

The Women's International Matteotti Committee has been formed to shoulder a humanitarian task too long delayed. All the world is aware of the murder of the Italian deputy G. Matteotti, Parliamentary leader and secretary of the Italian Socialist Party, who was assassinated by the direct instigation of the Fascist Government after delivering in the Chamber of Deputies a powerful attack on the corrupt and violent tactics of the Fascist Party.

Comparatively few people know that since the murder of her husband Signora Velia Matteotti has lived under a heavy and continuous persecution. The Fascist police have given her a warning, which is in effect a threat, not to visit her husband's grave if she cares for the safety of her children. Police agents follow her wherever she goes. Her dwelling is under the observation of fifty police agents controlled by an officer of the Fascist Militia. Few dare to visit her. Whoever has the temerity to do so is ordered by the police on duty outside her residence to state his or her name and address, occupation, reason for visiting the unfortunate widow, etc.. Even persons visiting people who occupy other flats in the same building are shadowed lest they should slip surreptitiously into Mrs. Matteotti's flat. At night a searchlight plays on her house that all who come and go may be observed.

F. F. Nitti, nephew of an ex-Prime Minister of Italy, a Liberal in politics, called once on Signora Matteotti to present her with a wreath of flowers for her husband's grave. For this sole "offence" he was sentenced to five years on the terrible penal islands, as he has recorded in his book "Escape" (Putnam).

The very name of Matteotti is not permitted in Italy. The children of the murdered Deputy are not allowed to bear it. They have been denied admission to school because their mother refused to send them under another name. Recently, to get some sort of education for her eldest son, she reluctantly agreed to let him be registered at a secondary school under her maiden name. This unfortunate lad is compelled to sing Fascist hymns, to salute, in the so-called Roman fashion, the portrait of Mussolini, the man who is charged with direct responsibility for the murder of this young Matteotti's father; the man who to this day dictates the persecution of this young Matteotti's mother!

Early last year Dr. Mario Germani, a friend of the murdered deputy, well known for his medical studies in Paris, Berlin, and Vienna, returned to Italy to arrange for Signora Matteotti to leave Italy with her children. He was arrested, kept in prison for a year, and on the charge of attempting to get the widow secretly across the frontier, sentenced to ten year's penal servitude!

Even according to the Fascist Code the sentence was excessive, for the Code imposes a sentence of five years only on persons actually caught in the act of escaping from Italy without permission - an offence rather common in these days! Dr. Germani was punished by a sentence of double duration as an accomplice to an act never committed, for Signora Matteotti had not moved from her dwelling in Rome.

The persecution of the Matteotti family, in short, has come to a pass where international action becomes a clamant need. I do not doubt that once the facts become widely known a great volume of international public opinion will be formed in defence of this blameless and tragically ill-used family. Already the Women's International Matteotti Committee has received gratifying expressions of sympathy and support from many countries.

It is our intention in the near future to send a delegation to Italy to negotiate for the future welfare of Signora Matteotti and her children; to secure permission for them to leave Italy if they wish or to reside there free from persecution should they elect to remain.

All who desire to aid the work of this Committee are requested to communicate either with me or with the Hon. Treasurer, Mrs. Helen B. Allen, 56, Corringham Road, London, N.W.11.

Yours faithfully,

E. Sylvia Pankhurst.

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