

Mussolini Launches the War in Ethiopia
(October 2, 1935)

Blackshirts of the Revolution, men and women of all Italy, Italians scattered throughout the world, across the mountains and across the oceans, listen!

A solemn hour is about to strike in the history of the fatherland. Twenty million men are at this moment gathered in the piazzas throughout the whole of Italy. Never in the history of mankind has there been seen a more gigantic demonstration. Twenty million men: a single heart, a single will, a single decision. This demonstration is meant to show and it does show to the world that the identity between Italy and Fascism is perfect, absolute, and unchangeable. Only brains weakened by puerile illusions or benumbed in a crass ignorance can think the contrary, because they do not know what this Italy of 1935, this Italy of the thirteenth year of the Fascist era is.

For many months the wheel of destiny, under the impulse of our calm determination, has been moving toward the goal. In these last hours the rhythm has become faster and cannot now be halted. Not only is an army marching toward its objectives, but 44,000,000 Italians are marching in unison with this army, because there is an attempt to commit against them the blackest of all injustices, to rob them of a place in the sun.

When in 1915 Italy united its lot with those of the Allies, how many shouts of admiration and how many promises! But after the common victory, to which Italy had brought the supreme contribution of 670,000 dead, 400,000 disabled, and 1,000,000 wounded, when it came to sitting around the table of the stingy peace, to us were left only the crumbs from the sumptuous colonial booty of others. For thirteen years we have been patient while a ring was being tightened ever more rigidly about us to suffocate our overflowing vitality. With Ethiopia we have been patient for forty years. Now, that's enough!

At the League of Nations, instead of recognizing the just rights of Italy, they talk of sanctions. Now, until there is proof to the contrary, I refuse to believe that the true and generous people of France can associate themselves with sanctions against Italy. The 6,000 dead of Bligny, who perished in a heroic attack which drew admiration even from the enemy, would turn in their graves. Until there is proof to the contrary, I refuse to believe that the true people of Great Britain want to spill blood and push Europe on the road to catastrophe in order to defend an African country universally stamped as a barbarous country and unworthy of taking its place with civilized peoples.

To sanctions of an economic character we shall reply with our discipline, with our sobriety, and with our spirit of sacrifice. To sanctions of a military character we shall reply with orders of a military character. To acts of war we shall reply with acts of war.

Let nobody delude himself that he can deflect us without first having to defeat us. A people which is proud of its name and its future cannot adopt a different attitude. But let it be said once again in the most categorical manner, as a sacred pledge which I take at this moment before all the Italians who are listening to me, that we shall do everything possible to avoid a colonial conflict assuming the character and bearing of a European conflict. This may be the wish of those who see in a new war revenge for fallen temples, but it cannot be our wish.

Never more than in this historic epoch has the Italian people revealed the force of its spirit and the power of its character. And it is against this people to which humanity owes the greatest of its conquests, it is against this people of heroes, poets, artists, navigators, and administrators that they dare to speak of sanctions.

Proletarian and Fascist Italy, Italy of Vittorio Veneto and of the Revolution! To your feet! Let the cry of your decision fill the heavens and be a comfort to the soldiers who are about to fight in Africa, and let it be a spur to our friends, and a warning to our enemies in all parts of the world—a cry of justice and a cry of victory!