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SOUTH TYROLIAN PARTY

MAY 1945

SOUTH TYROLIAN PARTY

Bozen, May 17th 1945

Col. Nelson. W. Monfort
15 th Army Headquarters

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Florence

Sir,

In my quality of leader of the South-Tyrolian Party I want to thank you, in the name of our South-Tyrolian people, for the kindness shown to our Mr. Toni Lucia. He has told us about the interview you accorded to him at 5th Army Headquarters on Saturday, 5th May, Florence, and of your interest in our statements.

Mr. Lucia has expressed our hopes and our apprehensions as to the treatment of the Tyrolian people up to the time of the final decisions to be taken by the Allied, concerning the future of our country.

You kindly informed Mr. Lucia, that decisions concerning the treatment of the South-Tyrolians up to the time mentioned can only be taken by the political advisers of General Alexander, to whom you promised to report about our problems. We have prepared all the necessary informations on the questions, which Mr. Lucia could not give you on the spot. We hope to be given in the near future the opportunity to speak to the interested political advisers, either in Rome or here, or at any other place they will find suitable.

The South-Tyrolians were greatly relieved to see that one of the most important questions, put before you by Mr. Lucia, the bringing of South-Italian Partisans into the province of Bozen, has been settled favourably. On the other hand, another of our main apprehensions seems to become a fact, as it is one of the questions we believe to be decided by the before mentioned political advisers of General Alexander, we beg you to consider this fact.

We hear that all the local South-Tyrolian Police and Carabinieri Forces (Gendarmerie) are to be replaced by purely Italian men from Southern Italian Provinces, Carabinieri and CML.-People, armed civilians. Our opinion on this matter has not been asked, which is another reason for us to believe that this order has come from higher headquarters. The German Gendarmerie- and Police Forces stationed in this province consisted of Germans and Austrian subjects, but among those Austrians were many Tyrolians from this province, who could be relied upon. Even if these Tyrolian Policemen, who have been transported south a few days ago,

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cannot be brought back soon enough, there are enough trained and reliable men in our villages to assume these functions along with local Italians, according to an agreement that could easily be obtained with Allied help.

We may recall, that in spite of twenty-years Fascist oppression and forced Italianisation the South-Tyrolians represent still about $\frac{2}{3}$ of the population of this province, viz 200.000 South-Tyrolians against 110.000 recently immigrated Italians. (About 80.000 Tyrolians emigrated north in the years from 1940 to 1945 and have mostly been replaced by Italians). Of the 109 communities in this province 47 have a more than 90 % majority of Tyrolians, while there is not one Italian community with such a majority of Italians. 36 communities show a $\frac{2}{3}$ majority in favour of the Tyrolians. 10 communities are mostly Ladinians, whilst only 5 communities (including Bozen and Meran) have an Italian majority. 4 others show about equal Tyrolian and Italian percentage with a slight majority of Italians, whilst in 7 other communities the balance shows a slight Tyrolian majority.

There cannot be any doubt about the importance of Tyrolian land-property and economy. About $\frac{9}{10}$ of the land is still owned by Tyrolians, who form certainly an element of peace and order in this country. It seems only just that our people should be accorded the right to cooperate with the Allied Forces and the local Italian people in keeping order and peace in this country.

The South-Tyrolian people are therefore hoping that given orders concerning the Italianisation of the police-forces in this province will be altered to give us a chance to show our good will and our resolution to keep peace and order at all costs.

I am, Sir,

Yours very respectfully

Erich Amonn
Leader of the South-Tyrolian Party

South-Tyrolia Party

Box 1, May 22nd 1945

To the
Allied Military Government

B o s e n

Sir,

President Wilson's private Secretary at the time of the Treaty of Versailles, Mr. Baker, writes in his Memories, Volume II, page 111, that the President regretted very much to have promised Mr. Orlando of the Italian Government the Brenner frontier, thus delivering 150,000 (in reality 250,000) Tyrolians to the Italians. He called it a mistake that had happened before he had studied the question thoroughly.

It is necessary to dwell a moment on the development caused by this decision of one is to judge the attempt of the present Italian authorities to undermine any statement made by the South-Tyrolia Party or single South Tyrolians by indiscriminately calling the population of this country Nazis.

In 1919 the land between the Brenner, Reschensee, Innichen and Salurn became Italian against the unanimous wish of its population. This population formed a very homogenous and compact group of people. Besides 250,000 South-Tyrolians speaking the Austro-Tyrolia dialect there were about 20,000 Austrian-minded Ladinians and only about 8000 Italians residing here.

Already Liberal Italy began by not fulfilling the promise she had made to respect the Tyrol as a culture. But the Fascists who oppressed this province for more than 20 years really created impossible conditions of life for the South Tyrolians.

Let us here Mussolini himself, then in the prime of his activities, on this subject, in the interview he granted to the special correspondent of the "Petit Parisien" on February 26th 1926: "When I visited South-Tyrol, I noticed that everything there was German- Church, school, public functionaries, railway and post officials. Everywhere nothing but the German language was to be heard and people sang songs such as in Rome would have caused their immediate arrest ... Now in all schools of the province the teaching of the Italian language is obligatory, all post and railway officials are Italians, and we are just now about to settle there a large number of Italian families.

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One thousand families of ex-combatants will be sent to South-Tyrol with a view of promoting the work of amelioration of the soil. At Meran, where there are nitrogene industries, we have settled 400 Italian families, and several hundreds more are being employed in the zinc mines near the town. In this way we shall succeed to italianise the country, just the same as we have italianised the "Sette comuni" near by...."

This was the beginning: the rest was worse. Giving any kind of lessons in our language was severely punished with prison or deportation. Nearly all public and semi-public institutions and offices were occupied by Italians. The same method of replacing our men by Italians brought here from southern provinces took place in the banks and economical organisations, in the Chamber of Commerce, industry and trade as well as in our agricultural institutions. In the courts of law and in all the aforesaid offices we could not defend ourselves or bring forth our requests in our language. All public and private inscriptions, placards etc. had to be in Italian, even the very words on the tombstones in our cemeteries.

The result of all this was an acute unemployment among the South Tyrolians owing to the arrival of some 10,000 Italian families from the South of Italy, who took their places, leaving them in a hopeless situation.

To speed up Italianisation and Fascist penetration big Italian firms were forced to build large industrial plants near Rosen. This economical nonsense was pulled through with the help of the State, these firms being exempt from taxes, having them granted free transportation for their goods to and from Verona and being strongly supported by the Government. By special laws the selling of landed estates was closely watched and influenced by the prefect in favour of Italian purchases. These measures of course brought another mass of Italian families into the country.

The statement therefore that most of the Italians in this province were more or less brought here by the Fascists and directly or indirectly supported by the Italian Government or the Fascist Party is certainly not exaggerated.

To make a long story short, it can be said that the South Tyrolians were completely governed, down to the smallest mountain village, by Italian Fascists, worse than any ~~white~~ colonial tribe of people who are at least allowed to keep their language and to have their own chiefs.

No wonder that especially the younger generation was depressed by the hopelessness of their future prospects. But in spite of this situation they would not become Fascists.

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Things stood like this when Hitler and Mussolini came to the famous agreement regarding the emigration of the South Tyrolians to suit the Axis. The propaganda of the Third Reich set in with all its powerful methods and means. Propaganda promising and threatening alternatively penetrated into every family, every single household in the country, making use of the existing hatred against the Fascist oppression and of the never extinct hopes to get rid of it at last and at any cost. Hints were given, very cleverly, that a clear unanimous option against Fascist Italy might bring the country autonomy without emigration. The Italian propaganda unintentionally helped the Germans by saying (Senator Tolomei) that South Tyrolians who would not vote must become 100% Italians, whilst the Nazis spread the secret rumour that these non voters would be sent off to Sicily or to Abyssinia. The Prefect Mastromattei threatened to settle the not-emigrating portion of the population south of the Po. On the other hand, in order to eliminate religious scruples, the Nazi propagandists had it said among the people that in Germany the Ten Commandments had become law.

To stop this flood of lies was impossible. Finally the South Tyrolians really thought that - as emigration or deportation was to be their lot - Austria was in any case a better place for them than the places selected for them by the Italian authorities. Too late the prefect of Bozen realised his mistake and tried to withdraw his threats. Only about 15% of the population decided to stay in the country, to stick to their homes and to their mountains and run the risks hinted at before. Considering the diabolic propaganda the percentage is remarkably high. -

The decision taken by most of the South Tyrolians in 1939 was therefore not one of free-will, but even less can it be looked upon as a manifestation in favour of Nazi ideas, even if some of the younger people did hope to find a better future in Hitler's Germany than they could look for in Fascist Italy! They did not know Nazi Germany as they got to know it later on.

When in 1943 German troops came into this country, the German authorities took their chance to get at those South-Tyrolians who had either voted for Italy or had not voted at all. Many of these were sent to concentration-camps or prisons, others were severely handicapped in their economic existence.

But the Italian population in South Tyrol had little to complain of being protected by the still existing Italian State, the Axis partner. The removal of some leading Italian officials who had been put into office by the Fascists (the majority of Italian employees staying on) can not be looked upon as an act of oppres-

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sion. It was only a natural reaction to a much stronger and much more thorough oppression. Besides, in most cases, the South-Tyrolian interests in the branch of business or administration concerned, or the percentage of population in question, was quite in accordance with this new management, it was therefore merely a rectification of the Fascist methods of Italianisation.

During these last weeks though the distortion of facts by the Italians went so far as to call people Nazis who had under personal danger and at great sacrifices worked against Nazism from the very beginning, just as it appears part of a malicious plan to pretend that our South Tyrolians are still infected by Nazism.

On the other hand, we cannot find the slightest difference between the way Italians have comported themselves in this province since May 1st and the aforementioned Fascist methods.

We do hope there is an end of Nazism and Fascism alike ! We shall see to it that Nazi survivors be kept away from our people and our Party. Let the Italians do the same with Fascist men and methods !

Of course, we also see the Italian point of view. As they have come into this country during these last 25 years and depend more or less directly on the support of their Government, they are pouring into the offices again to get a job, as long as the going is good.

But for us who form the settled, economically important, land-owning population with a majority of 2/3, a repetition of the well-known Fascist grip on our people is simply intolerable. This is why we have asked you in a previous letter to preside a series of meetings, in which to reconsider the management of the provincial, communal and administrative offices. With us is not a mere question of finding employment for our people, but to have our interests looked after and our rights respected.

I am, Sirs,

yours very respectfully

Erich Amonn
Leader of the South-Tyrolian Party

Bozen, May 23rd 1943

Dates of the development of Fascist oppression in South-Tyrol

7th November 1918 - Arrival of Italian troops in Bozen.

18th November 1918 - Proclamation of the Italian Military Governor, General Pecori Giraldi to the population of the "Upper Adige" containing the assurance that also citizens speaking a foreign language would be treated with justice and affection. "Italy declines any idea of violation of her subjects of foreign language and race. Assurance that the population of Austro-German language would have equal rights as well as separate schools, institutes and associations.

February 1919

Foundation of the South-Tyrolian National Council in the name of German-Austria to oppose all aims of annexation by Italy. Very soon after this movement is forbidden.

February 1919

Memorandum to President Wilson recalling the right of self-determination of all people proclaimed by himself. Declaration of the wish of the whole South-Tyrolian and Ladinian population to remain with Austria. Basis the census of 1910 according to which there lived 22000 Austro-German speaking South-Tyrolians north of Salurn, along with 19.400 Ladinians and only 7.000 Italians, the latter mostly land-labourers, scattered all over the country. Referment to the very clear linguistic delimitation, the geographic, cultural and historic unity of Tyrol looking back on a tradition of a 1000 thousand years. Foundation of the "Deutscher Verband" (South-Tyrolian Unity Party) consisting of the Tyrolian People's Party, the Social Democratic Party and the Liberal People's Party.

July 1919

Petition of all the communities of South-Tyrol to the Italian Parliament to acknowledge the right of self-determination. Turati declares in Parliament: "As a citizen, as a socialist and as a representative of the people I hope that the desire spontaneously expressed by a free population may be heard and that their wishes be realized." Credaro is appointed Governmental Commissary for the regions of Bozen and Trient. Admission, in principle, of an autonomy for South-Tyrol. The President of the

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Benato, Tittoni, declares in Parliament, whilst promising to respect language and cultural institutions, " We can assure the population of South-Tyrol, that we will never introduce a regime based on police-force and arbitrary acts of violence."

April 1920

Negotiations of the South-Tyrolian representatives in Rome concerning autonomy. Fundamental admission of Premier Minister Nitti. Minister of Finances Lazzati declares: " I am absolutely for the autonomy of South-Tyrol ". The acquiescence of the Roman Parliament rouses the opposition of the Nationalists of the Trentino who fear the separation of South-Tyrol from the Trentino, wishing as they did, to control our country both nationally, as well as economically and politically. Fierce attacks against all claims for autonomy. Beginning of disagreement, domineering proceedings and acts of violence performed by Chauvinists from the Trentino. Evasive answers and double-tongued assurances from the Governmental Commissary Credaro.

May 9 th 1920

South-Tyrolian people's Meeting in Meran. Demand for full self-government in South-Tyrol.

October 10th
1920

Declaration of annexation of South-Tyrol. Solemn protest of the "Deutscher Verband". Turati brings in a petition in Parliament in favour of the separation of South-Tyrol from the Trentino and protection of the National, legal and cultural interests of South-Tyrol. Article 4 of the decree of annexation proclaims that all laws and provincial as well as communal autonomies up to now in force in the annexed provinces should be made to agree with the Statute and the laws of the Kingdom of Italy.

April 24th 1921

First act of violence of the Fascists. Attack of a group of " Fasci di combattimento ", forwarded here from Verona, on the procession of regional costumes during the Exhibition in Bozen. Murder of the teacher Innerhofer from Merano. The Governments of Cioletti protests against this act of violence. Mussolini declares in the " Popolo d'Italia " : " If these Germans have to be beaten and stamped upon to become reasonable, well, we are ready to do so. There are many Italians trained for this business. "

May 15th 1921

Parliamentary elections in South-Tyrol. 46,192 inscribed voters. 40,567 actually voted of which 66,574 for

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the "Deutscher Verband", 3,893 for the Social Democratic list. The "Deutscher Verband" obtains four seats in Parliament.

July 4th 1921 The Fascists threaten not to let the South-Tyrolian Deputies get to Rome. In Rome our Deputies are attacked and insulted by the Fascists Cianta, Starace and Finzi. Premier Minister Bonomi deplores the incidents and forwards a declaration to the press. Formal protest against the annexation in Parliament by our deputies. Attacks of the Fascists. Disputes with the deputies from the Trentino. Mussolini claims the suppression of the South-Tyrolian "Germanism". Foundation of the Fascist initiative news-paper "Piccolo Posto" in Meran. Groups of armed Fascist force our business-men to advertise in their paper. The epoch of the "casser-cil terror" begins.

November 1921 General census in Italy. Results in South-Tyrol : 260,748 inhabitants of which 225,000 real South-Tyrolians, 16,300 Ladinians, and 20,000 Italians, predominantly employees and their families transported here after the Armistice.

1922

Under Fascist pressure the Government increases its enmity towards South-Tyrol. The children are obliged to go to Italian schools by the application of the "Lex Corbino". Italian obligatory military service is introduced. The names of the places are Italianized. Italian banks are obliged to open branches here. Gradual penetration of Fascism and press-campaigne of Mussolini. On September 12th the Fascist Party presents 10 claims to the Municipality of Bozen. After receiving counter-propositions, ultimatum threatening "Fascist action" in case of non-acceptance. On September 30th "conquest" of the Town-Hall of Bozen, occupation of the schools by armed Fascists, removal of the Mayor Dr. Perathoner, dissolution of the Municipality council and appointment of the Fascist Governmental Commissary Guerriero. Removal of Gredaro. Guadagnini becomes Prefect. Mussolini's March to Rome.

1923

The "Piccolo Posto" writes : "This country must become Italian, its inhabitants must become Italians, so that everything is Italian here and everything reminds one of Italy!" Attempt of the "Deutscher Verband" to get to an understanding with the Fascist Part., ending by a complete failure. Separation of the provinces of Bozen and Trient. Separation of the Austro-German spe-

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king region south of Bozen with annexation to the province of Trient. Buchenstein and Ampezzo are joined to the province of Belluno. Immediate and unrestricted Italianisation concerning administration and school, and acts of violence in both regions.

In South-Tyrol the great Fascist offensive begins. Senator Ettore Tolomei proclaims the future programme :
 " Extinction of the name of Tyrol - Italian communal administration - Italian language in all offices and courts of law - total Italianisation of all names of places, of streets and squares, of all placards, inscriptions etc. as well as of all the names of farm-houses - purchase of landed estates by Italians - entirely Italian atmosphere both in schools and in all cultural manifestations - liquidation of all German banks - dissolution of the " Deutscher Verband " and of all societies, clubs, companies etc. - Italianisation of all Austro-German family-names. Forceful acknowledgement of the Brenner frontier by Germany.

The following years are conspicuous for the literal, realisation of Tolomei's programme. Guadagnini launches the motto: "South-Tyrol must be covered by an Italian varnish". In 1923 the word " Tyrol " is strictly forbidden, even in composed expressions such as " South-Tyrolians wines ", "South-Tyrolian fruits" etc., most important for the denomination of our exports, and hence for our economy. Resolution of all Alpine Clubs and requisition of all alpine huts, even of those belonging to local sections, and of all property belonging thereto, they were given to the Club Alpino Italiano. Decrees for using only the Italian language in all offices and courts of law and for all public placards and notifications. School reforming Bill of Gentili: not only Italianisation of all schools in South-Tyrol, but introduction of Fascist and Chauvinistic educational methods. The local teachers were either sent to the old provinces of Italy or dismissed and forced to emigrate. Severest and continual persecution of secrets teaching in our Austro-German language. In such cases the "criminals" were banished or deported. Along with the Italianisation of the public offices the local officials, employees and judges were sent to Italy or forced to emigrate. Attempt at Italianising worship in the churches and religious teaching. Religious teaching may only be continued privately. Gradual suppression of all the news-papers and periodicals in our language, excepting the "Tolomei" (Thrice weekly) and the "Volksbote". On the other hand foundation of the 3-

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Fascist "Alpenzeitung" and the "Provincia di Bolzano". Dissolution of the Farmers' associations (Bauernbund) and suppression of the farmer's banking institutes. Elimination of all Mayors and communal representatives and appointment of professional mayors (Podesta) and purely Fascist Communal Secretaries in all the communities of South-Tyrol. Abuse of official authority and excessive exploitation of communal property was one of the consequences of this arbitrary step in Fascist administration. Carabinieri and Finanzieri are the terror of the villages, continual arbitrary actions and acts of violence by the Militia, the Carabinieri and civil Fascists in the whole of the country. Law concerning the regulation of property in the zone near the frontier which proclaimed that all modifications on the surface, all constructions, felling of trees, all sales and purchases of property-rights etc. are subject to the prefect's authorization. Thus restriction of property, control and limitation of dealings of landed property and of any kind of building. Principally meant to be an open entrance for the penetration of Italian into landed property in this province. Expropriations in favour of the "Opera Nazionale Combattenti". All inscriptions on tombstones in the grave-yards must be exclusively in Italian after September 30th 1927 " (Prefect of Bozen). Persecution of any opposition against draconian methods of Italianisation by sentencing the "culprits" to banishment to the Liparian Isles or to Calabria. Assistance to this political and cultural oppression by economic means. South-Tyrol was the province of Italy in which the highest taxes and imposts were levied. The steadily increasing economical crisis specially in our agriculture was exploited so as to facilitate immigration of Italians who are financially assisted by the Government. Landed estates of South-Tyrolians are brought to sale in consequence of accumulating debts and are bought by the Ente Nazionale Combattenti and resold to farmers from Italy to whom the Government advances the necessary funds.

In Order to raise the Italian percentage of the population here industries were founded and particularly the industrial zone of Bozen was created in which Italians could establish branches of their industry with great governmental assistance.

Thus the programme of turning Bozen into an Italian city of 100,000 inhabitants was going to be realized step by step.

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1939 - So as to solve the South-Tyrol problem in as radical a manner as possible, Hitler and Mussolini hit on the plan of emigration. During the period of option the Fascist prefect of Bozen, Mastromattei, had it made known that those South-Tyrolians, who did not declare to be ready for emigration beyond the Italian frontiers would be sent to the South of Italy. -

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