

its signatories against aggression, had remained inactive when Germany invaded the U.S.S.R., and that therefore her two Allies would be fully justified in paying her back in her own coin if she launched a war of aggression in the Pacific. Moreover, it was realised in Rome that, although war in the Pacific would be immediately advantageous to the Axis inasmuch as it would tend to divide the activities of the American Navy, the outbreak of hostilities in the Far East would mean that the war had expanded into a genuine world war and would inevitably lead to an eventual American intervention in Europe. For these reasons the Rome correspondent of a leading New York newspaper was apparently inclined to consider that Italy and Germany would be chary of adding at present to their already heavy commitments, and that beyond, possibly, the rupture of diplomatic relations with Washington no immediate action would be taken by the Axis Powers.

This judgment is not altogether convincing. For a long time past Italian spokesmen have shown an increasing tendency to hold up President Roosevelt as the arch-enemy to peace in the world. Not only has Mr. Roosevelt been vilified in terms of the coarsest and most scurrilous personal abuse, but it has been repeated again and again that, if the President and his "warmongering clique" in Washington had not supported Great Britain both morally and materially as they have done, this country would long ago have thrown in her hand and the war would have been at an end. Stress has constantly been laid upon the provocative character of American and British policy towards Japan for many years past. In the light, then, of the notorious propensity of the Axis leaders to depict their crimes of aggression as acts of legitimate self-defence, it would not be wholly surprising if, should such a course appear advantageous to them, Mussolini and Hitler were to waive their rights under the Tripartite Pact of standing aside and were to proclaim their intention of assisting Japan by all the means in their power. There is, in fact, presumptive evidence that Italy is contemplating the probability of an armed clash with the United States. On the day of Japan's aggression the well-known Italian broadcaster, Ansaldo, declared that Mr. Roosevelt, "true to his boa-constrictor tactics, is determined to manoeuvre a war with the Axis through a crisis with Japan," and "wants to subdue the Axis forces and stretch the tentacles of United States control over the European continent, especially over Western Europe." But, said Ansaldo, Europe, "garrisoned by the armies of the Axis and with a proper organisation of her economic productive life, will be invulnerable to all possible flights of Roosevelt's imagination or programmes of the United States High Command."

Whatever, then, the official Italian position towards the conflict in the Far East, it may not unreasonably be assumed that means will be found of helping Japan. If any direct military assistance on a large scale is out of the question, Italy can obviously do Japan a good turn by containing in the Mediterranean as many British forces of all arms as possible. Even before Japan had flung down the gauntlet, Italian opinion, influenced, perhaps, by the desire to minimise the Russian successes, was already tending to lay more stress upon the importance of the Libyan fighting. The battle of Marmarica, it was declared, is "not at all of secondary importance, and will have very serious political and military consequences in 1942." Newspapers such as the *Stampa* announced that "the Axis units are being continually reinforced." There is reason to believe that there is some truth in these claims, despite the successful "spoiling" tactics of our air and naval forces. In the broadcast already mentioned Ansaldo referred to the probability of an American expeditionary force being sent to Africa, adding that there had been much talk recently of Dakar and Massowa. The implication clearly is that there is no time to be lost if the Axis Powers are to execute their much-vaunted design of driving Great Britain out of the Mediterranean.

A recent report which depicted Italian morale as higher than have some other accounts added that it would soon collapse if Italy suffered a really heavy defeat. Another observer recently in Italy brought back the impression that, if we were victorious in Libya, there would be serious repercussions in the industrial north, particularly now that the workers have learned of the successes of the Soviet armies. Everything would, then, point to the probability that the Italian Government will make every effort to maintain a successful resistance in Libya. Such fresh information as has become available during the past week suggests that the conspiracy trial which has been staged with such a flourish in Trieste is unlikely to shed much, if any, light upon the existing state of Italian morale or

upon Italian popular feelings towards the Fascist régime. The prisoners, it is learned, are all of Slovene origin and were arrested as soon as Italy went to war with Yugoslavia last spring. The reports describing the accused as predominantly Communist are untrue. The prisoners are Yugoslav irredentists and of good social position.

SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE.

The ultimatum addressed by His Majesty's Government to Finland, Hungary and Roumania expired at midnight on the 5th December. A respite of five days had been offered to the three Governments concerned, in the faint hope that they might withdraw their troops from active aggression upon Russian national soil; and it was thus implied that, while having no direct quarrel with any of the three, Britain wished to make it clear that the enemies of her Allies were her enemies also. The two South-Eastern States responded differently. The Hungarian Premier, M. Bardossy, announced that the ultimatum would simply be allowed to expire; and the official *Pester Lloyd* was instructed to dismiss the British decision as "unintentionally comic," and a mere gesture. But when he came to speak on a new Bill assigning full powers to the Government, he declared that the British declaration was "unwarranted," and rested upon a decision "directed against the whole of Europe." Hungary could not accept any intervention from foreign Governments, and stood united to the last man against the Bolshevik danger. Information from a reliable neutral source represents the Regent and his circle as regretting the British decision, and insisting that Hungary's sole interest was to keep the Russians from her frontier and to contribute towards an impending Russian collapse. The new Under-Secretary of the Hungarian Foreign Office, M. Ghyczy, was quoted as saying that Hungary, who had hitherto had two roads to follow, found herself now restricted to that one of the two which she did not wish to follow (his meaning is somewhat obscure). The Hungarian press gave greater prominence to the Premier's statement than to the declaration of war, and there was virtually no comment. Curiously enough, *Transocean*, which some days earlier had spoken of anti-British feeling and stressed the "moral importance" of British action, now stated that it had failed to make any impression upon the Hungarian people. It is safe to assume that the attitude of the important Hungarian colony in the United States will react very seriously upon opinion in the home country.

In Roumania Marshal Antonescu is dispensed from such parliamentary trammels as still hamper the movements of Hungarian statesmen. His lengthy official answer, transmitted through the American Chargé d'Affaires, only became public after the expiry of the ultimatum. It sought to justify Roumania's participation in the war against Russia as an essentially defensive measure. Soviet concentrations on the frontier, attacks upon the Danube delta, the Soviet régime of terror in Bessarabia and the transportations to Siberia—all this rendered military action inevitable. The central argument of the statement, however, deserves some notice. First, it is contended that Soviet Russia by her seizure of Bessarabia in June 1940 violated international law, historic rights, self-determination and treaty obligations equally; that in this situation Britain did nothing to implement the guarantee of April 1939; and that on the 22nd June, 1941 (the date when Roumania entered the war at Germany's side), Britain was not yet the ally of Russia, and Roumania could not, therefore, be regarded as having attacked an ally of her former guarantor.

Marshal Antonescu also issued a proclamation, reminding Britain that while she "has not known the humiliation of foreign occupation," Roumania "has passed from one occupation to another," but has "never given up," and "leaves to history the task of judging us." In combating communism she is defending "the whole of civilisation, to which Britain cannot but be a stranger." But for this final impudence the document is worthy of a better cause. In any press comment the entire stress is laid upon the Bolshevik menace, and upon the "European front" which has been established against it, and from which will emerge a new Europe—in the words of Mihai Antonescu on his return from Berlin, "Hitler's gift to the world of to-morrow." The chauvinist *Porunca Vremii* (formerly the organ of the Iron Guard) declared that "without German leadership all Europe would groan under the Bolshevik boot."