievances?

If the Italian police think they have an answer to the first question, they are not making it public. The Italian and Austrian press, preoccupied with polemics, is unhelpful. It has become increasingly clear, however, that the answer must be sought beyond Italy's borders.

The obvious signs point to Innsbruck, and particularly to the Berg Isel Bund. This frankly irredentist organization, named for the mountain just south of Innsbruck where Andreas Hofer and the Tyrolese revolutionaries of 1809 checked Napoleon's armies, has been in the forefront of the South Tyrol "self-determination" struggle for many years, collecting money throughout the German-speaking world for the "oppressed brothers" south of the Brenner and spending it on propaganda, libraries, schools, scholarships to Austrian and German universities and the like. Many highly suspect individuals, like the propagandist Wolfgang Pfaundler, who runs free in Austria despite the guns and explosives found in his Innsbruck apartment in the spring, are among Berg Isel's leaders, and a large number of the South Tyrolers arrested this summer were suspect because they are among the Bund's Italian subscribers. The most knowledgeable of the South Tyrol moderates I have talked to, political opponents of the Berg Isel Bund and its irredentist goals, are convinced, however, that the Bund as an organization is not involved in the terrorist campaign, although some extremist members undoubtedly are. The source of funds must be sought elsewhere, they say, and add that Bund chief Dr. Eduard Widmoser does not have it in his character to support terrorism, whatever the Italian press may say to the contrary.

I report this for what it is worth. It seems to me quite possible that a leader of the Bund who is also a leader of the terrorist organization - Pfaundler may be one such - might easily have diverted some Berg Isel funds from propaganda to more nefarious uses. To be certain, one would have to know much more about Berg Isel bookkeeping. There are in addition many similar organizations, especially in Bavaria (the German students arrested after the 9th September outrages were all from Munich or Nürnberg), that might similarly be used. It is certainly in the character of the leaders of rightwing German nationalist organizations I have met elsewhere to turn a blind eye to such goings-on, even if they were unwilling to dirty their own hands farther than that.

It would be nice to be able to name names. Pfaundler, the ex-Tyrol chief of the Austrian People's Party Alois Oberhammer, and Vienna publisher Fritz Molden (DR-35) have all been specifically cited by German as well as by Italian journalists. Moderate German politicians here in South Tyrol are ready to believe these charges, but what is more significant, so apparently is Dr. Friedl Volgger, a leading South Tyrol radical and personal friend of all three, himself suspected of involvement by many of his opponents here.

Dr. Volgger is a particularly interesting figure, and worth a lengthy aside at this point, since his career provides a useful insight into the subtleties and complications of local politics usually ignored outside the province (see also DR-19 and DR-35). He is of peasant birth and unlike his colleague, Party Chairman and Provincial Governor Magnago, one of a characteristically large South Tyrolese mountain family, who studied at Innsbruck University under a prominent Gross-deutsch ("Pan-German" is a usual but inaccurate translation) professor amid the ideological ferment of the 1930's. In Bolzano he became a disciple of the devoutly nationalist, but firmly anti-Nazi journalist-priest, Canon Michael Gamper, spiritual leader of the German-Tyrolese resistance to Fascist Italianization efforts. In 1939 Volgger was one of Gamper's lieutenants in the latter's gallant effort to persuade the South Tyrolers not to opt for German citizenship in fulfilment of the Hitler-Mussolini agreement that was to end the South Tyrol problem through a transfer of populations. As a reward for these efforts, he was arrested by the Germans within a week of their occupation of South Tyrol in September, 1943, and spent the rest of the war in Dachau. Emerging, he was sent to Paris to plead with the Allies then negotiating the Italian Peace Treaty, for the return of South Tyrol to reborn Austria. As responsible editor of Gamper's (and the SVP's) Dolomiten in subsequent years, he earned a reputation as a radical nationalist, and in 1957 was briefly arrested for alleged involvement in a bomb plot against the Brenner railroad. The same year he became Vice-Chairman of the SVP (under Magnago), when the party radicals took over the

party executive, and he was a representative in the Italian Parliament in earlier years (but not at present, as a slip-of-the-mind caused me to write in January). *

On the 23rd of August this year he resigned as responsible editor of the Dolomiten.

With this personal history, Friedl Volgger's views on terrorists and terrorism become doubly significant. He had always opposed such efforts, he reminded me last week, "not because they are ineffective, but because I never thought the South Tyrolers capable of carrying them through." And how right recent events had proved him! (Once again the old comparison was made with the centuries-old Cypriot tradition of violent opposition to Turkish oppression.) On the other hand, he would not accept either of the easy labels "Nazi" or "Communist" for the summertime terrorists of the Alto Adige (many devout peasants here, horrified at the explosions, are absolutely convinced that they are part of a Communist plot to divide the anti-Communist west). Whatever else they may be, Volgger said, no one can call Pfaundler, Oberhammer or Fritz Molden a Communist or Nazi (Molden, once son-in-law of Allen Dulles, was a leader of the Austrian anti-Nazi resistance movement during the war). Does this mean to imply that he believes these three are among the leaders of the terrorist organization? To this I received the same curious reply that Volgger had given to the same question in December: "Molden is a courageous and energetic man, and life for him in today's little Austria is simply too dull (German: ihm ist es im heutigen Oesterreich einfach zu fad!); He wants Austria to have a foreign policy, and South Tyrol is the only possibility."

As for the other two, from this and other conversations of the past fortnight the following judgment emerges: Oberhammer was informed, at least, of what was planned; Pfaundler is a man of unreliable political judgment, inclined to enjoy intrigue. That is also reported for what it is worth, to look back on when and if the truth is known.

This is not to say that neo-Nazis are not also involved. I have not found anyone who really doubts the justice of the arrest of SVP Secretary Hans Stanek, for example, although several people (like Dr. Volgger) are convinced that the specific evidence that provided the basis for his arrest - the 250 terrorist leaflets found in his Brixen house - was planted on him by the police. (Could even Stanek have been so stupid as to have kept such incriminating material in his home? they ask. On the other hand, where could the police have got such a large number of terrorist leaflets at once, unless they printed them themselves?)

What are the men behind the terrorist organization - these or others - trying to do? This is a sticky question; we seem to have a crime without a motive. Annexation of the South

Tyrol to Austria? Foreign Minister Segni and Interior Minister Scelba both reminded Parliament in the first week of the outrages that this could only be accomplished through a war, which Italy would have to lose; men of the caliber of those implicated as terrorist leaders are intelligently enough to know that this is true even if the peasants who set the explosives are not. Friedl Volgger said as much in 1959, and he repeated the statement in the same words this week: "The only way that border will be changed is for the Austrian Army to drive the Italians to Salurn; that seems unlikely to happen!" Yet the only alternative answer is the unsatisfactory one I was given by several "moderate" SVP politicians: the men involved are adventurers and opportunists, irresponsibly seeking to build careers out of the discontent of the Tyrolese peasantry with the present system. Take it or leave it.

As for the much-abused South Tyrol peasantry, it is difficult for any foreigner (including any Italian) to know what they really think. If I were to generalize from my own contacts among them, I should say that they are opposed to, and appalled by, the terrorist acts of this summer. But they are equally convinced that the blame lies with the Italians and/or the North Tyrolers; their own people, now that they are reluctantly convinced that some of them are involved, are only victims - of the Italians, who bully them and will not let them find jobs, and so ripen them for mischief, and of the Innsbruckers, who organize the mischief for their own obscure purposes. There are variants on this theme (the one that substitutes Communists for Innsbruckers is the most common), but the final conclusion is always that the local boy-terrorist is a victim of a system and of intriguers who should be excused, defended, and, if necessary, hidden. And that Italian police are beastly people who hate South Tyrolers on principle and delight in false arrests. In this sense, my two more sophisticated Bolzano (German-speaking) friends may have been partly right when they lodged a minority opinion with me by maintaining that Italian police measures, police brutality, and the large number of false arrests with which the police have demonstrated their zeal, all have served to solidify the peasantry in passive support of the terrorists.

The Italian Government is now operating on the basis of a different premise, to which I shall return later.

I have already mentioned the schizophrenia of the Dolomiten in the fact of the bombs of June and July, a day-to-day wavering in attitude that was the delight of the rival Italian-language daily of Bolzano, the Alto Adige. This schizophrenia was nothing more than a reflection of the old split in the Volkspartei leadership, which the terrorist outbreak had suddenly made acute. The Party moderates, ousted from the Party machinery by the 1957 revolution of the radicals, but left as Parliamentary representatives (because the radicals feared to make too many changes at

once?) have raised their heads once more. The struggle for control of the Unity Party of all the Tyrolers is on again, and its outcome may be decisive for the future of the South Tyrol problem.

The tangible problems of the Alto Adige today, as I tried to show in my 1959 letters from Bolzano, are primarily social and economic, and only secondarily national. This basic fact is hidden from the majority of the South Tyrolers by the psychological legacy of an unjust annexation in 1919 and of twenty years of acute national persecution by the Fascist Regime. This is an intangible but pre-eminent psychological problem that is overlooked by most Italians, but it is one that has been kept dramatically and (as this summer has proved) dangerously alive with the active help of Volkspartei progaganda and the German-language press. The leaders of the German-speaking community must therefore bear a heavy burden of responsibility for the climate of tension that nefarious forces outside Italy's borders have been exploiting this summer (a responsibility shared, to be sure, with the Italian nationalists and ex-Fascists who still say and who continue to believe that German-speaking Italians are an anachronism not to be tolerated). It is, I believe, a growing awareness of this responsibility that is bringing about a crisis within the SVP.

This is the most important thing that I have to say in these letters.

Of the true nature of the South Tyrol problem the business leaders of the German-speaking community have long been aware. But these men - representative examples are Chamber of Commerce President Walter von Walther, ex-Senator and chief of the Provincial Tourist Office Breitenberg, and the Bozen wholesaler and first chairman of the SVP Erich Amonn - seem to have lost contact with the overwhelming peasant majority of their countrymen and have largely abdicated any political role. They have joined the Italians in blind impatience at the simple stubbornness of the peasantry.

It is of far greater significance that many - perhaps most - of the present leadership of the Party are also aware that the real problems of their country are economic and social, and that the "national" problem is today primarily one of healing old wounds, and only secondarily one of keeping a watchful eye on the malevolent efforts of neo-Fascists and Italian nationalists. A notable exception to this rule seems to be Governor Magnago himself. In his simple-minded social conservatism, which categorically rejects industrialization, the establishment of the proposed bi-lingual University of Bolzano, or any other measure that might alter the traditional Tyrolese peasant social structure, he preserves his own integrity by honestly confusing social change with destruction of Tiroler Volkstum. (An interesting

psychological theory might be based on the observation that Magnago, almost alone among the South Tyrol leaders, has no personal roots among the Tyrolese peasantry.) But a Party "radical" like Friedl Volgger is as ready as a "moderate" like Toni Ebner to admit the facts of South Tyrol life in private conversation. And neither radicals nor moderates have admitted them in public print.

What is the difference, then, beyond the obvious level of personal political rivalry, between SVP "radical" and "moderate" terms in every-day local usage? It seems to be this: The "radicals" were willing to beat the drum of the national threat, because it was eagerly heard by the embittered peasants ready to blame everything on the evil Italians, and because they themselves really believed that only a firm line of non-cooperation and threats would wring more concessions to local autonomy from the ever-nationalist-minded Italian Government. On this platform they took over the Party machinery. And a corollary of this platform, accepted by the peasants and also by the moderates, was that the Volkspartei must remain the exclusive voice of the South Tyrol people until the problem of local autonomy is solved. The "moderates", therefore, while continuing to believe that a cooperative attitude toward Rome, which would persuade Italian liberals that the loyalty of the German-speaking minority to the Italian State was to be trusted, would produce more concessions, were willing to withdraw to the sidelines and leave the running of the Party to "those who were so eager to run it, and thought they could run it better" (the words of a leading "moderate").

The events of 1961 have exposed the grave dangers of a party line that encourages distrust and hatred between the national communities. The honest men among the "radicals" (this is only my personal judgment) are thoroughly alarmed at the situation they have helped to bring about. But they are in too deep to withdraw with conviction or success. Their condemnation of terrorism rings a little false, even though it may be sincere. The "moderates" are meanwhile waking up to their own share in responsibility for the situation, growing out of their meek submission to the 1957 party line, which they, too, have enunciated (albeit in more pacific vocabulary) in Parliament and in the German-language press. They are now wondering if it is too late to speak the truth with political profit.

The Dolomiten, with its powerful influence over local public opinion, wavered, and then began to lean increasingly toward the moderate side, reporting outbreaks of terrorism more fairly and giving increasing prominence to statements by men like Austrian Federal Chancellor Gorbach that violence could only damage the true interests of the South Tyrolers. On 23 August Friedl Volgger resigned as responsible editor. He told me he had done so on his own initiative, because he "was no longer willing to accept technical legal responsibility for an editorial policy" which he did not control. (A "responsible editor" under Italian law is a man who must answer in court,

and go to jail, for libel or crimes like "defamation of the nation" perpetrated in the columns of his paper. Toni Ebner, director and chief owner of the Dolomiten, cannot be responsible editor because he is also a Member of Parliament with parliamentary immunity.) The new responsible editor, Dr. Vincenz Oberhollenzer, declared that the change in personnel meant no change in policy; "Our press was, is and remains, in accordance with its chosen task, the herald and the alarm-signal, calling us to the protection of our Volkstum..." In a sense this was true; the change had already occurred, and it was only a very slight one of emphasis and degree. Beyond that the Dolomiten was still not prepared to go.

(Dr. Oberhollenzer's public statement was made only after the Alto Adige had called attention to the quiet change in the Dolomiten's masthead. The duel between the Dolomiten and the Alto Adige - in whose pages the German-language paper is always referred to as "the Museum Street rag" - is incidentally a source of unending fun for any American raised on tales of the classic duels among the New York newspapers of a generation or two ago. It is the healthiest aspect of Alto Adige politics today, and would be the most hopeful if the two national communities would only read one another's press. Toni Ebner tells me that the Alto Adige does, in fact, have about 10,000 German-speaking readers, but the German press has thus far been unable to make an equivalent invasion of the Italian community.)

The masthead alteration was, however, symptomatic. At this point it is not unduly risky to prophesy that control of the SVP machinery will be disputed during next spring's annual party elections, for the first time since 1957, and the Dolomiten and Volksbote, while formally neutral in the inner-party struggle that will precede the party congress, will be working for a "moderate" comeback.

Party Vice-Chairman Volgger, to be sure, says that this will not happen. "Everyone is agreed that Party unity comes first, and as long as Magnago and I stand together, there will be no change. Besides, the present leadership has produced results, which the earlier did not: we now have the Special Commission." On what subjects Magnago and Volgger stand together, beyond the necessity of keeping the Party unified (and in the hands of their own faction), was not clear, since Volgger also admitted that "Magnago is socially unprogressive, but we are educating him gradually."

Which of these prophecies will be fulfilled depends to a large extent on an outside factor - the Italian Government. As I pointed out in my last letter, Rome began the summer with a series of anti-terrorist police and political measures, all too often beside the point in any case, which served as splendid

raw material to the German nationalist propaganda mill, supported by sometimes-substantiated reports of police brutality accepted in their most exaggerated form by the local populace. Sometime in August, second thoughts began to predominate and, while police measures were necessarily continued, a more positive approach was added in the form of Interior Minister Scelba's sensible speeches and his proposal for a Special Commission.

In the Alto Adige these latest Roman efforts have been variously received. Radicals and moderates alike are convinced that the Government's new initiative was not its own idea, but that it was suggested, rather firmly, by the ambassadors of Italy's NATO allies, and especially the Americans. (Dr. Volgger told me he had definite, but confidential, proof of this intervention. This may well be true, but I am inclined to ascribe the theory to a Tyrolese reluctance ever to admit that an Italian Government could be motivated by either good will or good sense.) The radicals have reverted to their timeo Romanos et dona ferentes position: the Italians are seeking to isolate us from our Austrian friends by substituting Rome-Bolzano discussions for Rome-Vienna ones, and when they have succeeded, we will find that no real concessions are involved; from the Special Commission nothing good will come out, as one can prove by examining its composition. The moderates, true to their old form, have said: no, the Italians are probably sincere, and they are also testing our loyalty to the Italian State by seeing if we are in fact willing to accept a compromise agreement; let us go into the Commission with good will and awareness that this may be a last chance, and if the Italians will meet us half way, we shall have resolved the South Tyrol problem.

This difference in attitude, of which I was already conscious as the result of private conversations, was rather awkwardly revealed in the German-language press last week (a revelation that the usually-watchful Italian press somehow seems to have missed). On 7 September the weekly Volksbote carried a front-page editorial setting forth the radicals' doubts about the Commission. It was unsigned, but I learned afterward that it had been written by Friedl Volgger and published without the knowledge of publisher-director Toni Ebner, who was out of town. (Grumbled Frau Ebner: "Toni doesn't dare turn his back for a moment!") Six days later the Dolomiten carried a report of firmest optimism written by Ebner himself from Rome, where the Commission was installed on the 13th; the article was reprinted, still with the headline "No Lack of Good Will on the Part of South Tyrol's Representatives", in the next day's Volksbote, in the same front page position that Volgger's article had occupied a week before.

With this dispute, the radicals have staked their reputation on the failure of the Commission (partly, perhaps, because Magnago is the only member of the radical faction to

be a member), and the moderates have staked theirs on a faith in its positive results. The amount of re-insurance each faction has given itself in the form of qualifications and reservations is slight. (The radical claim that the appointment of the Commission is the product of their hard-line policy, repeated by Magnago in an interview with an Innsbruck paper this week, is the only specific piece of re-insurance I have yet seen.) If the Commission fails, therefore, the radical hold on the SVP is almost sure to be unbroken; if satisfactory proposals can be produced, and got through the Roman Parliament, the moderate cause will be on its way to victory.

So it is up to the Special Commission in the first instance, and to the Italian Government in the second. Through the opportunistic drum-beating of the radicals and the timid acquiescence of the moderates, the SVP has lost control of the situation. It is up to Rome, with the anxious and belated co-operation of the South Tyrolese moderates, to regain that control.

The radicals had always said that peace or war depended on Rome!

Yours sincerely,



Dennison Rusinow

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