MUSSOLINI: NOT JUST HITLER'S FOOL

Posted on December 7, 2009 by Keghart

Economist.com

Category: Opinions

The Economist, Rome, 19 November 2009

"I shall carry out a massacre, like the Turks did"

"THESE disgusting Jews, I must destroy them all." Adolf Hitler's dinnertime conversation? No. This is one of several anti-Semitic rants ascribed to Italy's fascist leader, Benito Mussolini, by his mistress, Clara Petacci. Both were executed by partisans at the end of the second world war.
The diaries of "Claretta", published as a book ("Mussolini segreto") on November 18th, after more than 50 years in the state archives, challenge the comforting view that many Italians have of the Duce as a leader misled by Hitler, his ally. Mussolini's reputation still matters in a country which, for most of the past eight years, has been led by governments incorporating his "post-fascist" heirs.

The Economist, Rome, 19 November 2009

"I shall carry out a massacre, like the Turks did"

"THESE disgusting Jews, I must destroy them all." Adolf Hitler's dinnertime conversation? No. This is one of several anti-Semitic rants ascribed to Italy's fascist leader, Benito Mussolini, by his mistress, Clara Petacci. Both were executed by partisans at the end of the second world war.
The diaries of "Claretta", published as a book ("Mussolini segreto") on November 18th, after more than 50 years in the state archives, challenge the comforting view that many Italians have of the Duce as a leader misled by Hitler, his ally. Mussolini's reputation still matters in a country which, for most of the past eight years, has been led by governments incorporating his "post-fascist" heirs.

In 2004 his son, Romano, published a memoir, "My Father, Il Duce", which presented Mussolini as a caring family man, largely ignoring the dark side of the leader who had occupied Ethiopia in 1935-36 and, during his final years as Hitler's puppet, sent thousands of Jews to Nazi death camps. In 2007 Marcello Dell'Utri, a close aide to Silvio Berlusconi, the prime minister, claimed to have found Mussolini's diaries. Most historians said they were fakes, but not before Italians were told of contents which, in the words of Romano's daughter, Alessandra Mussolini, showed "all the efforts made by grandfather to avoid the war".

Italian television documentaries generally go easy on the Duce too, often reflecting the view that his government's anti-Jewish "racial laws", passed in 1938, were an aberration. Mr Berlusconi's own opinion, given in a 2003 interview, is that Mussolini "never killed anyone".
So for many Italians, it comes as a jolt to read of Il Duce boasting that "I've been a racist since '21." His mistress even recorded a remark by Mussolini in 1938 that foreshadowed the Final Solution: "I shall carry out a massacre, like the Turks did"—an apparent allusion to the mass killing of Armenians in 1915.

"People have always assumed the racial laws were a political instrument; not part of a policy in which he sincerely believed. This would suggest quite the opposite," says Paul Corner, professor of European history at the University of Siena. As a lover's account, the diaries should be treated with due caution, says Sergio Luzzatto, an historian from the University of Turin. "But they are a kind of wake-up call. They reveal Mussolini's true gravity and wickedness."