

Don Sturzo has bitterly portrayed the non-Fascist Parties, refusing to cast a united vote to unseat the Fascist Government, in the period when the Parliamentary powers under which they might have done so still existed—refusing because of their own political differences and the utterly vain belief that it was possible to make the old leaders, Giolitti, Salandra and Orlando, “the centre of a new situation.”

While the Fascists had still merely 35 seats in the Chamber every constitutional pass was sacrificed in turn.

The Fascist armed squads were transformed into one of the forces of the State, a voluntary militia under the personal orders of Mussolini for the protection of his regime.

A Bill to destroy the existing electoral system and facilitate the acquisition of a Parliamentary majority for Mussolini, if he could obtain a 25 per cent. poll, was passed into law because “the whole Opposition, except the Socialists, decided to abstain.” Thus Don Sturzo tells us, on page 138 of his book, “The ‘Totalitarian’ System of Mussolini” was “countersigned by all the men of the declining political class, represented by three names, Giolitti, Orlando and Salandra.”

The election contest of January, 1924, which followed, was disgraced by even more widespread and sanguinary violence than its predecessor. It opened with the murder of Piccinini, a candidate for Reggio Emilia. The old Liberal and Democratic leaders, including Salandra and Orlando, agreed to add their names to Mussolini's List. Giolitti had a List of his own, limited to Piedmont, but declared this “did not signify hostility towards the Government. In point of fact it voted with the Government majority, and Mussolini was satisfied”—again we quote Don Sturzo's “Italy and Fascismo” (page 172). He adds: “The entry of the old men of Liberalism into the Fascist List” “widened the zone of confidence” in Mussolini's dictatorship.

Wherever the electors were able to record their votes without immediate coercion the results were very favourable to the Opposition Parties. In the South, owing to Fascist violence, “the majority of voters abstained and small Fascist groups voted in their stead, repeating the operation ten and twenty times.” In spite of everything the Government had an unfavourable vote in Northern Italy; therefore, when the results were known, Opposition newspapers and organisations were punished by Fascist raids. Pope Pius XI sent half-a-million lire to repair the damage done by the Fascists on this occasion to the newspaper, “L'Azione Cattolica,” at Brianza, in Lombardy.

Events were hastening towards the culminating tragedy, which was to precede the destruction of the Parliamentary constitution of Italy. Giacomo Matteotti, Secretary of the Socialist Parliamentary Group, by his courage and ability, was recognised as the leader of the Opposition to the Mussolini regime. On May 30,

1924, Matteotti delivered a precise, factual indictment of the corruption and violence which the Fascist Government had employed in the election campaign.

On June 10, Matteotti was suddenly seized on the Tiber embankment by five of Mussolini's associates, who dragged him into a motor car, murdered him, and buried his remains in the Quattarella, a wood in the Roman Campagna. There was an outburst of public feeling. Thousands of people flocked to the spot where Matteotti was kidnapped. The site was heaped with flowers, crowds of men and women knelt to pray. Fascists tore off their badges, it seemed the Fascist regime must fall.

Mussolini affected ignorance and consternation, he obtained from the Senate a vote of confidence. This was opposed by Senator Albertini, Editor of the “Corriere della Sera,” from which position the Fascist regime would soon expel him. Count Sforza and Senator Abbiate also opposed. Nevertheless, Giolitti, Orlando and Salandra continued their support of the regime, which Giolitti had brought to power.

Revelations of Fascist Crimes

Startling facts irresistibly pointing to responsibility for the murder of Mussolini's close associates and Government colleagues—of Mussolini himself—began to leak out. Mussolini resigned from the Ministry of the Interior, which he held with other offices, and compelled the resignation of some of his colleagues who were implicated in the plot. One of these men, Finzi, the Under-Secretary of the Interior, believing Mussolini intended to make him a scapegoat, sent to the leaders of the Opposition an account of the Cabinet Press Bureau, disclosed the whole working of the Fascist murder gang, giving details of murders of prominent public men at Mussolini's behest.

These documents were laid before the King by the Liberal leader, Giovanni Amendola; the King took no action. Amendola, in consequence, was twice attacked by Fascist bullies and died at Cannes of the injuries thus suffered on account of his patriotic solitude.

Professor Salvemini subsequently published the revelations of Finzi and Rossi in his important volume, “The Fascist Dictatorship in Italy.”

The old Liberal leaders, despite the appalling disclosure concerning the crimes organised by Mussolini, whom Giolitti had raised to power, still gave their support and lent their prestige to his regime.

The Government majority in the Italian Parliament staged a commemoration of the man whom the Government had murdered, and whose mutilated remains were still undiscovered.

The Opposition Parties, disunited though they were, under Amendola's lead were nevertheless sufficiently drawn together to