

Gentlemen!

The speech I am going to make before you might not be classed as a parliamentary speech. It may be possible that, at the end, some of you will find that this speech is tied, even though a space of time has elapsed, to the one I pronounced in this same hall on November 16th. Such a speech can lead somewhere, but it cannot lead to a political vote. In any case let it be known that I am not looking for this vote. I do not want it; I have had plenty. Article 47 of the Statute says: "The Chamber of the Deputies has the right to accuse the Ministers of the King and to bring them to face the High Court of Justice." I formally ask if in this Chamber, or outside it, there is any one who wants to make use of Article 47.

My speech will then be very clear; it will bring about an absolute clarification. You can understand this. After having marched for a long time with comrades to whom our gratitude always will go out for what they have done, it is good sense to stop to consider whether the same route, with the same companions, could be followed in the future.

Gentlemen, I am the one who is raising in this hall the accusations against me.

It has been alleged that I have founded a "Cheka".

Where? When? In what way? Nobody is able to say. Russia has executed between 150,000 and 160,000 people without trial, as shown by semi-official statistics. There has been a Cheka in Russia which has exercised terror systematically over all the middle classes and over the individual members of those classes, a Cheka which said it was the red sword of revolution. But an Italian Cheka has never existed.

Nobody has ever denied that I am possessed of these three qualities: a discreet intelligence, a lot of courage and an utter contempt for the lure of money.

If I had founded a Cheka I would have done so according to the criteria that I have always used in defending one kind of violence that can never be eliminated from history. I have always said—and those who have always followed me in these five years of hard struggle can now remember it—that violence, to be useful in settling anything, must be surgical, intelligent and chivalrous. Now, all the deeds of this so-called Cheka have always been unintelligent, passionate and stupid.

Do you really think that I could order—on the day following the anniversary of Christ's birth when all good spirits are in the air—do you think that I could order an assault at ten o'clock in the morning on Via Francesco Crispi, in Rome, after the most conciliatory speech that I ever made during my Government?

Please, gentlemen, do not think me such an idiot. Would I have planned with the same lack of intelligence the minor assaults against Misuri and Forni? You certainly remember my speech of June 7th. It should be easy for you to go back to that week of ardent political passion when, in this hall, minority and majority clashed every day, so much so that some persons despaired of ever being able to reestablish those terms of political and civil cooperation most necessary between the opposite parties in the Chamber. The shuttles of violent speeches were flying from

one side to the other. Finally on June 6th Delcroix with his lyrical speech, full of life and passion, broke that storm-charged tension.

The next day I delivered a speech which completely cleared the atmosphere. I said to the opposition: "I recognize your ideal rights, your contingent rights. You may surpass Fascism with your experience; you may put under immediate criticism all the measures of the Fascist Government".

I remember, and I have still before my eyes the vision of this part of the Chamber, where all were attentive, where all felt that I had spoken deep, living words, and that I had established the basis for that necessary cohabitation without which it is not possible to continue even the existence of any kind of political assembly. How could I, after a success—let me say that without false or ridiculous modesty—after a success so clamorous that it was admitted by all the Chamber, opposition included, a success because of which the Chamber opened again the following Wednesday in a good atmosphere, how could I think, without being struck with mad extravagance, to order, I won't say a murder, but even the slightest, the most petty offense against that very adversary whom I esteemed because he had a certain courage which resembled my courage, and an obstinacy which resembled my obstinacy in sustaining a thesis?

What should I have done?

Those who pretend that I was making only cynical gestures on that occasion have the minds of crickets. Such gestures are the last to be tolerated by me; they are repugnant to the very depths of my conscience. And I feel as strongly against the show of strength.

What strength? Against whom? For what purpose? When I think about that, Gentlemen, I remember those strategists who, during the War, while we were eating in the trenches, made strategy with little pins on the maps. But when the problem is to get something done at the place of command and responsibility, things are seen in another light and have a different appearance. And yet on enough occasions, I have proved my energy. I have usually not failed to meet events.

I have liquidated in six hours a revolt of the Royal Guards. In a few days I have broken an insidious revolt. In forty-eight hours I brought a division of Infantry and half of the fleet to Corfu. These gestures of energy—and the last one amazed even one of the greatest generals of a friendly Nation—are cited here to demonstrate that it is not energy that fails me. The death penalty? But that is a joke, Gentlemen! First of all, the death penalty would have to be introduced into the penal code and, in any case, capital punishment cannot be the reprisal of a Government.

It must be inflicted with restraint—indeed let us say very restrained—judgment, when the question concerns the life of a citizen. It was at the end of that month which is carved deeply into my life, that I said, "I want peace for the Italian people and I want to re-establish normal political life".

What was the response to this principle of mine? First of all the Aventine Secession—an anti-constitutional and clearly revolutionary secession. Then a press campaign which lasted throughout the months of June, July and August. A dirty, miserable campaign which dishonored

us for three months. The most fantastic, the most terrifying, the most frightful lies were extensively disseminated in the press. It was truly an act of necrophilia.

Investigations of underground happenings were also made; they invented things, they knew they were lying, but they lied all the same! I have always been tranquil and calm amid the storm. That storm will be remembered with a sense of intimate shame by those who will come after us. This is the result of this campaign! On September 11th, somebody wanted to revenge a killing and shot one of our best men. He died poor—he had sixty lire in his pocket. But I continue my effort to normalize. I repress illegalities. I state the bare truth when I say that even now in our jails there are hundreds of Fascists.

It is the bare truth when I remind you that I reopened the Parliament on the fixed date and that the discussion covered, with no lack of regularity, almost all the budgets.

It is the bare truth that that oath of which you know is taken by the Militia and that the nomination of all the generals for all the zone commands is conducted as it is.

Finally a question which raised our passions was presented—the question of accepting the resignation of the Hon. Francesco Giunta. The Chamber was excited. I understood the meaning of that revolt; however, after 48 hours I used my prestige and my influence. To a riotous and reluctant assembly I said: “Accept the resignation,” and the resignation was accepted.

But this was not enough: I made a last effort to create normal conditions—the plan for electoral reform. How was that responded to? It was met with an accentuation of the campaign and with the assertion that “Fascism is a horde of barbarians camped on the Nation, and a movement of bandits and marauders”. Now they stage, Gentlemen, the moral question! We know the sad history of moral questions in Italy.

But after all, gentlemen, what butterflies are we looking for under the arch of Titus? Well, I declare here before this assembly, before all the Italian people, that I assume, I alone, the political, moral, historical responsibility for everything that has happened. If sentences, more or less maimed, are enough to hang a man, out with the noose! If Fascism has only been castor oil or a club, and not a proud passion of the best Italian youth, the blame is on me! If Fascism has been a criminal association, if all the violence has been the result of a determined historical, political, moral delinquency, the responsibility for this is on me, because I have created it with my propaganda from the time of our intervention in the War up to this moment.

In these last days not only the Fascists but many citizens ask themselves: Is there a Government? Have these men dignity as men? Have they dignity also as a Government? It was I who wanted things to reach this determined extreme point. My life experience of these six months is rich. I have tried the Fascist Party. Just as to try the temper of some metals it is necessary to hit them with a hammer, so have I tested the temper of certain men. I have seen their value; I have seen for what reasons, at some moment when the wind is treacherous, they turn around the corner. I have tested myself. And be sure that I would not have resorted to those measures if the interests of the Nation had not been at stake. A people does not respect a Government which allows itself to be scorned. The people want to see their own dignity reflected in a Government, and the people, even before I said it, said, “Enough! The measure is filled!”

And why was it filled? Because the Aventine revolt has a republican background.

This Aventine sedition has had consequences, because now in Italy whoever is a Fascist risks his life! In only the months of November and December eleven Fascists were killed. One had his head crushed, and another one, an old man 73-years-old, was killed and thrown from a high wall. Three fires occurred in one month, three mysterious fires on the railroads, one in Rome, another in Parma, and the third in Florence. Thus a subversive movement has arisen, which demonstrates why it is necessary to document some headlines reported in the newspapers of yesterday and today:

A squad chief of the Militia severely wounded by subversives.

A fight between Carabinieri and subversives in Genzano.

An attempted attack against the Fascist headquarters in Tarquinia.

A man wounded by subversives in Verona.

A soldier of the Militia wounded in the Province of Cremona.

Fascists wounded by subversives in Forlì.

Communist ambush in San Giorgio di Pesaro.

Subversives sing “Bandiera Rossa” and attack Fascists in Monzambano.

In just three days during this January of 1925, and in only one area, incidents occurred in Mestre, Pionca, Valombra; fifty subversives armed with rifles scoured through the country singing the “Bandiera rossa” and exploding petards; in Venice the soldier Pascai Mario was attacked and wounded; in Cavaso di Treviso another Fascist was wounded; in Crespano, the headquarters of the Carabinieri was invaded by about twenty frantic women, a chief of a detachment of the Militia was attacked and thrown into the water; in Favara di Venezia Fascists were attacked by subversives.

I call your attention to these matters because they are symptoms. The Express train No. 192 was stoned by subversives who broke the windows.

In Moduno di Livenza, a squad chief was attacked and beaten.

You can see by this situation that the Aventine sedition has had deep repercussions throughout the whole Country. And then comes the struggle in which one side says: Enough! When two elements are struggling, the solution is force. There never was any other solution in history, and never will be.

Now I dare to say that the problem will be solved. Fascism, the Government and the Party, is at its highest efficiency. Gentlemen, you have deceived yourselves! You thought that Fascism was over because I was restraining it, that the Party was dead because I was holding it back. If I would use one one-hundredth part of the energy that I used to contain the Fascists, to unleash them.... Oh! You would see, you would see then...

But there will be no need for that, because the Government is strong enough to completely and definitively suppress this Aventine sedition.

Italy, Gentlemen, wants peace, wants tranquility, wants work, wants calm; we will give it with love, if possible, or with force, if necessary. You can be sure that in the 48 hours following this

speech the situation will be clarified in every corner. We all know that this is not a personal fancy, not lust for government, not base passion, but only infinite and powerful love for the Fatherland.