

ITALY

AND THE

HOLOCAUST



A SUMMARY OF ITALY'S ROLE IN EUROPEAN POLITICS
FROM 1933 - 1945 PRIMARILY CONCERNING
RELATIONS WITH THE WORLD-WIDE JEWISH COMMUNITY



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CONTENTS

Introduction.....	2
How Italy Differed from Germany.....	3
Political Chart of the Kingdom of Italy 1939 – 1943.....	4
Hitler Unleashed 1933 – 1938.....	5
Italian Racial Laws of 1938.....	13
International Attitudes 1933 – 1938.....	17
Sanctuary in Italy 1939 – 1943.....	25
Under Italian Protection (Occupied Europe 1940 – 1943).....	35
The Republic of Salo` 1943 – 1945.....	45
The Righteous.....	53
Bibliography.....	57

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INTRODUCTION

The genesis of this report came from an increasing body of research now extant in English. This research was pioneered by Italian historian Renzo De Felice whose landmark work *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo* was first published in 1961 and translated into English in 2001 as *The Jews in Fascist Italy*. Though a gentile, De Felice was a well-respected historian and a Communist in his youth, which underscored his impartial authority. But undoubtedly it was his exhaustive research into primary sources that gave his work substantive rigor. What De Felice produced was a new and probing look at Fascist Italy and the Second World War. It differed from the Allied perspective and added to the more commonly known individual acts of Italian humanity. The result was a comprehensive collection of hitherto unpublished documents that detailed the acts and policies of Mussolini's Fascist government and that of the Royal Italian Army. For the English-speaking world, this book must be the cornerstone of our understanding of Italy — Fascist, Monarchist, and Catholic — during the 1930s and 1940s.

In addition to the plethora of books published in recent decades by individual Jews who came under Italian control during the war, authors such as Susan Zuccotti (*Italians and the Holocaust*) and Elizabeth Bettina (*It Happened in Italy*) have explored the lesser known side of the Holocaust. Bettina, in particular, elicited first-person testimonies of Jews who sought refuge in Italy before and during the war. While De Felice's and Zuccotti's documentation may be geared to scholars, Bettina's personal histories bring the facts down to everyman.

The work of Yad Vashem in Israel has also shed much light on both the Italian government and individual acts during the Holocaust. Some 500 individual Italians, private citizens, clergy, and even government officials, have been designated Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem. We relate some of these stories.

What is wholly original in this report is the synthesis of "sidetracked" historical events with the better-known path that led up to the Holocaust. The role that Italy played on the world stage during the 1930s to control a resurgent Germany has all but been expunged from Anglo-American histories. Yet, ample documentation is readily available.

Those who may interpret this report as revisionist do so to the detriment of an objective understanding of events. Advocacy groups that feel compelled to "nazify" the Italian past may now come to fully appreciate the complexity of those times.

We have attempted to delineate a balanced view of events based on that era's newspapers, primary sources, and post-war British authors. It is our hope that scholars and the general public will come to understand Italy's role both before and during the war. Incomplete reportage and revisionist-driven chronologies have obfuscated that record beyond the bounds of good scholarship. May this report foster a new attitude among scholars in this country, as it has in the United Kingdom, to revisit the crucial events of the 1930s with greater dispassion. - JLM

[This report is presented in a single-page exhibit style format.]

HOW FASCIST ITALY DIFFERED FROM NAZI GERMANY



Benito Mussolini



King Victor Emmanuel III



Pope Pius XII

ITALY WAS NOT A MONOLITHIC STATE

From 1922 to 1943, Benito Mussolini, founder of Fascism, ruled Italy. His was an authoritarian dictatorship very different from the totalitarian rule of Adolph Hitler in Germany. Italy still maintained its traditional society with a royal family, the House of Savoy, and a state religion, Roman Catholicism, vested in the Pope (Pius XI and Pius XII). Italian citizens, in general, had multiple loyalties: to the Pope, to the Duce, to the King. Military personnel, for example, swore fealty to the King, not to Mussolini. In contrast, Nazi Germany was a monolithic state with one leader and one loyalty. The military swore allegiance solely to Hitler. National Socialism, itself, came with a mythology of Teutonic-Aryan racial doctrine.

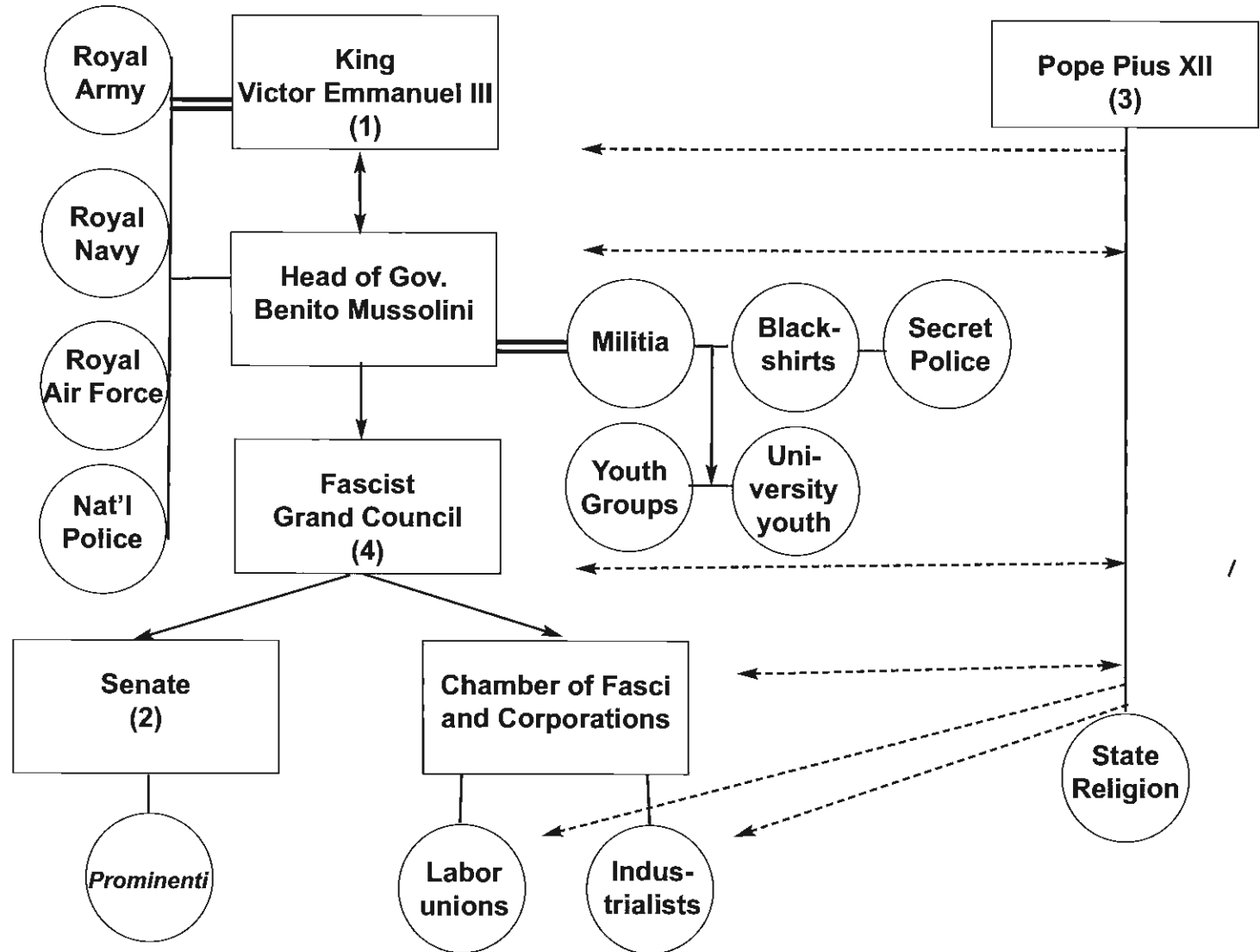
Hence, another difference between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany was that ethnicity (“race”) was of paramount importance in Nazi doctrine. Though there was some tolerance for mixed blood Germans, the nation was defined by purity of Germanic blood. Jews, Slavs and most other ethnicities and races were considered inferior and expendable. Fascist Italy was not “race conscious,” at first. Many Italian Jews were members or supporters of the Fascist Party in the early years. However, with the formation of the Axis, Fascism descended into a race-conscious aberration. However, most historians and observers agree that rank and file Italians, even many Fascist party members, recoiled from this form of intolerance.

The King is Chief of State with constitutionally supreme authority over the military and legislation.

Mussolini reports weekly to the King, commands the military in the King's name, but is the supreme leader of all Fascist components.

The Grand Council advises the Head of Government and initiates major legislation such as the 1938 Racial Laws. It also has the power to choose the King's successor.

Only the Fascist Party is legal. Parliament is subject to Fascist hierarchy and theoretically the King. In July, 1943, the King reclaimed control.



NOTES

(1) The Royal House of Savoy is the ultimate authority - Executive, Legislative, Judicial.

(2) The Senate is composed of prominent Italians from all fields except the Church and has minor legislative function. Example: inventor Guglielmo Marconi was a senator.

(3) The Pope has a major influence on laws and politics even though he is outside the State. However, the State accepts the Church's role in public education including textbooks. The government has the right to approve Italy-based clergy.

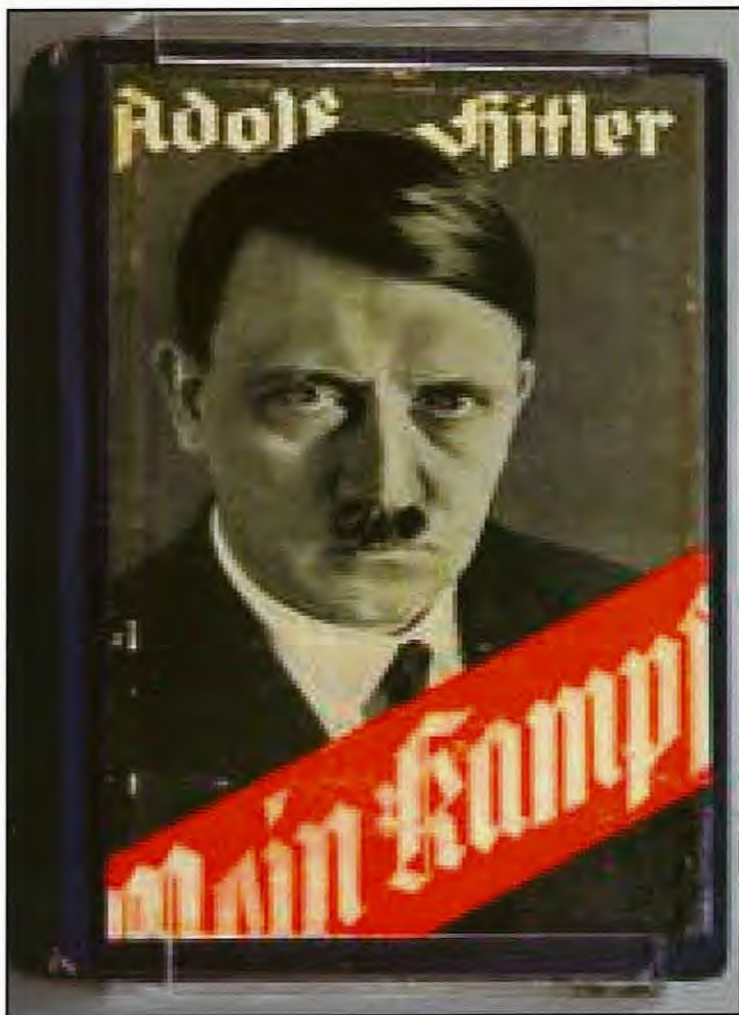
(4) Although only a consultative body, In July, 1943, the Grand Council's no confidence vote led directly to Mussolini's removal as Head of Government by the King. He was arrested on the King's orders by the national police (Carabinieri).

The Kingdom of Italy under Fascism until July, 1943

HITLER UNLEASHED:

THE EARLY YEARS 1933-1938

HITLER NEEDED AUSTRIA TO BEGIN HIS CONQUESTS



MEIN KAMPF

CHAPTER I

IN THE HOME OF MY PARENTS

IT HAS TURNED OUT FORTUNATE FOR ME TO-DAY THAT Destiny appointed Braunau-on-the-Inn to be my birthplace. For that little town is situated just on the frontier between those two States the reunion of which seems, at least to us of the younger generation, a task to which we should devote our lives, and in the pursuit of which every possible means should be employed.

German-Austria must be restored to the great German Motherland. And not indeed on any grounds of economic calculation whatsoever. No, no. Even if the union were a matter of economic indifference, and even if it were to be disadvantageous from the economic standpoint, still it ought to take place. People of the same blood should be in the same Reich. The German people will have no right to engage in a colonial policy until they shall have brought all their children together in the one State. When the territory of the Reich embraces all the Germans and finds itself unable to assure them a livelihood, only then can the moral right arise, from the need of the people, to acquire foreign territory. The plough is then the sword; and the tears of war will produce the daily bread for the generations to come.

And so this little frontier town appeared to me as the symbol of a great task. But in another regard also it points to a lesson that is applicable to our day. Over a hundred years ago this sequestered spot was the scene of a tragic calamity which affected the whole German nation and will be remembered for ever, at least in the annals of German history. At the time of our Fatherland's deepest humiliation a bookseller, Johannes Palm, uncompromising nationalist and enemy of the French, was put to death here because he had the misfortune to have loved Germany well. He obstinately refused to disclose the names of his associates, or rather the principals who were chiefly responsible for the affair. Just as it happened with Leo Schlageter. The former, like the latter, was denounced to the French by a Government agent. It was a director of police from Augsburg who won an ignoble renown on that occasion and set the example which

Hitler's plans of aggression were clearly spelled out in his revealing autobiography *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*), written in 1923. In it, Hitler stated that before Germany could colonize eastern Europe at the expense of the Slavic nations of Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Russia, it needed to reunite with Austria, a Germanic nation of ten million souls. This land mass and the additional manpower were prerequisites to conquest. "*German-Austria must be restored to the great German Motherland....The German people will have no right to engage in a colonial policy until they shall have brought all their children together in the one State.*" [*Mein Kampf*, Chapter I, page 1.]

Upon ascending to power as German Chancellor in January, 1933, Hitler began his campaign to subvert the Austrian government and annex the country. Under the

various guises of a German-Austria customs union or trading zone, Hitler softened his real intent of *Anschluss* (annexation). Only the Big Four allies were in a position to thwart his ambition. Of these, the United States had very limited interest in European affairs, Austria lay far from France's borders as Switzerland was between them, and Britain, also far from the scene, sought to rationalize any German-Austrian union as an internal ethnic matter. Only Italy touched the Austrian border. That border region had just been restored to ancestral Italy as a result of the Great War and 600,000 war dead. Were Hitler to absorb Austria, Nazi Germany would be at Italy's front door. For the Jews of Austria, who numbered some 200,000, Nazi annexation would be their worst nightmare.

ITALY'S FIRST ATTEMPT TO DEAL WITH A RESURGENT GERMANY

June 7, 1933

The 4-Power Pact (left column) was conceived by Mussolini before Hitler became chancellor of Germany but was signed four months after Hitler took power.

The Pact was to be a high-level forum to revisit the toxic treaties that ended the First World War.



Inspired by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, a League of Nations was created in 1919 to settle disputes and stop aggressor nations. Lacking any real powers or even a standing peacekeeping force, the League offered little more than a debating forum for European nations. Surprisingly, the United States refused to join the League.

Italy sought to create a better mechanism than the League of Nations to accommodate a resurgent Germany. It conceived the Four-Power Pact before Hitler came to power.

The pact members were to be Italy, France, Great Britain, and Germany. Unlike the "balance of power" blocs of old Europe, the Four-Power Pact was novel in that traditional enemies would be bound together by

treaty. Moreover, it joined two democracies with two dictatorships and made Germany an equal partner again. Although each nation agreed in principle to such a commitment, Great Britain and France did not want the pact to supercede the League. In effect, any disputes among the four parties would be submitted to the League instead of direct negotiations among the pact members. However disappointed, Italy accepted the watered down terms to keep Germany in line. The Four-Power Pact was signed in Rome four months after Hitler came to power. Ironically, Britain and France invoked it at Munich after the League failed to control Hitler's designs on Czechoslovakia in 1938.

"AUSTRIAN JEWRY REGARDED [DOLLFUSS] AS A BULWARK AGAINST PERSECUTION AND THE HORRORS OF A NAZI REGIME..."

[Encyclopaedia Judaica]



Engelbert Dollfuss,
Austrian Chancellor



Austrian Chancellor (Rejecting Herr Hitler's Proposal) "Oh, Take the Next Step Away! I Won't Have Any More Today!"

AUSTRIA'S BATTLE WITH NAZIS HOLDS ATTENTION OF EUROPE

Neighboring States See Their Interests Involved in the Fight of Chancellor Dollfuss for His Small Republic's Independence

By EMIL LENGYEL.

The diplomatic tension between Austria and Germany, which has since the country's birth and the subsequent appointment of Hitler, found dramatic expression in the smallest and youngest of the nations of Europe, informed the leading power of the continent, Austria was in a result of the menace of Hitlerism, she was reported to have asked the great power to exert diplomatic pressure on the Reich to assist from furthering the Reich's policy of her nationals to stand by Austria, but the Reich has failed to do this, as the German Reich's interest.

This appeal has called attention to the dangerous situation along the Austria-German frontier. It is now the lines drawn in this struggle of the two German empires, since the World War. What events led up to the present conflict and, particularly, what is its effect on the present status of the two countries?

Barbaric German Movements.

Germany, the Christian Socialists, too, had their fighting organization, the *Hitlerbewegung*, and, however, the stage was set for a possible three-cornered fight. This was the appointment of Hitler, and the Nazis in Austria saw the opportunity. The German Nazis asked them by every means possible and possible were common. It became obvious that the government could not be on the defensive, democracy. At the beginning of March, Chancellor Dollfuss issued a statement to the parliamentarianism to act in the German Reich. The Social Democrats did not want to be recognized as their German friends had been, and sent out a general appeal to their protective league. They were the latest party in Parliament and they felt they were entitled to assist in the situation.

Socialists Made Threat.

Among the conditions were announced that resemble a state of war. The frontier guard of Austria was ordered by army units and that of the German by detachments of Brown Shirts, who placed Austria under a heavy hand. The Reich's policy at the present time, under a pact with the Reich, was to maintain the status quo, but the government of Vienna, which had been in contact with the Reich, was not to be considered. The Reich's policy was to maintain the status quo, but the government of Vienna, which had been in contact with the Reich, was not to be considered.

At a definite measure against a possible Hitlerist "push," Austria was placed under a heavy hand. The Reich's policy at the present time, under a pact with the Reich, was to maintain the status quo, but the government of Vienna, which had been in contact with the Reich, was not to be considered.

The Social Democrats were handicapped. What had been their strength—their power in Austria—had become their weakness. The terms were imposed on them and the proclamation of a Socialist dictatorship in the Reich. If they were to have been followed by the proclamation of a Nazi dictatorship in the countryside with the present making common cause with the Reich. The Social Democrats were paralyzed; they had to back down and be headed by the Reich.

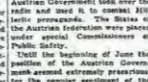
Reich's new deals with Austria's will.

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Reich's new deals with Austria's will.

The Reich's new deals with Austria's will.



Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss.

The Reich's new deals with Austria's will.

Just six months after coming to power in Germany, Hitler began to destabilize Austria to fulfill his goals in *Mein Kampf*

FOR THE 200,000 JEWS OF AUSTRIA, A NAZI ANNEXATION WAS THEIR WORST NIGHTMARE

Hitler's obsession with annexing Austria did not take long to manifest itself. As early as 1932, a year before he became German chancellor, Austrian Nazis were stirring internal troubles, including political assassinations, in the young republic. Catholic political parties in Austria countered this destabilization by forming an Austro-fascist coalition, with Italy's blessing. Its leader, Engelbert Dollfuss, became the Austrian chancellor in 1932. The next year, with Hitler now in power, Germany turned up the

pressure on Austria to form a commercial union. Dollfuss wanted no part of Hitler or Germany. Dollfuss knew of the antipathy Hitler had toward the Catholic Church in Germany. He looked to Italy to guarantee Catholic Austria's independence. According to the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, although Dollfuss had an anti-Semitic history, "*Austrian Jewry regarded [Dollfuss] as a bulwark against persecution and the horrors of a Nazi regime...*" In turn, Dollfuss entrusted Austria's safety to Italy.

MUSSOLINI SENT WORD TO NAZI GERMANY:

L'AUSTRIA NON SI TOCCA! [HANDS OFF AUSTRIA!]

AUSTRIAN NAZIS KILL DOLLFUSS, REVOLT FAILS; 147 PLOTTERS HELD; MARTIAL LAW IN EFFECT; ITALIAN ARMY, NAVY, PLANES READY TO ACT

Germany Recalls Embassy For Actions in Vienna

Special Down in the New York Times. BERLIN, Thursday, July 26.—The German Government today recalled its embassy in Vienna...

INTERVENTION IS HINTED

Rome Reports Appeal to Powers by Austria to Guard Independence.

75,000 TROOPS AT BORDER

Italian Forces Whip Equipment Into Order and War Planes in Steaming Northward.

VIENNA CONFERENCE TODAY

Representatives of Italy, France, Britain and the Little Entente Expected to Act.

BERLIN DECLARES HANDS-OFF POLICY

Asserts Austrian Revolt is Purely Internal Affair and No Concern of Reich.

PARIS AND LONDON GRAVE

Insist Vienna's Independence Must Be Preserved—British Four Cables Like 1914.

By WASHINGTON, D. C. (Special)

Special to the New York Times. BERLIN, Thursday, July 26.—The German Government today declared its policy in regard to the Austrian situation...

KILLED IN VIENNA REVOLT.



Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss.

Eight Nazis Hold Off 1,000 Men For Hours at Vienna Radio Plant

Restaurant Table—Wounded Gun and Bombs of Police and Weimarer Force Their Surrender.

By G. E. R. GEDDE

Special to the New York Times. BRATISLAVA, Czechoslovakia, Vienna, July 25.—I had to cross the Austrian frontier because the Austrian authorities refused to allow me to enter...

ALL OF REBELS PRISONERS

Passage to Germany, Arranged by Austrian Minister, Revoked.

MOB TRIES TO LYNCH THEM

Their 'Chancellor' is Also Held, While Kurt Schuschnigg Succeeds Dollfuss.

VIENNA IS QUIET AGAIN

But Armed Guards Patrol the Streets—Reports of Fighting in Styria, West Stronghold.

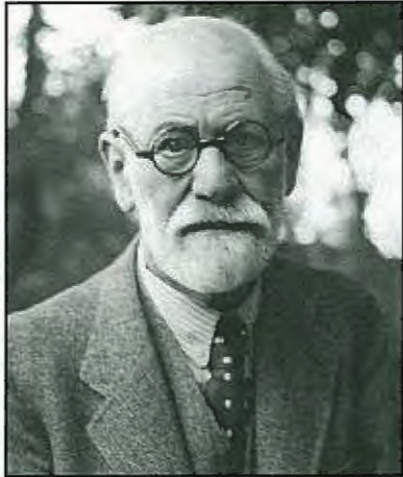
By WASHINGTON, D. C. (Special)

Special to the New York Times. VIENNA, Thursday, July 26.—The calm and quiet which reigned over Vienna this morning...

On July 25, 1934, Austrian Nazis gunned down Chancellor Dollfuss in his office. An Austrian Legion of Nazis, armed by Germany and stationed in Munich, was poised to invade the country in preparation of annexation to the German motherland.

What was the significance of Italy's unilateral act? The American ambassador to Austria wrote this to his superiors at the U.S. State Dept: "I hold no brief for Mussolini, but I am confident that had he not taken the decisive action which he did, at least a part of the Austrian Legion would have got into Austria, and the fat would have been in the fire."

SO LONG AS ITALY PROTECTED AUSTRIA IT REMAINED INDEPENDENT AND A SAFE HOME FOR JEWS



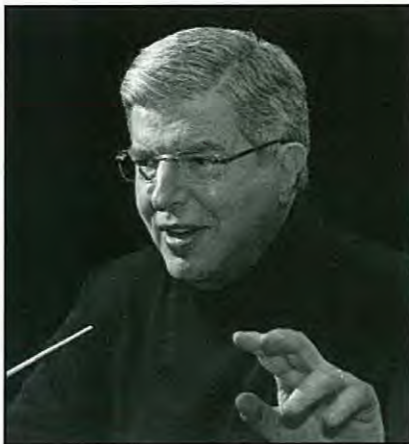
Dr. Sigmund Freud
Father of Psychoanalysis



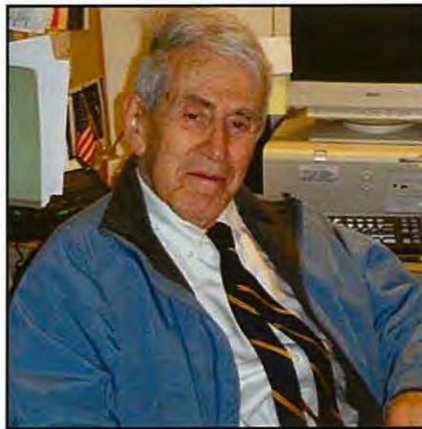
Evelyn Lauder
Business Leader



Heddy Lamarr
Actress



**The father of composer
Marvin Hamlisch (pictured)**
escaped to Italy in 1938



**Klemens von Klemperer, of Jewish origin, fled
Germany for Austria in 1935. There, he led an
anti-Nazi student group until 1938.**



**Austrian Premier Kurt
Schuschnigg with
Mussolini in Rome**

From this bitter lesson, Hitler understood that his access to Austria would depend on neutralizing Fascist Italy. Austria was essentially an Italian protectorate.

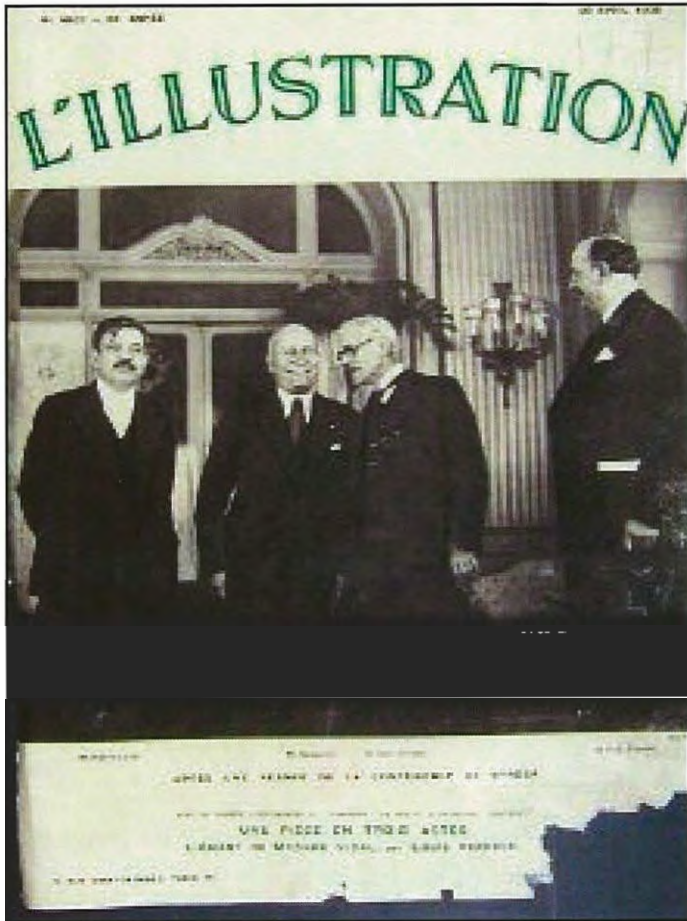
After the Dollfuss murder in 1934, Mussolini met with Nahum Goldman, of the World Jewish Congress, who sought the Duce's intervention with Dollfuss's successor Kurt Schuschnigg to continue Austria's policy toward its Jewish citizens. *"I shall talk to him seriously, you can count on me,"* replied Mussolini. Schuschnigg did, indeed, continue that policy

From his failed annexation, Hitler put aside foreign adventures temporarily, to focus on internal affairs. He awaited future opportunities to reach an understanding

with Mussolini. It would take four years (1934-1938) and a host of international crises for the two dictators to link their fortunes. In the meantime, Austria remained independent and a relatively safe home for Jews. During these years many German Jews including anti-Nazi activist Klemens von Klemperer fled to Austria, joining co-religionists such as psychiatrist Sigmund Freud, beauty consultant Evelyn Lauder, transplant researcher Fritz Bach, actor Hedy Lamarr, movie director Otto Preminger, Imre Rochlitz, whose son was to produce the documentary *Righteous Enemy* dealing with the Italian occupation of France, Greece and Yugoslavia, and Eric Lamet who wrote of his later asylum in Italy (*A Child at Confino*).

“...DESPITE ALL HIS DEFECTS, MUSSOLINI’S CONTINUED CO-OPERATION WAS ESSENTIAL IF HITLER WAS TO BE KEPT IN CHECK.”

[RICHARD LAMB, MUSSOLINI AS DIPLOMAT]



The Stresa meeting of 1935 was called by Italy to create a unified front against Hitler



Anglo-German Naval Treaty, only two months after Stresa, broke the united front.

Anglo-German Naval Treaty allowed Nazi Germany to rearm, without consulting either Italy or France.

In the wake of Hitler's attempt to annex Austria and to rearm Germany, the Italians called for a meeting with Great Britain and France at Stresa, Italy, in April, 1935. The three powers agreed to work in unison to protect Austria and to resist German rearmament. Known to history as the Stresa Front, it was soon violated by Great Britain.

Less than two months later, in June, 1935, the British had secretly negotiated and signed with Hitler the Anglo-German Naval Treaty which allowed Nazi Germany to

rearm. It was done without consulting either Italy or France. The betrayal reverberated across the globe. The U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union at the time reported to President Franklin D. Roosevelt that even the Soviets denounced the British for "breaking the chain around Germany." This was three years before the Munich "appeasement." As journalist William L. Shirer put it in his *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, "With incredible naivete and speed, the British government fell for Hitler's bait."

ITALY CONCEDES AUSTRIA IN 1938



Hitler enters Vienna
in March, 1938



Czechoslovakia was now sur-
rounded by the Nazi Reich.

By 1938, Hitler felt that his relationship with Benito Mussolini was secure enough to focus on Austria again. Fascist Italy was then engaged militarily in the Spanish Civil War and still hadn't recovered economically from its African war against Abyssinia (1935 – 1936). Moreover, France and Britain had resisted any collaboration with Italy to isolate the Nazis.

In March, 1938, Hitler knew the time was right. But he still feared an Italian military reaction like that of 1934. He sent a personal messenger to Rome to announce his overwhelming need to absorb Austria. Italy stood aside and the German Army marched into Hitler's homeland. Hitler was recorded to have said, *"I am no longer in fear of the terrible position which would have existed militarily in case [Italy and Germany] got into a conflict. You may tell [Mussolini] that I thank him ever so much; never, never shall I forget him."* [Mussolini, - Laura Fermi, p.359]

Austrian Jews fell on hard times. By the end of 1939, only 57,000 Jews remained, the rest fleeing to safer havens, including a small number to Italy. Dr. Sigmund

Freud found refuge in England where he lived out the short remainder of his life.

Italy had staved off the Nazis for four years, but could no longer resist German military power single-handedly. And though saving Jewish lives was clearly not the reason for Italy's actions they gave Austria's Jews that many more years to go about their lives and to plan for the eventualities.

The annexation of Austria meant that Czechoslovakia was now surrounded by Nazis on three sides. Within five months the infamous Munich Conference took place.

The words of former British Cabinet Minister Duff Cooper should provoke historians today:

"In any case, we should have retained the friendship of Italy; and the Axis, which was to prove the pivot of Hitler's assault upon Europe, and without which he could hardly have launched the Second World War, would never have been formed."

[*Old Men Forget*, 1954 p. 191]

THE RACIAL LAWS OF 1938

ITALY DESCENDS INTO ANTI-SEMITISM

MANY JEWISH CITIZENS RALLIED TO THE FASCIST CAUSE DURING ITS FORMATIVE YEARS, SOME BECOMING PARTY MEMBERS

It is generally acknowledged that, early on, neither Mussolini nor Fascism held any special animus against the Jews. In fact, many Jewish citizens rallied to the Fascist cause during its formative years, some becoming party members. Aldo Finzi was elected to Parliament as

a Fascist Deputy in 1921 and served in Mussolini's Cabinet from 1923 - 1925, and appointed the first chief of the Royal Air Force when it was founded.

In the 1920s and 1930s Fascist Italy attracted the admiration of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, founder of the Revisionist Zionist movement. To Jabotinsky, Mussolini had recreated Roman Italy just as Jews wanted to recreate Biblical Israel. He saw Italy, not Great Britain, as the vehicle to a new Jewish state in Palestine. The regime gave him permission to establish the Betar Naval Academy in Civitavecchia in 1934. Jewish cadets from Europe, South Africa and Palestine trained at Betar. It eventually produced many of the future commanders of the Israeli Navy.



Ze'ev Jabotinsky
Founder of the
Revisionist Zionists Movement



The Betar Naval Academy
at Civitavecchia, founded in 1934.
First training center for
the future Israeli Navy

THE FASCIST FEAR OF FRATERNIZATION IN NEWLY ACQUIRED ABYSSINIA ALSO CONTRIBUTED TO THE RACIAL LAWS



The Racial Laws of 1938 aimed at stopping intermarriage between “aryan” Italians and “non-aryans.” They were applied to native Africans as well as to Jews in the Italian colonies and in the homeland. They caused severe economic, political, and social hardships as well.

Unlike their Nazi counterparts, Fascists had little basis for a “pure Italian race.” Italy has been a melting pot since before the founding of Rome.

However, it should be noted that these laws did not require Jewish citizens to be interned, deported or liquidated:

“Despite the infamy of the racial laws there was not

the will to exterminate the Jews neither within the Italian Army nor with the Italian government.”

[Carlo Spartaco Capogreco, Holocaust scholar]

It should be noted that Pope Pius XI (1922 – 1939) privately objected to the Racial Laws, with regard to

converted Jews being treated as “non-Aryan” and the concept of racial superiority, which was contrary to the Church’s teaching of universal brotherhood. However, the Church had gained so many privileges under the Lateran Accords of 1929 that Pius XI chose not to strain relations with the regime by airing his objections, according to David Kertzer, author of *The Pope and Mussolini*, Random House, NY, 2014]

SOME JEWISH ITALIANS RESISTED THE FASCIST DICTATORSHIP



Carlo and Nello Roselli,
founders of the anti-Fascist *Giustizia e Libertà*



Enrico Fermi, a gentile, and his Jewish wife Laura chose to leave Italy in 1938. They settled in Chicago where Enrico pioneered the nuclear chain reaction.

Neurobiologist Rita Levi-Montalcini and her distinguished family chose to remain in northern Italy until 1943. Rita conducted her research in a country home to escape Allied bombings.



Belonging to many political parties, from Democratic to Socialist to Communist, many Jewish Italians saw a danger in Fascism. They became outspoken critics of the regime as it tightened its hold on Italy. International Communism, a virulent enemy of Fascism, was held by many in Italy and elsewhere to be heavily Jewish. Attempts on Mussolini's life were deemed justified by many of these enemies of the regime.

With the rise of Nazism in Germany, elements of the Fascist Party adopted a more militant tone. In 1934, a Jewish member of the anti-Fascist group *Giustizia e Libertà* ("Justice and Liberty" founded in 1929) was caught trying to smuggle anti-Fascist literature from France. Police arrested fourteen accomplices who were mostly Jewish. This fed the embers of anti-Jewish prejudice among even moderate Fascists and other segments of Italian society.

During the Spanish Civil War (1936 – 1939) Jewish anti-Fascists like Carlo and Nello Roselli collaborated with the Republican-Communist government to subvert Italian troops fighting for nationalist Francisco Franco. In 1937, the brothers were assassinated by French fascists, likely ordered by Rome.

By 1938, with pressure from his militant party members and his own fears of international Jewry and of race-mixing in the African colonies, Mussolini had his Grand Council draft a Racial Charter which was the basis for the Racial Laws. Moderate Fascists on the Council were able to mitigate the laws to allow many exemptions. Historian Renzo De Felice estimated that some 12,000 Jewish Italians, out of a population of 45,000, were exempted from the harshest measures. Still, the laws gave loyal Jewish citizens second-class status. However, those who were removed from public schools and universities were permitted to set up their own schools.

Nevertheless, about 6,000 opted to immigrate, including Laura Fermi and her non-Jewish husband and nuclear physicist Enrico Fermi.

Others, like Nobel Prizewinning neurobiologist Rita Levi-Montalcini, remained in Italy with her family. Although banned from university facilities, she conducted her research at a home in the Piedmont countryside until 1943, then fleeing to Florence to escape the Germans.

With the German occupation of Italy from 1943-1945, some 7,000 Jewish Italians were deported and killed in Nazi camps outside of Italy.

INTERNATIONAL ATTITUDES

1933-1938

ITALY'S SLIDE INTO ANTI-SEMITISM DID NOT OCCUR IN A VACUUM



The Dearborn Independent



Nuremburg Laws

Italy's slide into anti-Semitism did not occur in a vacuum. Even among the Western democracies during the post WW I decades, anti-Semitism grew both socially and politically. In the United States, automaker Henry Ford was the personification of anti-Semitism, publishing the weekly *Dearborn Independent* and the 4-volume work *The International Jew*, that reflected his virulent views of the Jewish people. In the 1920s, federal lawmakers passed quota restrictions that effectively limited the immigration of Eastern Europeans as well as Mediterraneans.

Germany's Nuremburg Laws of 1935, which stripped Jews of their citizenship, forced them to consider fleeing their country. The problem was that few nations would have Jews in such large numbers. Compounding the problem was the Nazi's refusal to allow the exiles to leave with any assets, essentially making them poor immigrants.

THE RESOLUTION OF ROME, 1934



German troops enter the Saar 1935

Nahum Goldmann of the World Jewish Congress sought and received Mussolini's intercession on behalf of German Jews in the Saar



Saarland was occupied by the Allies, including Italy, in 1934-35

After the murder of Austrian Chancellor Dollfuss in July, 1934 and Italy's prompt response to Hitler's threat of annexation, Mussolini was seen by the leaders of the world Jewish community as a counterbalance to the Nazi regime.

As a result of the First World War, the German region of Saarland was occupied by the Allies. A plebiscite was scheduled for 1935 to determine if the inhabitants wished to return to German control. Approximately 5,000 Jewish Germans living in Saarland planned to leave if the Nazis gained control.

Nahum Goldmann of the World Jewish Congress sought Italy's help in protecting the assets of Jewish residents from Nazi confiscation. He met with Mussolini on November 13, 1934.

Mussolini promised to help. As it happened, the League of Nation's commission for the Saar was headed by an Italian. What became the "Resolution of Rome of 1934" did, indeed, persuade Hitler to allow Jews to leave the Saar with their assets.

Such protection was not given to the Jews of Germany proper, nor to Austrian Jews after the Nazi annexation.

THE DISASTROUS EVIAN CONFERENCE OF 1938



The Evian Conference of 1938 only demonstrated that the democracies, including the United States, would not accept Jewish refugees.

Eleven days after Hitler marched into Austria (March, 1938), president Franklin Delano Roosevelt sought to open havens for German and Austrian Jews in democratic countries around the world. He convened the Evian Conference in France in July, inviting thirty-two democratic nations from around the world. The conference was a disaster. Few nations wanted to accept Jewish immigrants,

especially impoverished ones. Even the United States did not respond generously, only lessening some visa requirements without changing its quota. Many believe the Evian Conference made conditions worse for German and Austrian Jews. Hitler saw how few nations cared about their plight and he could turn the screws tighter. *Kristallnacht* occurred only three months after the conference ended.

THE DOORS CLOSE TO JEWISH IMMIGRATION



The SS St. Louis, with 930 Jewish refugees, was turned away from the United States in 1939.

Kristallnacht (November, 1938), was the last straw for German and Austrian Jews. They were desperate to leave their homelands. But the United States severely limited asylum. The most famous example was the steam ship St. Louis with 930 German Jews aboard that was refused entry to the United States in June, 1939.

In stark contrast, Great Britain opened its doors to 10,000 Jewish children between 1938 and 1939. In February, 1939, U.S. Senator Robert Wagner (D-NY) tried to emulate Britain's precedent by drafting a bill to allow in 10,000 Jewish children. His bill failed to pass. Ironically, Fascist Italy with its Racial Laws allowed Jews to enter without visas. Some 9,000 foreign Jews found refuge in Italy. Of these, only 2,400 were interned and 2,000 sent into *confino libero* in small towns. The rest lived as they wished among native Italians. The government even supported the indigent refugees with monthly housing and living allowances. The Italians allowed foreign Jews to leave Italy if they obtained a visa from another nation.



Great Britain gave asylum to 10,000 Jewish children in 1938-9.

THE CONQUEST OF ABYSSINIA BROUGHT 40,000 BETA ISRAEL (FALASHAS) UNDER ITALIAN CONTROL



The Abyssinian highlands north of Addis Ababa were home to 40,000 Beta Israel (Falashas). Mussolini considered opening this area to European Jews.

With its victory in Abyssinia, Italy became the ruler of many diverse peoples within the country. Among them were approximately 40,000 Beta Israel (Falashas) who believed themselves Jews descended from the tribe of Dan. In 1936, Mussolini saw in the Falashas a way to win over worldwide Jewish support for his regime. He allowed Jewish community representative Carlo Alberto Viterbo to visit the Falashas to assess conditions. The Italians soon implemented a number of changes including an an-

nual subsidy for the International Committee for Falashas (originally founded in Florence in 1906) as well as Falasha schools. The onerous pre-war “land tax” was abolished on non-land-owning Falashas. The Abyssinian law restricting Falasha inheritance of land (the “rist”) was also abolished. All Falasha religious and cultural customs were respected and the Italian military began purchasing Falasha wares that were previously shunned by Abyssinian Christians.

ROOSEVELT SUGGESTS AFRICA FOR JEWISH SETTLEMENT

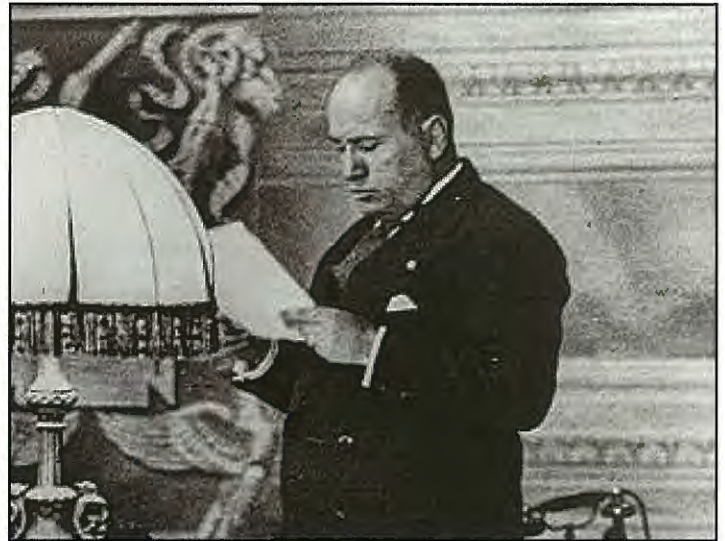


President Roosevelt approached Mussolini in December, 1938 to settle Jews in Abyssinia.

[Excerpt of the U.S. State Dept.'s correspondence with Premier Mussolini on December, 7, 1938.]

“In searching the areas which would appear to lend themselves to resettlement, President Roosevelt has been particularly struck with the appropriateness of the Plateau, a small portion of which lies in the southwestern section of Ethiopia, and the greater portion in areas lying to the south of Ethiopia. It has occurred to him that the Chief of Italian Government may believe that adequately financed colonization of refugee families in this area would be in accord with plans which the Italian Government may have formulated for the development and economic reconstruction of Ethiopia.”

[See the page 24 for the complete letter.]



Mussolini came to believe that only the United States, Brazil, or Russia could accommodate a large influx of Jewish refugees.

After the Evian Conference in May, 1938, desperate to find a solution to the refugee problem, President Roosevelt wrote to a number of world leaders asking them to open their colonies to “foreign” immigration (he did not mention Jews specifically). Among these leaders was Benito Mussolini. Roosevelt and Mussolini exchanged ideas for a Jewish state, which Mussolini supported, except in the Middle East. Roosevelt suggested the southern Ethiopian highlands, an Italian colony, be made available. Mussolini noted that the area had a hostile native population. Instead, he recounted that he had previously suggested opening northern Ethiopia to immigration, where 40,000 Falasha Jews already lived. But that suggestion was not well received by Jewish representatives. Mussolini informed Roosevelt that a better option was the vast spaces of the United States, Russia, or Brazil. These lands had the capacity to create a Jewish state with tens of thousands of new settlers. Roosevelt did not respond.

Not surprisingly, after Italy’s defeat in East Africa in 1941, the Roosevelt Administration proposed to Zionists that parts of Abyssinia and Kenya be their new homeland and Jerusalem be made into a “Vatican City.”

SELECTED ROOSEVELT PAPERS 1938 & 1939

840.48 Refugees/1077a

*President Roosevelt to the Chief of the Italian Government
(Mussolini)*¹

WASHINGTON, December 7, 1938.

MY DEAR SIGNOR MUSSOLINI: The decisive action which you took last September,² which was so powerful a factor in assuring the avoidance of hostilities, is recognized everywhere as an historic service to the cause of world peace. The results of your efforts have provided a practical demonstration that even grave international crises can be resolved by negotiation without resort to armed force.

It is with this recollection in mind that I write to you today.

The problem of finding new homes for the masses of individuals of many faiths who are no longer permitted to reside freely in their native lands, and are obliged through force of circumstances to find refuge abroad, is one of immediate urgency. Both for those governments which desire to bring about the emigration of such individuals, as well as for those governments whose peoples feel it their duty and their desire to help so far as they may be able in the task of resettlement, the problem presented is one of grave complexity. Unless there is effective international collaboration, the prospect of a successful solution is not hopeful. And unless a solution based on justice and humanity can be found, and found promptly, I fear that international relations will be further embittered, and the cause of peace still further prejudiced.

I have, of course, given earnest thought to this matter and certain projects have occurred to me in which the United States could well

¹ Draft copy unsigned. The American Ambassador in Italy delivered the President's letter personally on January 8, 1939, to the Chief of the Italian Government.

² In connection with the Munich Conference; see pp. 568 ff.

POLITICAL REFUGEES

859

collaborate.³ I am requesting Ambassador Phillips to ask an audience of you as soon as may be convenient to you after his return to Rome, and to submit these thoughts to your consideration, and to discuss them with you.

It would give me genuine pleasure to feel that you and I were working together along constructive lines toward a solution of this problem, and that thereby we might be contributing toward a happier and a more peaceful world.

I take this occasion to convey to you my best wishes and the assurances of my highest regard.

Very sincerely yours,

840.48 Refugees/1077a

*Memorandum Elaborating the Points Referred to in President Roosevelt's Letter to the Chief of the Italian Government (Mussolini),
December 7, 1938*⁴

While the Intergovernmental Committee at London has achieved some measure of success in planning, in a practical way, for the resettlement of refugees, adequate results have not as yet been produced. The President of the United States believes that only by virtue of international collaboration involving coordinated policies, based on justice and humanity, on the part both of countries of emigration and countries of reception can the problem be settled in a manner which will not tend to engender further international bitterness and ill-will.

If a general plan can be found sufficiently ample in scope, and practical in character, which in his judgment holds out assurance that the problem which has arisen will be solved in consonance with justice and humanity, the President stands ready to request of the Congress of the United States that it agree to assume an appropriate share of the cost.

In searching the areas which would appear to lend themselves to resettlement, President Roosevelt has been particularly struck with the appropriateness of the Plateau, a small portion of which lies in the southwestern section of Ethiopia, and the greater portion in areas lying to the south of Ethiopia. It has occurred to him that the Chief of the Italian Government may believe that adequately financed colonization of refugee families in this area would be in accord with plans which the Italian Government may have formulated for the development and economic reconstruction of Ethiopia.

³ See memorandum *infra*.

⁴ For modification of this memorandum, see telegram No. 123, December 30, 1938, to the Ambassador in Italy, p. 853.

January 26, 1939

Dear Bill:

I have read with a great deal of interest your letter of January 5 and the accompanying memorandum of your conversation with Mussolini concerning the Jewish refugee situation.

Although I was naturally disappointed that the Duce was not receptive to my suggestion concerning the settlement of refugees on the East African plateau, I am gratified that he at least appreciates the desirability of finding a real solution of the refugee problem and that he indicated a willingness to be helpful in this connection. I have taken note of his expressed willingness to give sympathetic consideration to a specific plan.

It was a real pleasure to have had the opportunity to talk with you at such length when you were here.

With warmest regards, I am,

Very sincerely yours,

The Honorable
William Phillips,
American Ambassador,
Rome.

Top left and above, FDR's letter and memorandum to Mussolini dated December 7, 1938. Reprinted from U.S. Department of State's *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers 1938*.

Left, a copy of FDR's letter to Ambassador William Phillips on January 26, 1939 from the FDR Library at Hyde Park, NY

SANCTUARY IN ITALY

A HAVEN FOR JEWISH REFUGEES 1939-1943

DESPITE THE RACIAL LAWS, ITALY'S BORDERS REMAINED OPEN TO JEWS

— Renzo De Felice —

Jews with Italian Citizenship

The Grand Council of Fascism has established the following, whether a person belongs to the Jewish race or not:

- a. anyone born of two Jewish parents is of the Jewish race;
- b. anyone born of a Jewish father and a mother of foreign nationality is considered of the Jewish race;
- c. anyone born of a mixed marriage who practices the Jewish religion is considered of the Jewish race;
- d. someone born from a mixed marriage, who is of a religion other than Judaism is not considered of the Jewish race as of October 1, XVI.

Discrimination Among Jews Who are Italian Citizens

No discrimination shall be applied, except in all cases for teaching in schools of every grade and level, to Jews who are Italian citizens—who have not been penalized for other reasons—and who belong to:

1. families of War Dead in the four wars Italy has engaged in during this century: Libyan, the Great War, Ethiopian, Spanish;
2. families of volunteers in the wars in Libya, the Great War, Ethiopia, Spain;
3. families of combatants in the wars in Libya, the Great War, Ethiopia, Spain;
4. families of the Dead for the Fascist Cause;
5. families of those wounded, disabled, maimed for the Fascist Cause;
6. families of Fascists members of the Party during the years 1919, '20, '21, '22, the second semester of 1924 and the families of Fiume Legionnaires;
7. families with exceptional merits that will be ascertained by a special commission.

The Other Jews

Italian citizens of the Jewish race who do not belong to the categories mentioned above, while a new law is being drafted regarding the acquisition of Italian citizenship, will not be able to:

- a. be members of the *Partito Nazionale Fascista*;
- b. own or manage companies of any kind employing more than one hundred persons;
- c. own more than fifty hectares of land;
- d. serve in the armed forces in peacetime or in war.

The exercise of the professions will be subjected to further measures.

Exemptions in the Racial Laws of 1938



Some 9,000 Jewish European refugees sought safety in Fascist Italy

In 1938, when Italy's racial laws went into effect, 45,000 Jewish Italian citizens were adversely affected in varying degrees. Some, like Laura Fermi, chose to leave Italy with her non-Jewish husband, nuclear physicist Enrico Fermi. Those who remained coped as best they could. In fact, there were many exemptions in the laws for veterans and their families, former Fascist Party members, and families with "exceptional merits." Still, like Fermi, some 6,000 Jewish citizens opted to leave their native land.

Despite its increasing anti-Semitism, European refugees saw Italy as a temporary safe haven from German occupation elsewhere in Europe. By 1941, approximately 3,000 Jewish refugees from Germany, Austria, Poland, Yugoslavia and other war-torn areas were allowed into Italy without visas, in spite of racial prohibitions. These refugees joined the 6,000 foreign Jews – students, tourists and temporary workers – that were previously stranded in Italy by the war. Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi referred to these refugees as "that flood of thousands of foreign Jews who had found hospitality, and a brief peace, in the paradoxical Italy of those years, officially anti-Semitic."

FOREIGN JEWS WERE TREATED HUMANELY



Many semi-restricted internees were given monthly stipends to rent rooms in rural Italian towns.

Foreign Jews were required to relocate to internment camps or allowed restricted mobility within municipal areas (“confino libero”). Internees were usually given living expenses, access to synagogues as well as entertainment and libraries, and occasional travel passes. These camps were totally different from the German variety and even from the bleak prison barracks used by the United States to confine its 100,000 Japanese American citizens from 1942 - 1945. Scholar Carlo Spartaco Viterbo notes

the absence of physical abuse in the camps. But he suggests that idleness had a demoralizing effect on internees.

Why did Italy, an Axis partner, open its doors to Jewish refugees? There was even a provision in the Racial Laws to allow Jewish immigration to newly conquered Ethiopia, to dissuade Jews from flooding Arab Palestine.

It was only after Italy changed sides during the war in Sept, 1943 and the Germans occupied central and northern Italy that Jews in that zone were at risk of deportation.

FORMER REFUGEES HAVE ATTESTED TO BENIGN TREATMENT IN ITALY



Families remained together and had access to social and religious activities within camps like this one in Calabria.

American author Elizabeth Bettina has documented the personal stories of many of these foreign refugees interned in Italy. Her book, *It Happened in Italy*, published in 2009, is a testament to this little-known chapter of the Second World War. As primary sources, former refugees provide us an alternative look at humanity amid the horrors of the Holocaust.

Edith Moskovich Birns (Auschwitz survivor): “I always told [my husband] Fred that he had a picnic in Italy. Fred’s family, like so many others, decided to leave Germany before the country’s political situation worsened (ca.1938), and Italy was the only country that would let the Jews in without a visa.”

REFUGEES KNEW THE ALTERNATIVES TO ITALIAN CAMPS



Overcrowding often meant a barrack existence for some internees.

Herta Mingelgrün Pollak (Italian internee): “When I speak to people, they always say that ‘Italy was a fascist country’ and believe that the Italians must have been just like the Germans. It hurts me to hear this. Even when he [Mussolini] became an ally with Hitler,

he did the best he could for the Jews, under the circumstances, by opening internment camps, which were not at all like the German death camps. Mussolini interned the Jews under humane conditions where they were treated well.”

REFUGEES HAD AMENITIES THAT MADE INTERNMENT BEARABLE



Internees were permitted mail service. These postcards show correspondence with northern Italy, Turkey, and even Germany.

“Ferramonti di Tarsia, located near Cosenza in Southern Italy, was an internment camp for Jews and foreigners. It was the largest of the fifteen internment camps established by Benito Mussolini between June and September 1940. Over 3,800 Jews were imprisoned at the camp.

The construction of Ferramonti began on June 4, 1940, less than a week before Italy entered World War II. The arrest of Jewish citizens began on June 15, and prisoners began arriving at the camp on June 20. Between June, 1940, and August, 1943, there were 3,823 Jewish internees at Ferramonti, of which only 141 were Italian. The majority, 3,682 people, were foreign-born.

The camp was never a concentration camp in the German sense of the term. Internees were allowed to receive food parcels and visit sick relatives. In addition, there were no mail restrictions. None of the internees were killed or subjected to violence. In fact, the internees were constantly protected from deportation to Germany, as the Nazis requested. The main protagonists of this unique example of human solidarity and tolerance were the director of the camp, Paolo Salvatore, and the Capuchin monk, Fra Callisto Lopinot. Prisoners were allowed to organize a nursery, library, school, theater and synagogue. Several couples got married at the camp and 21 children were born.” -[Wikipedia, from The Historical Journal, Vol. 40, No. 1, March, 1997]



Walter Kleinmann (an Italian internee): “The interned Jews residing in Potenza and the surrounding towns during 1940-1945 in what was known then as *confino libero* were indeed very lucky to have lived among people who, for the most part, did not embrace the racial laws of their own country, and who acted decently and ethically toward the foreigners among them.” [From *It Happened in Italy*]

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM WAS NOT RESTRICTED IN THE CAMPS



Ursula Ebstein Kersh (Italian internee): "Even though a Fascist, Catholic country and ally of Germany, and even though we were relocated into 'concentration camps' which had as the only similarity with German concentration camps, the name, we found a safe haven." [From *It Happened in Italy*]

LOCAL ITALIANS AND EVEN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS TREATED INTERNEES WITH RESPECT

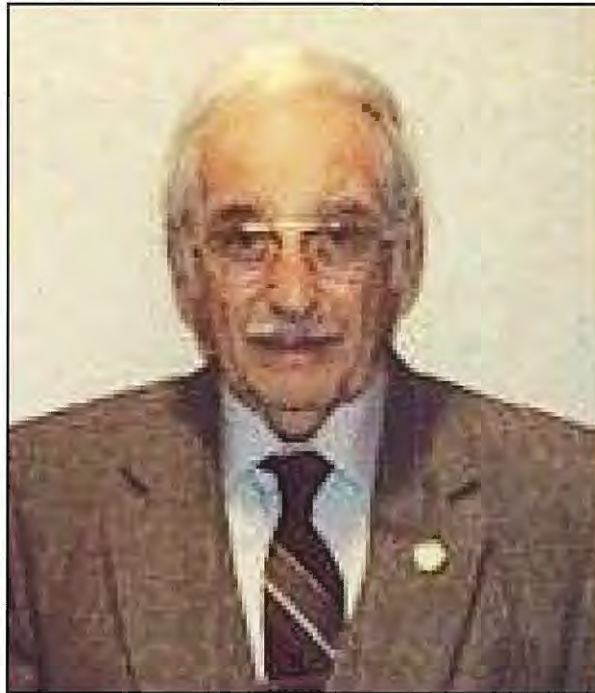


Jewish children at school in the Ferramenti internment camp.
[from the Fondazione Museo Internazionale della Memoria Ferramonti di Tarsia]

Dr. Salim Diamond (Italian internee): “The townspeople were indifferent to our status as Jews, or enemy aliens, or prisoners. We made friends among the local populace and the police. We met them in cafés, spent afternoon hours in conversation with them and we met them in football matches. Like tourists, we took pictures of the town

and our newfound friends. Of course, we missed the variety and the bustle of the big city, but it was a relaxing and healthy existence. If one must be a prisoner, then Eboli [southern Italy) in the summer of 1940 was as good an incarceration as one might have hoped for.”[From *It Happened in Italy*]

WHEN THE U.S. REFUSED HIM, ITALY GIVE HIM REFUGE



Walter Wolff – *Confino Libero* (1939 –1943)

Prior to the United States entry into World War II, America was not readily open to Jewish refugees. The experience of Walter Wolff, whose book *Bad Times Good People*, is representative of many Holocaust survivors who were desperate to leave Germany and found that only Italy would take them in.

In the wake of *Kristallnacht* (November, 1938), Walter Wolff, then a young man of 26, was arrested by the Gestapo and sent to Dachau Concentration Camp. He was released a few months later because he had received a scholarship to study in the United States. America was to be his ticket out of Germany until he tried to obtain a visa from the U.S. consulate in Stuttgart. As he relates the story, the American clerk denied his visa because, ‘we don’t have any firm guarantees that you would leave the United States at the end of three years [of study]... We cannot take the risk.’

Walter only had six months to leave Germany or he would be sent back to Dachau. Worse, neither his widowed mother nor brother had a way out of Germany. Fortunately, he learned that Italy did not require a visa to cross its border. In August, 1939, one month before Hitler

plunged Europe into war, Walter Wolff, his mother and brother found themselves in Fascist Italy.

Upon their arrival, Walter was sent alone to a camp in central Italy (*provincia Salerno*), much different from Dachau. There was no forced labor, few and unarmed guards, adequate food, civilian clothes, and Sabbath observance. A few months later, the Italian government allowed families to reunite and Walter’s mother and brother joined him.

In 1940, after Italy entered the war on Germany’s side, Walter was given *confino libero* status. He was able to reside in an Italian city with a small stipend. Free to live and work, Walter chose a town in northern Italy that had a Jewish community. He worked for the Italian Army as a foreign language instructor and later at a scientific laboratory named for Arnaldo Mussolini, the *Duce*’s deceased brother.

His good fortune in Italy changed in September, 1943, with the Nazi occupation. Still, with the help of many Italians, civilian and military, he lived a tolerable life, eventually meeting his future Jewish-Italian wife in 1945. In 1947, Walter, his wife, mother and brother finally reached America.

ERIC LAMET (née LIFSHÜTZ) *CONFINO LIBERO* (1938 –1943)



Eric Lifshütz Lamet, who fled Austria with his mother in 1938



The town of Ospedoletto, where Lamet and his mother stayed under *confino libero*.

The Lifshütz family, of Polish Jewish origin, owned luxury hotels in Vienna before fleeing Nazi-occupied Austria in 1938. Eric and his mother sought refuge in Italy while his father went to Poland to stay with his parents. From 1938 to 1941, mother and son lived comfortably and unmolested in Milan and San Remo, though Eric was not allowed to enter a public school because of Italian racial laws. However, during those years they were free to travel to Switzerland, where Eric attended summer camp, and to France, as well as destinations within Italy.

In June, 1941, they were required to relocate to a village near Avellino in central Italy for *confino libero*. They were given 50 lire each month for rent. Eric's mother was given an additional 275 lire per month for living expenses and another 50 lire for Eric's benefit. They were able to choose their own apartment (they found one for 50 lire with a communal toilet). Each day they checked in with the local police and each month they would pick up their stipends. In the same area were other

foreign Jews, and Sabbath services were conducted in someone's apartment. Eric's mother fell in love with a fellow internee, an Italian gentile named Pietro Russo. Eric revered him as a father, not knowing the fate of his real father in Poland.

When Mussolini was deposed in 1943, German troops occupied the village demanding a list all of all internees. The Italian officials never complied. Eric, his mother and the other Jewish refugees lived to see the Allies take control of southern Italy. Eric and his mother remained there after the war, while Eric attended the University of Naples. In 1950, they immigrated to the United States with step-father Pietro.

Eric lost 80 of his Polish and Austrian relatives in the Holocaust. His father, as it turned out, had escaped Poland when the Germans invaded but was captured by the Soviets and sent to a concentration camp in Siberia, where he barely survived. Upon reuniting with Eric, he divorced his wife and settled in Israel.

UNDER ITALIAN PROTECTION:
JEWS IN OCCUPIED EUROPE 1940-1943

THE JEWISH POPULATIONS WITHIN THE ITALIAN EMPIRE



Italy and its empire in 1940.

In addition to 45,000 Jewish Italians and the 9,000 foreign Jews who sought asylum in Italy, there were an estimated 68,400 Jews within the Italian Empire. These included, mainly, the Beta Israel (Falashas) of Ethiopia as well as Sephardics in the Aegean territories, Libya, Eritrea, and Somalia.

“There was no specific campaign launched against the Falashas by the Fascists. On the contrary, for the majority of the occupation (1936 -1941) they were able to live their lives relatively unmolested.”[Daniel Summerfield, *From Falashas to Ethiopian Jews*, 2003]

ITALIAN OCCUPIED AREAS OF EUROPE, 1943



Map #1



Map #2



Map #3

By 1942, the Italian military occupied extensive areas in France and the Balkans.

In France (Map 1), Italians initially held the yellow area along the Alpine border. After the collapse of the Vichy government Italy took control of Corsica and the hatched violet area.

In the Balkans (Map 2), the Italian Army controlled half of Croatia, part of Serbia, all of Albania and most of Greece. When the state of Croatia was created the Italians only held coastal areas of that country.

In Greece (Map 3), Italy occupied the lion's share of the country, in blue.

On June 10, 1940, Italy joined the European war as an Axis partner. Its army, navy and air force eventually fought on such far-flung battlefields as North Africa, East Africa,

the Mediterranean, the Balkans, the USSR, the North Atlantic, France and even the Black Sea. Italians occupied areas of southern France, Greece and Yugoslavia until 1943.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF OCCUPATION



Italian troops in France, with French representatives

While few victors, even today, can claim “benevolent” military occupations, Italy’s control of southern France, Greece, Croatia and Dalmatia (Yugoslavia) was a stark contrast to that of the Germans anywhere during the Second World War. In the treatment of Jews in these occupied areas, there is little doubt that Italy deserves honorable mention. Italian cultural official Furio Colombo, himself

a Jew, has written of the Italian occupations: “[the] most astonishing group, and perhaps the most typically Italian, was composed of bureaucrats, civil servants, military personnel, and Fascists...many aided and saved families, individuals, entire communities.”

[The Italians and the Holocaust, Susan Zuccotti]

THE OCCUPATION OF THE YUGOSLAV COASTAL AREA



**Persecuted Jews fled the new Croatian state (remnant of Yugoslavia)
to safety in the Italian occupation zones.**

In Croatia, Yugoslavia, to protect 3,000 Jews from the Nazis and Croatian terrorists, the Italian Army rounded them up for internment under Italian protection. They were eventually transported to an Italian island, Arbe, in the Adriatic Sea. Almost all survived the war. The Jews were housed in barracks while Slav prisoners were kept in tents, even during the winter.

The story of General Giuseppe Amico exemplifies the role the Italian Army played in hindering the efforts of

their allies, both Nazis and Croatian nationalists, to destroy the Jewish community.

In 1941 and 1942 Amico refused to turn over any Jews in his area of responsibility, saying that it was “against the honor of the Italian Army.” His refusal was reported to SS Reichfuehrer Heinrich Himmler. In 1943, after the Kingdom of Italy surrendered to the Allies, General Amico was captured by the SS and shot as a traitor.

ITALIAN RULE IN OCCUPIED GREECE



Having assisted the Italians in the defeat of Greece, Germans occupied Athens and the heavily Jewish region of Salonika. The Italian Army occupied the major part of Greece.



Sholom Venezia and his family lived in Greece during the war. They were protected by the Italian occupiers until 1943 when the Germans took over and they were shipped off to Auschwitz.

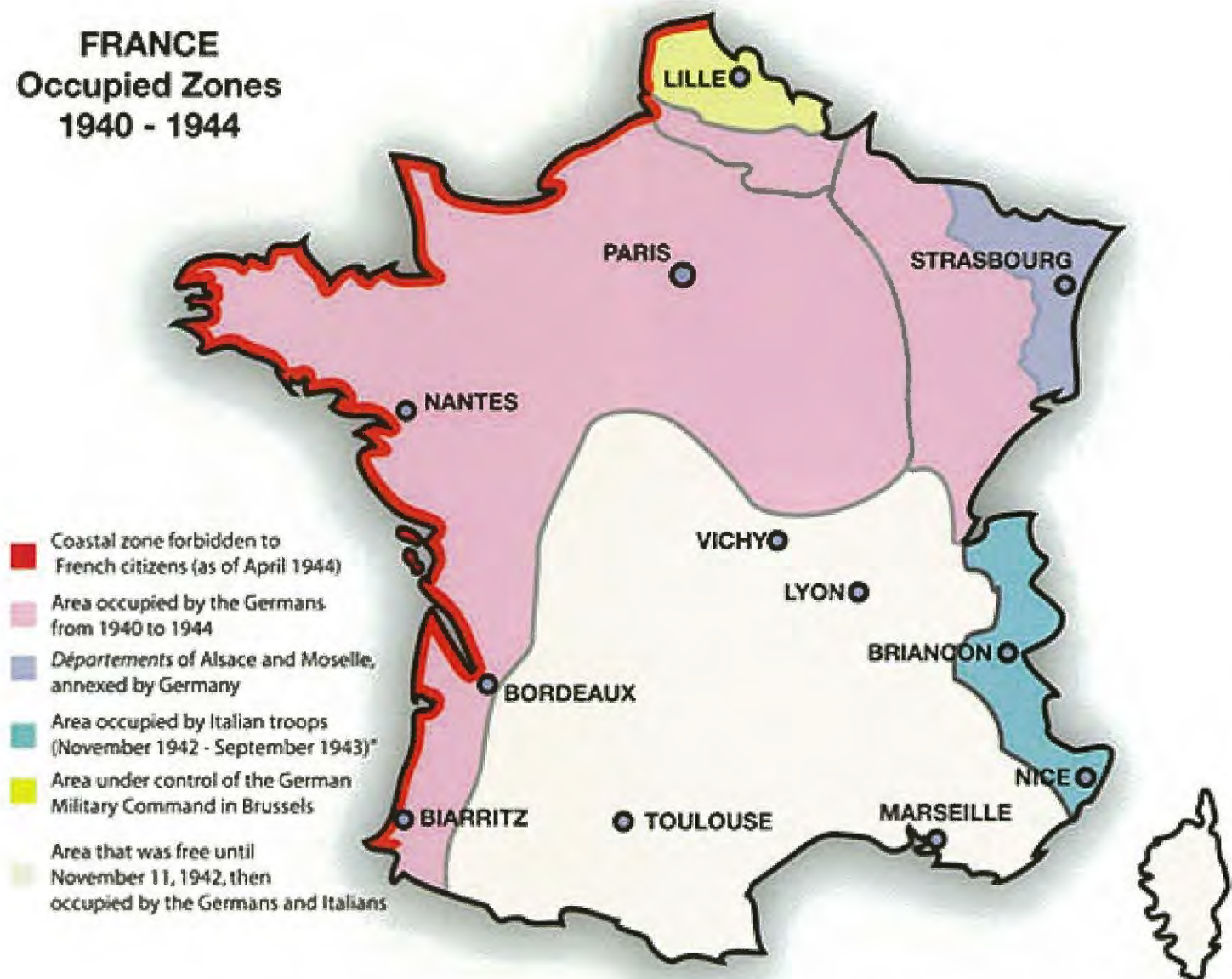
In Greece, about 13,000 Jews remained in the Italian zone of occupation where they lived safely under military protection. Italian commanders went so far as to reach into the German zone of occupation to save as many Jews as they could. Using creative bureaucratic measures such as insisting that many of the Greek Jews had Italian “names” or “connections,” many were released by the Germans to the Italians. Their safety would only last until 1943, when Fascism was overthrown and the Germans seized the Italian zone.

Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi described, perhaps overstating, the Italian military in Greece as, “...the most compassionate military occupation that history records.” [The Reawakening, page 43]

In his book *Inside the Gas Chambers*, Shlomo Venezia recounted how his Jewish Italian family had lived in Greece during the war. With the Italian invasion of Greece, his family was protected until Italy’s surrender. Those three years of relative normalcy ended when the Germans came and the family was deported to Auschwitz.

IN OCCUPIED FRANCE

FRANCE Occupied Zones 1940 - 1944



The initial Italian zone of occupation (blue) included part of the Riviera and Alps. After the Vichy government was removed, the Italian occupation extended further west and included Corsica.

In 1942, after the Vichy government was removed, France was divided between German and Italian occupation zones. The Italian zone held approximately 20,000 Jews. Neither the Fascist officials nor the Italian military required Jews to be interned or even to have the infamous “J” stamped on their identity papers. They forbade the

French police from mistreating or segregating Jews, as was done by French officials in the German zone. When word went out of the Italian policies, thousands of Jews from the German zone escaped to the southern zone. A German report of 1943 estimated 50,000 Jews in the Italian zone.

THE MYSTERIOUS GUIDO LOSPINOSO IN FRANCE



To satisfy the Germans, “Commissar for Jewish Affairs” Guido Lospinoso moved refugees in the Italian zone from Nice (above) to the resort of St-Martin-Vesubie in the Alps (below).



Was banker Angelo Donati, a Jewish Italian, actually “Commissar Lospinoso” who was sent to occupied France by Mussolini?



Nazi impatience with the Italian occupation in France came to a head in 1942 when they heard that Jews were leaving the German zone in a “Biblical Exodus” to go to the Italian “Promised Land” as one Gestapo agent described it. When it was brought to Mussolini’s attention, he placated the Germans by appointing a Commissar for Jewish Affairs, one “Guido Lospinoso,” to get tough with the Jews. The Germans knew something was amiss when SS agents could not locate Lospinoso in France for over a month. They then learned he was evacuating Jews from the coast to mountain resorts in the Alpine foothills, put-

ting the refugees up at swank hotels. Jewish refugee Alfred Feldman, who had escaped with his father to the Italian zone, witnessed Italian police and soldiers mingling with Jews enjoying the streets and cafes of a mountain resort. He had never seen such a thing in wartime France.

Lospinoso figured in the Eichmann Trial of 1961-62, in Israel. According to testimony, Eichmann was detailed to deal with the wily Italian but allegedly never found him. One Nazi official believed Lospinoso was actually a Jewish Italian banker by the name of Angelo Donati.

MUSSOLINI'S FALL CHANGES JEWISH FORTUNE



When the Germans took over the Italian occupation zone in France, some refugees sought safety in Italy, a harrowing trek across the Alps.

The Italian haven in France was not to last. With the fall of Fascism, Germans invaded the Italian zone. Most refugees were rounded up and sent off to concentration camps. Some desperate Jews fled with the Italian Army over the Alps, a harrowing trek, to safety in northern Italy.

But even there, soon to be Mussolini's "Salò Republic," the Germans were now dominant. Worse, the new "republican" Fascism had embarked on a markedly less tolerant policy toward Jews.

ACCOUNTING FOR ITALY'S MILDER OCCUPATION



Former New York State Liberal Party leader Raymond Harding (center) was born Branko Hochwald in the Balkans. His father was harrassed and attacked during the Nazi invasion of Yugoslavia. He and his family escaped to Italy, taking refuge in a Fascist internment camp in Calabria. Democrat Mario Cuomo and Republican Rudy Giuliani stand on either side of Harding.

When asked what motivated Italian officials and soldiers to help Jews in the occupied territories, Dr. Menahem Shelah, a researcher at Yad Vashem, considered all the possible reasons, from plain spite toward the Germans

to political territoriality, or even as “insurance” in case of an Allied victory. In the end, he decided that the overriding motivation was simple humanity.

[The Righteous Enemy, by Imre Rochlitz]

THE REPUBLIC OF SALO`
CIVIL WAR 1943-1945

THE FALL OF MUSSOLINI IN 1943



**Mussolini was freed from Italian imprisonment
by German commandos in 1943.**

The Jewish population in Italy, citizen and foreign, was protected from the Final Solution until the Italian surrender to the Allies in 1943. According to Susan Zuccotti (*The Italians and the Holocaust*, p.57) "...until the German occupation, Mussolini's government did not release a single Jew to the Nazis for deportation." All of this changed when the Germans freed Mussolini from his Italian jailers and set him up as head of the Italian

Social Republic. By leading a new Italian Fascist state that would continue the war at Germany's side, Mussolini hoped to shield his half of Italy from Hitler's wrath after the Kingdom of Italy surrendered and joined the Allies. There were now two Italys, a monarchy south of Rome and a Fascist republic in the north. German troops occupied central and northern Italy and oversaw Mussolini's new domain.

MUSSOLINI TAKES HIS REVENGE



Galeazzo Ciano was a member of the Fascist Grand Council who voted against his father-in-law Benito Mussolini, which led to Mussolini's arrest by the King of Italy. When Mussolini was restored to power as leader of the Salo` Republic, he exacted his revenge. Ciano and three other Council members were tried for treason and shot.



Mussolini at the head of his new Italian Social Republic at Salo`

The nature of Fascism itself changed radically with the Italian Social Republic. No longer constrained by King and Pope, Mussolini sought to toughen his regime to continue the fight against the Allied invasion of the Italian homeland. Moreover, he needed to demonstrate to Hitler that his Republic was not merely a puppet state of Germany but a steadfast ally. Mussolini needed to purge his own ranks of

traitors and defeatists as well as maintain control of northern Italy to avoid a Nazi annexation. (Hitler was already annexing the Alpine region of Alto-Adige and bringing Cossack refugees from the eastern front to settle in Italy's Udine region).

Throughout history, such radicalization leads inevitably to chaos and fraternal bloodshed. Italy was no different.

TREATMENT OF THE JEWS WORSENS

Renzo De Felice

35.

[Report by the Ministry of Finance on the confiscation of Jewish property]

Note for the DUCE.

Subject: Confiscation of Jewish property—Situation as of December 31, 1944-XXIII.

At the end of the first year of the application of the legal decree of January 4, 1944-XXII, n.4, which ordered the confiscation of property belonging to citizens of the Jewish race, I consider it appropriate to present to you, DUCE, the statistical data relevant to the work carried out until now.

In all, on December 31, 1944-XXIII, 5,768 decrees of confiscation arrived at the EGELI, allocated as follows:

Real estate and fixed property	2,590 decrees
Bank deposits	2,996 decrees
Companies	182 decrees

The transmission of the confiscation decrees is not yet completed in many provinces, among them those with the greatest number of Jews and the property owned by them, because of the complexity of the related assessments, which we are addressing with the greatest possible care and urgency.

Work has not yet begun in the provinces and operational zones of the foothills of the Alps and on the Adriatic Coast (and particularly important in this regard is the Province of Trieste), since the application of L. D. January 4, 1944-XXII, n.2 was suspended by the German authorities; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has, however, brought the matter to the attention of the German Embassy, to find a solution.

Finally, within the information reported above the decrees issued in some provinces are not included, since they have fallen into enemy hands following the enactment of the D. L. January 4, 1944-XXII, n.2.

As far as the value of the confiscated property is concerned, this can only be precise for certain categories; while for others, even adding up considerable sums (furniture, valuables, linen, various merchandise) accurate data can only be obtained at the time of their sale. For businesses, finally, the value can be given when the EGELI is able to take possession.

As far as the confiscations included in the data reported, bank deposits in cash amount to a total sum of L. 75,089,047.90; State bonds of L. 36,396,831 (nominal value); industrial and other bonds, valued according to the list at the end of December, at L. 731,442,219. Many other bonds exist whose valuation has not been tabulated.



The Jews in Fascist Italy

All of the bonds, deposits and cash, are being transferred to pre-established venues, which offer maximum security.

The real estate property has been valued on the basis of the standards established for property tax purposes. The official values calculated in this manner come to: land total of L. 855,348,608, and for houses L. 198,300,003. Naturally, if one wanted to consider today's actual real estate value, these amounts would have to be considerably increased.

As far as what is stated above, I can assure you, DUCE, that the progress of this delicate and important work is to be considered satisfactory in every way and that the offices in charge of it, including those in the provinces (Prefectures, Revenue office, EGELI, etc.) work with dedication and commitment endeavoring to overcome in the best possible way the difficulties associated with the existing situation.

Civilian Mail, 316,1, 12/3/1945-XXIII.

**During the short life of the Italian Social Republic,
Jewish Italians were stripped of their citizenship
and their property liable to confiscation.
This 1944 report tallies the worth of such confiscations.**

Labeled the Republic of Salò, Mussolini's republic was beset by anti-Fascist partisans, including many Communists. In effect, civil war broke out. Each side committed atrocities. Luigi Villari, a former Fascist diplomat, claimed that some 50,000 Fascists and their families were murdered by partisans during this time. But Fascism was no longer moderately anti-Semitic. Jewish property was now seized to help pay for the Duce's new state. A report

to Mussolini claimed that by the end of 1944, almost 7,000 confiscations had been accomplished. The republic had taken billions of lire worth of land, buildings, savings, bonds, artwork, and household possessions from Jews living in the republic. Civil war and Nazi occupation had hardened *il Duce*. The 1971 Italian film *Garden of the Finzi-Continis* immortalized this sad chapter in Italian history.

CIVIL WAR AND CHAOS OVERTAKE ITALY



No longer tied to the Kingdom of Italy, the Italian Social Republic created new military forces. A state of civil war had broken out with semi-independent Fascist units combatting partisan groups, many of which were Communist.

Note on the map that Hitler, in delineating the Salò Republic, unilaterally attached the green areas to his Reich. These Italian regions, and Venice, were ultimately to be annexed by Germany.

Fascist republican troops fought Allied troops in the south as well as internal Italian partisans and Yugoslav Communists in northeastern Italy. Semi-autonomous bands of Fascists such as the Muti, Koch, and Carita squads also terrorized Jews. If Mussolini himself did not direct them, some of his fanatical cohorts urged them on.

“No Italian authorities directly controlled them,” according to Susan Zuccotti (*Italians and the Holocaust*), “In fact, the bands survived by cultivating personal relationships with German SS units in their area.” During this republican period, these bands rounded up foreign and Italian Jews, including future author Primo Levi.

THE STRUGGLES OF PRIMO LEVI



Primo Levi had joined the anti-Fascist partisans in 1944 and was captured by Fascists.

Primo Levi was a young chemist of 24 when he joined a partisan group. The Fascists captured him and were preparing to summarily shoot him when he announced that he was a Jew. His captors chose to turn him over to

the Germans for deportation. Shipped off to Auschwitz, Levi ultimately survived the war. He lived to chronicle his experiences as a best-selling author and witness to the Holocaust.

THE GERMAN OCCUPATION OF ITALY 1943-1945



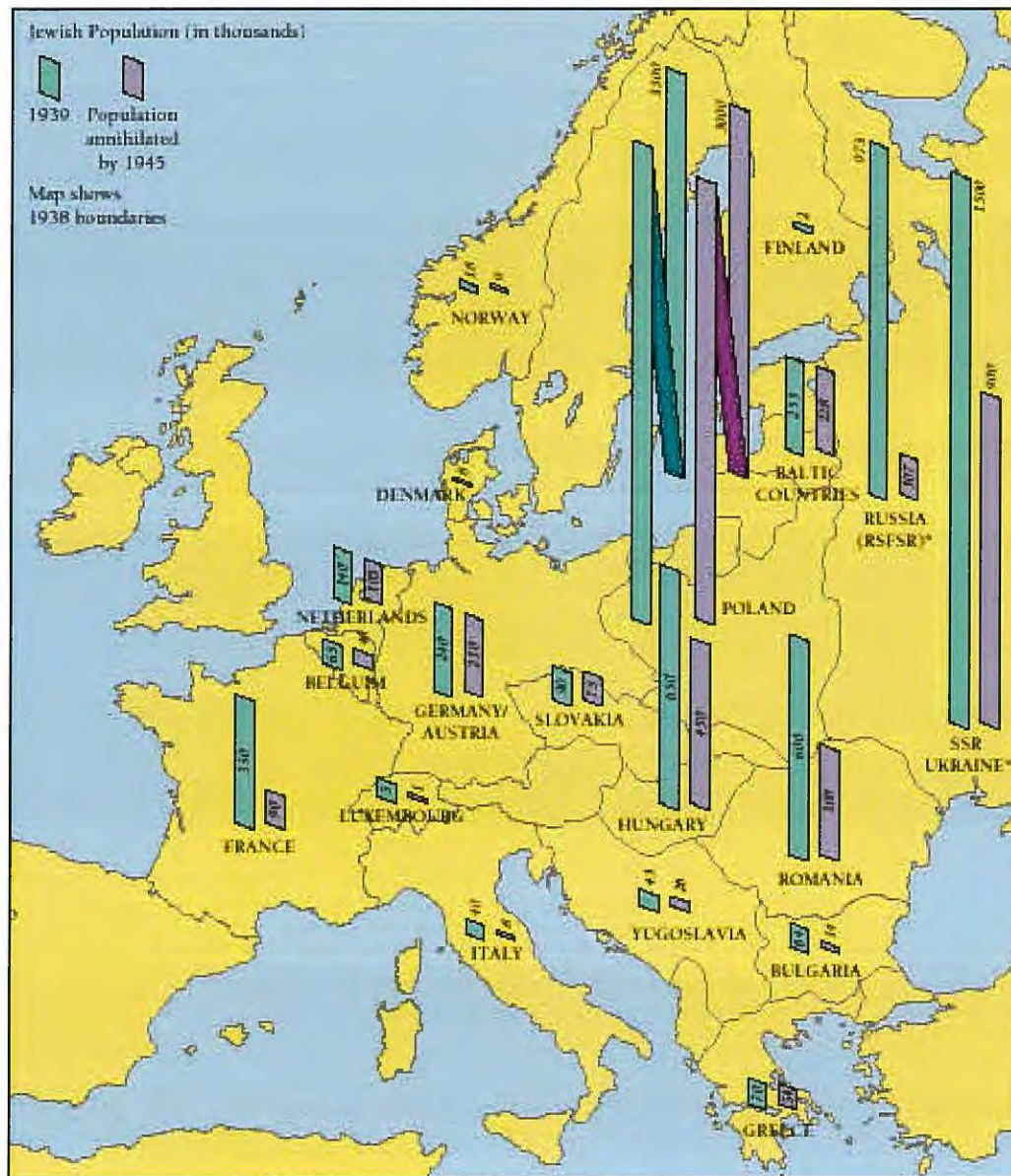
German forces flooded into Italy when the Kingdom of Italy changed sides in 1943.

Meanwhile, in occupied Rome, during October and November, 1943, there was no Italian government. Italy's King Victor Emanuel III and his prime minister, Pietro Badoglio, Mussolini's replacement, had fled before the Germans arrived. Overly confident, Jewish leaders in the city felt no need to advise their co-religionists to flee, trusting that, as loyal Italians, they could continue their restricted but secure lives. At first, the Germans only demanded a gold ransom from the community, later they pillaged synagogue treasures and archives dating back centuries. By mid-October, the round-up of Jews began. Although the Vatican was aware of what was taking place,

no formal protest was made to the German authorities or to the world at-large. However, churches, monasteries and convents within Rome took in fugitive Jews, 4,000 by some estimates, and even 450 within the Vatican. Historian Renzo De Felice lists 100 convents and 55 monasteries in Rome that sheltered Jewish fugitives.

Gestapo chief Herbert Kappler noted that his troops found ordinary Italians sheltering Jews, "The anti-Semitic section of the population was nowhere to be seen during the action...in some individual cases [some Romans] tried to cut off the police from the Jews." In another instance a Fascist official lent his identity papers to a Jew just before a raid.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE GERMAN OCCUPATION OF ITALY



Pre-war Jewish populations and survival rates by country

In other parts of German-occupied Italy, German SS and some fanatical Fascists removed Jews from Turin, Milan, Ravenna, Cuneo, Genoa, Florence, Siena, and Bologna for deportation. Only the courageous acts of individual Italians saved any of the condemned. In the Trieste suburb of San Sabba, the SS set up and operated the only extermination camp on Italian soil. In the end, a total of 6,801 Jews (Italian and foreign) in Italy perished in these pogroms, 15% of the Jewish population of 1943.

With a survival rate of 85%, the Jews of Italy had a better survival rate than any other Nazi occupied country except Denmark. Contributing to this was the relatively short duration of the German occupation.

It should be noted that over 600,000 Italian soldiers were themselves imprisoned in German POW and concentration camps as a result of the Kingdom of Italy's surrender to the Allies. It is estimated that between 37,000 – 50,000, including the daughter of the Italian King, died in captivity.

THE RIGHTEOUS

1943-1945

THE CHAOS OF 1943-1945 AFFECTED JEWS AND GENTILES



Marshal Pietro Badoglio. His poor planning led to chaos both in Italy and Italian-occupied areas of Europe.



General Mario Roatta was one of many Royal Army officers who protected Jewish refugees throughout occupied Europe.

The Nazi occupation of Italy was caused by the precipitous fall of Mussolini's regime in July, 1943. The head of state, King Victor Emmanuel III, had Mussolini arrested at that time and installed Marshal Pietro Badoglio the new head of government. In September, 1943, this new Italian government switched sides in the war and became an Allied power. The poorly planned move threw Italy into widespread confusion and chaos.

Hitler had already anticipated the betrayal and German troops poured through the Alps.

The Italian peninsula became a hodge-podge of Fascists fleeing north, many Royal Army soldiers deserting or fleeing their German allies, Jews seeking shelter, anti-

Fascist partisans vying for weapons and territory, and ordinary Italians trying to understand and cope with the anarchy. Still, many Italians retained a sense of humanity.

According to the Yad Vashem Remembrance center in Israel, some 500 individual Italians showed enough compassion for Jews in war-torn Italy to earn the designation "Righteous Among the Nations." These Italians came from all walks of life: farmers, businessmen, soldiers, diplomats, partisans, and clergy. They may have hidden refugees from German and Salo' Fascist pursuers or had positions of authority to save Jews from deportation to death camps.

500 ITALIANS WERE NAMED RIGHTEOUS BY YAD VASHEM



Ida Lenti

In 1940, Ida Lenti was fifteen years old when she was employed by a refugee Hungarian Jewish family stranded in Tuscany. The family kept their Jewish heritage a secret from Ida.

In 1944, during the German occupation, the mother became gravely ill and died. On her deathbed, she pleaded with Ida to take care of her orphans, aged 9, 12, and 13. She also revealed to her that they were actually Jewish. Young Ida had to shoulder the responsibility of raising the children with no economic means whatsoever, keeping the secret about their being Jewish, and facing the terrible danger of discovery by the authorities.

In desperation, she decided to take them to her hometown near Padua. They were introduced as Hungarian refugees, and no one knew they were Jewish except the mayor. With his help the children were put in various Christian institutions.

After the war, Ida contacted the Allies' Jewish Brigade, soldiers who were looking for hidden Jewish orphans throughout Italy. The children were then transported by ship to Israel. One of the children, Zvi Yanai, would eventually become a director general of Israel's Ministry of Science and Technology.

On February 24, 1993, Yad Vashem recognized Ida Lenti as Righteous Among the Nations. She lived very modestly, married late, and did not have any children of her own. She died in 2008.



**Giovanni Palatucci,
Chief of Police in Fiume, Italy**

Italian official Giovanni Palatucci was Chief of Police in Fiume, northern Italy. In 1938, with the promulgation of the Racial Laws, he urged foreign Jews in his jurisdiction to accept relocation to an internment camp in the Campania region of central Italy where his uncle was diocesan bishop. When the Germans arrived in Fiume in 1943, one of Palatucci's first acts was to destroy all files and lists dealing with Jews. When possible, he warned those in danger of Nazi searches or raids. He arranged for escapes of Jews by boat to Allied-occupied southern Italy and provided staging areas and false documents to assist them.

Warned that the Germans were on to him, the Swiss consulate offered Palatucci a letter of transit to Switzerland. Rather than use it himself he gave it to his Jewish girlfriend. She survived the war and lived the remainder of her life in Israel. Palatucci was arrested by the Gestapo in September, 1944 and died at Dachau at age 40. He was named Righteous by Yad Vashem in 1990.

THE RIGHTEOUS WERE ALSO BUSINESS PEOPLE



An image of the round-up of Jews in Hungary



Giorgio Perlasca was a Fascist volunteer in the Spanish Civil War. While in Hungary he became a de facto official of the Spanish consulate. In that capacity he was able to protect thousands of Hungarian Jews from deportation to Auschwitz.

GIORGIO PERLASCA: AN ITALIAN IN HUNGARY

In areas not under Italian control, such as Hungary, individual Italians were notable for their humanitarian efforts. Giorgio Perlasca was a meat importer working with the Spanish Embassy in Budapest (1944-1945) when he saw first-hand the Nazi round-up of Jews. In league with the Spanish officials, Perlasca helped issue Spanish identity doc-

uments to Jewish victims. When the Spanish ambassador abandoned Budapest, Perlasca claimed his title and rescued between 5,000 – 10,000 Jews from the Hungarian police and Germans. Perlasca was finally recognized for his work in 1990 when he was given honorary Israeli citizenship and honored by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council.

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ITALY AND THE HOLOCAUST

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