



Chapter 4

England and America: Episodic Relations

The English

Mussolini, in an attempt to test the British waters again, began by approaching the new Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, the son of his old friend in England, Austen Chamberlain. He did this as he was not as trustful of his German ally as he let the world believe. This was 1938 and the fires of wars and the threat of wars were being stirred. One reason for his hope that Britain might be different was that Anthony Eden, whom Mussolini did not like or trust, had resigned from the government. But, once again, he was disappointed. Britain, he said, was thoroughly confused in her attitudes and policies and the general population was led to believe, by anti-Italian press releases and news coverage, that Fascism was an evil that must be stamped out for the sake of democracy and freedom. Neville Chamberlain made a last overture to Mussolini. He offered to meet with Germany and France to arrange for the transfer of the Sudetenland, a disputed region of Czechoslovakia, to Germany. Mussolini chose Munich as the site of the meeting and arranged the conference, to be held on September 29, 1938. The world cheered this peace initiative. Mussolini was the centre of the world's attention by this master stroke of diplomacy, by having deterred Hitler from his promised action of military movements against the government of Czechoslovakia. Mussolini was the only participant at the Munich conference who spoke all the languages of their meetings, and he went from one delegation to another clarifying points. Mussolini acted as the conference's host and chairman. He opened the meeting by stating the demands of Germany. The meeting then broke up into bloc meetings, with Mussolini carrying messages and information and his input between the delegations. He dominated the conference and Hitler yielded to him time and time again. He told the British and the French that the situation between Czechoslovakia and Germany was not a matter of significant importance to plunge the world into another World War.

On September 3, 1939, Prime Ministers Chamberlain of England and Daladier of France announced to their respective parliaments that their earlier promises of peace were premature and their countries bilaterally declare war on Germany. England, the first to attack, sent bombers to Germany's North Seaports and destroyed the ships they found in their harbours.

All through this period, Mussolini remained resolved in his decision to remain neutral, but was becoming very concerned about the future status of Italy and Fascism. He began to see himself and his country being surrounded by conflicting groups, which would threaten Italy's future regardless of whatever decisions he made.

The Americans

He admired America and held it in great esteem. In an early broadcast, via the new medium of radio, which was conceived of and invented by another Italian nationalist, and fellow Fascist, Guglielmo Marconi, spoke to the people of America and publicly thanked them for taking into their land the millions of Italian emigrants who travelled there since the turn of the century. Mussolini was very taken with America and wanted to maintain excellent relations with, what he saw as, the newly emerging great power in the world.

Mussolini's most remarkable, most costly and most daring gesture of friendship and goodwill towards the American people was the unprecedented flight of a squadron of twenty-four twin engine Savoia-Marchetti flying boats to the 1933 Chicago World's Fair: a 7100-mile journey across Europe and the North Atlantic to North America. Ahead of the Armada lay the hazards of transatlantic flights - fog, clouds, storms, and possible mechanical and supply problems.

While in the air, the Armada maintained constant communications with Rome and New York. Balbo described his Armada in these words,

This is the most perfect combination of material: Italian hydroplanes, Italian motors, Italian instruments for navigation, the whole animated by the flexible will to risk and to succeed which today constitutes the essence of the new soul of Fascist Italy under the auspices of the Duce.

Without a doubt, the strongest and most revealing connection he experienced with the United States was the appearance of Ezra Pound in the early 1930's.



He quickly and wholeheartedly became a devotee of the new leader of Italy, and his social, political and economic ideas and programs. He wrote to his friends and associates of the praise and worthiness of the concepts of this new Italy. He compared Mussolini to Thomas Jefferson. He said later, "No typescript of mine has been read by so many people or brought me a more interesting correspondence."

Pound became an instant believer in Mussolini's genius and his favor for the arts. Pound believed, because of the swiftness of Mussolini's mind, his honesty was reflected in the speed with which his real emotion was shown on his face. Mussolini, said Pound, "was a man with ideas for improvements, with plans for combating crime, usury and munitions makers, a man who would fight the money hoarders and aristocrats." He saw Mussolini's revolution as being an artistic one as well as political and economic. Ezra Pound, found many other Americans also enthusiastic about Mussolini, especially in the business community, because he made things work. The two men met once in January of 1933, at which time Pound presented Mussolini with a set of his now famous poetic work, *The Cantos*.