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DE BONO TELLS OF AFRICAN CONQUEST

Writer Says Mussolini Feared British Intervention



Did Il Duce inflate conqueror De Bono . . .

Italians, for the most part, had to learn to hate the English. In this they were aided last year by the appearance of a book* which revealed how, at one time, their *Duce* almost canceled his African expedition for fear of British attack.

Last week, with the appearance of a third printing, following a sold-out second edition (both of which were marked for publication in 1937), Italians at home and abroad noted certain deletions, including the passage which intimated that Mussolini had been on the point of abandoning his campaign in the face of British armed intervention.

Close observers of Fascist politics remarked significantly that the aged author, Marshal Emilio De Bono—a close friend of Mussolini and a pillar of Fascism—came out with his story of the conquest of Haile Selassie before his successor, Marshal Pietro Badoglio, published his own account of the major and latter part of the fighting and the reduction of Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian Capital.

Blessings—Knowing that Mussolini habitually relegates those who attract too much popular attention to obscure positions, Italians cited the case of Gen. Italo Balbo, whom *Il Capo del Governo* sent far from home as Governor of Libya. That, some thought, explained how the aged De Bono dared to reproduce in his book one of his cable messages in which he warned *Il Duce* against "some facileness" (*faciloneria*) which might be impressed upon you by Lessona (then Colonial Minister), and perhaps by Badoglio.

All Italy wondered if getting De Bono's book into the field first was not a shrewd move engineered by Mussolini to warn the Italian public against overlionizing Marshal Badoglio.

In support of this theory, they cite a significant passage in Mussolini's introduc-

*LA PREPARAZIONE E LE PRIME OPERAZIONI (Preparations and the Initial Operations). By Emilio De Bono. Introduction by Benito Mussolini. Istituto Nazionale Fascista di Cultura, 1937—Rome—XV.

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tion: "Without what we shall call the De Bono Period, the victorious completion of the campaign would have been neither possible nor conceivable . . . Emilio De Bono is the author of the African victory, and as such to him is due the gratitude of the country."

As if to merit such high praise, De Bono tries to explain the difficulties he encountered in transforming, within about ten months, the torrid, waterless cities of Eritrea into far-stretching colonies of barracks and tents; of how he had to purchase enough food, fuel and equipment to last a host of about 250,000 soldiers, laborers and beasts for three years or more.

Preparing—According to the Marshal, things really began to happen, at least in the *Duce's* mind, about 1932, when they both conjured up an Italian Empire. At that time De Bono was Minister of Colonies. He had taken part in the 1896 East African campaign, when, at Adowa, the Italians were massacred by the Abyssinians. Under Mussolini he was Governor of Libya, a trusted soldier who knew the colonies and was deeply schooled in African campaigns.

During that year he had visited Italy's East African colonies—Eritrea and Somaliland—and, with the consent of Mussolini, he induced the King to honor the possessions with a tour two years later. His dream of adding Abyssinia to the colonies began to bud, and he had lengthy talks with *Il Duce*. After obtaining the latter's general approval, De Bono saw to it that both the Cabinet and the Senate were apprized of their dream "in a very vague form."

Secret—When the idea was born in their minds, Mussolini had fixed on 1936 for the military operations and made it clear that none beside himself and De Bono were to be let in on the secret. Later they both agreed the time was ripe, because they had been reliably informed there was "disaffection" between the Abyssinian *Roses* (Chieftains) and the Central Government of Haile Selassie. To De Bono's warning that "money, plenty of money" would be required, the Dictator answered: "Money shall not be lacking."

Working in deep secrecy, they diverted money appropriated for road work to carrying out similar construction in Eritrea and enlarging the port of Massawa, for fear that Parliamentary discussion of war funds might evoke international repercussions. This done, *Il Duce* set 1935 for the campaign.

"A truly active policy in Ethiopia was undertaken after setting up a political office . . . in direct relation with our Legation in Addis Ababa, which had received categorical instructions from *Il Duce*." The head of this political office was "a profound student of men, terrain, machinations and subterfuge," and his experience enabled him to spread a "special net of informers who allowed him to establish direct contacts with the chieftains of the peoples we wanted to work on."

"Every region of Ethiopia was canvassed . . . The result of this political action of disintegrating (the Ethiopians) . . . was to subtract from our enemy not fewer than 200,000 men who either did not take up arms or else stayed passive."

Curtain Delayed—The stage was set, but Ethiopia would not provide a Serajevo. So unwilling to oblige the plotters was Haile Selassie that *Il Duce* wrote to De Bono: "Since the *Negus* has no intention

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of attacking us, we ourselves should take the initiative."

On the specific order of Mussolini, foreign correspondents were to be accorded first-class treatment.

The Bill—Interesting as all these intimate details were to the Italians, they failed utterly to appease the popular curiosity on one point: What is being done in the conquered empire to-day? What of the promised vast cotton crops, the hidden gold- and silver-mines? When would colonization start on a large enough scale to relieve congestion at home and put thousands of idle men to work?

And, even as they pondered, they received the disquieting news that the budget estimate for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1938, would mark up a new financial record in Italian history—\$1,250,000,000.

Still no answer to the burning question: **What price Ethiopia?**