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LATIFUNDIA

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SECURITY INTELLIGENCE

FILE

MINUTE SHEET

No. of sheet	Date	File no. of Ans'd Ltr.	From whom	Subject
1		REPORT	By MONTH-GARU	ON MAFIA-LATIF-MANDIS - SEPARATE DYES.

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The following material was furnished by Prof. MONTALBANO, a Socialist leader in Palermo.

The Latifundia Question in Sicily.

1. Historical Sketch.

When feudalism was abolished in Germany, it was provided by law in the major portion of the States that ownership of the land should remain vested in the agriculturists who had occupied it for centuries, while at the same time facilities were afforded them, through appropriate legislative acts and special credit institutions, for the enfranchisement of the land from all dues formerly owed to the feudal landlord.

In France a similar phenomenon occurred in the last decade of the 18th century, though with the difference that the substitution of the peasant for the feudal landlord as owner of the soil was accomplished by means of general confiscation, effected by the State, of all feudal holdings. In England and in Ireland the matter took a different turn. The nobility remained lords of the land, bound in their proprietorship by a great number of restraints, but nevertheless proprietors. The result of this was ~~the~~ a most unhappy condition of the peasant class, a situation which in Ireland even became finally the cause of grave dangers for the State.

In Italy, especially in those provinces where the medieval tradition was maintained alive to the greatest extent, and particularly in Sicily, where the feudal order lasted, intact and flourishing, until 1812, the abolition of rights under the feudal system produced no social revolution, precisely for the reason that feudal dominions, with the exception only of those lands which had been regularly held by enfeoffment, were left as freeholds in the hands of the ancient barons. Thus in the place of the bond between the agriculturist and the land, which theretofore had consisted in the institution of feudal servitude itself, there was not substituted, as elsewhere, the other bond of ownership. Instead this bond was simply broken, and the peasant found himself liberated under the law, without obligations, but also without rights, and hence reduced in effect to a greater degree of servitude than before, in the form of ~~his own~~ poverty itself.

2. Latifundia, Mafia, and Separatism.

Latifundia are these ex-feudal dominions which correspond⁴⁷ in general to the ancient baronial feudal dominions and which remain, at least in part, in the hands of the noble families. Others were alienated through various causes, — division by inheritance, sale to meet debts, etc., and are found in the hands of the rich middle class. Nevertheless, however they may have changed hands, they have

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been divided up only to a limited extent.

Every feudal holding has a common tenant house which is the center of the agricultural enterprise. These tenements are for the most part in a most deplorable state, and almost all lack stalls for the cattle and suitable habitations for the workers, who sleep, a large number in a room on rough pallets of straw and rags. One could count on his fingers the number of proprietors who have made any outlay to make suitable changes in these rural habitations, the state of which has just as much importance for the cultivation of the land as for the condition of the peasants.

In Sicily the ex-feudal dominions are as a rule leased out by the owners to entrepreneurs with capital for a term of years which varies, according to the province and the locality, from three to six, and, in rare cases, reaches nine. To lease out land against a money payment is called in Sicily to let it out in gabella and the lessee is called a gabellotto. The gabellotto sometimes leases several latifundia in order to sublet them out to others.

Intimately connected with the structure of the latifundium and with the position of the gabellotto is Mafia. It is difficult to establish with precision the historical beginning of this social plague sore which afflicts Sicily and forms a veritable state within a state, inasmuch as Mafia is a vast association of criminals, with a central power, with ramifications all over Sicily and in every branch of Sicilian public life, and with organs which are to a large extent analogous to the legislative, executive, and judicial organs of a modern state.

Perhaps in its origin Mafia arose as an organization for defense of the weak against the powerful and tyrannical feudal barons. But little by little it lost this aspect, taking on more and more that of a criminal organization, pure and simple. And so it was transformed from an organ of defense for the weak into an organ of rapine, oppression, and domination of all social classes. The wealthy landed proprietors, in order not to be molested, were obliged to pay regular wages to mafiosi and take them into their service as compieri (that is: as men charged with the duty of watching over and ensuring their personal safety and that of their agricultural concerns).

Once its power was consolidated, Mafia proceeded to extend its conquest into the latifundia, and the gabellotti, who have been described above came to be recruited from among the capi Mafia. These represent today, therefore, the true allies of the latifondisti, the true supporters of the latifundia system, the basic adversaries of subdivision of the land of agricultural cooperation, of liberty, progress, and in a word, of the political parties based on social reform such as the Christian-Democrat, the Social-Republican, the Socialist, and the Communist parties. Now since these four parties

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will most assuredly come into power in the free Italy of the post-war period and will without doubt resolve this social question in Sicily through the abolition of the latifundia, the capi Mafia and the latifundisti see no other means of salvation than that of separatism. That is to say, they hope that, when Sicily shall have been separated from Italy, they will be able, through the use of violence, to dominate the political parties of the left and keep intact their own privileges.

3. Remedies.

The first remedy is certainly political in character. The latifundia question in Sicily cannot be resolved if steps are not taken to strike at the Separatist Movement, which has no object other than to maintain the latifundia and Mafia. It is a most strange thing that the Allies have not yet become aware of such an evident fact and are continuing to maintain separatists in the highest public offices of Sicily, with the most serious damage to the Sicilian population and to the Allied cause, in the form of grave disorders which have already taken place in certain centers of the island.

The second remedy is economic in character and consists in the leasing or sale of the latifundia to agricultural productive cooperatives.

Among the Sicilian peasants the spirit of association is rather strong, even though the necessary education for obtaining from cooperation all the fruits it is capable of yielding is only on the way to formation. It is hence permissible to hope that cooperation may be in the immediate future a most important means of solving the latifundia question and of improving the very wretched condition of the peasant in Sicily.

After the first world war, there arose in Sicily many agricultural productive cooperatives, which pacifically and against proper payment entered into possession of various latifundia and began to cultivate them in a scientific manner, in place of the primitive methods formerly in use, to the great benefit of those concerned as well as that of national production. But the latifundisti and Mafia organized Fascist action squads and all of the cooperatives were very soon destroyed.

Now it is necessary that the aforesaid cooperatives arise again and receive encouragement and favor from the Allied Governments, in order to solve the problem of the latifundia, to destroy poverty, and to cause to be born in Sicily a healthy social democracy.

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