

The parade in Piazza Monte Grappa under the sound of bells

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"The parade of the fascist forces which was awaited with great impatience by a mass of "varesini" (Varese citizens) took place in the central city districts and it was what it was supposed to be: an unforgettable piece of history which would have told us over time the story of an irruptive epic prelude, experienced by a great amount of people. It launched into space a passionate song and a desperate cry of faith during a superb and strong demonstration of harmony".

With these words, the "Cronaca Prealpina" of Varese introduced the report of the parade of the previous day. The title of the article, read in the light of what happened afterwards, has a bitter taste: We are at war: We will win!

(photo: front page "Cronaca Prealpina", 11th June 1940).

In the afternoon of **10th June 1940** a huge crowd of people, **spontaneous or organised** in different branches of **the National Fascist Party** (the only political party in Italy wearing a black shirt), marched towards the main city square Piazza **Monte Grappa**, going through the streets decorated with the Italian flag hanging at the windows. Everywhere the speakers were reproducing the patriotic hymns and the songs of the so-called fascist revolution, punctuated by the invitation to take part to the "historic parade".

The church bells gave a festive tone to the day which would have inaugurated one of the most tragic periods of the Italian history. In order to encourage a wider participation, had factories and offices closed early. At 17.30, in fact, the main city square was already full: **the leader's speech was expected at 18.00.** The drum players of the Littorio Italian youth, the spontaneous choruses, the hymns performed by the local band, emphasised the excitement of the moment.

The platform of the authorities was closing the square: the highest offices of the province were lined up next to the prefect, the quaestor and the federal secretary of the party. At the scheduled time, the radio spread the speech pronounced by Mussolini

at **Palazzo Venezia**. " A deep silence fell on the huge mass of listeners – said the reporter of the Varese newspaper".

The **"Light!", the glorious catholic newspaper of Varese**, writes in its issue of 11th June: "At 18.00 sharp, here from Rome, from the historic balcony of **Palazzo Venezia**, comes the long-awaited voice, the secure speech of the Duce addressed to all Italians and announcing the declaration of war against **Great Britain and France**, after having explained the reasons". Once the speech was over, in the usual jubilation, the crowd, led by the band, by the youth organisations and by the authorities, paraded in Via Volta and in Via Manzoni, to head towards Piazza dell'Impero (Piazza Repubblica nowadays, inaugurated last spring), and to pay tribute to the War Memorial with a unanimous "To us!".

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