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DR 40
Terrorism in the South Tyrol, 1961
III. Prospects for the Commission

Bolzano (Bozen), Italy
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Dear Mr. Nolte:

If one may operate on the basis of logic, rather than of prejudice or rumor, one could reasonably suppose that the Italian Government has instituted the Special Commission to study the Alto Adige problem because wiser heads have prevailed for once in Rome, and that they have prevailed by arguing that re-starting direct Rome-Bolzano talks will cut Austria out of the pattern and re-establish the problem as an Italian internal one, while simultaneously isolating the terrorists and their supporters by bringing the rest of the populace over to the side of law and order, and that a successful outcome of the Commission's work will isolate the Bozen radicals in turn, confirm the Bozen moderates who have participated in the talks in their dependance on Rome, and thus reduce the whole Alto Adige problem to controllable size.

If this construction of the thinking of the Fanfani Government is correct, we may be fairly optimistic about the immediate work of the Commission. The truth is probably a little less positive. It is an open secret here (all political secrets in Italy are traditionally open) that some members of the Government, notably Foreign Minister Segni, were opposed to the new conciliatory policy. It seems reasonable to believe that its chief protagonist was Interior Minister Scelba himself, an opinion in which the South Tyrol parliamentarians, on good personal relations with him in Rome, concur. If this is so, it also means that Scelba will consider himself under pressure to deliver up an agreement - also a hopeful sign. For their part, the South Tyrolese members of the Commission with whom I have spoken seem to be aware that the Commission's recommendations must not appear to make too many concessions to the German-speaking minority, if the recommendations are to win official Government support before Parliament, since the Fanfani Government is already in political difficulties and must still look to the nationalist Right for its Parliamentary majority. This awareness, too, is hopeful.

On the negative side there are Segni and his (presumed) faction in the Cabinet, the hyper-nationalist attitude struck by almost the entire Italian press in the Alto Adige question,

the related sensitiveness of Parliamentary deputies toward any apparent concession to German nationalism, and, above all, the continuing power of the terrorist organization to sabotage any agreement by unifying Italian public opinion against concessions "under duress of terrorist bombs".

It is also unfortunate, as the South Tyrolers have complained, that the Government's commitment to the Commission was not made clearer by the nomination of a Cabinet minister as chairman. However, the actual chairman, the Social Democrat Paolo Rossi, seems a genuinely neutral figure and a happy choice, and Minister Scelba made a special point of installing the group in Rome with his blessing and a long speech of good wishes. It may also be unfortunate, as the Alto Adige has complained, that the Italian-speaking third of the population of Bolzano Province is represented only by Italian parliamentarians from the sister-province of Trento, whose interests are not identical with those of the Bolzanesi. But these are not serious defects. (Nor is the nomination of Francesco Prugger as representative of the Ladin community, although the mayors of all the Ladin townships afterward sent a joint letter of protest to Rome, complaining that Prugger would in no case be their choice of a representative.)

By the time you read this, the Commission will have begun its work, perhaps to the accompaniment of more terrorist bombs. I think it is worth examining briefly what the ideal outcome, within the limits of the politically possible, might look like.

If we accept that the interests of the inhabitants of Trento Province are only marginally involved, to the extent that no changes in the constitution of the Autonomous Region Trentino-Alto Adige should leave them with less autonomous powers than they now have, two groups, and only two, are vitally concerned with this problem: the German-speaking South Tyrolese and the Italian-speaking Alto Atesini of Bolzano Province, respectively two-thirds and one-third of the population.* The one justified anxiety an Italian Government would feel in granting further measures of autonomy to the Province is that it would be delivering up the local Italian minority to the doubtful mercies of a Provincial Government run by the present bosses of the SVP, with their known anti-Italian passions and socially anti-progressive instincts (if their social instincts are really progressive, as Friedl Volgger tells me, this in not publically apparent).

*Technically, of course all the inhabitants of the province are "Alto Atesini" in Italian and "Südtiroler" in German, whatever language they speak, but the distinction I have made throughout these letters is generally accepted as a verbal convenience.

The point was put in more general terms by two Italian-speaking Bolzanese, Giuseppe Farias and Lidia Menapace, both Christian Democrats, in an article in the Bologna political monthly Il Mulino (August, 1961), which incidentally provides the most objective analysis of the Alto Adige situation I have seen written by an Italian:

"In any democratic constituency, homogeneous from the point of view of nationality, the majority is formed on the basis of ideological and programmatic agreements of a politico-administrative nature. The minority that results from this process can aspire to become a majority by means of constructive criticism, directed at public opinion.

"However, in the Provincial Council of Bolzano the majority and the minority are formed on the basis of the number of councilors belonging to the two linguistic groups, with the result that the minority can never hope to become a majority, unless one theorizes the breakup of the other linguistic group. This is a hypothesis unlikely to be verified in reality, even if the South Tyrolese group gives birth to more parties. It is therefore evident that the minority group is destined to be unable to make its weight felt in important decisions that concern its very existence and development..."

To remedy this situation, the present Autonomy Statute superimposes the Region, combining Bolzano and Trento provinces, in which the roles of majority and minority as they exist within Bolzano province are reversed. This solution is no solution. As the Il Mulino article points out, "it tended to transform the relations between the two provinces into relations between an 'Italian' province (Trento) and a 'German' province (Bolzano); in reality, the difficult problem of the equilibrium between the two linguistic groups within the province of Bolzano was simply not faced in matters that concern the province, and in matters that concern the region it was conditioned by another province, which regarded autonomy as the realization of its own separate aspirations for self-government."

The solution is not to grant "guarantees" of equal treatment to the Italian minority in the province, as Governor Magnago tactlessly suggested in a speech last winter (DR-35), but (quoting Il Mulino again) "to grant to both linguistic groups in the province of Bolzano the possibility of contributing responsibly to the achievement of prosperity for the entire community, in a mixed-language area, without leaving this responsibility solely to the majority group." Suggestions for achieving this goal include enlarging provincial representation in parliament from two senators and four representative to three senators and six representatives, with the additional senator and representatives reserved to the Italian-speaking minority.

It is significant that every South Tyrolese politician I talked to this week had read the Il Mulino article and thought it made good sense. This is in itself a considerable step forward. A basic problem here has been the continued tendency of Tyrolese leaders to think and talk as though the South Tyrol were still exclusively a German-speaking community, as it was before 1918. If Italians generally are unconscious that theirs is a multi-lingual state, the South Tyrolers have been equally unconscious that theirs is a multi-lingual province. The structure of the Autonomous Region, tending to pit "German" Bolzano against "Italian" Trento, has encouraged this mode of thought, as we have seen.

If ways are thus found to assuage legitimate Italian fears of SVP "dictatorship" in the Alto Adige, and to satisfy the legitimate Italian desire to participate in the governing of the province, what of the grievances of the South Tyrolese, which did, after all, start the trouble?

The official demand of the SVP, seconded by the Austrian Government before the United Nations last autumn and in bi-lateral talks with the Italians in Milan, Klagenfurt and Zürich this spring and summer, is "full autonomy". It seems pointless to go again into the arguments that have surrounded this demand for the past 15 years (DR-15). The phrase is subject to varying interpretations, but what is important today is that it has become a catch-phrase, a panacea for the South Tyrolers and an anathema for the Italians. Perhaps the Austrian Foreign Office still takes it at face value; I doubt if the South Tyrolese politicians do.

Three South Tyrol representatives on the Special Commission have told me privately that they consider "full autonomy" a good first bid in the bargaining that is about to begin. This implies readiness to lower their sights. How far?

One leading SVP politician, of "moderate" stamp, but who perhaps should remain anonymous here, put his personal views this way: (I am paraphrasing him, so cannot use quotation marks) The Italians look as though they are ready, at long last, to make concessions to our legitimate desires. But, given the state of Italian public opinion and of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, no dramatic changes in the Autonomy Statute could ever be made law. I do not think this is necessary; I believe we can get what we want within the framework of the existing Statute, and that Scelba is ready to help us. This will only come after hard bargaining. He will make offers generous enough to test us; if we refuse them, the Government will be able to say that we do not want peace, but are really aiming at self-determination, at Anschluss with Austria. Against that threat they know what measures to take.

We must have more opportunity for our people in public employment (DR-16). This means a special bi-lingual entry examination, and a guarantee that a South Tyroler on public service

will not be sent out of the Province unless he wishes to be. I think the Italians are ready to meet us on that one.

We must have adequate power to administer our own German-language schools and cultural affairs, without tedious and unnecessary bureaucratic interference from Rome. The same applies to economic development, which must be geared to local conditions, which are different from those of the rest of Italy, as is the problem of public housing. In industry and commerce we must insist that the native labor force is fully employed before jobs go to workers from other provinces. These will be more difficult matters. But it can be done within the framework of existing statutes, without touching the constitution...

If this man is right in his optimism, this will make a good start. Distrust and lack of communication between the two national communities will remain. One has only to hear a Tyrolese child of seven repeat phrases like "Wop pigs!" ("Welsche Schweine") to know that it will take more than a generation for dislike to vanish - if it ever does. The "South Tyrol problem" will not disappear. But it might be got down to manageable size - become a provincial problem and cease to be a European one.

Much depends on whether the Romans are sincere or not, on the sharpness and sensitivity of the South Tyrolese members of the Commission, and (unhappily) on whether or not the police really have broken the back of the terrorist organization - as they are claiming, perhaps a little prematurely.

Yours sincerely,



Dennison Rusinow