

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 292

“An Article for Export”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

It is in the nature of fascism, with its strong emphasis on national character and national destiny, that the ideology is exclusively for one own's country and one's own people. As Mussolini put it in 1928, during a speech to the Italian Chamber of Deputies, “Fascism is not an article for export.”

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 292. An Article for Export.

October 1932 marked the tenth anniversary of Benito Mussolini's appointment as prime minister of Italy.

By any measure, it was a good ten years for *il Duce* personally; for the Italian people, not so much. Clementine Churchill's observation that it was easier to admire Mussolini and the Italian Fascist government from afar than it was to live under it certainly rings true, but in fact many foreigners did admire Mussolini. Politicians, celebrities, and journalists from around the world trekked to Rome for an audience with the man who was not merely a politician or a ruler, but an international celebrity; as much a must-see tourist destination for visitors to Rome as were the Coliseum or the Trevi Fountain.

What made Mussolini a prominent figure, an admired celebrity-statesman, was not only that he led the government of a major nation, but that he had devised an entirely new political party and ideology: Fascism. When Mussolini praised Fascism as the ideology of the twentieth century, coming to supplant the worn-out ideas of earlier ages, people listened. And despite Mussolini's declaration that I quoted at the top of the episode, he and other Fascist leaders in Italy certainly believed that at least some aspects of Italian Fascism were suitable for transplant to other countries.

Right-wing nationalist movements from across Europe agreed, and looked to Mussolini's Italy for inspiration, and often for more. After Spain became a republic in 1931, dissident nationalists, especially in the military, came to Rome to seek help in overthrowing the new, left-leaning Republic. And Italy sent help to the leaders of the failed 1932 coup and the more successful 1936 coup. Italy offered money and training to the Croat fascist Ustaše movement. Right-wing nationalists from Lithuania to France, Austria to Great Britain, looked to Italy for inspiration.

By the middle 1930s, it was possible to argue, as some Italian Fascists did, that you could see even in Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and in Joseph Stalin's Five-Year Plans and party purges, evidence that even the USA and the USSR were, in their own ways, moving toward something resembling Italian Fascism.

And then there was Germany. Most right-wing nationalist Germans had little use for Italy. In the racial theories popular among such people at the time, Nordic Germans were the most advanced members of the human race, while Mediterranean Italians were...well, let's not beat around the bush. The German right wing saw Italians as a feckless people, passionate but fickle and undependable. Incompetent, disloyal, and corrupt. For evidence, one need look no further than the fact that the Italians had signed a solemn mutual alliance with Germany and Austria—the Triple Alliance—and then promptly abandoned it when the prospect of territorial gain was dangled in front of them by the Allies: the South Tyrol and Trieste, regions history and destiny demanded be German. Not that the Italians had contributed much to the Allied war effort.

But there was one right-wing German nationalist politician who lavished praise on Mussolini and on the Italian people: Adolf Hitler. Hitler admired Mussolini. He eventually conceded that “The brown shirt would probably not have existed without the black shirt.” In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler argued that simple geography made it inevitable that Italy and France would be rivals, which in turn made Italy a natural ally of Germany. Hitler was even willing to overlook the Fascist policy of forced Italianization of the people of the South Tyrol, for the sake of the greater good to be found in a German-Italian alliance against the French.

By the late 1920s, the fact that this one German nationalist leader stood out from the pack in his generous praise of Italy and of Fascism was attracting attention in Rome. By the early 1930s, there were regular low-level contacts between the German Nazi Party and the Italian Fascist Party and talk of a face-to-face meeting between Hitler and Mussolini, a meeting that somehow kept getting postponed. Adolf Hitler took the occasion of Mussolini's tenth anniversary in power in October 1932 to offer his pledge that, should he become chancellor, Germany and Italy would be friends for decades to come.

The similarity between Fascism and National Socialism was a subject of much discussion long before Hitler became chancellor. National Socialists were not literal Fascists—with a capital F—but they were regularly described as fascists with a lower-case f. Italian Fascists applauded the

rise of National Socialism, but were also careful to emphasize that it was not the same thing as their own native Fascism.

Perhaps the most obvious distinction was that anti-Semitism played a central role in National Socialism, but Fascism was indifferent to it and found the Nazi obsession with the topic distasteful. I'm not saying that anti-Semitism was entirely absent from Italian Fascism, and you can find anti-Semitic quotes from Mussolini and other Fascists if you look for them. But Italian Fascists dismissed Nazi anti-Semitism as an affliction peculiar to Germans, who were, after all, a less civilized people. The Italians, Mussolini liked to point out, were producing the likes of Virgil and Augustus when the people north of the Alps were still no more than roving bands of illiterate savages.

With regard to race, it appears that Mussolini was no more a racist than your typical white European of the day, although that's pretty racist. He took it as a given that white Europeans were more advanced and capable than the peoples of Asia or Africa, but was leery of the sort of modern scientific racism in vogue among the Nazis, even going to far as to dismiss "race" as a vague and ill-defined concept. Italian Fascists believed in the superiority of the Italian people, but for them, Italian was defined more by culture than by race. Italy's small Jewish minority could be part of Italy's destiny, provided they embraced Italian culture. Ditto for Italy's Slavic and German minorities. Had Jews not been a part of life in Italy for over two millennia?

In fact, when Mussolini met with Pope Pius XI in 1932, it was the Pope who startled Mussolini with his anti-Semitism, blaming the Catholic Church's woes in Russia, Mexico, and more recently in Republican Spain, on the anti-Catholic Jews, though he allowed that the Jewish people in Italy were fine folks.

So despite their undeniable ideological affinities, it was by no means inevitable that Germany and Italy would become allies and partners. And no degree of ideological alignment could erase their geopolitical conflict over Austria. Hitler wanted the *Anschluss*; the Italian government was prepared to do whatever it could to prevent it, seeing Austria as a valuable buffer state. In Austria, Mussolini supported Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss, who championed an Austrian sort of fascism, modeled on Italian Fascism and hostile toward German National Socialism, which Dollfuss dismissed as too secular.

As you know from episode 286, Mussolini and Hitler finally had their face-to-face meeting in Venice in June 1934, but that meeting did not go well and left each of them thinking less of the other. Shortly after Hitler's return to Germany came the Night of the Long Knives, in which the Nazis turned against their own. The reaction in Italy was shock and confusion; in his own rise to power Mussolini had also had to deal with Fascist radicals who thought he had not gone far enough, but still, he had never felt a need to murder them. He used this example to warn Chancellor Dollfuss that the Nazis were unpredictable and dangerous.

But despite the warning, Austrian Nazis attempted a coup against Dollfuss and his government, just weeks later. The coup failed, but Dollfuss was killed in the attempt. In fact, the Austrian chancellor was about to leave for a vacation in Italy when he was killed. His wife and children were already there, staying with the Mussolini family when the coup took place, and the unpleasant task fell to Mussolini himself to inform the Dollfuss family of the murder of their husband and father.

Italy moved troops to the Brenner Pass and threatened war with Germany, and I think you can safely point to this moment as the low point in relations between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.

But as the rest of 1934 passed, and as Germany's rearmament plans went from secret to open secret, Mussolini and his government saw an opportunity.

[music: Vivaldi, "Spring" Concerto]

Back in episode 255, I told you how Mussolini's Fascist government used ruthless means to secure full Italian control over Libya at last. Following the Italians' 1932 declaration of victory in that conflict, the more imperialistic-minded figures in the Italian government turned their attention to Italy's other African possessions: Eritrea and Italian Somaliland. These lands were firmly under Italian control, but they were small and insignificant.

Between them, on the other hand, lay the independent nation of Ethiopia. Setting aside the dubious case of Egypt, there were only three independent states on the African continent in 1932, the others being South Africa and Liberia. All three were members of the League of Nations, but only Ethiopia could claim to be a fully indigenous African nation of long standing.

Ethiopia was alone among indigenous African nations in surviving the 19th-century Scramble for Africa, and this was only because Ethiopia had successfully resisted the Italian effort to conquer it in 1896, episode 23, the first time in modern history an African nation had defeated a European one on the battlefield.

Allow me to interject here that in 1932, most English-speaking people called this country Abyssinia, and that's the name you'll usually find in English-language sources from this time. While I generally like to keep the podcast in timeline, when speaking of nations, I prefer to use the modern names chosen by the people who live there. Also, even in 1932 Ethiopia was the usual name used by speakers of many other languages, including the Italians, so I'm not too far off base here.

That 1896 defeat in Ethiopia stung Italian pride, and the wound was still sore, nearly forty years later. Now that Italy's new Fascist government had settled the conflict the earlier democratic government had begun in Libya, perhaps it was time for the Fascist government to avenge the embarrassing defeat Italy had suffered under the leadership of that same previous democratic

government in Ethiopia. Besides vengeance, an Italian conquest of Ethiopia would link together Italy's other holdings in East Africa into a satisfyingly unified blob of green, or whatever color you want to use for Italian territories and, it was hoped, might help kickstart development in Eritrea and Somaliland.

Italy had been defeated by an Ethiopia led by Negus, or Emperor, Menelik II. As you know from episode 190, Menelik's grandson, the 38-year-old Ras Tafari, succeeded to the throne in 1930, following the death of his mother, and took the regnal name Haile Selassie, which translates into English as "The Power of the Trinity."

Ethiopia was at this time regarded as the world's only remaining absolute monarchy. That was perhaps overstating it; the power of the Emperor was limited by the nobility, who had considerable freedom of action. It might be more accurate to think of Ethiopia as the world's only remaining feudal monarchy.

One of the new Emperor's earliest initiatives was to draft Ethiopia's first constitution, which the Emperor promulgated in July 1931. The new constitution was based on the Japanese constitution, as the commission that drafted it looked to Japan as a model for how a non-Western nation could adopt Western legal traditions. The constitution provided for a bicameral legislature, with the upper house to be appointed by the Emperor, and the lower house by the nobility, with a provision that the lower house would eventually be elected directly by the people. Even without elections, this represented reform in a nation that had never before known as much as an appointed advisory parliament or council of ministers.

Haile Selassie's modernization plans were applauded in most foreign capitals, but were viewed with alarm in Rome. The Emperor's modernization plans meant that "time is working against us," as *il Duce* put it. A modern Ethiopia with a modern government and a modern military would complicate Italian ambitions to finish the job begun in 1896.

There were those in the Italian government who counseled against the idea. Italy's existing holdings in East Africa meant little to Italy, economically, culturally, or militarily. The government had encouraged Italians to settle those lands, but very few had taken up the offer. Perhaps it would be better for Italy to cut its losses.

Then came the rise of Adolf Hitler and the conflict over Austria. These developments forced the Italian government to put its ambitions in Africa onto the back burner for a while, but by late 1934, Mussolini's attention was turning back to Ethiopia. On December 30, he issued a directive to begin planning for the conquest of "the last piece of Africa which is not under European rule." To Mussolini, an Italian conquest now would demonstrate the superiority of Fascism and show how far Italy had come since the decadent democratic days of 1896. A new generation of Italians, who came of age under Fascist rule, would show the world how capable they had become.

Of course, this was also a generation of Italians who had come of age during the Great Depression. The Depression had not squeezed Italy as hard as countries like Germany, but Italy was unquestionably feeling the pinch. Like every other country, Italy's exports were down. Tourism was an important part of the Italian economy, but very few Germans had been visiting lately, and Americans? Forget about it. Also, Italy had been receiving substantial foreign remittances from Italian emigrants overseas, but most of these people lived in the Western Hemisphere, in countries such as the United States, Canada, Argentina, and Brazil, all of which were hit hard by the Depression, and that income had also plummeted.

Mussolini wanted a quick and decisive victory, so he decreed a force of no less than 300,000 soldiers. The question of how the already-burdened Italian economy was going to pay for this lavish military expedition was a difficult one, but one Mussolini had little interest in. Who cares about economics when national honor is at stake?

Aside from the expense of the war, Mussolini also had to consider the League of Nations. Ethiopia was a member state, so in principle an Italian attack upon that one country would bring down the wrath of the entire League upon an isolated Italy. In practice though, that seemed unlikely. Mussolini had before him the example of the Japanese occupation of Manchuria, episode 265. The League had condemned it, the Japanese had walked out, and that was the end of it. Similarly, Germany had walked out of the League in 1933. By now, in early 1935, it had become clear that Germany was rearming in defiance of the Treaty of Versailles, and the League seemed uninterested in taking any action.

But no matter what the League said or did, it would come down to the attitude of Italy's Great War allies, France and the United Kingdom. Relations between Italy and France had been chilly in the 1920s, but the rise of Hitler had drawn the former allies closer together again. In January 1935, French foreign minister Pierre Laval visited Rome for talks. Mussolini pledged a united front against German aggression and assured his guest that Italy would not contest France's control over Tunisia, a longstanding Italian grievance. He raised the possibility of Italian action against Ethiopia, but promised to respect French interests in the region. Laval was noncommittal, which Mussolini interpreted as a green light from the French. Publicly, the Italian government began complaining about alleged Ethiopian violations of the border between it and the Italian territories, to create a pretext for war.

But there were still the British to consider. Italy's admirals warned that conflict with Britain could be disastrous for Italy, not to mention the fact that any operation against Ethiopia would require Italian access to the British-controlled Suez Canal.

This period in early 1935, when Italian leaders were planning their war against Ethiopia, was also the time when the German rearmament program became public and Germany reinstated conscription, both in violation of the Treaty of Versailles. These developments helped make the Italian invasion possible for two reasons. First, the prospect of Germany again becoming a

military rival in Europe persuaded the British and French governments that maintaining their wartime alliance with Italy was crucial. In the 1920s, Italy's wishes could be safely ignored. A strong Germany meant that was no longer the case.

Second, from the vantage point of Rome, British and French inaction in the face of Germany's flagrant treaty violations helped convince Mussolini and the Italian government that neither of those countries would take any serious measures against Italy in the event of an invasion of Ethiopia.

April 1935 saw the Stresa Conference in Italy, which we have already discussed. This was a summit meeting between Mussolini, British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, and the French Prime Minister, then Pierre-Étienne Flandin (although French foreign minister Pierre Laval will soon be taking over the French premiership.) The point of this Conference was to reaffirm the commitment of the three allies to the Locarno agreements, which guaranteed the borders of France and Belgium. Mussolini did not raise the issue of Ethiopia formally at the conference, but he did sound out the British and French on possible Italian action, and again, both delegations were noncommittal, which Mussolini interpreted as a green light. The statement that came out of the conference spoke of supporting collective security "in Europe." Mussolini would later claim that he had inserted those two words and had done so to clarify that the agreement did not cover Africa.

Two months later came the Anglo-German Naval Agreement, the one in which Germany agreed to limit its navy to 35% of the Royal Navy. This agreement had been negotiated bilaterally and in secret. Neither the French nor the Italians received any advance warning before the agreement became public, which angered both governments. The British government sent an under-secretary for foreign affairs named Anthony Eden to Italy with an offer meant to avert the looming war in Africa: Britain would consent to Italian control over the Ogaden region of eastern Ethiopia, which could be added to Italian Somaliland. Britain would also sweeten the deal for landlocked Ethiopia by offering it access to the sea through the port town of Zaila in western British Somaliland.

Mussolini, who by this time had had his fill of British diplomacy, exploded at Eden. Italy already had 700,000 soldiers in the region, he said, a gross exaggeration, and if it came to war, Ethiopia would be wiped from the map. The minimum he was prepared to accept to avert a war would be the Ogaden plus the Tigre region of northern Ethiopia, reducing Ethiopia to a rump state centered on Addis Ababa, which would become an Italian protectorate. A shaken Anthony Eden returned to London and told his colleagues in the Foreign Office that Mussolini was the anti-Christ.

In September, the League of Nations opened session. British foreign minister Samuel Hoare spoke before the League's General Assembly, giving what has been called the greatest speech of his career, firmly declaring British support for what he called "collective resistance to all acts of unprovoked aggression."

The speech was celebrated in Britain and in many other countries, but it did not deter Mussolini, who by this point was determined to conquer Ethiopia regardless. Less than a month later, and without any prior declaration of war, Italian troops crossed into Ethiopia.

[music: Vivaldi, "Spring" Concerto]

On October 3, 1935, the Second Italo-Ethiopian War began. The Italians had about 400,000 troops in Eritrea, commanded by Marshal Emilio De Bono and 300,000 in Italian Somaliland, commanded by General Rodolfo Graziani. Both of these are familiar names from the campaign to subdue Libya. Their forces were a mix of Italian regulars, blackshirt militia formations, and indigenous East African *ascari* soldiers, supported with 275 artillery guns and 200 airplanes. The Ethiopians fielded 500,000, most of whom had no military training. About 400,000 of them had rifles, a mixed collection of hand-me-downs from past wars. Thousands of Ethiopian troops went into combat armed with bows or spears. The Ethiopians had over 200 artillery pieces, mostly obsolete, and an air force with nine working airplanes and four pilots. As tensions with Italy had risen over the past year, Ethiopian efforts to buy modern arms had been frustrated by a British-French arms embargo. In principle, both sides were under the embargo, but the Italians had a domestic arms industry; Ethiopia did not.

Foreign observers had no doubt that Italy would prevail, but that wasn't enough for Mussolini, who ordered a rapid and ruthless conquest of the country. Proving the superiority of Italian arms was not enough; he aimed to prove the superiority of Fascism.

In a matter of days, the town of Adowa, the scene of Italy's humiliation in 1896, fell to the Italians. A few days later, the historic and religiously significant town of Axum was captured. But after advancing some hundred kilometers, the Italian forces slowed to a crawl, due to the lack of roads, which limited supply, much to the frustration of *il Duce*, who eventually replaced Marshal De Bono with Marshal Pietro Badoglio, another familiar name.

In November, the League of Nations voted economic sanctions against Italy, though they were not as tight as they could have been, and crucially, the British made no effort to deny Italy the use of the Suez Canal. Germany, which was not a League member, did not honor the embargo, and allowed Italy to import strategic materials.

November also saw a British general election, in which both the National Government and its principal opposition, the Labour Party, campaigned on reliance on the League of Nations and collective security as a means of settling international disputes. Public sympathy was with Ethiopia, but in private the British service chiefs advised the Cabinet against military action, deeming Ethiopia not worth the cost.

British foreign secretary Samuel Hoare and French foreign minister and now also prime minister Pierre Laval worked out a secret peace proposal, which was sent to Mussolini. Basically, it amounted to a French and British endorsement of the peace plan Mussolini had thrown at

Anthony Eden five months earlier: Italy would gain Tigre and the Ogaden, with the remainder of Ethiopia to become an Italian protectorate. Ethiopia would still get the corridor of access to Zaila.

Mussolini expressed a willingness to negotiate, although whether he was serious or merely playing for time while his army completed its conquest is a matter of debate. The negotiations fell apart though, after the plan was leaked to the British press, which savaged it. Stanley Baldwin's government was strong enough to ignore criticism from the Labour Party, but they could not ignore *The Times*, which mocked the proposal in an editorial headlined "A Corridor for Camels," a dismissive slap at the British offer of port access. The British public was outraged by the plan, which sounded to many like a sudden reversal of the pledges the government had made during the election campaign to oppose aggression. Even the Archbishop of Canterbury weighed in to criticize the agreement. Samuel Hoare was forced to resign as foreign minister; he would be succeeded by Anthony Eden.

In January 1936, *Time* magazine in the United States named Haile Selassie its Man of the Year. In Ethiopia, however, the Italians renewed their offensive with additional soldiers and with the use of poison gas, against which the Ethiopians had no defense.

However popular the Ethiopian cause might have been in the UK or the US, in Italy not only the Fascists but public opinion generally was solidly behind Mussolini and the war effort as newspapers reported advance upon advance, victory upon victory.

On May 2, 1936, with Italian forces closing on Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital, the Emperor and his family fled to French Somaliland. From there, they were transported to Jerusalem aboard the Royal Navy cruiser, HMS *Enterprise*. On May 5, Italian soldiers marched into the Ethiopian capital and the Italian King Vittorio Emanuele III, was proclaimed Emperor.

In fact, though, Italian forces only controlled about half the land area of Ethiopia at that moment. The fighting went on for months longer, and even after the end of organized resistance, guerilla warfare against the Italian occupation would continue for years to come.

Nevertheless, the Italian conquest of Ethiopia was wildly popular in Italy. After being denied Tunisia, defeat in Ethiopia, and having their Great War victory "mutilated," Italians reveled in finally winning an indisputable and decisive victory. Mussolini was careful to frame the victory in Ethiopia as a Fascist accomplishment, and the Italian public was more than willing to embrace him and his movement as the architects of Italy's newfound glory. Patriotic fervor united Italians in a way that had not been seen before in the nation's short history. The hardships brought on by the Great Depression were forgotten; this moment was unquestionably the peak of popularity both for the Fascist movement and for Mussolini personally.

In June 1936, Haile Selassie was granted the opportunity to come to Geneva and personally address the Assembly of the League of Nations, the first time a head of state would do so. When

the time came for him to speak, the President of the Assembly, Argentine diplomat Carlos Saavedra Lamas, introduced him to the Assembly as “His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor of Ethiopia.” Italian journalists in the galleries broke into jeers and heckling, prompting the representative from Romania, Nicolae Titulescu, to leap to his feet and call for the “savages” to be shown the door. The Italians were cleared from the chamber.

The Emperor gave a moving address, reminding the League that Ethiopia was a member state and that it had striven for progress and for peaceful relations with all the world, including Italy. When Italy had stirred up border incidents, Ethiopia had sought international arbitration, and the arbitrators had found in Ethiopia’s favor. Still Italy did not relent. When Ethiopia sought to purchase arms to defend itself, it was subjected to an embargo. When war came, the Italians used air attacks and poison gas on civilians far removed from the front lines.

He went on to say, “War then took place in the atrocious conditions which I have laid before the Assembly. In that unequal struggle [followed] between a Government commanding more than forty-two million inhabitants, having at its disposal financial, industrial and technical means which enabled it to create unlimited quantities of the most death-dealing weapons, and, on the other hand, a small people of twelve million inhabitants, without arms, without resources having on its side only the justice of its own cause and the promise of the League of Nations...Apart from the Kingdom of the Lord there is not on this earth any nation that is superior to any other. Should it happen that a strong Government finds it may with impunity destroy a weak people, then the hour strikes for that weak people to appeal to the League of Nations to give its judgment in all freedom. God and history will remember your judgment.”

It was a stirring speech, but the League took no action. By 1937, only six nations refused to recognize Italian rule over Ethiopia: New Zealand, Mexico, the Spanish Republic, China, the United States, and the Soviet Union. Haile Selassie would spend the next six years living in exile in Bath, England.

Racism was never as strong a principle of Italian Fascism as it was of German National Socialism; nevertheless, in the case of Italian-administered Ethiopia, Mussolini insisted on strict segregation laws that among other things, criminalized sexual relations between Italians and Ethiopians. Two of Mussolini’s sons, 19-year-old Vittorio and 17-year-old Bruno served in the Italian Royal Air Force during the war against Ethiopia, and perhaps his father was disturbed by Vittorio’s public acknowledgement that he found Ethiopian women attractive and that they had “sex appeal.” (He used the English phrase.)

Modern estimates suggest that Italian casualties in the war ran to about 10,000 killed and perhaps 40,000 wounded, significantly higher than official figures given at the time. The Ethiopian government estimated over 200,000 Ethiopian soldiers killed during the war, along with hundreds of thousands civilians killed during the war and during Italy’s harsh occupation of the country, often in reprisal for acts of the Ethiopian resistance. To give just one example, in

February 1937, after an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Marshal Graziani, then the Viceroy of Ethiopia, in Addis Ababa, Italian authorities declared a three-day period during which Italian troops in the capital would be free to do as they wished to Ethiopians. There followed three days of shootings, lynchings, looting, and arson. It is estimated that 20-30,000 were killed, about a quarter the population of the city.

It is tempting to compare Italy's 1936 conquest of Ethiopia to its 1911 conquest of Libya. In one sense, what we are seeing here are the final convulsions of the 19th-century Scramble for Africa as latecomer Italy gobbles up the scraps left behind by bigger colonial powers like Britain and France. Indeed, when the French and British criticized the Italian war in Ethiopia, Mussolini complained of the hypocrisy of it coming from the world's two largest imperial powers, who between them controlled most of the African continent.

In another sense though, it is not an ending, but a beginning. The 1911 war was a step down the path that led to the Great War. A democratic Italy took advantage of the breakdown of the international order to seize a piece of Africa, three years before a general war erupted. Now we see a Fascist Italy repeating the feat during another breakdown of the international order, also three years before a general war erupts.

While it is important not to overlook the parallels with the past, the Italian conquest of Ethiopia is in our time most often framed as the first step toward the Second World War. Even as Italian soldiers were marching toward Addis Ababa, German soldiers were reoccupying the Rhineland, which is often seen as the second step. Those of you who have read ahead in the history of the twentieth century know exactly where all this is leading us.

Until now, Benito Mussolini and his Fascist Party, for all their innovations in domestic policy during their rule over Italy, maintained normal diplomatic relations with the rest of the world. Mussolini sought continuity in Italy's foreign relations, and foreign diplomats found Fascist Italy no more difficult to work with than democratic Italy had been, and arguably easier.

Now everything had changed. Mussolini watched a fascist regime defy the international community and get away with it, and suddenly ten years of cooperation in foreign policy began to look like a waste of time. Or maybe Italy had been cooperating with the wrong people. Germany was willing to support Italian adventures that France and Britain deplored. Perhaps Italy should return the favor. Perhaps a German-Austrian *Anschluss* would not represent so grave a threat to Italy after all. If Italy and Germany worked together, perhaps not even Britain and France together could stand against them.

The historical irony here is that the British and French governments mostly gave Italy a pass on Ethiopia, for the sake of maintaining the three-way alliance against Germany. Their sanctions were weak and ineffectual in deterring Italian aggression, but were strong enough to draw Italy closer to Germany, which undermined the whole object.

Thus the decision of the two major democratic powers in Europe to give Germany a pass on its unilateral repudiation of the Treaty of Versailles, and give Italy no more than a slap on the wrist for its aggression in Ethiopia, set Europe on the path toward the worst possible outcome.

As for the League of Nations, anyone who hadn't been persuaded by the League's failure to meaningfully oppose the Japanese occupation of Manchuria would now certainly have to admit that the League was toothless, its guarantees of collective security meaningless.

More than that, it was hard to overlook that the two cases in which the League failed to act both involved aggression against a non-European power: Asian China and African Ethiopia. Twenty years ago, Britain and France had leapt into a costly, bloody, brutal war, ostensibly to protect the rights of weak nations like Serbia and Belgium. Now it seemed clear that European security guarantees came with an asterisk, and down at the bottom of the page in small print were the words "only white European nations are eligible."

Africans and Asians would remember this lesson for decades to come.

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Brian for his kind donation, and thank you to Erik for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Brian and Erik help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone. They also keep Mrs. History of the Twentieth Century happy, by convincing her I'm not wasting my time on this thing, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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I'm going to be attending the 80th world science fiction convention in Chicago from September 1-5. This will be my first Worldcon, so I'm pretty excited. They've scheduled me for a table talk on Saturday the 3rd, so if you happen to be at the con, come on by my table talk and say hi, cause I'm not sure anyone's going to come, to be honest...

That whistling you hear in today's podcast is the sound of air passing through the space where I used to have an eyetooth, but it had to go. A partial is on order, but you can expect me to sound like this for the next couple of episodes, until it's ready.

And I hope you'll join me next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we return to Germany to talk some more about German domestic affairs and check out the memorable 1936 Olympics. Strength Through Joy. That's next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. In 1937, the Italian administration in Ethiopia removed the Monument to the Lion of Judah from Addis Ababa and sent it to Rome. The Monument was a bronze statue of the Lion of Judah, commissioned in 1930 to celebrate the coronation of Haile Selassie. "The Lion of Judah" being one of the titles of the Emperor of Ethiopia, as the ruling dynasty claims descent from the Biblical King Solomon.

The Italians also took the Obelisk of Axum, a 24-meter-tall, 4th-century monument from the city of Axum, which was broken into pieces and reassembled in Rome. In 1947, Italy agreed to pay reparations to Ethiopia and to return those two looted cultural treasures. The Lion of Judah was finally returned to Addis Ababa in 1967, but not the Obelisk, supposedly because of the technical challenges in moving it.

The Obelisk was finally returned to Axum in 2005, at a cost to the Italian government estimated at six million euros. The Obelisk was disassembled into three pieces, each of which was flown to Axum aboard a Russian Antonov-124 cargo plane. In Axum, the airport runway had to be enlarged to accommodate the huge aircraft. The middle section of the Obelisk is said to be the largest, heaviest object ever transported by air.

[music: Closing Theme]