

Mussolini the Revolutionary: The March on Rome

The English language press appears to have been fascinated by the “March on Rome” – the peaceful Italian revolution – which is highly convenient, as it gives us a day by day account of the event, allowing us to see how the dispute in Italy was playing out, and what was expected to happen as the days went on. The one constant throughout the ordeal was that nobody seemed entirely sure what the end goals of the Fascisti were, much like the contradictory and unclear nature of their ideology. Similarly, while the Fascisti praised war and its purifying effects, Mussolini did his best to portray the period prior to the revolution as peaceful, even though the Fascisti “terrorized” the population.¹ Conversely, he portrayed the revolution itself as more much more fraught with tension than it actually was so that it appeared that he had saved Italy from civil war purely out of the goodness of his heart.² The march therefore fits in quite well with the entirety of fascism: revolutionary, confusing, violent, and portrayed as something different than it actually was.³

In October of 1922, Mussolini and his squadristi, or Black Shirts, planned a march on Rome to take power away from the current Italian government and put it in to the hands of the Fascist party. Though Mussolini’s ascent to power was thoroughly legal, he used the squadristi to gain control of Italy. While he did his best to portray the period prior to the revolution as peaceful, the squadristi did use violence to secure their hold in the period before the march. However, with the Fascist emphasis on violence and the purifying effects of war, why did Mussolini attempt to make the period prior to the March appear more peaceful than it actually was? In the secondary literature surrounding the Fascist party, some historians discuss the nature

of the March, some discuss what makes a revolution a revolution, and others look at the support the March on Rome had, and its place in Italian historical memory.

In “Revolution? Counterrevolution? What Revolution?,” Eugen Weber discusses the meaning of the term “revolution” and the way it is applied to fascism. After the French Revolution, he writes, revolution “came to be about the poor ceasing to be poor,” rather than “political power for people who were far from poor.”⁴ Referring frequently to the French and Russian Revolutions, Weber writes, “One of the greatest luxuries revolution afforded [to the poor] was the opportunity to see their ‘betters’ humbled.” While Italy’s March on Rome did not involve eliminating a monarch – King Vittorio remained in the throne – it did involve removing the government from power that had failed them in many ways. Mussolini was therefore certainly a revolutionary, although the way his revolution was portrayed certainly varied with time.⁵

In “Reconsidering the March on Rome,” Giulia Albanese analyzes the historiography of the March on Rome and “attempt[s] to assess the role that Fascist representations of the March had in determining the overall direction of historical research,” or, how the March on Rome became mythic.⁶ She describes how contemporary liberals and democrats viewed the March as “a comedy” because they felt there had clearly been “some negotiation between the King and Mussolini” because they “could not understand how a revolution could be made without barricades, without fights, and without bodies in the streets.”⁷ In fact, the “prevailing official discourse on the March portrayed it as a peaceful revolution.”⁸ The squadristi, or Black Shirts, meanwhile, remembered “acts of violence as a fundamental part of the March,” resulting in forty dead, and the government thus did their best to keep them quiet.⁹ Some historians argue that, had the Italian military put up any resistance, the squadristi would have been defeated or forced to

back down, and some stressed Mussolini's "political role, that he had not fought alongside his men."¹⁰ In the post-World War II era, one historian, Adrian Lyttelton, classified the March as "an example of psychological warfare," as Mussolini had manipulated the Italian government into believing the squadristi could defeat their military.¹¹

It can thus be difficult to learn about events in Italian Fascist history, because the ever changing political climate affects the way that period is remembered. The memory of the March on Rome, in particular, was almost immediately altered by Mussolini, who strove to have it remembered as a relatively peaceful though tension-filled revolution though there were many instances of squadristi violence. Why he would do this, with his well-known love of violence and militarism is unclear, except that it would likely make the transition of power smoother. What is clear from the surrounding historiography is that the March on Rome brought Fascism and Mussolini in to power much quicker than many expected, resulting in an ironically fully legal semi-violent revolution.

The Build Up

The press's coverage of the Fascist coup to overthrow the Italian government began in late July, though thorough reporting did not begin until October. However, by July, Mussolini had begun threatening the current government with plans to attack if they did not give up power.¹² The government in power, a Cabinet led by the Premier de Facta, was plagued by political "deadlock" due to the number of factions within the government.¹³ Because the Italian Parliament was representative of the population, there were many parties comprising the government, and none had enough of a majority to get anything accomplished.¹⁴ Under the threat of Fascisti violence, the Facta cabinet resigned on July 20th, hoping that a new cabinet would be able to settle "the unrest in the country, which in some regions had assumed the character of civil

war.”¹⁵ However, he also wanted to ensure that the new Cabinet would “protect the lives and liberties of the people,” – that they would not only restore order to Italy, but not infringe upon their rights while doing so.¹⁶ Unfortunately, it was unclear how the problem should best be solved.

Initially, ex-Premier Orlando was expected to resume as Premier and to have a Cabinet whose “program [was] the pacification of Italy without violent repressions,” unlike Mussolini’s likely violent programs.¹⁷ It would be similar to the previous two Cabinets, “but stronger because of the greater prestige of Orlando.”¹⁸ By July 28, however, Orlando had turned down the job, and the next “most authoritative” options, Signor de Nicola and Signor Meda, did not want the responsibility of solving the nation’s problems either.¹⁹ This inability to fill the position left the King “in a rather embarrassing situation,” resulting in Facta remaining in power for three more months until Mussolini forced the King to grant him Premiership.²⁰ With no current clear candidate to lead the government, however, the press thus described each option they saw.

While Giolitti later took over the top choice spot for Premiership, Enrico de Nicola, the President of the Chamber of Deputies, initially seemed to be the best option if Orlando continued to turn down the job.²¹ However, the press noted, if either Nicola or Orlando took the Premiership, “it would mean the formation of a Cabinet of conciliation . . . which [is] believed to have been one of the principal factors that led to the downfall of the de Facta Ministry.”²² In other words, a new Ministry led by either Nicola or Orlando would likely be as unsuccessful as the current ministry, as its conciliatory nature prevented any group attaining a majority and accomplishing anything. On the other hand, it also prevented one single party from controlling everything, which later became an issue for Italy with the Fascist Party. Another option proposed was the installation of a Cabinet that included members of “all branches of the constitutional

parties, except the Conservatives and Fascisti,” though the press felt this option would be unlikely to work.²³ Finally in early October, because he felt that Parliament did “not represent ... the will of the people,” Mussolini called for a change in election policy.²⁴

It is important to note here that the Fascisti were not the only people who wanted a new government. The Facta Cabinet had been plagued by complaints from the Socialists as well, and the widespread strikes made it clear that workers were having issues too.²⁵ In Trent, Fascisti had marched in to the province because the Italians’ “rights ... [had] not been upheld,” and the general population was also dissatisfied as the Facta government had “calm[ed] neither the parliamentary situation nor the unrest in the country.”²⁶ Much of the public was simply ready to allow “any untried party which holds out the promise of doing things in a radically different manner” to take over, with the belief that anything had to be better than the current “unsettled condition” they were living in.²⁷ This feeling of discord within in the nation contributed to Mussolini’s belief that the Fascisti would win the upcoming election and likely spurred him onward in his quest for power. First, the Fascisti demanded that new elections be held that year so that Parliament would immediately reflect this changing political face of the country.²⁸ In addition, Mussolini insisted that “the party receiving a majority of the votes in a parliamentary election be granted three-fifths of the parliamentary seats,” so that one party would finally be able to pass legislation, rather than continue in political stalemate.²⁹ Of course, the Fascisti “forecast” that they would be the party to win the majority and thus be able to take charge of the government.³⁰ In fact, Mussolini said, “In Italy, there exists two Governments – a fictitious one, run by Facta, and a real one, run by the Fascisti. The first of these must give way to the second.”³¹ Clearly, he believed that the Fascisti Party was fully backed by the Italian people, and that the Fascisti would succeed in taking over the national government.

By October 1, *The Observer* was reporting on Mussolini's threatened "march on Rome," indicating his intent to make Italy into a Fascist nation, "governed either by Mussolini or by those who will suit their policy to his."³² A week later, the *New York Times* reported that the Fascisti wanted the Facta government out by November, and were demanding that new elections had to happen by December.³³ At that time, it was unclear as to whether the Fascisti would remain peaceful or would "decide to adopt violence to obtain their ends," that is, control of the new government after the elections.³⁴ However, Mussolini claimed that he would rather take a peaceful route to power, unless Facta chose to "contest [their] will" and refused to leave office.³⁵ In addition, due to the "extraordinary wave of popularity" of the Fascisti, it seemed likely that they would gain control of the new government in the December elections and would not need to use force.³⁶ However, the Fascisti demonstrated their popularity by planning a gathering in Naples on October 24 (later postponed to the 27th), so that they could march on Rome, though whether the march would be in demonstration of their support for the party or to overthrow the government was currently unclear.³⁷

Unfortunately, the Fascisti, in their campaign to prove that they would bring order to Italy and that they would be willing to fight for election reform, did not simply gather in Naples and wait to march. Rather, they used violence to combat various civilian issues.³⁸ On August 9, the *New York Times* reported that the Fascisti were "demobilizing" because their "battle was won on every front," referring to the brutal abuse inflicted upon "those who are agitating the workers against the country" by convincing them to go on strike.³⁹ In fact, the Fascisti had become so violent that the Italian government had insisted upon their demobilization because they were causing such "turmoil, bordering upon civil war," with "scores ... killed and thousands wounded in the fighting," leading to the institution of martial law in some areas.⁴⁰ The press also discussed

the fact that the Fascists killed Socialists in 1920.⁴¹ While more people were happy about the “weakening of the Socialist power” than were upset about the “methods by which it was brought about,” the fact remained, the press said, that “Italy needs peace abroad as well as at home,” which was not something the Fascisti would provide.⁴² Their attempt to use violence to show that they could bring order to Italy therefore backfired in this instance, at least abroad. By October 21, however, the *Los Angeles Times* was reporting “Fascisti Strength Grows by Terrorization,” with “ten felonies and two murders committed daily for political motives” by the Fascisti.⁴³ In the previous months, the paper reported, “the Fascisti strength has enormously increased ... due likely to ‘terrorization.’”⁴⁴ The Fascisti therefore hoped to capitalize on these gains by gaining control of the government. However, the paper noted, their support was “likely to diminish rapidly as soon as there [was] a government strong enough to enforce the laws.”⁴⁵ The popularity they were experiencing, the *Los Angeles Times* believed, was not based on actual support for their policies as much as fear of the disorder the nation was experiencing and fear of the Fascisti themselves.⁴⁶

Though it seemed likely that the Fascisti would win a majority of the seats in the election and thus be able to control Parliament, Mussolini was not willing to leave anything to chance, and therefore organized several marches around the country, culminating in the march on Rome. As mentioned earlier, in early October, five thousand Fascisti “occupied the building of the Provincial Council” because the “dignity ... and the rights of Italian citizens [had] not been upheld.”⁴⁷ There was also a large gathering of “Black Shirts” in Cremona, with “thirty thousand Fascists – youths ... and young girls,” parading through the city chanting “Il nostro Duce” – “our leader” – in a clear display of support for Mussolini and the Fascisti.⁴⁸ By mid-October, things in

Italy were coming to head, and the press began publishing articles nearly every day with updates on the constantly changing situation.

On October 12, Facta retracted his resignation of the Premiership and the Cabinet, saying that “the government is ready to face whatever action is attempted against the constitutional power,” to which the Fascisti replied that “we shall have very troublesome times and a critical national crisis if the government does not agree to our stand,” indicating their continued plan to attack if Facta did not resign.⁴⁹ On October 15, the *Observer* reported that while “all parties ... would welcome the Fascisti taking a prominent part in the Government,” the possibility of a “fascist coup” was still highly concerning to Italians.⁵⁰ The next day, the Cabinet had again decided to resign and was expected to “hand in its resignation to the King” the next day.⁵¹ The King would then “appoint a new Premier capable of facing the situation,” likely Giolitti.⁵² Negotiations then began between Giolitti and the Fascisti to build a Cabinet together; however, the Fascisti refused as they did not want to “collaborate with any one, but wish[ed] to form a Ministry of their own.”⁵³ They would then be fully in control of the nation rather than simply having influence in the Cabinet. By October 19, the Cabinet had decided yet again to refuse to resign, and it appeared that the Fascisti would indeed go forward with negotiations with Giolitti and Orlando to form a “strong, coalition cabinet.”⁵⁴ Negotiations with the two ex-Premiers had fallen through by October 20, and Mussolini had instead signed an alliance with Gabriele D’Annunzio, “the Italian soldier-poet,” whose forces controlled Fiume.⁵⁵ The next day, Orlando was once again being considered as Premier, and Giolitti was attempting to negotiate with the Fascisti, although they were still uninterested and were hoping to “[gain] sole control of the government either by peace or force.”⁵⁶ Also, at this point, there was an important distinction

between the “overturning” of the Italian government and the march on Rome, with the latter, presumably, being a more peaceful demonstration rather than a violent endeavor.⁵⁷

As the date of the gathering in Naples and the march drew nearer, the Fascisti continued accumulating power and allies. On October 22, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported that Francesco Nitti, another former Premier, had allied with Mussolini, despite their history of being “bitter political enemies” and the fact that the “Fascisti had repeatedly attacked the former premier.”⁵⁸ Continually accumulating political leveraging power, Mussolini began making more specific demands, such as control over the “portfolios of Foreign Affairs, War, Navy, Labor and Public Works,” after refusing Ministerial positions that lacked portfolios.⁵⁹ He also declared that “no peace was possible unless adversaries accepted the conditions of the Fascisti,” or that he was not willing to compromise on his terms with the current government or the Socialists.⁶⁰ Meanwhile in Naples, 90,000 Fascisti, including D’Annunzio’s Chief of Staff, General Ceccherini, and people from the “redeemed provinces” of Tripoli, Trieste, Trent, and Zara, had gathered to prepare for their meeting on October 27 and the increasingly likely march on Rome.⁶¹

The Threat of Action

October 27, the day the Fascisti gathering was scheduled in Naples, saw a variety of headlines about the “coup” the Fascisti had planned. On October 26, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported, Facta’s Cabinet had resigned after the Fascisti displayed a “hostile attitude” and ordered a “general mobilization . . . if the cabinet declined to give up power.”⁶² The King still had power, though, and was expected to join in “conferences with the political leaders” before any concrete decisions concerning the “formation of the new government” were made.⁶³ Meanwhile, it became clear that the Fascisti would definitely be the ones to take power in the new

government. Mussolini “ordered all the military leaders of the Fascisti to keep in readiness. The 800,000 workers who have joined the Fascisti organizations are ordered to cooperate at an opportune moment with the military sections.”⁶⁴ This military mobilization was, of course, to prepare for the coming march on Rome, and was “interpreted ... as preparation for the assumption of power by the Fascisti.”⁶⁵ Some, however, still hoped that Orlando or Giolitti would play some part in the new government, and would form a “strong administration ... capable of facing the Fascisti,” as there was “speculation as to whether the Fascisti would yield to offers of portfolios” that they had previously demanded if the government was controlled by someone other than Mussolini.⁶⁶ The Fascisti were certainly going to have some power in the new government, but it was unclear how much power they would insist upon, and if the power over most of the Ministerial positions would be enough to prevent them from using force.⁶⁷

The situation was also complicated by the fact that the Fascisti had been offered different positions in the Cabinet than the ones they had demanded, making it seem likely they would fight for more power. A different article however, indicates that by October 26, the government had “grant[ed]” the requested posts to the Fascisti, meaning they might soon resolve the conflict.⁶⁸ They continually insisted, and it was believed, that they were truly “making their last great effort to obtain as much power as possible by peaceful means” rather than resorting to violence.⁶⁹ There appeared to a great deal of anxiety during this couple of days as the former government had resigned, the King was not in Rome, and a new government had yet to take over.⁷⁰ The *Giornale d’Italia* explained that Italian credit was therefore suffering, and a new government needed to take over as soon as possible to “restore foreign confidence in Italy.”⁷¹ That last thing that anyone wanted to deal with were increased economic complications, so it was important that whoever took power did so quickly.

On October 28, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* opened with the enormous headline, “Fascisti March on Rome.” The Fascisti, the paper reported, had already taken Florence, Pisa, and Milan peacefully and had taken Cremona with only six of their own members dying.⁷² The paper also included the text of a pamphlet the Fascisti had released, giving the reasons for their march:

Officers, soldiers, citizens: The Fascisti movement is neither against the country nor against the king. We want his majesty to be really king of Italy and not to submit himself to state actions which are cowardly imposed on him by his present weak ministers. We march on Rome to give Italy her full liberty; to give the Italian people an Italy as was dreamed of the half million dead in the great war, and by our own dead who continued at war during peace. Marching with the sincere desire of peace and love, our greatest shout shall always be ‘Long live the army; love live the king, and long live Italy.’⁷³

This emphasis on maintaining the monarchy clearly differentiated the Fascisti from the Bolsheviks, whom most Italians were opposed to, as the Russian Revolution had toppled their monarchy. They also emphasized that they were only marching to allow Italy to reach her full potential as a great nation and that they wished the Italian people no harm, but rather hoped that “peace and love” would result.⁷⁴ The *New York Times* also reported on the Fascisti “seizing control of Italian cities” that day, and they asserted that it was now clear that Mussolini was the “dominant figure” to be consulted in the formation of the new Cabinet.⁷⁵ A speaker for the Fascisti, the Secretary General of the Party, said that day that “as it was Mussolini’s speech at Naples that determined the Ministerial crisis” – his threat that led the Cabinet to resign – “Parliamentary precedent required that he be entrusted with the task of forming new Ministry.”⁷⁶ However, as the Fascisti had not actually revealed their plan, nobody knew what exactly would happen in the immediate future concerning national politics, and the “rank and file” Fascisti wanted to wait until the regular elections to do anything further, so they could gain power both legally and completely.⁷⁷ They would not be able to pass anything until then anyway, they argued, as they did not have a majority in the Chamber, and if they gained power immediately

and were unable to pass any legislation, they would lose any confidence the citizenry currently had in them.⁷⁸ The leaders of the party, on the other hand, had exactly the opposite opinion, and therefore continued to seek immediate power.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, it was clear the Italy needed a strong and effective government to take over immediately to “place [Italy] on its feet again,” and the Fascisti “were masters of the situation” and would have to give their approval to any Cabinet formed in the near future.⁸⁰ Regardless of whether the people and Parliament truly wanted the Fascisti to be the ones leading the country, they were “relie[ved] ... that at least a decision will, and indeed, must be reached” regarding the political situation.⁸¹

The Aftermath

After refusing to compromise by forming a government with Salandra, it became apparent that the only peaceful option available was to give Benito Mussolini the Premiership.⁸² While some papers wrote that it was Mussolini who refused “co-operation even with Salandra,” or anyone who was not Fascisti, other papers reported that Salandra had been asked to head up the new government and had turned it down.⁸³ At the same time, Mussolini was refusing to even come to Rome until he had been “officially asked to form a new cabinet.”⁸⁴ Regardless of who refused to work with whom, on October 30 the press reported that King Vittorio Emanuele had formally asked Mussolini to assume the position of Premier and form a new Cabinet.⁸⁵ Only the day before, the Fascisti had “ordered a general mobilisation,” though they were still “insist[ing] upon the peaceful character of their movement, which they declare is only intended to enforce a swift solution of the crisis in harmony with Fascist aims.”⁸⁶ Therefore, this response from the King – choosing to ask Mussolini legally to take over the new government rather than fighting back against his threats and throwing the country into civil war – earned him much praise.⁸⁷

The Facta cabinet had, as their last hurrah, written a piece of legislation instituting martial law throughout the nation to prevent the Fascisti from militarily overthrowing the government.⁸⁸ While the King had supported the legislation that day, he “must have changed his mind” during the night, and he refused to sign it in the morning.⁸⁹ Rather, “hoping for a peaceful settlement” with Mussolini, which “could not be strictly legitimate, and in any case would not correspond to the state of parties in Parliament,” he chose to avoid civil war and instead gave Mussolini the power he so desired.⁹⁰ Mussolini was becoming very insistent on Fascisti power, vowing that “any other solution [meant] desperate action by the Fascisti.”⁹¹ The King, of course, hoping to “avoid bloodshed and civil war,” granted Mussolini the Premiership rather than sign the order to declare martial law.⁹² While martial law was never signed into place, the military did have orders to “forbid” the Fascisti’s “entrance to Rome.”⁹³ At the same time, though, the Cabinet was “urging the people to remain calm,” as mass chaos would hamper the military’s ability to keep order within the city.⁹⁴

Despite already eliminating the threat of civil war, the Fascisti continued their mobilization “happily.”⁹⁵ Having already gained power, the coming march was therefore simply a symbol of their power and a celebration that the revolution had occurred peacefully. While mobilizing, they “instructed the local prefects to transfer to them their authority,” which typically went smoothly, and military officers “treated the Fascisti with friendliness.”⁹⁶ That did not mean that they would not occupy certain areas as a show of their power, though. In an article prominently headlined “‘Black Shirts’ Rule Italy,” the paper both reported on Mussolini’s announcement that the “Fascisti military command” had control of the nation, as well as the Fascisti attacks on Socialist newspapers.⁹⁷ Another article explained how the Fascisti had “occupied the military fort” near Rome, though they promptly “returned it with all friendliness”

upon Mussolini's successful ascension to power.⁹⁸ Though the Fascisti had taken power, some troops still roamed the area, and the "various ministries and public buildings were occupied by troops," presumably to prevent any violence from occurring.⁹⁹ According to some, however, this was "nothing short of ludicrous" because "the only victims of [their] march [had] been a number of calves, commandeered but paid for, to feed [their] troops."¹⁰⁰ They were certainly not leading a violent revolution since power had already been handed over to them, and soon enough, the barricades around Rome were removed.¹⁰¹ A member of the Fascisti, Deputy Di Vecchi, had a meeting with the King that day, during which he "insisted on the highly patriotic aims of the Fascisti, who ... had no intention of upsetting the institutions of Italy."¹⁰² Causing more violence and upsetting the order would only cause more problems for them in the future, so they had no reason to attack the city anymore, and would continue in peace. While De Vecchi's pronouncement of patriotism showed "great emotion" and greatly "moved" the King to the point he hugged him, it was not entirely true as small skirmishes between the Fascisti and the Socialists would continue on.¹⁰³ However, any threat of a civil war between the government and the Fascisti had been eliminated, which was highly fortunate as many of the military officers would have likely sided with the Fascisti.¹⁰⁴

October 31 brought more discussion of the future of the new Fascisti government, concerns other nations had, and descriptions of the coming march. One of the biggest concerns about the new government was that Mussolini was very capable of overthrowing government, but it was unclear whether he could build one. The *Washington Post* wrote, "The Fascisti are called upon to abandon the destructive [sic] role which they have hitherto played, and which they declare were forced upon them by the march of events, and adopt a constructive policy with all the responsibilities that go with power."¹⁰⁵ It is all good and well that he believed he could

effectively bring order to a country in the midst of chaos, but until he had concrete proof, it remained unclear whether the Italian people would “accept unquestioningly the domination of the Fascisti.”¹⁰⁶ The *Post*, at least, believed that the Italians would likely not have much of a choice in the matter, as it was unlikely that “under the terrorism undoubtedly exercised by the Fascisti any really representative parliament could be elected.”¹⁰⁷ Italian citizens, afraid of the Fascisti, would not vote them out of power so soon after they nearly set the country on a path toward civil war, for fear that the Fascisti might initiate another more violent coup.

Foreign nations especially were worried that Mussolini’s takeover of Italy – considering his love of militaristic language and trenchocracy – would lead to another war. After finally reaching peace in 1919, the thought of another war only three years later was terrifying to Europeans. “Europe at the present moment,” the *Post* wrote, “is so full of explosive material that any ill-advised act might have disastrous consequences.”¹⁰⁸ Many nations were unhappy with the peace terms reached at the Paris Peace Conference, and any small spark of controversy could cause major problems. France in particular was fearful of any future conflict between Italy and Yugoslavia, the most likely object of Italy’s expansionist tendencies at the time as it also lay on the Adriatic. At the same time, the French, along with everyone else, were happy that a civil war had been “averted” and recognized the King as being the one who prevented the bloodshed.¹⁰⁹ Having declared the situation as peaceful, however, Mussolini did not risk his popularity and brought no major conflict to Italy for several years.

On October 31, Mussolini formally announced his chosen Cabinet to the press. The new Cabinet consisted of “seven Fascisti, five Nationalists, one Democrat and one member of the Catholic Party,” which gave the Fascisti the most seats but still allowed for representation of other parties, with the exception of the Socialists, who were disbanded upon Mussolini taking

power.¹¹⁰ The people believed that “Mussolini’s presence in the government” would “exert a moderating influence upon his followers throughout Italy” and prevent them from becoming extremists.¹¹¹ Hindsight of course would tell us that this was not the case, as Mussolini eventually eliminated the Parliament, making the party and the nation fully subservient to himself as the dictator. At the time, however, the party was attempting to enforce peace and curb Fascisti violence, so the Premier having more power than usual was deemed acceptable. A directive issued by the new government proclaimed that “orders have been issued to all the black shirts, imposing absolute calm, order, and discipline Attacks against shops and the selling of arms are absolutely prohibited,” which effectively banned any Fascisti from committing further violent acts.¹¹² It continued to say that “any action against the government institutions is rebellion against Mussolini.”¹¹³ Therefore, the government was not only led by Mussolini, but the government was Mussolini, and thus the concept of “Mussolini the Myth” was born.¹¹⁴

Finally, the long talked of March on Rome came on October 31 and was described in the press on November 1. “Fascisti Enter Rome” the papers proclaimed; “The triumphant entry of Fascisti troops into Rome today was the apotheosis of Italy’s bloodless revolution.”¹¹⁵ The Fascisti, they wrote, were the saviors of Italy, “for in 1870 ... Italy was born; today she has been saved from bolshevism.”¹¹⁶ On top of this, the Fascisti were apparently better dressed than the Socialists, “a fact which is everywhere favorably commented upon.”¹¹⁷ It is unclear whether Mussolini was sworn in or the Fascisti marched through Rome first, but it is clear that when Mussolini took his oath to “be true to the Constitution,” he also swore his loyalty to the King, who “was so deeply moved that he embraced Mussolini.”¹¹⁸ In a lengthy description of the triumphal march through Rome, it was obvious that the Fascisti were a highly regimented and disciplined military group, and that, had there been a civil war, it would have been “dreadful” for

the Italian people.¹¹⁹ A new day dawned on Italy, quite literally, as the sun finally broke through the previous day's storms to witness the Fascisti triumphantly marching through the ancient Roman capital, with each Fascist giving the ancient Roman salute as he neared the "eternal city."¹²⁰

Throughout these days following the overturning of the Italian government to Fascisti power, there were several instances of violence. While the march itself was peaceful and there were no major clashes between the Fascisti and the Italian military, there were small skirmishes between groups of Fascisti and socialists, and occasionally Royal Guards. On October 29 in Rome, "one person was killed and several injured;" in Allessandra "the Fascisti ... seized 200 rifles, a number of machine guns and a quantity of ammunition;" and in Bologna "two Fascisti were killed" in a conflict with the Royal Guards, and another in Verona.¹²¹ Meanwhile at the *Avanti* headquarters, "ten of the royal guards and two Fascisti were seriously injured," and four more Fascisti died in Cremona.¹²² On October 30, there were many clashes between the Fascisti and the Communists, with "one person killed, and one Fascista ... wounded;" in one riot, another Fascist was murdered by a group of Communists for killing one of their "comrades;" four others were killed in Palestrina; four Fascisti were wounded in another clash; two Fascisti and one Royal Guard were killed in Bologna; and other "clashes between Fascisti and Communists [were] reported from various towns."¹²³ On the last day of the month, however, after a conflict near the Vatican, Mussolini announced that "any action taken by the Fascisti ... against Communists ... will be repressed with the utmost severity."¹²⁴ Clearly, though the Fascisti rose to power through violent methods, once in power, Mussolini wished to rid his party of that image, and instead chose to focus on creating a disciplined, militaristic society.

The English language press seemed to respect the Fascisti and Mussolini for the most part. One article, though, was an anomaly in that it portrayed the Fascisti as more violent and radical than others had described the movement. While the French had expressed concern about Italy's future foreign policy decisions, they conceded that Mussolini seemed intent on ensuring peaceful revolution and that he was doing his best to protect Italy.¹²⁵ The *Los Angeles Times*, however, asserted in a headline that Mussolini was "Viewed in Washington as Too Napoleonic and Radical for Italy's Safety."¹²⁶ The news of his ascension to power was "received ... with keening interest and no little apprehension as to the outcome of the Fascisti adventure."¹²⁷ Fascism, it seemed to some Americans, was unreliable. "The rapid rise of Mussolini," they said, "is regarded here with distrust The organization, originally formed for the purpose of combating Bolshevism, apparently has become subversive in character itself and constitutes a direct menace to the throne of Italy."¹²⁸ This description was of course exactly opposite of what the Fascisti themselves had been saying – that they were extremely patriotic and wished to keep the King on his throne.¹²⁹ Rather than believing Mussolini's claims that the revolution had been peaceful, they pointed to the myriad other violent incidents that occurred prior to the revolution. While the revolution itself may have been free of violence, the public had already been bullied into submission, and thus the threat of violence was all it took to dismantle the Facta Cabinet. Specifically, the paper referred to the attacks against the workers on strike, and the fact that there was a Fascisti army in addition to the "legal" army.¹³⁰ Essentially, the paper urged the people to remember that the Fascisti had been aggressive and violent toward their own people prior to taking power, and that aggressiveness could just as easily be used during their reign of power.

While there is no doubt that the Fascisti were violent, Mussolini preferred to portray the violence as more of a demonstration of law enforcement. For example, in his autobiography,

Mussolini described how the Fascisti were ordered to “break the back of the attempt of the red rabble” – the members of the Alliance of Labor who were on strike – after the government gave “no sign of any act of energy.”¹³¹ Soon after, he mobilized the “squadristi” to continue to “crush” the strikes.¹³² All of these events were, according to Mussolini, to enforce the law and bring order to the land, rather than “terrorizing” the people, as the newspapers asserted.¹³³ On the other hand, he tended to portray the march itself as more fraught with tension than it was. In describing his take on the march on Rome, Mussolini wrote that he heard of the “bloody clashes in Cremona, Alessandria and Bologna,” never referencing the fact that these were small conflicts.¹³⁴ Instead, he wrote that the clashes made Italian life into “an ardent atmosphere of revolution,” leading the “liberal chiefs” to go “into their holes” as they were “inspired only by fear.”¹³⁵ The Fascisti actions lent “the city a sinister echo of civil war,” contrary to the impression the newspaper articles gave, in which the Fascisti were forever preaching their preference for peaceful resolution.¹³⁶ He even went so far as to exclaim that “War is declared!” and “the struggle is blazing all over Italy.”¹³⁷ While there was certainly some violence, it was hardly on the scale of a civil war, especially as the King refused to sign orders for martial law. Mussolini did mention that “the King, in his profound wisdom, flatly refused to sign” the martial law decree, though he wrote that the King “understood that only with the victory of one party” – the Fascisti – could Italy find peace.¹³⁸ In contrast, in the newspapers, it was clear that the King refused to sign the orders because he “would have abdicated rather than that a single drop of blood should be shed in civil war.”¹³⁹ The King was therefore less a proponent of Fascism than simply in favor of his people not killing each other. Interestingly, after all the fuss Mussolini made about gaining power, once the Facta government had resigned and he made his way to

Rome, he deemed his first days as Premier “not important,” and made very little of the actual march in to Rome, other than a quick word on the “perfect order” of the “black shirts.”¹⁴⁰

Here the “myth” of Mussolini is truly born: at his first meeting with the chamber of deputies he wrote that he announced to the room that he “called the attention of the audience to the fact that only by the will of Fascism had the revolution remained within the boundaries of legality and tolerance,” which was a bald faced lie, as the King’s refusal had been widely praised as the sole reason that civil war was avoided.¹⁴¹ However, this proclamation made Mussolini appear to be truly a savior to Italy, rescuing the country from both a potential civil war and the myriad of other problems facing the nation. As Falasca-Zamponi argued, by portraying himself in this mythic manner, he took on a god-like role, with the state portraying him as the savior of Italy, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, never aging, and virtually immortal.¹⁴² Mussolini therefore portrayed the March on Rome very differently from the way it actually occurred. The Fascisti committed much more violence than he admitted to, while the march itself was much more peaceful than he portrayed. Likewise, the King was the one who truly prevented a civil war between the state and the Fascisti, not Mussolini.¹⁴³

¹ Clarence K. Street, “Cabinet Near Fall in Rome,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 21, 1922, p. 14. All newspaper articles accessed via the ProQuest Database.

² Benito Mussolini, *My Autobiography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), p. 197.

³ Though I was limited to using only English language sources, the focus of this essay is Mussolini’s actions and portrayal of the march on Rome, not the American press’s reaction to the event.

⁴ Eugen Weber, “Revolution? Counterrevolution? What Revolution?,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 9, no. 2 (Apr. 1974): 7.

⁵ Weber also asserts that revolution always aims to go “forward,” to “progress,” which is always “towards the Left,” and so, we presume, counterrevolution tends to the Right. However, even though the Fascist revolution of Italy was rebelling against socialism, as it was “against the flabbiness and the failures of the existing [regime],” according to Weber, it was a revolution rather than a counterrevolution. Mussolini, in fact, prior to the March on Rome, noted “that one could be both revolutionary and conservative.”

⁶ Giulia Albanese, “Reconsidering the March on Rome,” *European History Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (2012): 404, 405.

⁷ Albanese, “Reconsidering the March on Rome,” 403, 404.

⁸ Albanese, “Reconsidering the March on Rome,” 407.

⁹ Albanese, “Reconsidering the March on Rome,” 407.

¹⁰ Albanese, “Reconsidering the March on Rome,” 409.

¹¹ Albanese, “Reconsidering the March on Rome,” 414.

For further information on the historiography of the March on Rome, see: Roland Sarti, "Fascism and the Industrial Leadership in Italy before the March on Rome," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 21, no. 3 (Apr. 1968). Sarti argues that while to contemporaries there appeared to be a very close link between industry and fascism, today we can see that "it makes little sense to speak of a systematic relationship between industry and fascism." In fact, he writes, "To Mussolini the industrialists were only one pawn to be manipulated in a subtle political game." While "personal contacts between fascism and industry undoubtedly existed," the relationship was not strong enough to "influence the political orientation of fascism appreciably." He goes on to explain that "industrialists became 'Mussolinians'" rather than fascists, because "Mussolini's political shrewdness is found in his ability to be all things to all men." That is, his contradictory policies and beliefs, or "contrasting currents," meant that the industrialists were led to believe that Mussolini was in full agreement with them, while in fact, in the end, they found that they were now subservient to him, rather than the other way around. Therefore, while the industrialists did offer some political support to Mussolini and the fascists, Mussolini "duped" them into that support leading up to the march on Rome, making them believe that they would have more power following the march than they received.

Also, see: Ruth Ben-Ghiat, "Fascism, Writing, and Memory: The Realist Aesthetic in Italy, 1930-1950," *The Journal of Modern History* 67, no. 3 (Sep. 1995).

Ruth Ben-Ghiat argues that "realism evolved in the early 1930s as part of an endeavor ... to create a culture that would reflect the notion of fascism as a revolutionary 'third way' after liberalism and Marxism." Fascism was presented as a "moral revolution" with an emphasis on the "spirituality" of the new political movement – a useful tool to allow for "conveniently vague" ideology to appeal to a large portion of the Italian people. Mussolini, however, felt that rather than being unclear, fascism "was the only political force 'adaptable' enough to survive in an uncertain social and economic climate." This "anti-ideological ideology" was then realist, according to Ben-Ghiat, because it "took its imperatives from 'fact' rather than theory" – an "aesthetic of the concrete." The article and its relation to the memory of Mussolini's reign is best summed up by Ben-Ghiat's final sentence: "If the writing of Italian realism in the early thirties testifies to the appeal fascism held for intellectuals on the peninsula, its writings in the postwar years sheds lights on the strategies utilized by these same intellectuals to reshape the collective memory of the relationship between culture and power under the dictatorship."

¹² "Leader of Fascisti Threatens Revolt," *New York Times*, July 21, 1922, p. 13.

¹³ "Italian Deadlock Becoming Graver," *New York Times*, July 28, 1922, p. 11.

¹⁴ "Italian Deadlock Becoming Graver," p. 11.

¹⁵ "Leader of Fascisti Threatens Revolt," p. 13.

¹⁶ "Leader of Fascisti Threatens Revolt," p. 13.

¹⁷ "Leader of Fascisti Threatens Revolt," p. 13.

¹⁸ "Leader of Fascisti Threatens Revolt," p. 13.

¹⁹ "Italian Deadlock Becoming Graver," p. 11.

²⁰ "Italian Deadlock Becoming Graver," p. 11.

²¹ "Italian Cabinet Won't Face Test," *New York Time*, October 16, 1922, p. 4.

Also, see: "Leader of Fascisti Threatens Revolt," p. 13.

²² "Leader of Fascisti Threatens Revolt," p. 13.

Also, see: "Italian Deadlock Becoming Graver," p. 11.

²³ "Italian Deadlock Becoming Graver," p. 11.

²⁴ "Italian Deadlock Becoming Graver," p. 11.

Also, see: "Fascisti Demand Election," *New York Times*, October 6, 1922, p. 33.

²⁵ "Italian Deadlock Becoming Graver," p. 11.

Also, see: Associated Press, "Fascisti to Quit, Claiming Success," *New York Times*, August 9, 1922, p. 4.

²⁶ "Fascisti Demand Election," p. 33.

Also, see: "Leader of Fascisti Threatens Revolt," p. 13.

²⁷ "Fascisti Prepare to Control Italy," *New York Time*, October 7, 1922, p. 4.

²⁸ "Fascisti Demand Election," p. 33.

²⁹ "Fascisti Demand Election," p. 33.

³⁰ "Fascisti Demand Election," p. 33.

³¹ "Fascisti Prepare to Control Italy," p. 4.

³² "The Master of Italy," *The Observer*, October 1, 1922, p. 8.

Also, see: "March on Rome?," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 27, 1922, p. 1.

³³ "Fascisti Prepare to Control Italy," p. 4.

³⁴ "Fascisti Prepare to Control Italy," p. 4.

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- ³⁵ "Fascisti Prepare to Control Italy," p. 4.
- ³⁶ "Fascisti Prepare to Control Italy," p. 4.
- ³⁷ "Fascist Coup Feared," *The Observer*, October 15, 1922, p. 14.
- Also, see: "Italian Cabinet Won't Face Test," *New York Times*, October 16, 1922, p. 4.
- Also, see: Street, "Cabinet Near Fall in Rome," p. 14.
- Also, see: Associated Press, "Fascisti Convene, Hear of Victories," *New York Times*, October 25, 1922, p. 4.
- Also, see: Associated Press, "Fascisti Force Facta Cabinet Out in Italy," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 27, 1922, p. 1.
- Also, see: Associated Press, "Fascisti Compel Cabinet to Resign," *Washington Post*, October 27, 1922, p. 1.
- Also, see: Associated Press, "Coup by Fascisti Forces the Fall of Italy's Cabinet," *New York Times*, October 27, 1922, p. 1.
- ³⁸ AP, "Fascisti to Quit, Claiming Success," p. 4.
- ³⁹ AP, "Fascisti to Quit, Claiming Success," p. 4.
- ⁴⁰ AP, "Fascisti to Quit, Claiming Success," p. 4.
- ⁴¹ "Plans of the Fascisti," *New York Times*, October 20, 1922, p. 13.
- ⁴² "Plans of the Fascisti," p. 13.
- ⁴³ Street, "Cabinet Near Fall in Rome," p. 14.
- ⁴⁴ Street, "Cabinet Near Fall in Rome," p. 14.
- ⁴⁵ Street, "Cabinet Near Fall in Rome," p. 14.
- ⁴⁶ Street, "Cabinet Near Fall in Rome," p. 14.
- ⁴⁷ "Fascisti Demand Election," p. 33.
- ⁴⁸ "The Master of Italy," p. 8.
- ⁴⁹ Luigi Barelli, "Fascisti Lays Down Law for Italy's Cabinet," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 13, 1922, p. 15.
- ⁵⁰ "Fascist Coup Feared," p. 14.
- ⁵¹ "Italian Cabinet Won't Face Test," p. 4.
- ⁵² "Italian Cabinet Won't Face Test," p. 4.
- ⁵³ "Italian Cabinet Won't Face Test," p. 4.
- ⁵⁴ V. De Santo, "Italy's Cabinet Decides to Defy Fascisti Edict," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 19, 1922, p. 18.
- ⁵⁵ "D'Annunzio to Aid Fascisti," *The Washington Post*, October 20, 1922, p. 6.
- Also, see: Associated Press, "Accord with the Fascisti," *New York Times*, October 20, 1922, p. 3.
- ⁵⁶ Street, "Cabinet Near Fall in Rome," p. 14.
- ⁵⁷ Street, "Cabinet Near Fall in Rome," p. 14.
- ⁵⁸ "Ex-Premier Nitti Forms Alliance with Fascisti," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 22, 1922, p. 10.
- ⁵⁹ AP, "Fascisti Convene, Hear of Victories," p. 4.
- ⁶⁰ AP, "Fascisti Convene, Hear of Victories," p. 4.
- ⁶¹ AP, "Fascisti Convene, Hear of Victories," p. 4.
- ⁶² AP, "Fascisti Force Facta Cabinet Out in Italy," p. 1.
- Also, see: AP, "Fascisti Compel Cabinet to Resign," p. 1.
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- ⁶⁶ AP, "Fascisti Compel Cabinet to Resign," p. 1.
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- ⁶⁸ "March on Rome?," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 27, 1922, p. 1.
- ⁶⁹ AP, "Coup by Fascisti Forces the Fall of Italy's Cabinet," p. 1.
- ⁷⁰ AP, "Coup by Fascisti Forces the Fall of Italy's Cabinet," p. 1.
- ⁷¹ AP, "Coup by Fascisti Forces the Fall of Italy's Cabinet," p. 1.
- ⁷² Associated Press, "Fascisti March on Rome," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 28, 1922, p. 1.

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- ⁷³AP, "Fascisti March on Rome," p. 1.
Also, see: "Fascisti Reported Seizing Control of Italian Cities," *New York Times*, October 28, 1922, p. 1.
- ⁷⁴AP, "Fascisti March on Rome," p. 1.
Also, see: "Fascisti Reported Seizing Control of Italian Cities," p. 1.
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- ⁷⁷"Fascisti Reported Seizing Control of Italian Cities," p. 1.
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- ⁸¹"Fascisti Reported Seizing Control of Italian Cities," p. 1.
- ⁸²"Italy in Fascist Control," *Manchester Guardian*, October 30, 1922, p. 8.
Also, see: Luigi Barella, "Hold North Italy," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 30, 1922, p. 1.
- ⁸³"Italy in Fascist Control," p. 8.
Also, see: Barella, "Hold North Italy," p. 1.
Also, see: V. De Santo, "'Black Shirts' Rule Italy," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 30, 1922, p. 1.
Also, see: "Mussolini Demands Full Control in Choosing Staff," *Washington Post*, October 30, 1922, p. 3.
- ⁸⁴Barella, "Hold North Italy," p. 1.
- ⁸⁵"Italy in Fascist Control," p. 8.
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- ⁸⁷Associated Press, "Civil Strife Marks Rise of New Rome Regime," *Los Angeles Times*, October 31, 1922, p. 11.
- ⁸⁸De Santo, "'Black Shirts' Rule Italy," p. 1.
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- ⁹¹Barella, "Hold North Italy," p. 1.
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- ⁹⁷De Santo, "'Black Shirts' Rule Italy," p. 1.
- ⁹⁸Louis Barelli, "Fascisti Army Marches South in War Panoply," *Los Angeles Times*, October 30, 1922, p. 11.
- ⁹⁹Associated Press, "Fascisti Hold Italy," *Washington Post*, October 30, 1922, p. 1.
- ¹⁰⁰AP, "Fascisti Hold Italy," p. 1.
- ¹⁰¹"King Awaits Mussolini," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 30, 1922, p. 1.
- ¹⁰²Associated Press, "King Victor Bows to Fascisti Power; Calls Mussolini," *New York Times*, October 30, 1922, p. 1.
- ¹⁰³AP, "King Victor Bows to Fascisti Power; Calls Mussolini," p. 1.
- ¹⁰⁴Edwin L. James, "French Think Victor Averted a Civil War," *New York Times*, October 30, 1922, p. 2.
- ¹⁰⁵"Triumph of Fascisti," *Washington Post*, October 31, 1922, p. 6.
- ¹⁰⁶"Triumph of Fascisti," p. 6.
- ¹⁰⁷"Triumph of Fascisti," p. 6.
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- ¹¹⁰"Mussolini Forms Cabinet for Italy with Fascisti Aids," *New York Times*, October 31, 1922, p. 1.
- ¹¹¹AP, "Civil Strife Marks Rise of New Rome Regime," p. 11.
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¹¹⁴ Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, "Mussolini the Myth," in *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetic of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

¹¹⁵ Associated Press, "Fascisti Enter Rome," *Washington Post*, November 1, 1922, p. 1.

¹¹⁶ AP, "Fascisti Enter Rome," p. 1.

¹¹⁷ "'Black Shirts' Hold a Roman Triumph in Assuming Power," *New York Times*, November 1, 1922, p. 1.

¹¹⁸ "'Black Shirts' Hold a Roman Triumph in Assuming Power," p. 1.

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¹²⁰ "Mussolini Forms Cabinet for Italy with Fascisti Aids," p. 1.

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¹²¹ AP, "Fascisti Hold Italy," p. 1.

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¹²² AP, "King Victor Bows to Fascisti Power; Calls Mussolini," p. 1.

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¹²³ "Mussolini Forms Cabinet for Italy with Fascisti Aids," p. 1.

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¹²⁴ "'Black Shirts' Hold a Roman Triumph in Assuming Power," p. 1.

¹²⁵ James, "French Think Victor Averted a Civil War," p. 2.

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¹²⁶ "Fascisti Move Distrusted," *Los Angeles Times*, October 31, 1922, p. 11.

¹²⁷ "Fascisti Move Distrusted," p. 11.

¹²⁸ "Fascisti Move Distrusted," p. 11.

¹²⁹ AP, "King Victor Bows to Fascisti Power; Calls Mussolini," p. 1.

Also, see: "'Black Shirts' Hold a Roman Triumph in Assuming Power," p. 1.

¹³⁰ "Fascisti Move Distrusted," p. 11.

¹³¹ Mussolini, *My Autobiography*, p. 163.

¹³² Mussolini, *My Autobiography*, p. 167.

¹³³ Street, "Cabinet Near Fall in Rome," p. 14.

¹³⁴ Mussolini, *My Autobiography*, p. 177.

¹³⁵ Mussolini, *My Autobiography*, p. 178.

¹³⁶ Mussolini, *My Autobiography*, p. 179.

¹³⁷ Mussolini, *My Autobiography*, p. 180.

¹³⁸ Mussolini, *My Autobiography*, p. 183.

¹³⁹ "Mussolini Forms Cabinet for Italy with Fascisti Aids," p. 1.

¹⁴⁰ Mussolini, *My Autobiography*, p. 187, 188.

¹⁴¹ Mussolini, *My Autobiography*, p. 197.

Also, see: AP, "Civil Strife Marks Rise of New Rome Regime," p. 11.

Also, see: Falasca-Zamponi, "Mussolini the Myth."

¹⁴² Falasca-Zamponi, "Mussolini the Myth."

¹⁴³ For further reading on Mussolini's discussion of the March, see: Emil Ludwig, *Talks with Mussolini* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1933).

In this book of interviews with Emil Ludwig, Mussolini answered questions about his rise to power. While Ludwig described Mussolini as "curt" and "ungracious," though he explained that this manner was unusual for Mussolini, and resulted from his "fatigue, and perhaps [was] in conformity with the military trend of his thoughts at the moment." When Ludwig asked, "When ... in the autumn of 1922, you sent your conditions to the Facta administration, were you confident that he would reject them?" Mussolini answered, "Certainly. Wanted to gain time." When asked how he "account[ed] for the fact that there was no resistance to [his] March on Rome," Mussolini responded that the lack of resistance was due to the "obsolete system," and that "in certain historical crises" revolutions "must happen." After asking what would have happened if "the King had agreed [to sign 'an ordinance declaring a state of siege'] and a state of siege had been declared," if Mussolini would have still "felt sure of victory," Ludwig followed by asking how Mussolini, "a soldier," could "be content during those last weeks to stay so far from the centre of action?" Mussolini then responded that the Fascisti "held the valley of the Po, and it is there that the fate of Italy has always been decided," and that he "was in command at Milan." Ludwig then asked if

he had “expected ... the King’s telegram asking [him] to take over the government,” or if he had been “surprised,” to which Mussolini responded that he had “expected” it. Finally, when asked whether he “anticipate[d] this ... to sit ten years or longer at [his] table,” Mussolini responded that he “came her in order to stay as long as possible.” While this interview does not provide any direct evidence that Mussolini portrayed the March as particularly violent, both he and Ludwig used militaristic language, and he insisted that the Fascisti would still have won if it had come to the point of military conflict. Mussolini also noted that he needed more time, presumably to build up his Fascisti army, and that he had indeed anticipated the King’s cable requesting his presence in the government. Therefore, he must have felt that tensions were high enough that the King would have no choice but to ask him to join, else he would risk a civil war. While this interview certainly leaves room for inference, it is clear that Mussolini was confident that he would gain power as a result of the March, and that he intended to install a dictatorship from an early time.