

# Il Duce—A Study in Dramatic Expression



(Courtesy Paramount News.)

By Joseph U. Dugan

ITALY'S greatest actor takes the center of the stage to play his favorite role. He is addressing thousands of small boys, assembled in military formation, and their relatives, before the Palazzo Venezia in Rome. At the precise dramatic moment Il Duce appears upon the balcony. Deafening is the high-pitched cheer which greets him. Then, suddenly, dead silence. The chief prolongs this dramatic effect for several moments. Slowly he raises his right hand, index finger pointed skyward. His voice rings out, magnified many times by loud speakers, and the show is on.

For each movement of his right arm and pointed finger there is a corresponding facial expression. At each outburst of applause his countenance is benign. He plainly revels in the acclamation of the throng. Benito Mussolini, original pattern for post-war dictators, presents perhaps the most successful example of self-aggrandizement in the world today. He

has made it axiomatic that dictators must be good actors. Also he has proved that to inspire that mixture of devotion and fear which gives him supreme power over his people he must hold their imaginations.

When Il Duce appears on a balcony to address his "subjects" he is playing the role of a whole people, concentrated in the person of one man. His eminent ability to do so reveals a sublime conceit which is reflected in these candid camera studies of the man in action.

Mussolini's world is Italy, and for him "all the world's a stage." All who have had the experience of an audience with him in the huge room of the Palazzo Venezia which is his private office have witnessed and have been affected by a masterful dramatic performance.

In a far corner of this room, Sala del Mappamondo (Room of the World Map), the dictator sits behind a magnificent antique table. A caller must walk a distance of 75 feet diagonally across the room to reach the table. The vastness of the

chamber is accentuated by a ceiling as high as the room is long. As the visitor walks toward Il Duce the dictator assumes one of two poses. Either he stares grimly at the caller or he smiles cordially. If the former is the pose, the caller stands for several moments before the table, while Il Duce glances at papers on his desk, apparently unaware that he is not alone. Finally he looks up with an expression of annoyance, and the interview is begun.

If he is in a cordial mood, however, Il Duce rises when his visitor has reached the table, comes around, and shakes hands. Few callers, however, are completely at ease, no matter how cordial the host may be.

At the same time, according to many who have had the experience, a formal call upon Il Duce creates the distinct impression of attendance upon a theatrical performance. Mussolini is frankly theatrical. His facial expressions are studied and his repertoire in this respect seems limitless.

At 51 Mussolini is as much the human dynamo as he was

in 1922 when he led his black-shirted Fascists on Rome. His large head today is almost completely bald. He has a large mouth and uses it effectively as an aid to his many expressions of emotion. When speaking he protrudes his lips to resemble a megaphone. He has broad shoulders and a solid body, but there is no suggestion of fat about him.

His early career, perhaps, was a perfect mold for his later political triumphs. From his father, a poor blacksmith, he received his first ideals of socialism. A born leader, he soon found himself a target for the conservatives, but jail sentences and persecution served merely to strengthen his determination. His pose in those days was one of martyrdom. It brought him more followers than any early success could have done.

No dictator of history served as model for Il Duce. Had he emulated Oliver Cromwell, for example, he would have needed a quality of religious asceticism which he does not and never will possess. Mussolini designed his own pattern, and he emerged the world's most theatrical figure.