The Syndicalist Tradition and Italian Fascism

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To Merrill J. Roberts
and the memory of Janet Dion Roberts

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The Syndicalist Tradition and Italian Fascism

1 / *Ideas, Ideologies, and the Problem of Italian Fascism*

"Fascism" and "totalitarianism" have become part of our everyday political language, yet it is not clear what disaffected Italians had in mind when they devised these terms in a context of political crisis after World War I. From one perspective, Italian fascism appears to have been an elitist reaction; from another, some sort of populist revolt. In some respects fascism seems to have been an attempt to modernize a relatively backward country, and yet it is often portrayed as an attempt to check or channel modernization, thereby preserving the socio-economic position of the established elites. On the other hand, fascism seems, in part at least, to have been symptomatic of a more general "modern crisis," and not merely a product of Italian backwardness. Perhaps fascism was primarily a response to essentially modern problems —problems in liberalism and capitalism afflicting societies that have already modernized. We know that fascism moved toward a corporative state, but the relationship between economics and politics in the corporativist conception remains obscure. There is disagreement over whether Italian fascism and German Nazism can be understood as species of the same genus. And even though the Italian fascists invented the term, it is not clear whether "totalitarianism" can accurately be applied to the regime they created or not.

It is possible to make sense of these contradictory patterns, but only if we ask some new questions and develop more complex and imaginative interpretive categories. In seeking to do so in the ensuing chapters, we will take advantage of a neglected and disprized body of evidence—fascist ideas. Our major focus will be on the political and intellectual tradition that began as revolutionary syndicalism and turned into one form of fascist corporativism, but our inquiry will suggest new ways of thinking about the overall problem of Italian fascism.

Sensitive Italian observers from Benedetto Croce and Costanzo Casucci to Delio Cantimori and Reno De Felice have warned against the facile moralism and schematism that make it difficult to place fascism in genuinely historical perspective.[1] But our memories are long, contemporary political concerns intrude, and so we still have trouble approaching the problem with an open mind. The very thought of fascism brings forth forbidding images: the squat figure of Mussolini, jaw protruding, fists on hips, leading his country to humiliation and disaster as Hitler's very junior partner; the ghosts of Giacomo Matteotti, the Rosselli brothers, and other noble victims of fascism, refusing to let us forget the needless suffering that fascism caused. Any approach to fascism that does not begin with contemptuous ridicule or outrage seems to smack of moral insensitivity, and thus the detachment—and even sympathy—necessary for historical understanding has been difficult to achieve. At the same time, two canons of interpretation consistent with our initial contempt seem to provide a ready-made explanation: fascism as reaction, and fascism as a petty bourgeois revolt against modernization. These schematic categories seem plausible because of the nature of Italy's postwar crisis and the characteristics of the fascist response.

With Italy readjusting to a peacetime economy, important sectors of heavy industry faced a difficult situation, particularly because the government no longer afforded an easy market for their expanded output. During 1919 and 1920, moreover, Italy experienced the most extensive and militant strike wave in her history, culminating in the factory occupations of September 1920. Italian Socialists, infatuated with the Bolshevik example, fanned expectations and fears by proclaiming that the dictatorship of the proletariat was imminent, and fascism began to gather momentum late in 1920, in violent reaction against the Socialist labor movement. In their precarious postwar situation, some Italian businessmen sought new political arrangements that would enable them to tame the unions and to absorb public power for their own ends. The Fascist regime was apparently serving their purposes when it outlawed strikes and forced the workers out of their traditional labor organizations and into new ones controlled by fascists, when it emphasized national solidarity and the further viability of Italian capitalism, when it brought economic and political power together through corporativism. Ultimately fascism mobilized society in order to instill the discipline necessary to keep the workers in their place, to enhance production, and to wage imperialist war.

A major source of fascism's reactionary content is easily identified. The Italian Nationalist Association, formed in 1910, merged with the Fascist party early in 1923 and gave the regime some of its leading functionaries, as well as a relatively sophisticated doctrine and program. Italian Nationalism was explicitly elitist and imperialist and was bitterly opposed both to socialism and to the liberal parliamentary system. The most substantial Nationalist ideologue, Alfredo Rocco (1875–1935), served as the regime's Minister of Justice between 1925 and 1932 and played a major part in replacing the liberal parliamentary system. It is often suggested that, through a kind of symbiosis, fascism provided Nationalism with the popular support it lacked and got in return the measure of doctrinal consistency and direction it needed to endure.[2]

There is general agreement that the mass base for fascism came from the lower middle class, which suffered especially in the difficult postwar economic situation.[3] High rates of inflation, stemming from government financial policies during the war, meant a redistribution of wealth in favor of the industrial classes, including the workers, who managed to hold their own or even to improve their position not only during the war, but also during the readjustment to peacetime. The postwar economic dislocations, including unemployment, reached their peak early in 1921, just as discontented petty bourgeois elements were making fascism a mass movement. Political observers had quickly recognized that disaffected lower-middle-class sectors constituted a new and volatile political force after the war.[4] Once fascism began its rapid rise late in 1920, discussion began to focus on the thesis of Luigi Salvatorelli, who collected his articles on the subject in his classic *Nazional-fascismo* in 1923.

Salvatorelli emphasized the autonomy and internal consistency of petty bourgeois fascism; since it opposed industrial capitalism as well as the working class, fascism could not be explained in simple, dualistic terms as bourgeois capitalist counterrevolution. On the contrary, Salvatorelli argued, fascism "represents the class struggle of the petty bourgeoisie, squeezed between capitalism and proletariat, as the third between the two conflicting sides."[5] But he found it necessary to distinguish between the "technical" petty bourgeoisie—those with a place in modern industrial society—and the "humanistic" petty bourgeoisie—preindustrial groups like school teachers, lower government officials, and marginal lawyers, who were often university-educated, but who lacked the solid economic roles of their "technical" counterparts. It was this humanistic petty bourgeoisie, threatened economically, socially, and psychologically, which created fascism. Since they lacked modern productive roles, Salvatorelli contended, these groups were too weak to struggle openly with the industrial classes and to develop a genuine "ideology," or political program, of their own.[6] They relied instead on hollow rhetorical ideals, especially the myth of the nation, as a way of denying the modern world of class and class

struggle; but such ideals, derived from their superficial humanistic education, were ever more irrelevant as modern industrial civilization developed. It was only because Italy was relatively weak economically that these marginal, preindustrial sectors of the lower middle class could attempt through fascism "to play the primary role on the political scene."[7]

It is testimony to the force of Salvatorelli's argument that it has a central part in the major interpretations of Italian fascism even today. Renzo De Felice strongly endorses Salvatorelli in insisting that fascism emerged as an autonomous petty bourgeois expression, that it was not simply a counterrevolution.[8] It has been argued, however, that De Felice accepts Salvatorelli's categories so completely that he underplays the essentially reactionary content of fascism and fails to emphasize sufficiently the role which petty bourgeois fascists played as a mass base in the interests of big business.[9] And indeed most historians employ Salvatorelli's categories to show how the petty bourgeoisie could be manipulated by irrational and rhetorical nationalism into doing the dirty work for the restricted groups that were in fact behind the fascist reaction.[10] For Roberto Vivarelli, who delineates this interpretation with exceptional force and clarity, Mussolini served essentially as a mediator, giving Nationalist ideas a populist veneer and thereby making them attractive to petty bourgeois sectors who would have found the language of Alfredo Rocco unacceptable.[11]

But whether autonomy or subservience is emphasized, current interpretations almost invariably explain the petty bourgeois role in fascism in terms of socioeconomic crisis and the traumas which industrial modernization causes the lower middle class. This class was indeed overrepresented in fascism, and the "petty bourgeois" quality of fascism, with its rhetoric and gestures and uniforms, is unmistakable. Since it is possible to characterize so many fascists in terms of socioeconomic grouping, it is easy to assume that socioeconomic concerns lay at the root of their common response. These lower-middle-class elements were discontented and turned to fascism, it would seem, because the universal process of modernization was either leaving them behind or threatening to drag them along, undermining their traditions, their status, and their self-esteem. In the words of a major American historian: "What makes a revolution specifically fascist is its slogans and its appeal to certain kinds of people who see themselves as losers in modern technological civilization."[12] By implication these people, since they were losers, could have played no progressive role in history; they could not seriously have hoped to lead the way in solving genuine modern problems. Even De Felice, while emphasizing the autonomy of the lower-middle-class elements in fascism, judges their aims as too absurd for practical implementation; the "confused and contradictory amalgam" of aspirations in early petty bourgeois fascism stemmed from a psychosocial crisis comprehensible in terms of Salvatorelli's categories, and not from genuine political awareness.[13]

At first glance, this socioeconomic interpretation seems plausible enough. In their vicious assault on the labor movement, resentful fascist *squadristi* apparently were seeking to undermine the source of the workers' relative economic advantage. After destroying the existing unions, the fascists tried to force the workers into new fascist organizations which also included nonmanual "intellectual labor" from the middle class—an attempt, it would seem, by threatened middle-class groups to defend themselves against the two-sided squeeze from capitalists and workers. In calling for a corporative state, these groups sought to overcome their disadvantageous position and to become the arbiters of conflicts between labor and capital.[14]

Fascist slogans and myths seem to indicate a backward-looking orientation, an attempt to defend the traditional values of the culture in the face of modernization. In glorifying the romantic preindustrial nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini, and in proclaiming his superiority to Marx, petty bourgeois fascists were apparently seeking to deny the modern world of class conflict represented by Marxism and repudiated by Mazzini. It is certainly true that these fascists called for class solidarity—and had misgivings about Italian capitalism. At the same time, Fascism stressed nationalism and the value of Italy's war experience, thereby offering a kind of psychological compensation to those whose place in society was eroding.[15]

Early fascism bitterly opposed the liberal parliamentary system—because, says a leading Italian scholar, its nucleus of declining petty bourgeois sectors could not get its interests represented through the existing parties and factions in parliament.[16] Fascism thus became an antiparty, denying the legitimacy of political parties and the whole parliamentary system. In the same way, Renzo De Felice invokes Salvatorelli's categories to account for the peculiar antipolitical thrust of early fascism, its "reactionary anarchism." Early fascism did propose some positive political alternatives, but De Felice also finds it possible to explain Dino Grandi's call for a national syndicalist "democracy," to bring the masses of "producers" into political life, in terms of Salvatorelli's thesis.[17]

So the elements of the standard interpretation converge in a neat synthesis. Even though petty bourgeois fascism emerged independently, and even though these fascists did not see themselves as the tools of big business, they were apparently incapable of developing a coherent program of their own. Confused and alienated, they were

easily exploited; ultimately they constituted the mass base for the reaction which the Nationalists spearheaded through fascism. The standard explanatory principles thus complement each other nicely: the forms of fascism were plebeian and petty bourgeois, but the content was Nationalist and reactionary.

Yet there is an anomaly in this approach. These interpretations rest on assumptions about the meaning of fascist ideas, about the intention behind fascist departures, but historians have been unwilling to take the fascists seriously enough to analyze their ideas systematically. Interpretive categories have been adopted a priori—based on hindsight, on the Nazi experience, or on schematic views of history—and have then been imposed on the evidence. The oppressive outcome of the Fascist regime is not in question, but the frustrations and intentions that gave rise to fascism are not so obvious.

Italy was, to be sure, a modernizing country, experiencing the kinds of socioeconomic strains that present accounts assume to be fundamental. However, she also had political and sociocultural problems that were not merely manifestations of her economic difficulties. Some of these problems were peculiarly Italian, having to do with the way Italy was put together as a nation, with the way she experienced World War I, with long-standing patterns of political alienation, social fragmentation, and cultural self-doubt. But Italy was also subject to more universal problems; though relatively inexperienced politically, she was modern and experienced enough to have encountered some perplexing, still-unanswered questions about the liberal parliamentary system. Given the nature of Italy's postwar crisis, moreover, plausible questions could be raised about the priorities of the Italian Socialist party—and even about the relevance of Marxist categories in general. For those seeking solutions to Italy's long-term national and political problems, it was reasonable to doubt the value of liberalism and Socialism and to begin casting about for alternatives.

Since the Italian crisis cannot be understood solely in terms of the standard socioeconomic categories, and since there were plausible reasons to reject both liberalism and Socialism, it is at least conceivable that some of the themes and actions which at first seem to confirm the prevailing interpretation might have had more than one meaning. Thus we have to approach the assault on Socialism, for example, and the antiparliamentarianism, and the revival of Mazzini, and the glorification of the war and the nation, more flexibly and imaginatively. Under the circumstances, even individuals from preindustrial middle-class backgrounds could have been more concerned about autonomous political and cultural problems than about problems stemming from socioeconomic change. In fact, a variety of concerns contributed to the petty

bourgeois revolt, and responses to different problems inevitably got mixed up together—even in the same individual. We need a pluralistic interpretive framework to account for this variety of motives and purposes. It is necessary to penetrate the minds of those involved, but misconceptions about the role of ideas in history, and especially in Italian fascism, have precluded that kind of analysis. By pinpointing certain inadequacies in three of the best accounts of Italian fascism, we can begin to see what is required for a more convincing interpretation. This will not, of course, do justice to the three authorities, all of whom have made major contributions to our understanding of fascism; my own considerable debt to each of them will be obvious in the ensuing chapters.

Adrian Lyttelton finds a contradiction between the corporativist ideology and the desire for a command economy in fascism. Corporativism, he says, was hostile to politics, while a command economy seemingly would have entailed an expansion of the political sphere.[18] In fact, however, the corporativist idea was sophisticated enough to transcend this apparent contradiction; Lyttelton's assertion manifests the widespread uncertainty about the intention behind fascist corporativism. In the same way, Lyttelton contends that the state syndicalism of the young fascist Piero Marsich strongly resembled that of the Nationalist Alfredo Rocco.[19] But Marsich's syndicalism resembled Rocco's only superficially; it was virtually identical, instead, to that of the former revolutionary syndicalist Sergio Panunzio, from which it was no doubt largely derived. Lyttelton's failure to grasp this crucial difference skews his interpretation of what was at stake for Marsich and others during the important disputes within fascism in 1921 and 1922. Although the meaning of national syndicalist and corporativist ideas is central at a number of points in his account, he misinterprets them again and again. These are, it must be emphasized, honest mistakes; Lyttelton simply did not devote much attention to the fascist corporativists who defined the concepts and goals in question. Like so many others, he takes it for granted that the "ideology" of fascism "can easily be written off as a tissue of inconsistencies if one analyzes it for formal doctrinal content."[20] At best, that ideology merits attention because of its instrumental and tactical import, its function as window dressing, its appeal to wider social groups.

Roberto Vivarelli, on the other hand, takes seriously the doctrinal core of fascism, but he assumes that its meaning is self-evident. To emphasize class collaboration and the further progressive role of the capitalist bourgeoisie, to oppose both Socialism and parliamentary government, to glorify the "mythical" nation, and to propose a national syndicalist or rudimentary corporative order—all this could only have

served to defend the restricted interests in Italian society that found ideological expression in Nationalism.[21] Vivarelli's interpretation of fascism depends on the meaning of these ideas and themes, but he has considered only one of their sources—the Nationalist tradition—and neglected others. Neither the intentions behind these ideas, nor their implications for practice, are as obvious as he supposes.

Renzo De Felice strives for greater flexibility and for a more genuinely historical perspective, and thus he has run afoul of those who insist on fervent moralistic denunciations. But even he views fascism in terms of schematic conceptions of political possibilities and purposes. Neither the antipolitical thrust of early fascism nor Dino Grandi's national syndicalism requires sustained analysis, since the petty bourgeoisie can play no progressive role and since those who oppose Socialism and the immediate pretensions of the proletariat by definition occupy a position on the right.[22] Having neglected the systematic study of these ideas, however, De Felice cannot explain the origins and meaning of the antipolitical, national syndicalist thrust of early fascism, nor can he grasp the practical political implications—what an attempt to implement the national syndicalist idea would involve.[23] Indeed, confusion about the intention behind fascist ideas inevitably impairs our understanding of the interplay of components that gave the regime its internal dynamics and overall shape.

These examples indicate that, despite the widespread denigration of fascist ideas, present interpretations of fascism rest on implicit assumptions about the meaning of ideas—especially national syndicalist and corporativist ideas and the themes that appealed to the petty bourgeois component in fascism. At issue, it must be remembered, is not social composition; fascism really was a kind of petty bourgeois revolt. But it is not obvious what those involved were trying to do, nor is it clear how their purposes fit into the long-term processes of European history.

It is well known that many one-time revolutionary syndicalists found their way into fascism, but the relationship between Italian syndicalism and fascism has never been studied systematically. Since Mussolini, with his interest in myth and activism, is widely considered to have been a syndicalist himself, it is often assumed that the others simply followed him as they moved from the heterodox Italian left to fascism.[24] On the other hand, since revolutionary syndicalism, emphasizing class struggle, and fascist corporativism, emphasizing class harmony, were apparently so dissimilar, many assume the syndicalists must have lost their intellectual bearings—and their autonomy—on their way from one to the other. The syndicalists seem to have fallen

under the hegemony of the Italian Nationalist movement when they became interested in nationalism and war between 1910 and 1915.[25] Systematic study reveals, however, that the syndicalists were never Mussolinians or Nationalists, that they had something of their own to offer fascism.

The petty bourgeois component in fascism drew considerable inspiration from the political and intellectual tradition that began as revolutionary syndicalism and ended up a populist, nationalist corporativism, intended as a political alternative to liberalism. This neosyndicalism was the synthesis of a variety of ideas, perceptions, concerns, and experiences shared in more rudimentary form by wider sectors. In the postwar period, the ideologues and labor organizers working within the syndicalist tradition sought to give direction to the vague aspirations of younger fascists and ultimately converged with the populist, petty bourgeois component in fascism. Syndicalism was the other source, besides Nationalism, of the antipolitical, totalitarian corporativism which was in many ways the major thrust of fascism.[26] By subjecting the syndicalists' ideas to serious historical analysis, we can develop the framework we need to explain the range of motives that led discontented young lower-middle-class Italians to fascism. Not all of these fascists embraced the neosyndicalist program, but our study will enable us to place such diverse young fascists as Dino Grandi, Roberto Farinacci, Augusto Turati, and Giuseppe Bottai in clearer perspective.

There is considerable testimony, both from contemporaries and from recent historians, that such syndicalists as Sergio Panunzio, A. O. Olivetti, Paolo Orano, and Agostino Lanzillo were among the most influential fascist ideologues. Giovanni Spadolini, for example, cites these four figures in emphasizing that some of fascism's "most authoritative and influential theorists" came from syndicalism.[27] Spadolini also stresses the importance of the *Carta del Carnaro*, a neosyndicalist constitution written in 1920, in shaping fascism. As fascism was rising to power, prominent liberals like Guido De Ruggiero, Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, and Umberto Ricci viewed neosyndicalism as a formidable threat, requiring a sustained counterattack, while the young fascist spokesman Curzio Suckert claimed late in 1925 that Sergio Panunzio had given fascism its content and direction.[28] Among contemporary foreign observers, Louis Rosenstock-Franck found Panunzio and Olivetti to be among the most influential theorists of corporativism; Marcel Prélot judged Panunzio to be one of the three major interpreters of the Fascist state, along with the Nationalist Rocco and the neoidealist philosopher Giovanni Gentile; and *New York Times* correspondent Herbert Matthews identified Panunzio and Gentile as the two major ideologues

upon whom Mussolini could rely.[29] Even today Panunzio is frequently mentioned as one of the major theorists of fascism, yet he has not been read systematically, and he is sometimes neglected altogether.[30]

Italian syndicalism began to emerge in about 1902 as a reaction against reformism within the Italian Socialist party. Both intellectuals and labor organizers were involved, but there was always a good deal of interchange between them; the leading organizers contributed to—or even edited—syndicalist periodicals. Most, but not all, ended up active fascists. Syndicalism was based on common perceptions, values, and goals that persisted over time, despite some changes in personnel and despite considerable differences in style and emphasis among the individuals involved. It is useful to consider several early syndicalists who did not become fascists, as well as others who participated in the tradition later, after it had undergone some modification. Two figures provided a significant measure of continuity: Sergio Panunzio and A. O. Olivetti, the most important of the syndicalists who helped to shape fascism.

Sergio Panunzio (1886–1944) became active in syndicalist circles in 1903 and continued until the fall of fascism in 1943 to develop and publicize the ideas that began to take shape in his mind then.[31] He came from a prominent family in Molfetta, in the southern region of Apulia. His grandfather had been a Risorgimento patriot and the first mayor of Molfetta after Italian unification; an uncle had served in the Chamber of Deputies. In 1902, while still in high school, Panunzio became a Socialist, gravitating to the sector of the party's antireformist wing that was on its way to revolutionary syndicalism.[32] He continued his education, earning degrees from the University of Naples in jurisprudence in 1908 and in philosophy in 1911, but during the same period he established himself as one of the most original theorists of revolutionary syndicalism. He subsequently held teaching jobs in Ferrara and Bologna before winning the chair in Philosophy of Law at the University of Ferrara in 1920.

As a fascist, Panunzio served in the Chamber of Deputies beginning in 1924 and occupied a variety of other positions in the regime. He was, at various times, a member of the directorate of the Fascist party, head of the educators' union, undersecretary in the Ministry of Communications, a member of the National Council of Corporations, and a member of the commission for reform of the Italian legal codes. At the same time, Panunzio continued his academic career, moving in 1925 from Ferrara to Perguia, where he served as rector of the university. In 1927, he assumed the chair of Doctrine of the State in the Political Science Faculty at the University of Rome, and in 1928 he began serving simultaneously as head of the first specifically fascist institution of

higher education, the Fascist Faculty of Political Science at the University of Perugia. Panunzio used his university positions as platforms from which to publicize his conception of fascism; for example, his inaugural lecture at the University of Rome in 1928, soon published as the title essay of a book, was one of the most widely discussed doctrinal statements of the fascist period.[33] He also contributed frequently to newspapers and periodicals, especially Mussolini's *Il popolo d'Italia* and Giuseppe Bottai's *Critica fascista*, and played major parts in such well-known gatherings as the meeting on fascist culture in Bologna in 1925 and the meeting on corporativism in Ferrara in 1932. In addition, Panunzio was frequently called upon to speak at fascist propaganda sessions. For example, at Giuseppe Bottai's invitation, he gave the lecture inaugurating the Roman Center for Fascist Studies in March of 1925. This lecture, too, was promptly published as the title essay of an influential book.[34]

Angelo Oliviero Olivetti (1874–1931) came from a well-to-do Jewish landowning family in the Romagna. His father, Emilio Olivetti, served with distinction in the wars of independence and ended up a colonel in the Italian army.[35] While a student at the University of Bologna in the early 1890s, Olivetti became active in socialist circles, speaking, arranging meetings, and eventually helping to organize the forerunner of the Italian Socialist party. The police reported that Olivetti was an especially effective apostle of socialist ideals—among both the workers and his fellow students—"because of an effective speaking style, which displayed his considerable knowledge and talent."[36] He remained active as a Socialist organizer and journalist in Bologna until 1898, when he moved to Switzerland to escape prosecution for his role in the riots of that year. There he enjoyed considerable success as a lawyer, and his house in Lugano became a center for exiled Italian Socialists—including, at one point, Benito Mussolini. By early 1905, Olivetti was calling himself a revolutionary syndicalist, and he promptly became a leading figure in the movement, founding and editing one of the most important syndicalist periodicals, *Pagine libere*. This semimonthly publication appeared from late in 1906 until the end of 1911, then again during the debate over intervention in 1914 and 1915, and yet again from early 1920 until the end of 1922. As a fascist, Olivetti was an influential member of the Commission of Eighteen, instituted to propose constitutional reforms in 1925, and served on the National Council of Corporations and on other bodies concerned with fascist corporativist development. Shortly before his death in 1931, for example, he was invited to join the technical advisory committee of the Confederation of Fascist Commercial Unions.[37] When he died, Olivetti was also a member of Panunzio's Fascist Faculty at Perugia.

Like Panunzio, Olivetti was recognized as a major authority on fascist corporativism and was frequently called upon to lecture on the subject—as he did, for example, in one of the major speeches at the Bologna meeting on fascist culture in 1925, and as guest speaker at the Center of Fascist Studies in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1928. He contributed frequently to fascist periodicals as well, especially *Il popolo d'Italia* and the two organs of the Fascist labor movement, the newspaper *Il lavoro fascista* and the monthly magazine *La stirpe*.

Panunzio and Olivetti were the most influential of the former revolutionary syndicalists in fascism, but there were many others. Agostino Lanzillo (1886–1952), a southerner from Reggio Calabria, became active in syndicalist intellectual circles in about 1908. Among the syndicalists, he had the closest personal relationship to Georges Sorel, who took an interest in the young Lanzillo before the war, using his influence to find journalistic positions for his Italian admirer.[38] Lanzillo was involved with fascism from the outset, serving as a member of the Central Committee of the *Fasci di combattimento* in 1919–20. During the regime, he served in the Chamber of Deputies, on the Commission of Eighteen, and on the National Council of Corporations. Although trained as a lawyer, Lanzillo was especially interested in economics and held various academic positions in economics during the fascist years. By the late 1930s, he had become rector of the *Regio Istituto Superiore di Economia e Commercio* in Venice.

Paolo Orano (1875–1945) was the son of Giuseppe Orano, a distinguished criminologist and professor at the University of Rome. Before the war, he taught philosophy in various Italian lycées, becoming active in syndicalist circles in 1905. Orano was the most restless of the syndicalists, the one most willing to try out ideas and political positions in a superficial, bombastic way. He collaborated with Olivetti on *Pagine libere* off and on, and he edited his own journal, *La lupa*, in 1910 and 1911. As a fascist, Orano served in the Chamber of Deputies, edited the Roman edition of *Il popolo d'Italia* in 1924–25, participated in a variety of Fascist educational and cultural organizations, and was made a senator in 1939. He was also a member of Panunzio's Fascist Faculty at the University of Perugia and became rector of the university after Panunzio's departure.

Among the revolutionary syndicalist labor organizers who found their way into fascism, the best known is Edmondo Rossoni (1884–1965), who headed the Fascist trade union confederation from its inception in 1922 until 1928. Before World War I, Rossoni worked as a labor organizer in the province of Modena and, beginning in 1912, in New York among the Italian immigrants. He returned to Italy with the outbreak of the war and played a leading role in the postwar syndicalist trade union

confederation before casting his lot with fascism. Though not a talented thinker, Rossoni was involved in various syndicalist and fascist journalistic endeavors, in addition to his activities as a labor leader.

A number of other one-time revolutionary syndicalist organizers played important roles in the Fascist labor movement, especially Luigi Razza, Livio Ciardi, and Mario Racheli. Ciardi was a leader in one of the railroad workers' unions before the war, while Razza and Racheli were disciples of Filippo Corridoni (1888–1915), the leader of the revolutionary syndicalist labor movement in Milan and the most remarkable of the syndicalist organizers. A committed and charismatic leader, Corridoni might have rivaled Mussolini during the volatile postwar period, but he was killed at the front in 1915. As fascists, Razza, Ciardi, and Racheli headed Fascist trade union confederations: Ciardi led the transport workers; Razza, the agricultural workers; and Racheli, the workers in commerce. All three served as deputies as well, and Ciardi and Racheli ended up senators. With his interest in the problems of agricultural labor, Razza was the first President of the Commission for Internal Migration and Colonization and became Minister of Public Works shortly before his death in a plane crash in 1935.

One of Rossoni's closest collaborators during the early years of the regime was Armando Casalini (1883–1924), who had originally been active in republican circles but who converged with many of the syndicalists after the war, collaborating on syndicalist publications and contributing to the clarification of syndicalist ideas. He was a deputy, and second in command in the Fascist union confederation, when he was murdered on a trolley in Rome in September of 1924, apparently in retaliation for the murder of the Socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti by fascists a few months earlier.[39]

Among the other former syndicalists active in fascism were the intellectuals Alighiero Ciattini, Antonio Renda, Luigi Viesti, and Alfonso De Pietri-Tonelli, and the labor organizers Michele Bianchi, Amilcare De Ambris, and Tullio Masotti. Bianchi (1883–1930) is relatively well known, since he was one of Mussolini's leading collaborators during the early years of fascism. But while he had been important as a revolutionary syndicalist labor leader in the province of Ferrara before the war, Bianchi had not contributed significantly to syndicalism as an intellectual tradition. As a fascist, he was more a tactician than an ideologue; despite his ready access to Mussolini, he was not a major carrier of syndicalist ideas into fascism. Other important fascists had been on the fringes of the syndicalist movement at various times, including, for example, Massimo Rocca (prewar pseudonym: Libero Tancredi), Ottavio Dinale, Cesare Rossi, and Franco Ciarlantini.

The transition from syndicalism to fascism was by no means in-

evitable, however, and several important syndicalists split off from the evolving mainstream. Arturo Labriola (1873–1959) was the first leader of the syndicalist current when he served as editor of the newspaper *Avanguardia socialista*, while Enrico Leone (1878–1940) edited *Il divenire sociale*, the most substantial syndicalist theoretical review, from its inception in 1905 until its demise in 1910. Neither of these two Neapolitan syndicalists contributed directly to fascism. After years in exile, Labriola did return to Italy and rally to fascism at the time of the Ethiopian War, but he had shared little in the intellectual evolution that had made a number of his former syndicalist colleagues major fascist theorists. Leone shared in this evolution even less; in 1921, while many of the other syndicalists were turning to fascism, he reentered the Socialist party, but he ended up in a mental hospital in 1925. On the other hand, Alceste De Ambris (1874–1934) played a central role in the syndicalist doctrinal evolution toward what eventually became fascism, but he refused to take the final step and died in exile. Before the war he had been a labor organizer, first among Italian immigrants in Brazil, and then in Parma, where he became one of the two most influential revolutionary syndicalist organizers of the prewar period, along with Filippo Corridoni. Though active as an organizer, De Ambris could certainly hold his own with the intellectuals of the movement; he edited *Il rinnovamento*, one of the central periodicals in the emergence of fascism, during the pivotal years 1918–19. We will also encounter the names of a few others who played secondary roles in elaborating the original syndicalist doctrine but who did not become active fascists—Paolo Mantica, Alfredo Polledro, Franz Weiss, and Tommaso Sorricchio. Another secondary syndicalist, Giulio Barni, was killed in World War I.

Especially after 1907, when the syndicalists left the Socialist party, Italian syndicalism was in some ways only a collection of individuals, each going his own way. Free of any institutional discipline, the syndicalists were able to emphasize and develop various aspects of their doctrine until, one writer contends, there were almost as many varieties of syndicalism as there were syndicalists.[40] But while generalization about Italian syndicalism is hazardous, a core of common concerns and ideals continued to unite figures as diverse as the pompous Orano and the selfless Corridoni, the scholarly Panunzio and the modest labor organizers Ciardi, Razza, and Racheli. The syndicalist tradition persisted, evolving in light of frustrations and events. After World War I, their long experience as anti-Socialist leftists gave the syndicalists considerable prestige among the young populists who sought alternatives to the old patterns of Italian politics but who found themselves unable to follow the Socialists. Carlo Curcio has recalled, for example, the aura of legend that surrounded Olivetti when the old syndicalist joined the Fascist Faculty at Perugia in 1930.[41]

If we are to grasp the relationship between the syndicalist tradition and Italian fascism, we must consider briefly the place of ideas in such political movements and the use of ideas in historical explanation. There is widespread confusion over these matters because it is difficult to establish the relationships among such central categories as power, social composition, ideas, ideologies, purposes, and motives.[42] In considering a movement like Italian fascism, it seems somehow "soft-minded" to consider ideas and "tough-minded" to focus on social composition and power relationships—to look at who the fascists were and what they did, not at what they said. But their actions are not transparent and self-explanatory; nor does social composition provide a ready-made answer to the central question of motivation. Interpretation requires that we make judgments about how coherently the fascists grasped the problems of their society, about how well they understood the inadequacies of liberalism and Marxism, and about how realistic was their vision of an alternative to both. There is no escaping such judgments as these, and they cannot convincingly be made without analysis of ideas.

Use of the ambiguous category "ideology" especially obscures the value of ideas as evidence about purposes—and thus about the origins of political movements. As George Lichtheim noted in considering the concept of ideology: "One encounters a terminological vagueness which appears to reflect some deeper uncertainty about the status of ideas in the genesis of historical movements."[43] We often assume that ideologies are merely justifications or unconscious rationalizations, but in fact a body of ideas may reveal purposes even if it contains an element of "ideological" distortion. On the other hand, we often assume that there is no connection between ideology and the real world. Practical men who influence the course of events are concerned with concrete objectives as opposed to ideologies, which are merely fanciful castles in the air. At most, ideology has a functional role in a political system, serving as a manipulative tool, an instrument of propaganda.

Since most of the ideologues with whom we will be concerned lacked major institutional power bases in the Fascist regime, it is especially tempting to dismiss their ideas as irrelevant. Given the characteristics of Italian fascism, however, ideologues like the syndicalists could be highly influential—even powerful. In the first place, as fascists went, the syndicalists were articulate and experienced, and they offered a blueprint practical enough to give direction to the vague aspirations of younger, less experienced fascists. They provided an interpretation of Italian problems and a conception of what fascism ought to become. Because the syndicalists shared many of the frustrations, perceptions, and values of these other fascists, they could speak for and influence them. Especially in a movement like Italian fascism, which emerged in

action, and quite suddenly, there was a major role for such political "educators" as these.

Moreover, ideologues can influence practice even if they lack direct personal power—if those who have power are not sure what to do with it.[44] The direction which Mussolini provided for the Fascist regime was hesitant and uncertain at best. It was only because the syndicalists and other publicists prepared the ground and continued to insist on their conception of fascism that the regime began to move toward totalitarian corporativism in the wake of the crisis of 1924.

Ultimately, the Fascist regime failed to create a meaningful new order, but many Italians continued to believe in fascism's potential for serious innovation even as the regime was nearing its collapse. This was true in part because ideologues like the syndicalists served as myth makers, giving the regime an aura of radicalism and purpose, distorting the perceptions of others about its real prospects. In playing this role, such publicists exercised another kind of power, justifying the regime's imperfections, keeping up expectations, and thus helping the largely haphazard regime to hang together. If we are to understand why the regime worked as well as it did, it is essential that we identify these myths, explaining their structure and showing why they had the force that they did. At the same time, we should remember that the difference between myth making and revolutionary education is largely a matter of hindsight. To a serious fascist, the role of ideologue and educator could appear a powerful one indeed—more powerful, in some ways, than a position in the state apparatus, where compromise and focus on immediate problems were inevitable.

Still, some political movements have more impressive intellectual pedigrees than others, and we are especially liable to relegate "intellectual" evidence to the shadows when we encounter Italian fascism. We tend to assume that an ideology, to be taken seriously, must be systematic and rigorous, so rhetoric and superficiality in a set of political ideas seem evidence of intellectual adventurism, of a lack of seriousness and commitment. The syndicalists devised a doctrine with some measure of plausibility and force, but they were not systematic thinkers operating on the frontiers of European thought. Even the most cogent of them, Sergio Panunzio, sometimes lapsed into rhetorical superficiality and failed to examine premises or resolve inconsistencies. While some of the syndicalists read and learned from more substantial thinkers like Durkheim and Pareto, they borrowed selectively, without coming to terms with the full body of thought in question. But this does not mean that they were intellectual adventurers, or that their ideas were too superficial to have affected fascism. The syndicalists began, for example, by adopting some of the simpler and more accessible—but

still essential—categories of Marxism. They were not "really" Marxists, to be sure, but one need not grasp the dialectic, or Marx's concept of alienation, to embrace other Marxist categories, to see problems and solutions in terms of them, and to ask questions on the basis of them. Despite their selective and in some ways superficial use of Marx, the syndicalists were quite serious about the Marxist categories they borrowed.

There is a vast middle ground between innovative political theory and opportunistic intellectual adventurism. The syndicalists and others who learned from them tried to use their heads in order to make sense of the problems around them and to devise rational solutions. In this endeavor, they certainly managed to ask serious questions about both liberalism and Marxism. We can understand why they argued as they did, and why they proposed what they did for fascism, only by following the logic of their ideas, seeing why their attempt to think led them in the direction it did.

Italian fascism did enjoy the services of a major social philosopher, Giovanni Gentile.[45] And students of fascism with a bent toward the history of ideas have tended to focus on Gentile's ideas, since they have the philosophical rigor we expect of an authentic political doctrine. Mussolini gave Gentile's ideas a kind of official imprimatur when he incorporated material actually written by Gentile into his well-known article on fascist doctrine for the *Enciclopedia Italiana* of 1932. Some have tried to draw analogies between Mussolini's ideas and Gentile's system in an attempt to establish the existence of a genuine philosophy of fascism.[46] But it is fruitless to try to make Mussolini into a consistent ideologue, and Gentile's philosophical system was both too abstruse to be accessible to most of those who created fascism and too abstract to be helpful to them as they sought alternative political institutions. To be sure, Gentile integrated ideas from other traditions into his system as he sought to establish himself as the quasi-official philosopher of fascism, and he was no doubt serious about the populist corporativist themes he helped to publicize. But he was not the source of these ideas, nor did corporativism require "actualism," Gentile's brand of philosophical idealism, as a foundation. Mussolini, despite his power, lacked long-term purposes of his own, while Gentile's ideology, despite its rigor, served only as window dressing, displayed in Mussolini's encyclopedia article to give the regime the appearance of a philosophical basis.

The syndicalists were able to provide "middling" ideas, more coherent than Mussolini's and more relevant and accessible than Gentile's, to the alienated young Italians who spearheaded fascism. The syndicalists were perceptive and articulate enough to make explicit the

concerns of other fascists and to offer convincing solutions. The non-intellectual sectors of the Fascist movement could embrace these simpler ideas about problems and solutions and act on the basis of them.

Those who recognize syndicalism as an autonomous current within fascism tend to restrict its scope by identifying it with the cause of labor and by linking it to the Fascist trade union movement. From this perspective, promotion of working class interests vis-à-vis the capitalists must have been the syndicalists' chief concern, and Edmondo Rossoni, the first head of the Fascist trade union confederation, must have been the leading syndicalist within fascism—especially since this important institutional position gave him more direct power than the other syndicalists. A leading American historian of fascism, pointing to Nationalism and syndicalism as the two principal components of fascist ideology, takes Rossoni as representative of syndicalism, pitting him against the Nationalist Alfredo Rocco.[47] This is an obvious mismatch, but the contest becomes more interesting when Rocco is set against a more plausible opposite number—and his adversary in fact—Sergio Panunzio. The syndicalists within fascism aimed at something far more sweeping than defense of the workers. Their real constituency was not the working class at all; it consisted of politically alienated young people from the lower middle class who were seeking a populist alliance with the workers in order to make sociocultural and political changes.

Even though some of the most important of them came from relatively prominent families, the syndicalists were certainly not part of the emerging industrial bourgeoisie, nor were they "establishment" intellectuals with secure places in Italian society. Rather, they were in important respects representative of Italy's "intellectual petty bourgeoisie." This category, which initially seems to non-Italians almost a contradiction in terms, has a major place in modern Italian historiography; it embraces the marginal, superfluous sectors of the educated in an overpopulated country, lacking enough productive roles to go around. We have already seen that the category is central to Luigi Salvatorelli's classic interpretation of fascism. Writing in 1925, Gaetano Salvemini indicated some of the characteristics of the intellectual petty bourgeoisie as he criticized that segment of the Italian interventionist movement in which the syndicalists were especially important:

> Almost all of them came from the intellectual petty bourgeoisie. . . . They discerned in the war a good chance to foster disorder in the existing society, in which they had still not managed to assure themselves a means of livelihood. They were the ones who invented the myth of the war as revolution. But no sooner had they found themselves a secure and passably comfortable little position, in a propaganda office, in a division command, in a committee on the so-called domestic front, than they immediately became rabid patriots, archmilitarists, ultrabourgeois, bringing to these new attitudes the same noisy violence with which they used to run off at the mouth about revolution.

These elements, Salvemini went on, recognized Mussolini as their "natural condottiere"; ultimately, "they provided fascism with its general staff and cadres."[48]

Even though the "petty bourgeoisie" category is problematic, and although it has been overused in discussions of European fascism, it can be a helpful generalization or approximation if employed flexibly, without schematic reductionism, as part of a much broader interpretive framework. In this book I use the category to refer to propensities of mind and personality that reflect the traditions, forms of education, and socioeconomic insecurities of middle-class Italians lacking ties to modern industrial production.

These "superfluous" Italians tended to view politics as a vehicle for personal place-seeking, so historians of prewar Italian socialism have often assumed that the syndicalists' political evolution can be explained away in terms of narrow, self-serving aims. According to Gaetano Arfé, for example, revolutionary syndicalism in Italy was "a form of extreme protest of the most restless strata of the intellectual petty bourgeoisie, attempting to avail themselves of the labor movement in order to conquer in society that position of superiority lost in the dialectic of the modern class struggle, and for which they were unable for the moment to glimpse another means of access. The leaders of syndicalism retained of their socialist experience only a generic subversivism and an organic predilection for adventures. The Libyan War, World War I, and fascism would find them in the most turbulent and extremist positions of agitation."[49] Arfé finds in the prewar syndicalist doctrine remnants of the anarchism which the Socialist party and the labor movement had by then outgrown. And given the syndicalists' presumed interest in irrationalism and violence, he finds nothing mysterious about their turn to fascism.[50]

When we encounter the syndicalists in print, the exaggerated and rhetorical forms of their ideas may strike us first, apparently confirming the charges of adventurism and opportunism. Umberto Ricci, a noted economics professor at the University of Rome, turned to a recent book by A. O. Olivetti when he sought to understand syndicalist ideas in the uncertain political context after World War I. But he obviously found Olivetti's style and mode of argument rather appalling. Olivetti's writing was imprecise and highly rhetorical, and he sometimes indulged in extravagant metaphysical speculation, noting, as Ricci remarked sardonically, the parallel between molecules and syndicates and finding support for his conception of association in the theories of modern physics.[51] Moreover, especially after World War I, certain accents in

syndicalist writings seem to betray some of the standard petty bourgeois prejudices and traumas. During the postwar crisis, for example, the syndicalists had solid theoretical reasons to oppose Italian labor, but the tone of their remarks about the workers reveals a strain of classic socioeconomic resentment.[52] The criticisms which Olivetti and Panunzio leveled at Marxism during the fascist period were often mere rhetorical exercises devoid of intellectual substance.[53] The syndicalists also worried about the family during the fascist period.[54] It would be silly to suggest that those desiring to preserve the traditional family cannot adjust to modernity, but here again, the shrill tone of the syndicalists' statements manifests a kind of petty bourgeois cultural and psychological substratum.

With their rhetoric and superficiality, the syndicalists seem to fall into the category of surplus petty bourgeois intellectuals unable to find a place in overpopulated Italy and venting their frustrations by trying out the most extreme positions, one by one, with little assimilation of serious ideas. As the syndicalists found their way into fascism, it could be argued, the petty bourgeois concerns underlying their position began to surface; now they found the personal positions they had always craved and settled down to defend traditional values.

The petty bourgeois cast to their thought, then, has reinforced the tendency to neglect the syndicalists. But it is precisely because they do fit the petty bourgeois stereotype in certain respects that the syndicalists are significant. They transcended petty bourgeois prejudices to some extent and developed a program with some progressive and modernizing features. At the same time, it was largely because they shared some of the basic concerns of the petty bourgeoisie that the syndicalists were able to reach many of the creators of fascism, offering ideas and proposals that rang true.

In the ensuing chapters, we will explore the interaction between the syndicalists, as ideologues striving to find a constituency and to develop a realistic response to Italian problems, and a petty bourgeois political revolt which was striving for sufficient coherence to be effective. The young populist malcontents in fascism were seeking to transcend a narrow, class-based perspective and to develop a progressive program responding to the genuine problems affecting Italian society as a whole. The syndicalist tradition was the major source of the blueprint for change which these alienated populists sought to impose upon Italy. These fascists certainly did not see themselves as a mass base for Nationalist reaction, and they had, thanks to syndicalism, an alternative conception of fascist purposes. As a result, a genuine struggle developed to determine what fascism was to become.

The syndicalists are worthy of attention, then, because they were

intelligent and articulate enough to have left direct evidence of what they were thinking, but not so intelligent and articulate that they were completely atypical. Unlike less articulate fascists, they at least are able in principle to stand up to our a priori categories, to resist our tendency to explain them away, and to fight back, forcing us to see things from their perspective. By examining the frustrations and hopes of some concrete, living fascists, we can get a better sense of the range of frustrations and aspirations that were possible for other fascists who have not left us the same kind of direct evidence about their concerns.

At the same time, the syndicalist tradition constituted a bridge between the petty bourgeois populist current in Italian fascism and the ongoing European movement of radical opposition to the bourgeois order. The syndicalists tried at first to work with some of the basic categories of Marxism, the dominant force within the European radical tradition by the 1890s, but frustration in practice soon forced them to take a fresh look at the problems around them. They ended up involved in the reorientation of the radical tradition that was occurring on the European level, and the result, for them, was the petty bourgeois "socialism" that came to be called fascism. The suggestion that syndicalism affords a link between Italian fascism and certain problematic features of the European experience in the early twentieth century is not surprising, but we are liable to assume that the new irrationalism or the new cult of violence or the new vogue of Nietzsche was instrumental in the syndicalists' evolution from Marxism to fascism. Study of the Italian syndicalist tradition will reveal what that evolution in fact involved and ultimately will enable us better to understand the place of fascism in European history, in terms of the dilemmas confronting radical critics of the bourgeois order in Europe.

Since the syndicalists were "organic" intellectuals, speaking to and for a particular social constituency, their experience does not simply constitute another chapter in the rather overworked story of "fascism and the intellectuals," a story concerned with fascism's appeal to thinking people who should have known better. The syndicalists cannot be understood in terms of the personal and ontological malaise that we find underlying the appeal of fascism to many discontented European intellectuals between the wars.[55] They differed sharply, for example, from the romantic malcontents like Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, Robert Brasillach, and Lucien Rebatet who considered themselves fascists in France. The syndicalists had in mind something more precise than, for example, a revival of "energy" or "vitality" to overcome the decadence afflicting a "materialistic" age. Moreover, the intellectuals whom we will consider were not simply responding to the appeal of fascism—as a political phenomenon; rather, they helped to create fascism as they