

## Italy's exiled royal family shunned as they return

By Bruce Johnston in Rome

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Italy's former royal family returned to their homeland yesterday after 57 years in exile - to a barrage of criticism which threatened to overshadow the lavish parties and welcoming dinners.

The three-day visit to Naples by Prince Victor Emmanuel, the 65-year-old head of the House of Savoy, his wife, Marina Doria, and their son, Emmanuel Filiberto, 30, was intended to be a grand official homecoming from Switzerland.

Instead, the prince's expressions of "love" for his native land have been met by hostility within Naples - where he was born and from where he sailed into exile at the age of nine - and derision throughout much of Italy.

The family has lived in exile since 1946, when the male line was banished after the late King Victor Emmanuel III, the prince's grandfather, collaborated with Mussolini's fascist regime.

Their return was orchestrated by Silvio Berlusconi's centre-Right government, which pushed the Italian parliament to lift the constitutional ban last year. But feelings still run deep. "I am sorry Naples is receiving with all the honours the people who have been our assassins," said Pasquale Squitieri, the Neapolitan film maker.

Posters lambasting the royal family as "traitors of Italy" and "slaughterers of the South" have appeared around Naples - the latter a reference to the rough treatment meted out to southern "brigands" when the Savoys became rulers of a newly-united Italy in the 19th century.

There is added hostility in the South because Naples was the seat of the rival Bourbon dynasty until it was displaced by the Savoys. Outside Naples cathedral, where the Savoys are expected to attend Mass today, the hard-Right Movimento Sociale is planning a sit-in, demanding that the family "apologise" for their wrongs.

An impulsive man, the present-day Victor Emmanuel, who has renounced all claims to the throne, did

little to enhance the family reputation when, five years ago, he described Mussolini's racial laws - which eventually led to the deportation of 8,000 Jews to concentration camps - as "not all that bad".

Some, at least, were clamouring to see him. Naples socialites battled for invitations to drinks at the Circolo dell'Unione, the city's stuffiest club, or to a gala dinner at the glitzy Vesuvius Hotel, where the Savoys are staying.

But to the Savoys' astonishment, the city's mayor, Rosa Russo Jervolino, turned down a 15,000-euro (£10,000) donation by the prince to a city hospice, claiming it was a publicity stunt. She said that the family had wanted a plaque unveiled in Victor Emmanuel's honour. "Charity must be done quietly and not ostentatiously," she said.

The Neo-Bourbon Movement in Naples, meanwhile, printed thousands of stickers showing the Savoy coat of arms surmounted with a "no entry" sign and the words "Indietro Savoia" - "Savoys, go home".

Professor Gennaro De Crescenzo, the movement's president, said: "The South has nothing to celebrate with the Savoys' return. From unification onwards, they have spelt nothing but death, repression and the plunder of our resources."

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