

NEWS FROM ALBANIA ¹

BY ROBERT KEMPNER

'*Evviva Italia!*' shouted the Italians as the steamboat from Valona brought them in sight of Saseno Island. This spot is the military centre of Italian policy in the Adriatic. The native observer informs us that the island has become a maritime possession of the first rank. It is equipped with innumerable batteries of heavy modern guns, and a powerful radio station keeps it in touch with the outside world. Military construction work on the island has not been confined to the last few months; years of effort have been devoted to making a Gibraltar of the Adriatic here, and to-day the task is completed. The Strait of Otranto, about eighty kilometres away, can be brought within range of these Italian guns.

Saseno is also an important military factor in Italy's plans regarding Albania. Reports that Italian troops occupied other parts of the country during the last few weeks are not quite true. People in Scutari whisper to one another that there are Italian cannon in Tarabosch, that the entrance to the mountains is guarded, that there are excavations for forts under way in Shirokka and elsewhere. Not a word of all this is so. What they are building on the road to Tarabosch is not an Italian battery, but Albanian houses, material for which is carried on the backs of donkeys. One scans the black mountain-peaks in vain for fortresses or new military construction work. All

that can be seen is collapsed remains of the gun emplacements which were erected here in 1912 and 1913, and which are of no more military value. All insinuations that Tarabosch is being fortified are based on the fact that an Albanian day laborer was seen building a stone embankment along a highway leading to the mountain, in order to keep the water that was flowing over the road from doing further damage.

A similar misconception launched other rumors from Potok in the forest of Marmura, and from Kavaya, which lies fifteen kilometres south of Durazzo. The Serbians were particularly alarmed about the reports concerning Potok, and felt that they had immediate ground for action on the basis of information received from certain spies. What actually had happened? Nothing that gave the least indication of military preparations. There was no blockade, no Italian coercion, no sign of transports. Nobody in the immediate vicinity had noticed anything suspicious taking place. The only activity of the Italians that could be discovered was their development of the air service, which had been going on for a long time and was sorely needed. Yet the rumor spread, and the idea got about that the valley of Rodoni near Potok had been a depot where the Albanians were supplied with Italian military equipment. The darkness of the forest and the loneliness of the scene in which these activities were alleged to have taken place helped politicians build up the fable.

¹From *Vossische Zeitung* (Berlin Liberal daily), May 1, 4

These false reports about the military activities of the Italians found eager ears throughout Europe, because nothing is known about the real political developments here during the last two years. At the present moment this is the situation. Italy does not contemplate military occupation of Albania, because she has already set up a fruitful and complete civil occupation. The time has come to enlighten European opinion as to the fact that Albania, although supposedly a sovereign state, is actually an Italian colony under English supervision. To the Albanians themselves this fact is painful because they have to put up with foreign control; and it vexes the Serbians because it proves their defeat. The rest of Europe is not pleased either, because it shows that the incorporation of one independent state into a larger state is still quite possible in spite of the League of Nations. Now that the occupation has been completed it no longer disturbs the Italians at all, because they know that only a European war can get them out of the country — and that is the last thing anyone wants. The strength of their position is expressed in the old saying, 'Possession is nine points of the law.'

Italy's occupation of Albania has progressed slowly and gradually for a space of about two and one-half years. On December 25, 1924, with the help of Yugoslavia, Ahmet Zogu seized the reins of government in Tirana. Within a few weeks he had opened up negotiations with the Italians, who, it appeared, were able to grant him greater concessions than the Yugoslavs. For a while Ahmet played off the two rival nations against each other, gaining an advantage over his enemy and fellow countryman, Essad Pasha. At that time the chief interest of Italy was to establish an Albanian National Bank. Ahmet hesitated. He tried to

postpone final negotiations. Perhaps he did not really want Italy to be connected by any economic bonds with Albania; perhaps he feared that the ratification of the bank agreement would deprive him of all Serbian financial support. At this juncture a threatening telegram was sent to him from Rome. He ordered the deputies to ratify the treaty on a holiday, and they bowed to the will of the Dictator. Through this bank treaty an Italian group of financiers who are connected with the Italian Government has acquired for fifty years the exclusive right to coin money, issue bank notes, and print stamps for Albania. The Albanians themselves can own only forty-nine per cent of the capital. Every important position in the bank is occupied by Italians, and in this way the entire control of Albanian finance has been in Italian hands since the year 1925.

As soon as the National Bank had been established, the 'Company for the Economic Development of Albania' (Svea) was founded. It is purely Italian, and has a monopoly of the construction of railways, street railways, harbors, roads, bridges, and drainage and reclamation works. Italy also sees to it that all other public works are awarded by the Albanian Government to the Italian firm making the most favorable offer. In order to secure the capital for the Svea's undertakings the Italians took as security the customs duties and the national monopolies of salt, cigarette paper, and matches. In fact, virtual control of all taxation was presently handed over to the Italians. In 1925, also, the first producing oil wells, near Fieri, were brought in by the Italian National Railways.

In July 1926 the Italians decided to fortify their financial and economic control by political supervision. Ahmet was to agree to allow the Italians

a protectorate over Albania under the auspices of the League of Nations. This project was defeated by English opposition, but final plans for Italianizing Albania were nevertheless laid by Chamberlain and Mussolini at their conference of August 1926. Meanwhile the foreign postal service, which had previously been handled by Yugoslavia, was placed under Italian supervision, and the telegraph system is now following suit. Already wireless communication is entirely in Italian hands, since the Marconi station at Tirana, through which all the news from the country passes, is under the management of an Italian engineer.

In the old days nearly all traveling in Albania was done in Fords, but more recently the Fiat and other Italian automobiles have appeared in increasing numbers. These machines are bought through Italian companies. But the most significant development of all is the consolidated corporation known as the Adria Aerolloyd, which the Italian Government has purchased. The Adria Aerolloyd was a German enterprise allied with the Lufthansa. It connected Tirana with Skutari, Valona, and Korça. At its head was Director Ryssel of Berlin, who did more than anyone else to promote air travel in Albania. By buying up the stock of this company Italy has acquired the airplane monopoly of Albania for the next ten years, including seventy-five per cent of the interest in the air mail. How highly the Italian Government values this air monopoly can be surmised from the fact that the purchase was concluded without any assurance that Italy would receive the airplanes and other equipment then in service. Director Ryssel and the German pilot, Vogel, soon had to resign their positions. At the same time that the air monopoly was acquired, an air route was established to Durazzo and Valona

from Bari and Brindisi, and in this way the dependence of Albania on its new motherland was assured.

That this air monopoly is of the greatest importance to Italy is obvious enough. It is important from a strategical point of view, since it has enabled the Italians to make a complete set of military photographs of Albania.

The Albanian army has a number of Italian officers as instructors, and the gendarmes are under the supervision of an Englishman, General Percy. But the total number of Italian officers in all the Albanian forces does not exceed a dozen. This is explained by the fact that the Albanian army is of almost no importance in the business of Italianizing the country. Reports that Albanian companies drill along with Italian companies are denied by everyone who knows what is really going on. There is also no significance in the fact that there are still thirty big Italian field tents of the 1918 model in Durazzo, for they are used to shelter earthquake refugees.

On the other hand, it is of military importance that negotiations are now under way in Rome for the purchase of the German-Danzig Lumber Company, known as the Inag, for which an Italian group is bidding. The Inag has valuable holdings in the Marmura forest — holdings that reach almost down to the Bay of Rodoni. A new ferro-concrete bridge has just been built here under which big steamships can pass. This bridge, at one of the most important points strategically in Albania, links the rest of the country with Durazzo.

Italian money now circulates in all the cities, especially in Tirana. The better hotels are run by Italians, and the Italian language is spoken from the coast far into the interior.

By the autumn of 1926 the civil occupation of Albania was completed

and almost all important economic activities in the country had passed into Italian hands. The man responsible for this conquest was the Italian Ambassador, Baron Aloisi, who has now been removed from Durazzo and sent to Tokyo. The Tirana Treaty of the twenty-seventh of November, 1926, surprised Europe only because the political situation of Albania was not generally known. It was greeted as an opening wedge, whereas it really indicated the consummation of Italy's peaceful penetration. The Tirana Treaty tried to give legality in the eyes of the League of Nations to what was already a *de facto* accomplishment. The only significance of the treaty is that Albania has in fact become an Italian colony. Ahmet Zogu vacillated at the last minute as to whether he should convert a *de facto* situation into a *de jure* condition. But the November revolution which Italy organized was intentionally feeble, and was simply intended to show Zogu his own weakness. Then when the time came for the treaty to be concluded, he was promised three million gold francs. The pact was sealed, and Ahmet Zogu conferred the first of his new decorations, known as the Bessa Order, on his new master, Mussolini.

In pushing the policy of Italianismo to the limits in Albania, Italy has followed English and Dutch colonial methods. The reigning rajah, who happens in this case to be called a bey, was subsidized, and the domestic affairs of the colony were left in his hands. Ahmet Bey still has the right to deal with other beys and to fight with native Albanians. As far as his own country is concerned, he can play the rôle of dictator, and perhaps even call himself King. He can build himself a castle on the highest peak overlooking the Bay of Durazzo. But the real ruler of the country is the

Italian Ambassador, who is concealed in the background far behind Ahmet. Italy no longer attaches the least importance to Ahmet himself, — so I have been assured on all hands, — even though she made a treaty with him and supports the present régime. As far as Italy is concerned, any other nominal ruler would be just as desirable as Ahmet provided he agreed to the present foreign orientation and economic development of the country.

The Roman Governor of Trans-Adriatic Italy is Ugo Sola, the man who put through the Treaty. He will reap the harvest of the victory which Ambassador Aloisi won in his work of peaceful penetration during 1925 and 1926. Roman prefects, the consuls at Valona and Korça, and Consul-General Faralli in Skutari, will all help to make his task more easy.

In 1913 Albania was recognized by the Council of Ambassadors in London as a *de jure* independent state. Thirteen years later the will of Italy and the consent of England have transformed it into a *de facto* Italian colony.

In the course of the Italian-Yugoslav conflict the press has alluded to Albania's armament. In point of fact, there is no evidence to show that the Albanian army is strong enough to fight either a foreign or a civil war. But it is particularly difficult to estimate the nation's fighting strength, because a neutral observer is looked upon with the deepest mistrust by all Albanian officials. They regard any visitor who does not revere their dictator, Ahmet Zogu, as a Serbian emissary heavily bribed. Therefore whatever information they give concerning their military equipment must be taken with a good many grains of salt.

The armed forces of Albania are of two kinds — regular troops, and irregu-

lars, or komitadji. Statistics show that there are three hundred and twenty thousand men in Albania of military age, of whom thirty thousand are Yugoslav citizens. The result is that a considerable number of men of military age are likely to move across the border as soon as conditions become unsettled.

In 1925 universal military service was introduced. The task of organizing the regular troops was first put in the hands of the former Austrian commander, Mirdatsch, chief of the so-called General Staff, who became an Albanian citizen. Mirdatsch worked on the theory that it was impossible for the country to maintain a standing army. In his day only six months' military service was required. There were twelve instruction centres, each composed of four instruction companies. In a crisis each of these companies could be expanded to the size of two battalions. To each of these centres two artillery batteries and one machine-gun unit were attached. In case of war an army of this sort was useful only for defending the border, where it could select positions which would enable it to withstand any foreign power. But for various political reasons the plan was never carried through.

Since 1925 developments have gradually moved along other lines. Albania now has five battalions of infantry, each battalion being composed of three companies and one machine-gun company. The infantry are not equipped with uniform weapons, but are for the most part supplied with Austrian or Italian carbines. These troops are mercenaries, and they receive about fourteen dollars gold a month. One of these battalions, the so-called Guards, serves as Ahmet Zogu's bodyguard. The members wear bright red hussar uniforms with black braid, and black calpacs. Thirty

former members of Wrangel's army, ten officers and twenty men, also belong to this body. Ahmet prefers to trust his personal safety to Russians, because they are not likely to be influenced by the political developments of Albania. On account of their earlier experiences, the Russian officers are intensely jealous of the Albanian officers, and a brisk rivalry exists between them. The Guard also boasts a military band, which plays every afternoon in the square in front of the President's palace. These are the only occasions on which Ahmet appears in public, because he lives in constant fear of assassination.

The total armed strength of the regular Albanian troops, including the military gendarmes, cannot possibly exceed sixty-five hundred men. These troops are of no significance whatever to any hostile nation that contemplates an attack on Albania. They are unable to guard either the hundreds of kilometres of seaboard or to cover the Yugoslav or Greek frontier. Their value for internal warfare is no greater. They can do no more to support Ahmet Zogu's régime than they can to confront any foreign opposition. The difficulties of universal military training are largely due to the fact that the inhabitants of Albania are of three different religious faiths, which are all brought together in the army. They are keen supporters of their tribal independence as well as of their national independence, and refuse to obey the commands of foreign officers. Never yet has Albania been able to depend on its regular troops to suppress the internal revolt of any party.

Thus it is that the irregular troops are of particular importance in domestic difficulties. Their bands are held together by loyalty to their leaders, and in this respect they are reliable, obedient, and faithful to their com-

mander, who is also the chief of their tribe. In their native surroundings the komitadji are invincible on account of their knowledge of the countryside, where they are far more effective than the regular troops. During the World War these groups of Albanian soldiers would fight first on one side and then on the other, but they would never stick to either party. Most of them are now equipped with old Austrian repeaters. Their numbers are, however, considerably overestimated, because of their amazing ability to appear in different places almost at the same moment. From the mouth of a member of one of these organizations I learned that Ahmet Zogu cannot count on more than four thousand irregular troops, and

that as many other irregulars would be likely to oppose him. As things stand now, the number of regular and irregular troops owing allegiance to Ahmet is about ten thousand.

In this military atmosphere, it is rather funny to hear any mention of Albania's navy. The country boasts at the present time only two former German mine-sweepers, which were given to Italy as reparation and were then handed over to Albania. An Italian captain, Prelli, is commander of the Albanian Fleet. His ships are always at anchor off Durazzo, and will continue to lie there peacefully, because Albania wisely refuses to provide any money to buy coal for superfluous vessels.

THE GOOD WIND¹

BY MASSIMO BONTEMPELLI

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SOME twelve years ago I fitted up for my amusement a private chemical laboratory, where I devoted myself to the absorbing pursuit of trying to isolate a substance intermediate between the physical and the spiritual world. One day I unexpectedly found in my hand the very thing I sought. My reader will realize at once that it was the most marvelous discovery ever

made. The substance consisted of a fine powder, which I could hold in my palm, neither cold nor warm, impalpable, imponderable, — although I could feel it in my hand with my eyes shut, — absolutely colorless, and yet quite visible. A feeling of intoxication almost overcame me. Please note that intoxication is itself an intermediate state between physical and psychical reality.

So here, as I felt at once, and quickly demonstrated, was the substance I had been seeking. I proved it by a succession of extraordinary effects, which I will now describe.

It was midsummer. I was living at the time in a little town in the midst of

¹ From *Revista de Occidente* (Madrid literary monthly), December