

11 / *Critics and Myth Makers, 1925–1943*

During the years of the Fascist regime proper, from 1925 on, the syndicalists continued to publicize their proposals for radical change. They formed part of a wider left fascist current that worked until the fall of the regime in 1943 to give fascism a radical and populist direction, especially through corporatism. That current, needless to say, was not successful: the much-discussed corporative state never amounted to much. Yet, for two basic reasons, their efforts were quite important for the practice of the regime. First, this current was one of the forces that Mussolini sought to balance. Because the syndicalists and their colleagues goaded and criticized, institutions that seemed to provide the foundation for a corporativist alternative to parliamentary liberalism were erected. And second, because they never gave up, because they continued to insist that fascism was on its way to serious change, the syndicalists and other left fascist idealists helped to give the regime a veneer of revolutionary legitimacy that masked, to some extent, its real hollowness. In so doing, they helped the regime to stay together as well as it did; Italians of unquestionable integrity and seriousness continued to hope that fascism would amount to something. The syndicalists, then, ended up myth makers, serving the dictatorship by making it seem to others that fascism was involved in an ongoing process of revolutionary implementation.

We have seen that Mussolini sought to avoid dependence on any particular constituency, to avoid precise commitments, to keep his options open. He did not see himself as a tool of the old elites or of big business, nor could it have satisfied him, psychologically, to preside over a merely conservative, authoritarian regime. The generic radicalism in him was never entirely dead; perhaps, sporadically at least, he was even genuinely interested in the kind of change which left cor-

porativists proposed. But his skepticism invariably got the upper hand. He doubted the new corporativist institutions would work; he did not trust the people who would have to make them work and tried to keep the developing system under tight control. The extent of his compromise with, for example, the traditional bureaucracy no doubt made him uncomfortable, but he lacked the confidence to create a new order in which he could do without it.

Still, Mussolini's fundamental ambivalence made the regime ambiguous and produced an ongoing sense of openness and potential. There continued to be room for lively discussion about corporatism and the purpose of fascism, room even for remarkably explicit criticism of the practice of the regime. It seemed that those willing to keep pushing, to publicize their vision of what fascism was to become, could influence its direction. Given all the ambiguity and uncertainty, in fact, the outcome seemed to depend on how hard and effectively one pushed, on how convincingly one argued, and on how large an audience one was able to reach.

Mussolini himself sought to convince the world that fascism was moving toward corporatism. The neo-syndicalist program envisioned gradual change, not the imposition of a fully developed corporative system, and Mussolini invariably counseled patience. When the regime's equilibrium, or when he needed to move leftward to maintain the place, changes that seemed to be leading step by step to a meaningful corporativist order. So to those involved, the corporativist push did not seem to be futile; fascism did evolve—just enough to keep alive the hopes of committed left fascists, just enough to maintain the appearance of ongoing innovation and purpose that Mussolini's system required.

It is only because matters never seemed settled that Italian businessmen remained uneasy about fascism until the fall of the regime.¹ For example, the General Confederation of Italian Industry (*Confindustria*) opposed Rocco's syndical law of 1926, especially the magistracy of labor provision, preferring to keep labor relations a private matter. Nor did the business community welcome the launching of the National Council of Corporations in 1930, for businessmen feared that now at last they might begin to lose their autonomy and suffer political coordination. There was considerable friction between wary business organizations and Giuseppe Bottai at the Ministry of Corporations. Clearly, then, the possibility of a more serious outcome to the corporativist experiment was taken seriously at the time—even by those who were by no means sympathetic. One could never be sure of Mussolini, after all. And it was Mussolini's genius to be able to provide the

illusion of dynamism necessary to sustain the efforts of committed fascists. It was never as clear to them as it is to us that the changes and new institutions added up to very little, above all because they never knew how little time they had.

In syndicalist statements after 1925, there is a three-way pattern of argument, mixing buoyant affirmation with frustration, doubt, and bitterness. At each stage in the regime's history, the syndicalists insisted that fascism was involved in the necessarily gradual process of implementing the neosyndicalist program. But they always emphasized that the process was far from complete, that the present situation could by no means be taken as fulfillment. And as they stressed this point, notes of criticism crept into their statements. Not only was the revolution only in its initial stages, but there were obstacles within fascism itself that seemed to be undermining the revolution, bogging it down.

The problem was that for the syndicalists to maintain their license to criticize and push, they had to make compromises that served to justify the regime as it was. This was true especially of their glorification of the Duce and his essential role in fascism, although such ritualistic praise had more positive purposes as well.² The syndicalists' personal positions depended to some extent on Mussolini's favors. For example, when Olivetti complained of financial difficulties to Mussolini, whom he had known by then for twenty-five years, he was soon made a full professor at Sergio Panunzio's Fascist Faculty of Political Science at the University of Perugia.³ Olivetti could assume a position at this rank because of a special law waiving certain requirements for appointment to the Perugia faculty. Lanzillo approached Mussolini several times in search of personal favors—in an unsuccessful attempt to launch his own periodical, for example, and in quest of more favorable academic employment.⁴ While teaching at Cagliari in Sardinia in 1934, he wrote complaining of "exile" and asked Mussolini for the help of the Ministry of National Education in securing a position then open at the Istituto Superiore di Scienze Economiche e Commerciali at Venice. The ensuing chain of events is unclear, but Lanzillo soon won appointment to the Institute's faculty and ended up its rector on the eve of World War II.

By lauding Mussolini in public, the syndicalists hoped not only to stay on his good side, but also to play up their own kinship with him and thus to influence his policies. They praised him because, as they represented the situation, he was spearheading precisely the revolution they were advocating.⁵ Moreover, they glorified the Duce because, for better or for worse, he seemed the best available cutting edge for radical change, especially once the strength of the obstacles to serious innovation had become clear after 1925.⁶ If fascism was to have any chance of overcoming the resistance of the old bureaucracy, a powerful

position for Mussolini no doubt really was necessary. To place one's hopes on Mussolini was a gamble, but it was not clear there was any alternative.

Glorification of the Duce, then, was not exclusively a compromise enabling the syndicalists to continue prodding, but it was mostly that. And the compromising did not stop there. During the 1930s, Panunzio, especially, sometimes constructed sweeping syntheses having a place for all aspects of Mussolini's haphazard regime. In his *Teoria generale dello Stato fascista*, based on his course at the University of Rome and intended as a textbook of fascism for classroom use, Panunzio devised a precise, legalistic outline of the existing Fascist state, giving the whole chaotic hodgepodge a veneer of logical order and purpose. He talked about the role of the army, for example, and insisted that fascism was, and could only be, monarchical. By 1939 attempts were afoot to interject certain features of German Nazism into Italian fascism, and Panunzio also found a place in his synthesis for anti-Semitism, linking the Jews to Bolshevism and the international counterrevolutionary conspiracy against fascism.⁷ Without trying to justify this, the neediest of Panunzio's compromises, we should note that he went out of his way to contrast the Italian fascist and German Nazi positions on race. For fascism, he explained, the nation was ultimately an autonomous historical product, not reducible to race. This meant that Jews, for example, could be assimilated into the Italian nation. In explicitly disavowing the biological racism of the Nazis, Panunzio clearly was taking an antirealist position in context. And despite these elements of compromise, Panunzio continued until the fall of the regime to devote much the greater part of his efforts to working for a popular corporatist order.

Two significant implications for practice in the syndicalist-fascist blueprint affected the syndicalists' ability to criticize. Despite all their rhetoric about the real nation overcoming the antinational state, the syndicalists recognized that the process of political maturation in society was not complete. The masses, including the socialist workers, were not ready to have the state turned over to them immediately; rather, they were ready to be educated, ready for the process of change that would gradually make them fuller participants in the national life. So the syndicalists and their colleagues always insisted that revolutionary implementation would have to be a gradual process, with the organizational society taking on more and more serious public functions as political education and maturation proceeded.⁸ Implementation would have to be gradual partly because experiment and trial and error were necessary to determine the most effective set of institutional relationships.⁹ The syndicalists claimed that this respect for a sometimes-incalculable

reality was one measure of fascism's superiority to the Soviet system, with its reliance on abstract schemas. But their plausible belief in gradual implementation affected their perceptions of the Fascist regime and helped to soften their criticism. Since a full-blown corporative state could not be established all at once, present inadequacies did not necessarily mean that the system could never be made to develop in a meaningful way. Each imperfect measure was only a step in a gradual process, which would overcome the imperfections sooner or later.

Moreover, since the masses still required political education, there was room for some degree of interference with the unions and corporations from the top—by the state and especially by the Fascist party. The syndicalists, in emphasizing the central place of corporatism in fascism, were not seeking to downplay the role of the party. The economic organizations and the party were not rivals, but had complementary roles. As we saw in chapter eight, the party leader Augusto Turati and the corporativist advocate Giuseppe Bottai essentially shared this view. The party in the syndicalist-fascist conception was the elite, the conscious vanguard, with the major responsibility for implementing the revolution; it was up to the party to inspire the new socioeconomic organizations with fascist principles.¹⁰ At a time of frustration in 1933, the union leader Luigi Razza called for more intimate links between the party and these organizations as a way of stimulating the disappointing corporative system.¹¹

The fact that the people still had to be raised to political consciousness by the elite meant that, for now at least, the Nationalists and syndicalists had something else in common beyond the perceptions discussed in the preceding chapter. In the short term, the elitist control of the organized society from the top that the Nationalists expected to be permanent partly converged with the mobilization by the new elite that the syndicalists saw as a temporary phase of revolutionary implementation. So some of the patterns of the practice of the regime could satisfy both, but the deeper differences were never far beneath the surface. In a revealing statement in 1927, Panunzio calmly admitted that the current emphasis on authority, centralization, and discipline in fascism was excessive, a dialectical overreaction, but he reassured his readers that any present authoritarianism was by no means the final goal of fascism, but only a phase, "a means for the better education of man to liberty."¹²

Although revolutionary implementation required a phase of elitist manipulation, left fascist idealists understood the fascist elite to be an open one. The party was to universalize its values and raise the whole society to its level, and as it completed this task, a new democracy would emerge. For Olivetti, the party was a new aristocracy, but one

completely open to the young generation of fascists as they reached political maturity.¹³ He looked forward to the day when the party, having fulfilled its mission and become universal, would no longer be necessary. In the same way, Panunzio pointed out that the Fascist state of 1925 was a party state only because fascism had not yet realized its universal principles; the party was simply the instrument for their realization.¹⁴ Later, as it became increasingly clear that the party was not likely to wither away, Panunzio assigned the party a permanent, but no longer elitist, role. Even after fascist values had been universalized, the party would remain as a kind of populist "church," a source of structure and sociality to the individual's experience, a focus of common feeling in the new totalitarian order.¹⁵ So the party as an organization would still be useful, but totalitarian fulfillment would mean homogeneity, not a permanent cleft between the elite and the masses.

It was questionable, to say the least, whether the Fascist party was fit to raise the rest of the society to a higher level of political consciousness. The Fascist movement had fallen heir to some of the idealism bound up with the war experience, and certainly Augusto Turati, party leader from 1926 to 1930, understood the party's role in the dynamic, revolutionary way that the syndicalist blueprint for fascism required. By the early 1930s, however, it was hard to ignore the fact that this idealism had become considerably diluted. The party was becoming a vehicle for place-seeking and petty squabbling as it lost power in the regime to Mussolini and the old state apparatus, including such collaborators as Arturo Bocchini, the chief of the secret police. Bocchini was an authoritarian bureaucrat, not a totalitarian idealist associated with the party. The decline in vigor and commitment in the party was especially obvious after December 1931, when Achille Starace became party secretary. But already at the beginning of 1931, Olivetti warned that the party, despite its potentially fruitful role, might become a mere oligarchy existing as an end in itself, without its original idealism.¹⁶ He feared especially that the party was not really instilling new values into the economic organizations but undermining their autonomy for narrow, partisan reasons. If the party lost its revolutionary capacity, and especially if it began to compromise the corporativist essence of fascism, it would have to be eliminated altogether. The severe tone of Olivetti's warning leaves no doubt that he found these dangers only too real.

Such criticisms of fascism in practice, however, did not have to wait until 1931, nor was the party the only source of frustration. Fascism sometimes in the corporativist direction which the syndicalists desired, but it continued to be a struggle. There was occasionally dissension

among the syndicalists themselves. The first case involved Agostino Lanzillo, who began to fall out with the others as soon as revolutionary implementation began in 1925. Although he favored a neosyndicalist political system, Lanzillo disliked some of the more coercive features of the program which Panunzio and Olivetti advocated, especially the labor magistracy and the attendant elimination of the right to strike. As a member of the Commission of Eighteen, Lanzillo did not favor the majority proposal, which Olivetti had a major hand in shaping. Reporting on the commission's labors while they were still in progress, Olivetti claimed that Lanzillo's opposition stemmed from a rigidly Sorelian, revolutionary syndicalist perspective.¹⁷ Olivetti's son Ezio Maria, praising the commission's contribution to fascist corporatism in a book published in 1927, contended that Lanzillo had by then become completely isolated from the neosyndicalist mainstream.¹⁸ As a member of the commission, Lanzillo had been too "individualistic," too much the classic revolutionary syndicalist for the younger Olivetti's taste.

These accusations were considerably exaggerated, since Lanzillo had played a major part in the syndicalists' evolution away from their original revolutionary orthodoxy. But while he accepted the essentials of the syndicalist-fascist blueprint, and while he considered himself a good fascist, there were some differences of emphasis, and Lanzillo was not as influential as the other syndicalists within fascism after 1926. Of all the syndicalists, Lanzillo had the deepest reservations about Rocco's syndical law of April 1926, which he criticized sharply in the Chamber debate which preceded its passage.¹⁹ His statement expressed very clearly the neosyndicalist vision he shared with the others, but he wondered aloud whether the Fascist economic organizations could ever have the autonomy and spontaneity they needed to reach maturity from within Rocco's framework, especially given Rocco's own coercive purposes. No wonder the Nationalists had been so opposed, though to no avail, when Lanzillo had been named to the original Commission of Fifteen in 1924.²⁰ The other syndicalists also had misgivings about the Rocco law, but most would be more circumspect and would continue the struggle more covertly. And Lanzillo, despite his doubts and diminished influence, continued to publicize the syndicalist-fascist conception throughout the years of the regime.

The other syndicalist who expressed explicitly his misgivings about the Rocco law was Edmondo Rossoni, who worried that the law could lead to excessive state interference in the functioning of the Fascist unions. In 1926 he warned—rather starkly—that a lasting new regime based on neosyndicalism could not be created with the mentality and the methods of the police, and when ensuing experience seemed to con-

firm his fears, he called again and again for more freedom for the Fascist economic organizations.²¹ He also complained about the unequal treatment for business and labor implied in the syndical law, which did not subject business organizations to the same state regulation as it did the workers' syndicates.²² Rossoni himself had been seeking to ensure equality of treatment—and to begin the evolution toward a fuller form of corporatism—by forcing the employers into Fascist organizations too. When Italian businessmen fought strenuously—and ultimately successfully—against this attempt at fascist coordination, Rossoni attacked them with surprising openness and bitterness. He insisted repeatedly that fascism's most urgent task was to subject the employers to fascist discipline, for the business mentality had not been transformed the way the labor mentality had; obviously mere party membership and vague formulas about class collaboration and the national interest were not enough. The stakes were clear: "If we hesitate or how will we be able for long to ward off the accusation of having adopted a double standard and of having constituted tame organizations in the service of the employers?"²³

Once Rocco's bill became law in April of 1926, Rossoni admitted temporary defeat in his efforts to subject businessmen to fascist discipline.²⁴ Despite a good deal of bitterness, however, he anticipated that sooner or later, given the logic of its revolutionary conception, fascism would bring the employers under the same kind of coordination as the workers. Rossoni's optimism in the wake of defeat was a bit forced, but fascism had a way of conciliating its losers and leaving the future apparently open. And the next corporatist measures did what they were largely designed to do: persuade Rossoni and his colleagues that the game was not over. The Ministry of Corporations was established in July 1926, and Giuseppe Bottai quickly emerged as its leading figure, first as undersecretary from 1926 until 1929, then as minister until July 1932, when he was removed as part of a general reshuffling of the governmental leadership. For now, Rossoni argued, the new ministry would provide a measure of the coordination between business associations and the organizations of workers and technical employees that he had been seeking; it could pave the way for a system of genuine corporations in the future.²⁵

Rossoni could point to the new ministry to minimize his defeat, but he was hardly satisfied, and it was partly because of his grumbling stances surrounding the drafting of a labor charter. The circumstantial document itself, epitomizing the ambiguous compromise of the Fascist regime, especially with respect to corporatism,²⁶ Mussolini envisioned

the charter as a way to pacify discontents in the Fascist union movement, and, more broadly, to reassure fascist idealists, although he wanted a document that would not seriously antagonize business. Bottai was given the first chance to draft the document; Mussolini even wrote to him on 3 March 1927 to recommend an article by Olivetti, published in *Il popolo d'Italia* the day before, which called for a charter of concrete, practical commitments, without rhetorical generalities.²⁷ Mussolini seemed to be serious. The industrialists, of course, favored a different direction for the charter than left fascists like Bottai and Rossoni, and when Bottai proved unable to resolve the differences, Mussolini asked Alfredo Rocco to work out a compromise. But Rocco, in attempting to define the fascist position on private property, went too far to the right for Mussolini, who was apparently responsible for the significant changes in the final draft. Since Mussolini was seeking to reestablish his flexibility, he did not want to commit himself to a position so clearly conservative and probusiness as the one Rocco had outlined. The Grand Council of Fascism approved the final version in April 1927, along with a resolution calling on the government to begin immediately to develop a program of legislation to implement its principles, from state enforcement of collective labor contracts to the corporative organization of the state.²⁸

The document itself was an awkward conglomeration of abstract and concrete, of radical- and conservative-sounding statements.²⁹ It stressed the social responsibility of labor and capital, the significance of the juridical recognition of the syndicates, the sociopolitical import of collective labor contracts, and the possibility of coordinating the economy through the economic groupings and the Ministry of Corporations. While it certainly did not commit fascism to a fully developed corporative state, the Labor Charter did help to reassure serious corporativists that the fascist revolution was just starting—and that Mussolini was on their side. In the article which Mussolini recommended to Bottai, Olivetti had portrayed the charter as a foundation for the more concrete corporativist measures to follow and had stressed that Mussolini obviously understood the document in the same light.³⁰ Panunzio, writing shortly after the charter was promulgated, linked it to the neosyndicalist tradition and found it "saturated with the creative will of Benito Mussolini."³¹ The Labor Charter, and the measures of 1925–27 in general, were evidence that fascism was revolutionary after all; those who had seen fascism as merely reinforcing the old order, and who had laughed at the fascist revolutionaries as the heretics of the movement, were now being proven wrong. In times of frustration later on, the syndicalists referred back to the Labor Charter, portraying it as the foundation for ongoing development, as they continued their efforts to

push and shape—and sought to reassure themselves at the same time.³²

By interpreting the Labor Charter and Mussolini's intentions in this light, the syndicalists were able to maintain or raise expectations and thereby to keep up the pressure. And change did continue, on a piecemeal basis, with every new institution giving the syndicalists the chance to proclaim, once again, that Mussolini was leading fascism in the desired direction. Discussion of corporativist issues remained open and lively, and the syndicalists continued to have no difficulty reaching an audience. They were able to publish explicit criticisms even in the quasi-official organs of the regime, *Il popolo d'Italia* and *Gerarchia*. Olivetti no doubt felt encouraged when Mussolini wrote him a warm personal letter in 1927 to praise Ezio Maria Olivetti's book on fascist corporativism.³³ In his famous article on fascist doctrine, written for the *Enciclopedia Italiana* of 1932 but also published separately in newspapers and as a book, Mussolini enhanced the syndicalists' pedigree by lauding the contributions that Olivetti's *Pagine libere*, Orano's *La lupia*, and Leone's *Divenire sociale* had made to the renewal in Italy that had culminated in fascism.³⁴ The considerable and quasi-official hagiography that developed around Filippo Corridoni also increased the syndicalists' prestige, for they could plausibly claim to bear the legacy of their late colleague.³⁵

Mussolini consistently portrayed the fascist revolution as an ongoing process that was by no means complete. When Olivetti, in February 1928, was preparing a lecture on corporativism to be given at the Center for Fascist Studies at Lausanne the next month, he sent his comments to Mussolini beforehand, hoping to influence him. In his reply, Mussolini referred especially to the reform of the Chamber of Deputies which was about to be implemented, giving the Fascist economic organizations a modest, indirect voice in selecting the deputies. His letter shows how encouraging he could be:

I read with great interest your remarks on the corporations. The truth is as you have indicated: we do not yet have a corporative regime; we are still in the syndical phase. But I would add that the syndical phase is, in my opinion, the necessary entrance way for the truly corporative phase. . . . I remind you of my earlier statement regarding national political representation and the reform of the constitution, which is not definitive, even though it is, in my opinion, notable as a departure and as a mechanism. Still, when we remember that this gigantic task of ordering all the activities of a great nation has been achieved in two years, we must recognize, with some pride, that the fact is without precedent in world history. Let me say, finally, that the improvements that you indicate in the last part of your study should not have to wait long to be implemented.³⁶

In his lecture at Lausanne, Olivetti served as an effective propagandist, citing the Labor Charter and recent speeches by Mussolini as evidence that fascism was firmly committed to corporativism. And naturally he went on to emphasize that implementation had to proceed gradually and that fascism was still in its preliminary syndical stage.³⁷

Meanwhile, Panunzio had convinced Mussolini that fascism needed an academy of its own—to develop fascist doctrine and to teach fascist principles to those who would administer the new fascist state. The two began to discuss the idea during the summer of 1925, not long after Panunzio had called for the more formal elaboration of fascist doctrine at the meeting on fascist culture in Bologna the previous March.³⁸ Around the end of the year, Panunzio presented a proposal to Mussolini, and the outcome was the Fascist Faculty of Political Science, attached to the University of Perugia. Legally authorized in 1927, it began to function in March 1928, with Panunzio as its director. To staff the faculty, Panunzio gradually assembled an important group of fascist publicists and scholars, including the syndicalists Orano and Olivetti, the Nationalists Maraviglia and Coppola, the renowned social scientist and one-time syndicalist Robert Michels, and able younger scholars such as Carlo Curcio, Giuseppe Chiarelli, and Vincenzo Zangara. According to Curcio, Panunzio himself held together this heterogeneous faculty and gave it direction. Both Curcio and Panunzio's son, Vito, have stressed how serious Panunzio was about the new institution and the role it could play in the regime.³⁹ Writing in January 1925, just as fascism seemed to be committing itself to radical change, Panunzio had emphasized the primacy of the party over the Fascist government in revolutionary implementation.⁴⁰ Since the government had to be concerned primarily with the day-to-day operation of the state, its perspective was bound to be limited and the scope of its activities circumscribed. Panunzio was implicitly acknowledging that Mussolini's government still rested to an important degree on compromise with the old order. It fell to others to focus on the long-term tasks of education and doctrinal development that were essential if a new order was to be created. Panunzio had a point: if fascism was serious about revolutionary implementation, there were crucial tasks—and powerful roles—outside the sphere of immediate governmental decision making. His faculty was something new and special when it began, and it seemed to have the support of the fascist political leadership. Augusto Turati gave the featured speech, dealing with the complementary roles of party and syndicates, during ceremonies closing the first term in June 1928, and Panunzio presented the members of the faculty to Mussolini at a reception the next month.⁴¹

In an interview with *Il popolo d'Italia* just before the first session

began, Panunzio outlined the double mandate which he felt that he and his colleagues had from Mussolini. On the most immediate level, "this Faculty will be, by the will of the Duce, an organ, even the Seminary, of the Regime," offering a sound fascist education to those preparing for positions in the Fascist state: "The Faculty that is emerging responds to a very serious need of the Regime. Fascism . . . requires that its doctrine and its political, economic, and juridical institutions be the object of rigorous study on the part of young people embarking on administrative, syndical-corporative, diplomatic, and colonial careers."⁴² If fascism was to assume full control of the Italian state, it did require a way of training a new bureaucratic elite that would be both technically competent and politically committed. Traditionally, the faculties of law had trained the upper bureaucracy in Italy, but they could hardly be relied upon for the present task, even if those comprising them were nominally fascists. For one thing, their curriculum was too old-fashioned and did not consider sufficiently the modern realities—involving syndical development, for example—that especially concerned fascism.⁴³ Moreover, when established scholars discussed fascist innovations in such areas as syndical law, they often did so from what seemed to committed fascists to be a dangerously detached point of view. Writing in 1927, Panunzio inveighed against the old system, who do not feel and follow our movement, and who observe it, more or less skeptically and distrustfully, from the outside." It was up to committed believers to examine fascist legislation, in an atmosphere of revolutionary enthusiasm; "only they can read the books on fascist syndicalism in order to translate them into action, as opposed to subjecting them to scholarly criticism."⁴⁴ Like Panunzio, A. O. Olivetti played a major part in attempts to make Italian higher education more genuinely fascist during the later 1920s.⁴⁵

Through his Fascist faculty, then, Panunzio was seeking both to develop a system of education relevant to the tasks that fascism intended to tackle and to undercut the role of the old, hide-bound university establishment in training civil servants. It was Panunzio's understanding in 1928 that Mussolini would guarantee graduates of the new Fascist faculty at least equal access to government jobs. Finally, in 1932, with new Fascist political faculties established elsewhere as well, he managed to get Mussolini to advise the ministers that, in their hiring, they were no longer to insist on the traditional juridical training. Ultimately, as a result of Panunzio's efforts, graduates of the new political faculties were able to compete equally in most branches of the administration.⁴⁶ This was a breach in the armor of the traditional bureaucracy, which constituted one of the major obstacles to serious

fascist innovation. At the same time, Panunzio called on the state to provide the student financial aid necessary to insure that these careers were open to talent. For access to such careers to be a function of wealth would be fundamentally antithetical to fascist principles.⁴⁷

To fulfill its educational mission, the faculty offered courses on syndical and corporatist doctrine and law, on the history and doctrine of fascism, on diplomacy and diplomatic history, on the history of economic and political doctrines, and on similar subjects of particular concern for fascism. The courses were passed around from one faculty member to another, although Coppola, for example, continued to specialize in international relations, while Michels focused on the history of economic doctrines, giving ample attention to fascism's Labor Charter and corporative system.⁴⁸

To provide the kind of training Panunzio envisioned, the new faculty would have to assume a broader role as well and work to elaborate and propagate fascist doctrine.⁴⁹ If fascism was to be a revolutionary movement worthy of the name, Panunzio insisted, it needed a doctrine of its own, one that could seriously claim to challenge liberalism and communism. Even in 1928, this task still seemed to him to be open, but it could no longer wait, since the regime was beginning to develop specifically fascist institutions. So the new faculty could not simply educate; it also had to determine what needed to be taught. The faculty's teaching would, of course, seek to inspire enthusiasm and faith in the superiority of fascism; Panunzio stressed this point in a memorandum to the faculty in 1930.⁵⁰ Still, Panunzio had no illusions that revolutionary fervor—or, for that matter, activism or intuition—afforded a substitute for serious doctrinal development, based on careful study and hard intellectual work. And by doctrine, he insisted that he intended not abstract theories, but concrete principles that could guide the formation and functioning of new Fascist institutions. To influence subsequent practice, it was necessary to study the situation, to define what needed to be done, and to prepare people to do it.

As its major doctrinal endeavor, the faculty sponsored a series of books, the *Collana di studi fascisti*, dealing with the principles and program of fascism. Twelve titles were published in all, including important works by Panunzio, Michels, Curcio, and Charelli. They constituted a significant collection, but the series fell short of Panunzio's initial hopes. In a report to Mussolini on the faculty in January 1934, Panunzio found the *Collana* promising, but he admitted that it had scarcely begun to fulfill its objective of establishing and publicizing a definitive fascist doctrine.⁵¹ Nine of the books had already been published by this time, however, so the impetus behind the endeavor was obviously waning, despite Panunzio's predictably optimistic assertion that it was still in its initial stages.

Syndicalists and Nationalists could coexist at Perugia partly because the syndicalists, for reasons of their own, overplayed the prewar convergence of the two movements and even depicted the Nationalists, especially Rocco and Corradini, as convinced syndicalists.⁵² No doubt that still separated them from the Nationalists; to minimize the differences how deeply fascism was divided against itself. But they were also seeking to enhance their own influence. If, as the syndicalists claimed, a symbiosis between Nationalism and syndicalism lay at the root of fascism, with Nationalism responsible for the fascist emphasis on state sovereignty, and syndicalism responsible for the fascist conception of the new social content of the state, then it was the syndicalists who were most qualified to influence the most important decisions still to be made, for these concerned the role of the syndicates and corporations. By admitting the great contribution of Nationalism to fascism, and by stressing that they themselves were the source of the syndicalist hegemony over the areas of policy development that seemed most important for the future, Panunzio endorsed changes in the form and exercise of executive power which the Nationalists had spearheaded; he was admitting the Nationalists' leadership in matters which preoccupied them but which he considered secondary.⁵³ Despite the not collaboration at Perugia, Panunzio continued to insist that syndicalism, by showing how to unify state and society,⁵⁴

Seeking to present syndicalism as the heart of fascism, the syndicalists adopted another device as well and began to overemphasize the place of Georges Sorel—and sometimes even Henri Bergson—in their tradition. This not only seemed to enhance their intellectual pedigree, but also enabled them to claim a more intimate kinship with Mussolini, whose intellectual debt to these Frenchmen they emphasized at the same time.⁵⁵ They were trying to convince the fascist public—and no doubt Mussolini as well—that whatever the necessity of short-term compromises, Mussolini was essentially one of them. But while the syndicalists were willing to manipulate the facts of their own past, they did not play down their subversive backgrounds. They referred frequently to the revolutionary syndicalist tradition, seeking to explain its connection with fascism. Even in 1936, thirty-three years after he had first encountered the work, Panunzio quoted at length from Sorel's *Avenir socialiste des syndicats* in an article in the official review *Gerarchia*, as he sought to recall the Fascist unions to their educational mission.⁵⁶

Meanwhile there continued to be innovations in practice. The syndicalists repeatedly called for a new system of political representa-

tion, based on economic organizations, and finally, late in 1927, fascism committed itself to a fundamental reform of the Chamber of Deputies. The ensuing law of May 1928 did not create the kind of procedure the syndicalists had called for, but it seemed a significant step in that direction.⁵⁷ The economic organizations in society were not to elect representatives directly, but were to offer a list of candidates, from which the Fascist Grand Council would designate those to be proposed, in a bloc, to the electorate for ratification. At this point even some committed corporativists doubted that full-scale corporative representation would be a good idea, given the present balance of forces in the country, and given the questionable role that Edmondo Rossoni seemed to envision for his union confederation. Because of these misgivings, there was considerable agreement when the Grand Council declared that the Fascist economic organizations were mature enough only for the first step toward full-fledged corporative representation. It was still necessary for the Grand Council itself to make certain that the candidates proposed were committed fascists with a sure national consciousness. But the Grand Council was careful to emphasize that "this does not exclude the possibility that, as the syndical organizations are consolidated and perfected, a typically and exclusively fascist form of national corporative representation could be achieved, after the next legislature has had a trial."⁵⁸

When Olivetti discussed the electoral law in his speech at Lausanne in March 1928, he admitted that the new system was hardly optimal. But for now, he insisted, it was the best that could be expected, for fascism had to "exercise control over syndical electoral participation, which especially at first could . . . commit errors that would affect the entire policy of the regime; and the regime, in assuming the weighty responsibility for a transformation of the system of representation, clearly has the right to be sure that this transformation is achieved in a normal, orderly way and in a way that is consistent with the supreme interests of the nation."⁵⁹ Olivetti justified the role of the Fascist Grand Council in the process by stressing, once again, that the Fascist party was "the active elite of the entire fascist nation," but he insisted that the present arrangement was only provisional and that a full-fledged corporative assembly would not be long in coming. The pattern was typical: Olivetti could find enough in the new system to warrant continued efforts to push and shape, but only by justifying present imperfections and by giving present realities a gloss of revolutionary meaning they merited less and less.

There was a place in the syndicalist blueprint for party interference and even for the new Ministry of Corporations to play a key role in coordination, at least until real corporations were instituted. In light of

practice, however, the syndicalists developed misgivings about the party, about the Ministry of Corporations, and, surprisingly, even about the Fascist syndical confederation. The rivalries that had developed by the late 1920s among Rossoni's union movement, Turati's party, and Bottai's Ministry of Corporations were a serious source of weakness for left fascism. Some friction was inevitable, given the personal ambitions involved and given the sensitive short-term relationships among the three entities which the theory itself envisioned. The inadequacies of corporative development in practice only intensified hostilities; all three of the leaders, at least, genuinely wanted to move in the same direction, but each blamed the others for present problems.

By 1928 Rossoni was faced with a varied array of adversaries, including not only leaders from business, the party, and the Ministry of Corporations, but also major neosyndicalist publicists like Olivetti and Panunzio and union leaders like Mario Racheli. Even to these old syndicalist colleagues, Rossoni seemed too prone to personal ambition, too concerned with preserving the autonomy of his confederation for his own sake, and too willing to play on old class antagonisms. Panunzio disagreed publicly with Rossoni's negative assessment of the 1926 syndical law, while Olivetti complained that Rossoni's confederation concentrated power excessively and preserved too much traditional class dualism.⁶⁰ Thus Olivetti was calling by early 1928 for Rossoni's class-based confederation to be broken down to make way for truly corporativist organization linking all those involved in a given economic sector. Mario Racheli wrote to Olivetti in December 1927, noting that the present labor and employer organizations were organized along traditional class lines and would have to be replaced by organizations based on economic category if a meaningful corporative state was ever to be created.⁶¹

The controversy over Rossoni and his confederation stemmed in part from personal rivalries, but plausible differences in strategic emphasis were involved as well. Rossoni still hoped to impose the collective interest in the economy by subjecting the employers to fascist discipline, and he genuinely wanted to enhance the role of labor in economic decision making.⁶² However, he was also beginning to draw a distinction between the economic and political spheres, one that was incompatible with the syndicalist-fascist program but that did promise to enhance his personal position. Although he favored corporative representation, Rossoni portrayed the political and economic spheres not as a convergent, but as parallel.⁶³ This meant that Mussolini and his party were to be dominant in the political sphere, with Rossoni and his confederation dominant in the economic sphere. While fascist-style po-

litical unity in Italy had already been achieved, Rossoni claimed, a comparable measure of unity in the economic sphere still had to be created, through his organizational network. Seeking to counter charges of untoward personal ambition, Rossoni modestly insisted that the head of the vast confederation of the entire economy could only be Mussolini himself.⁶⁴ But such a concentration of power in the economic sphere would have made Rossoni a brilliant second, even a *piccolo Duce*, precisely what his adversaries claimed he was seeking to become. The other neosyndicalists, including union leaders like Razza and Racheli, as well as younger fascists like Turati and Bottai, had a more integral conception of fascism, requiring a symbiotic relationship between the party and the economic organizations, between the political and the economic spheres.

Rossoni's opponents finally prevailed in November of 1928, when he was ousted and his confederation broken up into six smaller syndical groupings based on economic sector.⁶⁵ This outcome has generally been judged a defeat for the radical or leftist elements in fascism, because it is assumed that the "leftist" course was to seek to maintain working-class autonomy. Rossoni's large and relatively powerful confederation had served to some extent to protect the immediate economic interests of the workers and to preserve their class consciousness. And certainly businessmen hostile to this confederation helped to bring about its fragmentation, or *sbloccamento*. But if we view the situation in this light, we cannot understand why party and corporatist leaders, as well as many of Rossoni's old syndicalist colleagues, worked for the *sbloccamento* as well. Opposition to Rossoni did not prevent Olivetti and Bottai, for example, from criticizing the narrow class mentality which they found still characteristic of too many employers.⁶⁶ As it turned out, of course, the *sbloccamento* was bad for labor and in some ways good for business, but the measure was consistent with the serious corporative evolution that some of Rossoni's opponents were seeking; the radical change they envisioned did not require the preservation of labor's autonomy and class consciousness. So the *sbloccamento* of 1928 was not the end of the national syndicalist current in fascism, any more than was the compromise of 1921, or the Palazzo Chigi Pact of 1923, or the Rocco law of 1926. The import of the change depended on what would happen subsequently, whether meaningful organization of the society by economic sector was to be forthcoming or not. And discussion of what should be done next began immediately in the wake of the *sbloccamento* and led to the institution of the National Council of Corporations in 1930.

For the moment, however, much depended on the functioning of the Ministry of Corporations, which had become Giuseppe Bottai's

institutional base almost immediately after it was established in 1926. The new ministry found itself frequently involved in jurisdictional conflicts with the older, traditional ministries, especially the Ministry of National Economy. These representatives of the old bureaucracy took a dim view of genuine corporatism and thus played down the competence of the Ministry of Corporations, seeking to restrict it to syndical matters. At the same time, the new ministry itself turned into another preserve of traditional bureaucratic elements, despite Bottai's committed leadership and despite its allegedly revolutionary import. Thus an institution that was supposed to foster serious innovation became its obstacle, as new forms only masked the absence of real change and the depth of the compromise between fascism and the old elites.⁶⁷

Serious corporativists quickly began to complain of bureaucratic interference with the network of Fascist economic organizations—and would continue to do so until the fall of the regime. Olivetti warned again and again that the Fascist unions had to be more active and dynamic—in negotiations for collective labor contracts, for example—if Turati wrote to Mussolini in January 1930 to complain of the complicated bureaucratic apparatus that, he said, was suffocating fascism's network of economic organizations.⁶⁸ Turati proposed that major functions of the Ministry of Corporations be taken over by the local representatives of his own Fascist party. Anticipating objections that he was seeking to enhance the position of the party at the expense of other institutions, Turati insisted that he wanted only to reduce the number of bureaucratic place-seekers, to streamline the system, and thereby to enable fascist corporatism to develop in a healthier way.

The rivalry that was developing between Turati's party and Bottai's ministry stemmed from genuine dilemmas and plausible differences in perception, not simply from a self-serving competition for power. Turati and Bottai were both frustrated with the evolution of the corporative system in practice, but Turati blamed interference from the ministry, while Bottai blamed interference from the party. They were both right, for neither the party nor the ministry was the supple, dynamic instrument of revolutionary implementation which the syndicalist-fascist conception required. At the same time, Bottai continued to find a major role for the party, while Turati continued to view corporatism as the key to the new order which the party was trying to create.⁷⁰ From the beginning of his tenure as party secretary in 1926, Turati worked to make the party more active and influential on the syndical level, seeking, for example, to develop intersyndical committees as nuclei for subsequent corporations.⁷¹ More generally, he wanted the

party to become more active in the political education of the unions. The workers, he was quite willing to admit, did not yet believe in fascism, and this he found a major source of weakness, damaging, for example, the regime's chances of imposing political coordination on business.

Although the syndicalists by the early 1930s had serious misgivings about interference from both the party and the ministry, their conception still specified that the corporative order could not emerge in an entirely spontaneous way. So they sought to distinguish between legitimate and excessive forms of supervision. Olivetti's attempt in 1931 to strike a balance between elitist control from the top and spontaneous development was awkward, to say the least. After stressing the Fascist state's educational role, he cautioned that "the formative process of the corporations cannot be rushed, nor can it be completely external. The state *cannot make* the corporations, just as the midwife does not *make* the newborn child. They must make themselves on their own, but the state must not watch their development passively, because it is not a liberal state, but a corporative state in the making."⁷²

The equivocation in Olivetti's statement indicates the unresolved dilemmas of revolutionary practice in the context of fascist Italy. Implementing the syndicalist-fascist conception required that a very fine line be drawn between elitist control and popular spontaneity. The masses were capable of being educated and raised to the level of the elite, but only through participation in living organizations that had serious decisions to make. On the other hand, the organizations could not be allowed freedom and power until the process of education was well advanced. So there was a danger that corporativism would enable the people merely to go through the motions of participation—and leave them in a state of permanent political inferiority. The inadequacies of the two major candidates for revolutionary leadership before 1930—the party and the Ministry of Corporations—complicated this dilemma immeasurably. The syndicalists called incessantly for the Fascist economic organizations to be allowed more spontaneity and more serious functions. But there was also continued equivocation in their statements about the relative importance of state intervention and spontaneously elite manipulation and the natural pedagogical qualities of organization.

Despite its novelty, the Ministry of Corporations was an entity in the traditional bureaucratic mold. However, the 1926 law which established the ministry had also authorized a National Council of Corporations, to have a modest consultative role, although such an entity had not been set up by 1929. Corporativists now began to call for the National Council to be instituted, with functions far exceeding those envisioned in the 1926 law, as the way to move toward real corporativ-

ism in the wake of the Labor Charter of 1927 and the reorganization of the Fascist union movement of 1928.⁷³ Bottai proposed a corporative council with serious deliberative functions to the Grand Council in April 1929, while the syndicalists, in the subsequent Chamber debate and in the press, played up the revolutionary implications of the proposed institution.⁷⁴ When Mussolini keynoted the inaugural meeting of the National Council, on 21 April 1930, he too emphasized its revolutionary significance.⁷⁵ His speech naturally drew raves from the syndicalists, who stressed its commitment to continuing corporative development. Mussolini's ingratiating tone reassured them that he had been on their side all along, and the advent of the new institution seemed to indicate that the corporative state would now begin to develop in earnest.⁷⁶

The National Council of Corporations seemed a major step toward real corporativism because it was composed of sections—seven in all—corresponding to the major branches of the economy. The council was to have deliberative and consultative functions, and it could have become a powerful body if this had been Mussolini's desire. But little came of it. Mussolini himself was head of the council, and others from the traditional state apparatus were given important *ex officio* roles. Lacking initiative and autonomy, the council was unable even to make effective use of the normative powers it had, and had no chance to try to expand them. What political coordination of the economy there was during the early 1930s took place in the traditional way, under the aegis of Mussolini and the appropriate ministries, with the council virtually ignored. Its powerlessness became increasingly obvious; the full body was not convoked at all after actual corporations were organized in 1934.

Livio Ciardi, as president of the Fascist Transport Union Confederation, was still advising patience in 1932, but at the meeting on corporativism held at Ferrara the same year, Panunzio condemned the vacillation of fascism and called for a reaffirmation of the principles of the Labor Charter.⁷⁷ And A. O. Olivetti was completely running out of patience. Between mid-1930 and his death in November of 1931, he produced some of the most bitter and remarkably explicit criticisms to appear during the entire fascist period. Serious fascists had to admit, he warned in 1930, that all their efforts and sacrifices—in interventionism, in the struggle against Italian socialism, in accepting fascist discipline—might simply have been in vain.⁷⁸ Too many of those calling themselves fascists understood fascism as a mere restoration of order, so it was possible that fascism would end up revolutionary in name only, producing nothing but vague corporativist slogans. A year later, his criticisms becoming ever more shrill, Olivetti declared that the future

of fascism depended on the outcome of the present struggle between two conceptions of the fascist corporative system. The first, linked to revolutionary syndicalism, required broad autonomy and serious functions for the fascist socioeconomic organizations. From this perspective, the National Council of Corporations was to be a transitional body, paving the way for concrete corporative organisms, which had to be authentically representative. Olivetti warned, however, that present practice betrayed too much of the second conception, which viewed corporations as administrative organs of the state, to be developed and controlled from above. With chilling prescience, he concluded "that this latter conception is not only counterrevolutionary, but is also completely lacking social and historical meaning; it is an arid and contrived device that inevitably will produce a superbureaucracy and a police state."⁷⁹

This statement reveals not only that Olivetti still believed himself to be an active participant in an ongoing struggle, but also that the struggle was allowed to go on—and with surprising openness. The fact that such a statement could appear in a major Fascist monthly no doubt reassured Olivetti and others that the contest was not hopeless. From our perspective, it seems clear that Mussolini's relative tolerance merely provided a safety valve; to contemporaries, however, it seemed that Mussolini really was not sure, that the outcome could still be influenced, as long as the push continued.

And the push did continue, although the personnel involved changed at the same time. For example, Turati was replaced as party secretary in October 1930 and Olivetti died in November 1931, but now younger fascists like Carlo Curcio, Gherardo Casini, Luigi Fontanelli, and Ugo Spirito joined the struggle for a populist form of corporativism. There continued to be differences in strategy and emphasis, leading committed left fascists to expend valuable energies fighting each other. One of these squabbles has been the source of considerable confusion about the nature of the corporativist Left within fascism. The dispute concerned the proposals for proprietary corporations which the young philosopher Ugo Spirito offered, especially at the Ferrara meeting on corporative studies of May 1932.⁸⁰ Spirito wanted corporations that would actually own and operate businesses, not merely provide "political" coordination. A system of proprietary corporations, he felt, would provide the desirable features of collective ownership without undesirable economic centralization. This seemed to him the logical end toward which the regime must move, given the fascist belief in class collaboration in production. By bringing together all the productive elements in a given sector, in fact, the new corporations would

render the old class-based syndicates superfluous. Fascism would finally overcome these legacies of past class divisions altogether.

Spirito's position is often portrayed as the extreme left of the fascist spectrum. Certainly, Spirito could see his own stance as radical, but there were plausible reasons for dissent from a left fascist perspective, and Panunzio, Bottai, Razza, and others promptly attacked his proposal. In his remarks to the Ferrara meeting, Panunzio underscored the political and juridical import of fascist corporativism and accused Spirito of falling into economic reductionism. Mario Rachei specifically endorsed Panunzio's criticism. For both, the problems calling for corporativist solutions were primarily political, not economic, and had to do with coordinating economic activities in terms of the public interest.⁸¹ Spirito's focus on a secondary issue—the relative merits of public and private ownership—could only confuse matters. Panunzio warned repeatedly that the political entity, the corporation, and the economic entity, the firm, must not be confused.⁸² The corporation's out purpose was to order the economic sphere through law, not to carry out economic activity.

More specifically, Panunzio, Bottai, and other left fascists disagreed with Spirito's contention that fully developed corporations could replace syndicates altogether. This point merits special emphasis, because it is sometimes assumed that the trade unionist and corporativist currents in fascism after 1925 were hostile or mutually exclusive.⁸³ This misunderstanding derives from overemphasis on the extreme positions represented, among the syndicalists, by Rossoni before the *allocamento* of 1928 and by Spirito among the corporativists. Most, in fact, like Panunzio, Bottai, Razza, and Luigi Fontanelli, continued to insist that the system required both class-based syndicates and corporations transcending class.⁸⁴ These critics of Spirito feared that the workers would be totally submerged if they had no institutional base of their own. For all their emphasis on class harmony and collaboration, these left corporativists continued to view class differences as inevitable and to find class-based organizations essential if the corporations were genuinely to involve the workers.

In addition, Panunzio feared that Spirito's system would produce the kind of bureaucratic uniformity in the economy that the syndicalists had always opposed. While Spirito's blueprint seemed to smack of schematism and rigidity, Panunzio argued for a flexible and mixed economic system, one which did not exclude a direct proprietary role for the workers. Whenever capacities warranted, the syndicates themselves should assume the responsibilities of ownership and management.⁸⁵ Panunzio had in mind producers' cooperatives that would

grow out of the present unions, developing new firms or taking over existing firms on a case by case basis.

These proposals led Panunzio into disagreement with another of Spirito's left fascist critics, the young journalist Gherardo Casini. Arguing that Panunzio's cooperatives would involve only limited sectors and not change the basic shape of the economy, Casini called for syndical participation in the management of existing firms. Each of the two antagonists argued that his was the really dynamic and revolutionary proposal and that the other's would have only a limited impact in practice.⁸⁶ But as both recognized, they agreed on a deeper level, since each of them anticipated an increasingly important economic role for the workers through their syndicates. Only a plausible difference in strategy divided them. The distance separating each of them from Spirito was obviously greater, yet he too was trying to devise a system in which labor would have more real power in the economy. Again, the difference was essentially one of strategy and emphasis. Given the balance of forces at the time, however, it was possible to believe that Spirito's program, by downplaying the role of the class-based syndicates, might prove counterproductive in practice, weakening the role of the workers.⁸⁷ Certainly a committed left fascist was not obliged to agree with Spirito, nor was it a defeat for the corporativist Left when Spirito's proposals found little support. His failure was no more decisive for the current as a whole than Rossoni's defeat had been in 1928.⁸⁸ As Luigi Razza emphasized in 1933, Spirito's was an extreme position which did not represent the thinking of the left corporativist mainstream.⁸⁹

Meanwhile, the left corporativist current continued to encounter opposition of varying degrees of sophistication from other elements in fascism. Roberto Farinacci felt that corporativism placed too much emphasis on the economic sphere at the expense of "ideal," political factors.⁹⁰ He had a point, of course, but he was unable to grasp the relationship between economics and politics at the basis of the left corporativist idea. In an article entitled "A Corporativist Danger?" Gherardo Casini responded directly to objections like Farinacci's, insisting on the political and ethical import of corporativism.⁹¹ More conservative fascists like Carlo Costamagna continued to warn of the dangers of the left corporativist position and to portray the new socio-economic organizations as tools of subordination and control.⁹² Some fascists favored further corporativist innovation for essentially technical purposes. Alberto Benaglia, writing in 1941, called for more active corporations as vehicles for the economic coordination which autarky seemed to require; the corporations would become administrative instruments of a new superministry of autarky and economics.⁹³ Panun-

zio was quick to respond, insisting that Benaglia's conception would undermine the legislative role, and thus the revolutionary constitutional import, of the corporations.⁹⁴ The left corporativists, of course, did not deny that the party and the Ministry of Corporations had to be involved in the functioning of the corporations during this period of implementation, but they did not envision a structural relationship in which these organizations would be clearly subordinated to the party or the bureaucracy.

Although most left corporativists were not converted to Ugo Spirito's position during all the discussion in 1932, they were as anxious as he was to have actual corporations organized. Luigi Razza declared that the present system was a sham since entities like the National Council were not being given serious things to do; it was time for fascism to institute real corporations and for these promptly to take over major legislative powers.⁹⁵ Panunzio's accents were similar when he addressed the Assembly of the National Council of Corporations on 8 November 1933, complaining that the present corporative system was too cumbersome to be accessible to the people. If fascist institutions were not made more popular, he warned, they would prove as ineffective as the abstract institutions of liberalism, "which the people never understood and felt, and which never got the people very excited."⁹⁶

With such frustration increasing, Mussolini committed fascism to organizing real corporations in a speech before the Assembly of the National Council of Corporations on 14 November 1933.⁹⁷ Panunzio responded with an enthusiastic article entitled "Dicinamove" [1919] in *Il popolo d'Italia*, linking the innovations to come to early fascism and the radical hopes of 1919.⁹⁸ Finally a law of 5 February 1934 and a series of follow-up decrees actually established twenty-two corporations.⁹⁹ Earlier laws had anticipated the subsequent development of corporations, but the measures of 1934 established entities which had, on paper, considerably more extensive attributes than had been envisioned before. Above all, the new corporations were to have the power to elaborate norms governing production, so once again committed fascists could believe that progress was being made. At the same time, the innovations of 1934 included an attempt to revitalize the existing syndical structure. There was to be greater emphasis on the local union as opposed to the national confederation and more scope for initiatives from below, including elections to enable the rank and file to choose their own leaders.

The measures of 1934 could have constituted a significant departure, but again practice fell far short of promise. The new corporations lacked the autonomy and vitality to exercise the functions they were supposed to have. The suspicious, cynical, pessimistic Duce was un-

willing to decentralize decision making; he simply lacked confidence in the new system.¹⁰⁰ In addition, the traditional bureaucracy remained hostile and obstructive. The corporations were constantly subject to interference—sometimes from the Ministry of Corporations, sometimes from the party. Despite the reforms of 1934, leaders and representatives at all levels of the system continued to be imposed and controlled from above. The corporations quickly turned into areas for traditional bureaucratic place-seeking and clientism, and so hardly constituted a revolutionary alternative to the traditional mores of Italian public life.¹⁰¹

The deficiencies of the system were evident both to antifascist exiles like Carlo Rosselli and to serious corporativists like Bottai and Panunzio. Writing as the corporations were being established in 1934, Rosselli anticipated that despite all the rhetoric, the whole corporative structure would continue to lack vitality and purpose. He could see that even after eleven years in power, fascism was still groping for an innovation to give it historical justification.¹⁰² But Panunzio, Bottai, Lanzillo, and younger fascists like Gherardo Casini and Luigi Fontanelli were not prepared to give up. Panunzio called for a more serious, active syndical movement in an outspoken article in the official review *Gerarchia* in 1936. Lanzillo sought to take advantage of the League of Nations sanctions accompanying the Ethiopian War to prod the regime. If Italy was to meet the challenge, he said, more genuine mass participation was essential, and this required that the corporative entities become autonomous and authentically representative.¹⁰³

As frustration with the corporations grew, Bottai and others began to focus on reform of the Chamber of Deputies. Preparations for a definitive reform began late in 1936, culminating in the law of 19 January 1939, which established the Chamber of Fasces and Corporations.¹⁰⁴ At the outset, the new Chamber comprised the National Council of Corporations, with 525 members, the National Council of the party, with 139 members, and the Grand Council of Fascism, with 18 members. Members of the Chamber were replaced one by one as they left these other offices; there was no periodic renewal of all or part of the body through elections.

Panunzio had been much involved in the discussions which led to the reform of 1939, and now he greeted the new body with his usual enthusiasm, linking it to the hopes for a radical reform of the Chamber in 1919. He was willing to admit, however, that a "not brief" process of experiments and "successive approximations" had been necessary to reach the present fulfillment. But Panunzio could link the essential features of the new Chamber to the changes in the idea of political participation and sovereignty which he had advocated for years. The

Chamber of Fasces and Corporations was an emanation of the organizations in society, organizations to which the individual belonged—and in which he participated—permanently and continuously. Through membership in these organizations, Panunzio argued, individuals were involved more directly and constantly, and no longer in the indirect, sporadic way which the liberal suffrage system had made possible. He pointed out that elections within the corporate organizations remained essential, but the Chamber itself was to be based on a more direct and immediate identity between the organized society and the governmental body.¹⁰⁵

The reform of 1939 proved more fruitful than its predecessors. Mussolini and the executive branch remained predominant in legislation, but the new Chamber, through the legislative commissions in which it was divided, was allowed genuinely to collaborate in the drafting of legislation. There was now a serious attempt to overcome the widespread use of decree laws characteristic of Italian governments since before the rise of fascism.¹⁰⁶

In fact, this revitalization of the Chamber was part of a general radicalization and quickening of activity in what turned out to be the regime's final phase. Some of the underlying contradictions of the regime were now coming to the surface, as Mussolini sought a way out of the impasse through imperialism and the German alliance. This dangerous course raised new doubts about fascism in the monarchical and business circles that had tolerated Mussolini for so long. Partly for this reason, the thrust of the final radical phase was overtly populist and "antibourgeois." It included the semicomic reform of custom as well as some anti-Semitic legislation. Anti-Semitism, of course, had been lacking at the origins of Italian fascism. It is too facile, however, to attribute its sudden appearance in the late 1930s entirely to the influence of Nazi Germany, for it was symptomatic of the degeneration of fascism, as we will see in the next chapter. Still, anti-Semitism went as far as it did only because of official desires to establish cultural foundations for the alliance with Nazi Germany. At the same time, there were some, like Roberto Farinacci, who felt that Italian fascism could be revitalized by aping the apparently more dynamic Nazi movement.

However, this final phase also included commitments and activities which seemed to point toward the fulfillment of long-term left fascist goals. Giuseppe Bottai, who had been replaced as Minister of Corporations shortly after the Ferrara meeting of 1932, returned to favor as Minister of Education in 1936; such vicissitudes were typical and meant the fluid, uncertain quality of the Fascist regime. His Educational Charter, approved by the Grand Council in February 1939, established that manual labor would become part of the curriculum at all levels,

"so that the social and productive consciousness that is characteristic of the corporative system may be developed."¹⁰⁷ Bottai intended to replace "bourgeois" education with a more populist, egalitarian system. At the same time, the Fascist labor movement was becoming more effective. For years, the Fascist unions had not had sufficient political clout to prevent business from violating collective contracts and social legislation. But the movement achieved a considerable success in October of 1939, when firms in the metals and machinery industries were forced to recognize factory labor representatives—one for every two hundred workers.¹⁰⁸ It is impossible to say whether this would have signaled the beginning of a serious change in industrial relations had the war not intervened, and had the regime not collapsed.

Also in 1939, Dino Grandi returned from Great Britain, where he had been ambassador since 1932, to become Minister of Justice. Committed fascists were calling for a "fascist" reform of Italy's public and private legal codes, especially for a change in the legal basis of property. Panunzio and Lanzillo made the usual left fascist points in their contributions to a collection on the fascist conception of private property which the Confederation of Agricultural Workers published in 1939.¹⁰⁹ For years, in fact, Panunzio had been calling with considerable impatience for a radical reform of Italy's legal codes, to eliminate the liberal individualism that informed them and to establish the formal legal standing of norms elaborated by syndicates and corporations. Ultimately, he argued, this required constitutional change, recognizing the juridical pluralism of the Fascist state, with its corporatist basis.¹¹⁰ As a member of the Commission for the Reform of the Legal Codes from 1937 to 1941, Panunzio sought to maximize the specifically fascist quality of the changes being worked out.¹¹¹

New codes were finally established in 1942. Although most of the novel features were not specifically fascist, there were some significant departures in the direction of corporativism. The initial article of the civil code formally recognized the corporations as sources of law, while subsequent articles specified the particular capacities of the corporations.¹¹² The articles declaring property ownership to be a social function, subject to corporatist discipline, were especially significant, because they indicated methods of enforcement and seemed to commit fascism to serious implementation in this sensitive area. A private entrepreneur who failed to conform to the principles of the new corporatist order would be removed from control of his enterprise. The Magistracy of Labor would adjudicate such cases. In his contribution to the anthology on property in 1939, Panunzio had advocated such an expanded role for the Magistracy of Labor and recalled his own central role in publicizing the labor magistracy concept during the early years

of the regime.¹¹³ In a book also published in 1939, Paolo Orano took much the same tack, stressing the links between fascist corporativism, with its conception of property as a social function, and the *Carta del Carraro* of 1920.¹¹⁴

During its last years, then, fascism appeared to be committing itself more precisely, but these still-tentative steps by no means satisfied serious corporativists, who continued goading and criticizing even during World War II. Writing in *Critica fascista* in 1941, Panunzio went so far as to remind fascists of the value of the second wave of violent *squadristi* in 1924 and to portray the wartime context as a kind of third wave, an opportunity to accelerate the implementation of fascism.¹¹⁵ Now was the time to improve the still-imperfect Chamber, to enhance the legislative role of the corporations, to implement the postulates about labor and property in the Labor Charter, and even to begin preparations for an international corporatist order, as a foundation for the kind of international justice the syndicalists had envisioned after World War I. A year later, in the official review *Gerarchia*, Panunzio cited the generally lamented "inertness and dearth of normative activity in the corporations," and called for the corporations to carry out their crucial task of legally binding economic planning.¹¹⁶ By now Panunzio's non Vito had become a significant economic planner.¹¹⁷ By now Panunzio's working closely not only with his father, but also with Giuseppe Bottai. In his wartime writings, Vito Panunzio leveled strikingly explicit and damaging criticisms against the corporative system and reaffirmed the populist principles that were supposed to underlie the new order. He insisted, for example, that genuine elections within the constituent syndical organizations were essential if their unrepresentative quality was to be overcome. And writing in *Critica fascista* in 1943, shortly before the fall of Mussolini, the younger Panunzio warned that Mussolini's regime could win the war only if, at long last, it finally carried out the fascist revolution.¹¹⁷

It is impossible to doubt the sincerity of corporativists like these, who kept pushing even as the regime was collapsing around them. We wonder, though, how they were able to keep their faith for so long, in light of so many frustrations over the long term. It is essential to remember, of course, that fifteen or twenty years is not a long time to implement a revolutionary program, especially one that, for plausible reasons, called for experiment, pragmatism, and gradual change. And considerable change in institutions had indeed taken place—and presumably more could be made to follow. At the same time, it is only natural that these fascists tended to accentuate the positive, especially since they had already devoted so much to the fascist cause and were

now identified with the movement, for better or for worse. But obviously there were serious flaws in their perception of fascism's prospects, and thus we sense that a more intangible kind of psychological mechanism must have been operative for these publicists to have remained available, explaining and justifying Mussolini's regime until its very bitter end. They desperately needed to believe it was all leading somewhere, that it all had not been for nothing, because their own self-image as Italians depended so heavily on the outcome.

Fascism was understood as an antidote to traditional defects in the Italian character, but the effort of self-overcoming was difficult. Thus myths developed, providing psychological compensation as well as the confidence necessary for fascists to believe that Italy really could be made more healthy and dynamic, despite her sociocultural flaws. The talk about the Roman Empire during the Fascist regime shored up confidence by providing images of what Italians working in common could accomplish. Despite its orientation toward the past, the fascist cult of Rome does not manifest a desire to escape from "modernity" and return to a happier era. Committed fascists looked to Rome, however, not as a preindustrial utopia, but as an example—one which reassured them about Italian capacities and gave them the confidence for nation-building, modernizing, and constructing a post-liberal order. If "modernity" as it is usually understood had been bothering them, we could expect to find a different kind of past orientation, emphasizing preindustrial, preurban, peasant values. The past-oriented myths of the German Nazis were much closer to this syndrome and did stem from an inability to handle aspects of "modernity"; those in Italian fascism, however, were not analogous in origin or function.¹¹⁸

This is not to say that the myth of Rome was rational or comprehensible on its own terms. It obviously stemmed in part from precisely the rhetorical propensities in some sectors of Italian society that fascism was supposed to overcome. Ultimately, it hindered realism and effectiveness and contributed to the regime's overall hollowness. And this was true primarily because the Roman empire myth got bound up with fascist corporatism, thanks to our myth-making publicists. It was not enough that Italy had had an imperial and civilizing vocation in the past; nor was it enough for her now simply to catch up, to develop a mature liberal parliamentary system. Rome provided an image not merely of viability but of leadership. And now Italy again had an imperial mission—to offer something new and superior to others through her colossal corporatist achievements.

At the very outset of the regime, committed fascists began to describe their aims in grandiose terms, as the solution to a crisis in the

liberal system in general. The stakes for Italy were high; the challenge was exhilarating. She could confront her own problems effectively only by leapingfrogging over those like Great Britain with mature liberal systems and leading the advanced world beyond liberalism altogether. The world badly needed a third way between outmoded liberalism and misguided communism. Writing early in 1923, just a few months after the March on Rome, Panunzio was already claiming that while England and France were too smug and traditional to develop new political principles, "Italy, and only Italy, can give Europe the first example of a new organic, solid, and realistic political-national constitution on a syndical basis."¹¹⁹ A few months later, Panunzio proudly announced that now England would have much to learn from Italy and her fascist national syndicalism. And he concluded: "It was not for nothing that Spaventa called Italy *la Nazione 'Mattiniera'* of Europe."¹²⁰

This was not the only time that Panunzio would invoke the name of Bertrando Spaventa (1817–1883), who had taught the history of philosophy at the University of Naples after the Risorgimento, devising an interpretive schema which enabled him substantially to overestimate Italian contributions.¹²¹ In his lecture "The Sentiment of the State," given at the University of Rome in 1928, Panunzio told his audience: "We must highlight the superiority and the greatness of the reality and of the doctrine of the Fascist state, a product of the reality which with Fascism, resumes the function of the Italian spirit, Spaventa's phrase, the initiator and anticipator in the world of nations, a function that was lost during the long centuries of servitude and foreign imitation."¹²² Panunzio's use of Spaventa symbolizes the persistence of traumas about national worth among educated Italians. Like Spaventa, Panunzio desperately needed to believe that Italy had something uniquely hers, with roots in Italian traditions, but sufficiently relevant to present problems to be worthy of export.

Italy's task was not merely to catch up with others, but to work out her own political forms, based on her own traditions. According to Olivetti, the liberal parliamentary system which Italy had imported in the nineteenth century was not consistent with the talents of the Italian people; there was thus nothing surprising about its failure to take root. It was useless for Italy to try to catch up because, as Olivetti put it, "the English suit does not fit us."¹²³ Fortunately, however, Italy had talents and traditions of her own. Sometimes the syndicalists cited the role of the guilds in the medieval Italian communes or the structure of early modern Venice in an effort to convince themselves that corporatist democracy was specifically Italian.¹²⁴ As history, this was all a bit fanciful, to say the least, but myths of an Italian corporatist tradition helped provide the confidence necessary to build something new. Here

again, use of the Italian past does not reveal some sort of rejection of modernity or defense of traditional values; the syndicalists invariably—and correctly—stressed the novelty of corporativism and the modernity of the problems to which it was supposed to provide solutions.¹²⁵ They fell into contradiction, insisting that corporativist forms were both purely modern and traditionally Italian, in order to convince themselves that Italy was especially qualified to offer a nonliberal and noncommunist solution to a set of genuine modern problems. It was not absurd, of course, for Italians to seek the bases of cultural self-confidence in traditions that were uniquely theirs, but these preoccupations were dangerous, for they could easily reinforce the old provincialism and lead to unrealistic myth making.

The left fascist cult of Mazzini was more plausible. Mazzini was continually invoked as a prophet who had rejected both liberal individualism and Marxist socialism and devised an alternative based on duty and association. Again and again, Olivetti portrayed fascist corporativism as the practical fulfillment of Mazzini's ideas and concluded that now, thanks to fascism, Italy was at last worthy of the mission of leadership which Mazzini had assigned to her.¹²⁶ Like Mazzini, Olivetti envisioned a kind of Italian primacy resting not on military conquest, but on the value of the new forms of civilization she had to offer.

The syndicalists repeatedly indulged in this kind of argument, linking Mazzinian ideas, fascist achievements, and Italy's "imperial" mission to lead civilization to a higher stage.¹²⁷ For Rossoni, fascism was nothing less than "the great revolution of the twentieth century: a revolution which in its subsequent development will be nourished by the immortal spirit of the Italian people, which has returned once again to the vanguard of history, to impose its direction on the future of civilization."¹²⁸ Panunzio pointed with pride to the interest which the sociopolitical innovations of fascist Italy were attracting abroad; it meant a great deal to him to have Italy again setting the pace.¹²⁹ After Hitler came to power, Panunzio often made deprecating remarks about Nazism, which lacked, he said, the social content of fascism, the commitment to corporativism. Nazi Germany was merely reactionary—and thus no challenge to Italy's position of leadership.¹³⁰

The syndicalists were occasionally willing to admit some admiration for certain of the Soviet regime's achievements—in economic planning, for example—and to acknowledge some parallels in the practice of Soviet Russia and fascist Italy.¹³¹ But generally, they claimed the Soviet experience only confirmed what they had said all along about the authoritarian and bureaucratic implications of collectivist socialism. Fascism was superior because it was a synthesis, overcoming the economic anarchy and social exploitation of liberal capitalism, but

fostering decentralization, spontaneity, and popular self-government at the same time. While Soviet communism produced a dull uniformity, fascism would order the economy without undermining flexibility and initiative.¹³²

During the 1930s, such myths of fascist Italy's mission were an essential part of the fascist self-image, providing compensation for all the frustration and criticism. In the statements of committed fascists, we find these grandiose claims uneasily mixed with criticisms of present inadequacies and with practical proposals for making the corporative system work. The contradictions of this pattern betray the fundamental ambiguity of left fascism, which was a serious attempt to solve a set of complex modern problems, but which also embodied the rhetorical traditions of Italy's "intellectual petty bourgeoisie." Despite the seriousness of their quest for solutions, the left fascists were prone to revert to rhetoric when they suffered frustration and failure. As they sought to overcome the hated part of their society and themselves, and as they criticized the performance of the Fascist regime, they projected a reassuring myth of the leadership role that Italy was now playing through fascism. The greater the frustration, the more grandiose their claims became. Inevitably, these soothing fictions distorted their perceptions, keeping them from gauging realistically the Fascist regime's prospects for success. They so desperately wanted fascism to work and Italy to count that they could never admit, even to themselves, that they were on a treadmill. By clinging to rhetorical myths, they helped to blind others as well to fascism's real prospects for success—and thereby helped Mussolini's hollow regime to persevere.

When Mussolini's war came, these publicists stood ready to portray them in the best possible light, discussing imperial conquest in terms of Italy's corporativist mission.¹³³ For Vito Panunzio, writing in 1940, the war could break down barriers to a new order both at home and abroad.¹³⁴ If fascism had not yet realized its revolutionary corporativist program, the plutocracies with whom she was presently at war were largely to blame. And the war would enable Italy to conquer other peoples to corporativism. The same year, Sergio Panunzio portrayed the war as a crusade by fascist Italy to create the kind of just international order which the last war had failed to achieve.¹³⁵ Under the cover of such rhetoric, of course, the two Panunzios were seeking to arouse expectations and thereby to force fascism finally to realize its radical program. They no doubt believed it was true when they insisted that here at last was the chance. But this meant, once again, that they ended up providing a veneer of idealism for a shoddy enterprise—one, in this case, that soon led fascism and Italy to ruin.

There is cruel irony in the fact that fascism, which was supposed

to enable Italy to lead, ended up bringing her more ridicule and discredit than anything else in modern times. But the whole tragic experience dissolved some of the long-standing cultural traumas that made fascism possible—though not necessary—and created a cultural framework enabling Italians to respond to modern problems in a more genuinely creative way.

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If we ask what fascism was, we are asking several questions at once—questions that simply cannot be answered in the same breath. Above all, we must distinguish the purposes that made fascism possible from the realities of the regime, from what it all added up to when the end came in 1943. There was incongruity between intentions and effects, yet interpretation of the place of fascism in history must have room for both. As a regime, fascism ended up regimenting the working class, undercutting the possibility of popular participation in decision making, and enhancing the power of the traditional bureaucracy within the state. But these effects were evidence of the failure of some of the most important objectives that made fascism possible—not of their success. Some of the fundamental features of the regime were accidental, for the regime was not a “system,” but an improvisation based on capricious personal dictatorship. Committed fascists kept pushing, but it is hardly surprising that the existing elites in business and the bureaucracy also sought to make the most of fascism. They succeeded as well as they did largely because of the weaknesses and divisions among the genuinely fascist components. All the components, fascist and nonfascist alike, looked to Mussolini, for the logic of the situation made him the key to the practice of the regime. Thus it is crucial to understand Mussolini, what made him as he was, the phenomenology of his being as he was. His activism, his cynicism, his opportunism were symptomatic of certain problematic features of modern culture, and so Mussolini has his own place in modern European history.¹

Questions about how this dictatorial regime worked and what it did are essential, but additional questions must also be asked if our concern is fascism's place in history. Impulses that never found fulfill-