ists in any case. Even after they began to recognize the importance of the nation's position in the world, their central objective remained domestic change.

Domestic changes seemed to be necessary everywhere if Europe was to have an era of peace and justice in the aftermath of the Great War. While the Nationalists blamed popular government for being short-sighted and pacific, Panunzio called for changes to make the European governments more popular, as the way to overcome militarism and chauvinistic nationalism.[94] Even the parliamentary governments had to be transformed to enable the people genuinely to control foreign policy. So while the Nationalists wanted government to become less popular in order to enhance the nation's capacity to wage war, the syndicalists wanted government to become more popular in order to enhance the prospects for justice and peace.

# 6 / *The Postwar Crisis and the Nationalist Response*

The war lasted longer, and proved a more grueling test, than its advocates had anticipated in 1914–15. It had not been the buoyant interventionists who had sensed what was coming, but pessimistic neutralists like Giolitti and Giustino Fortunato, who had opposed intervention partly because they feared that Italy could not handle the challenge of a long war. Italy's disastrous defeat by Austria-Hungary at Caporetto in October 1917 seemed to confirm such gloomy presentiments, but this proved to be the nadir of her war experience—and a major turning point in modern Italian history. Although the defeat resulted from new Austro-Hungarian military tactics, contemporaries—both interventionists and neutralists—immediately became preoccupied with moral sources, since they viewed the defeat, like the whole wartime challenge, in terms of the long-standing problems of Italian national integration. And of course even if the defeat itself was comprehensible in strictly military terms, it still had to be asked whether this poorly integrated nation could hold together and recover.[1] Perhaps the neutralists had been right to doubt Italy's resiliency as a nation. Panunzio and Lanzillo were among those who were to participate in a project to rewrite Italian history in the light of Caporetto.[2] Now Italy was to have her examination of conscience.

The immediate situation looked brighter a month later when the philosopher Giovanni Gentile reflected on what this examination of conscience had meant for Italians. In discussing the terrifying self-doubts that he and his countrymen had felt just a few weeks before, he gave voice to all the crisis of national self-image that was—and would long remain—inextricably bound up with the Italian experience of World War I: "In its crudest, yet simplest and truest form, it was the

realization that an Italy destined to die as the result of a military defeat would not have been worthy of living. It would not have been a people created to live as a free state, precisely because, as our enemies love to depict us, it would indeed have been too much a heterogeneous crowd of people without any kind of discipline (lacking in political discipline because lacking in moral and religious discipline) and without the capacity for serious intellectual work (for this too involves method and organization)."[3] It was only because Italy had undergone this self-examination that her recovery after Caporetto and her eventual participation in the victory proved such a stimulus to her self-confidence. Caporetto transformed the war from a narrow exercise in "*sacro egoismo*" into a test of national viability and cultural worth—and Italy passed it. In the same article, Gentile stressed that Italy, in recovering from Caporetto, had proven her ability as a nation to respond to adversity and thus had earned both self-esteem and the esteem of foreigners. Writing a few days later, on Christmas Day 1917, he portrayed the ongoing wartime challenge as an opportunity for Italians to overcome their indolence and frivolous skepticism and to build "a more steadfast, compact, serious, hard-working Italy, more aware of its mission."[4]

Seeking to rally the nation after Caporetto, the government began to talk about the political renewal that would accompany victory, and the war began to seem a great popular crusade for the first time.[5] By the end of the war, the belief was widespread that the war experience had been the catalyst for the moral and civic renewal which Italy needed. The war had involved the whole people in a great collective enterprise requiring discipline and self-sacrifice. Many of the interventionists, despite their differences, had pushed for war in 1914–15 precisely because they believed that Italy could achieve national integration and political renewal only through an initiation rite like this. At last it would be possible to complete what the Risorgimento had only begun: to create a genuine national community out of the atomized mass of Italians. Clearly, the ongoing insistence on the value of the war for Italy can only be understood in terms of Italy's long tradition of cultural self-doubt, her enduring crisis of self-image.

In fact, Italy's share in the final victory was relatively modest. She did hold after Caporetto and repel the last-ditch Austrian offensive in June 1918, but the Italian high command, expecting another year of war, remained extremely cautious. As events accelerated during the fall, however, fears that Vienna might suddenly ask for peace prompted Italian military leaders hurriedly to plan and carry out the Battle of Vittorio Veneto. The Italian victory resulted above all from the retreat of an Austrian imperial army already in advanced stages of internal



collapse.[6] The ambiguous nature of Italy's contribution to the victory, and the high-handed way that she was soon to be treated at the Paris peace conference, did not help Italians supporting the war to put the value of the experience in clear perspective. The myth that immediately developed portraying Vittorio Veneto as the decisive battle of World War I was symptomatic of the deep feelings of inferiority and the strong desires for national redemption underlying the Italian war experience.

The war did bring new segments of the Italian population to political consciousness, first by making it all too clear that what happened to Italy deeply affected them and their families. By the war's end, 5,750,000 Italians had served under arms, 600,000 had been killed, and over 700,000 wounded. Ultimately, the war had affected everyone; it became the first great collective experience of the Italian people, engendering a sense of community and shared destiny.[7] At the same time, ordinary Italians had become more aware of their long-standing separation from the Italian state.

The war also changed Italian society by stimulating industrial development, and this, in turn, contributed to the new buoyancy and confidence.[8] Accelerating industrialization seemed to indicate that Italian society was more dynamic than the pessimists of the political elite had suspected. Important sectors of Italian industry responded to the wartime challenge by adopting more progressive methods in management and production. Some firms—Fiat, for example—took advantage of the situation to establish themselves on a solid productive footing once and for all. But the most striking feature of the war years was the fantastic expansion of ILVA and Ansaldo, the two big conglomerates centered around the steel industry. This growth involved some solid enterprise, as these firms sought to supply the government with military supplies, but also much unproductive dealing and financial manipulation. During the most difficult years of Italy's postwar readjustment, from 1921 to 1923, the two giants suffered severe crises, which ultimately led to the bankruptcy of Ansaldo and the fall of its principal creditor, the Banca di Sconto. Fiat, on the other hand, quickly surmounted its relatively minor problems; the electricity and chemicals industries, both relatively healthy, similarly endured the postwar readjustment quite well.[9] In fact, it was possible for those desiring viable industrial growth to be quite ambivalent about the overall condition of Italian capitalism as the war came to an end, since much of the economic expansion during the war had been too chaotic to be healthy, and since traditional financial manipulation had accelerated along with productive enterprise.[10] Contemporaries sometimes had difficulty dis-

tinguishing the healthy from the unhealthy, but it was clear that the ascendant economic sectors included not only solid industrial producers, but also speculating parasites with links to the Italian state.

During the war, new relationships developed between sectors of the bureaucracy and sectors of industry and finance that were symptomatic of more basic changes in the nature of the Italian state.[11] Inevitably, given wartime pressures, the parliament became less important in the overall system, and the executive governed increasingly by means of decree laws. At the same time there was some fragmentation of the state's authority, as private sectors established more direct and permanent links with the bureaucracy and thus with the decision-making process within the state.

Those in the trenches were the most deeply affected by the war experience. At the beginning of the war, the bulk of the young Italians called to serve were indifferent to the patriotic and antimilitarist ideals through which the interventionists had sought to arouse popular support for the war. They were especially resentful of the interventionists, who seemed to have gotten them into it in the first place; in October 1915, some even welcomed the news that Corridoni had been killed. But gradually, many of them—especially among the junior officers—began to see themselves as embodying the potential for healthy change in Italy thanks to the experience they shared at the front—the solidarity, the idealism, the common sacrifice. They felt separate from those not directly involved, from the old Italy they had left behind. It was widely believed in the trenches that civilian indulgence in luxuries was at a peak and that military suppliers were using fraud to gain excessive profits. Real wages for workers, profits, and private consumption did all go up during the war.[12]

The sense of community developing in the trenches bound together junior officers and enlisted men, since they shared the same sufferings, dangers, and purposes. There was a kind of equality, or classlessness, to their whole experience, despite the necessary hierarchy of military rank. Later on, memories of this wartime classlessness transcending formal hierarchy would inspire the creators of fascism as they sought to develop a new order from the embryo that had emerged during the war. Not surprisingly, however, the young junior officers from the middle and lower middle classes developed a more positive attachment to the war than did the masses of enlisted men, mostly peasants, who served under them.[13]

While the war experience was crucial in forging the generation that created fascism, the war for these young Italians was not primarily a brutalizing experience, undermining old values and certainties. It was not so much the danger, the violence, and the adventure that



defined the war experience for them as it was the new sociopolitical awareness and idealism, based on their experience of solidarity and common enterprise. The soldiers became more aware of what had previously been lacking in their fragmented society and began to glimpse the possibility of an alternative. The war experience, then, was a source of new ideals, even if it also led some to be impatient with theories and to glorify action, to link the new values with military trappings, and to be less than scrupulous about the means of implementing their new ideals. Partly because of their wartime origins, these new ideals could become hollow and rhetorical and subject to manipulation by others. But the ideals were genuine; the postwar role of the young soldiers cannot be explained without them.

Increasingly, and especially after the war was over and Italy had won, soldiers and veterans insisted on the value of the war and defended it against its detractors, despite their hatred of the war's hardships. With the domestic propaganda in 1918, the resignation of 1915–17 became impatient expectation of radical change in postwar Italy, to be based somehow on the war experience itself.[14] Thus an element with strong but confused aspirations for cultural and political change emerged from the war—a new, potentially revolutionary force defined by common wartime experience, not by social class. They constituted the spearhead of the wider hopes for renewal that the war had engendered. The outcome of Italy's postwar crisis depended in large part on what would happen to these veterans and their fragile ideals. Would the old liberal elite succeed in absorbing them into the liberal parliamentary system and, in the process, manage to revitalize both itself and the system? If not, would the Socialist party, apparently the most obvious vehicle for a change in the system itself, manage to develop a basis of understanding with them, giving their aspirations more coherent political expression? If not, could these new sectors develop sufficient intellectual coherence to constitute an autonomous challenge to the existing order and to develop a viable alternative to it?

The postwar crisis out of which fascism emerged was a political crisis, a crisis of the old restrictive transformist system which, thanks to the war, the society had simply outgrown. It was widely believed that the war had revealed an Italian people far superior to their unfavorable image in the minds of the pessimists in the political class.[15] But the political class proved inadequate to the task of self-renewal. Orlando, Nitti, and Giolitti, the prime ministers from 1917 to 1921 and the last hopes of Italian liberalism, all had important strengths, but none of them proved able to grasp what the war had meant or to bring to fruition the potential for change bound up with the Italian war experience. Vittorio Emanuele Orlando was an outstanding juridical scholar

and a generous man, with qualities that made him an effective wartime leader, but he was too sentimental and rhetorical to get a firm grip on the complicated postwar situation. Like many others in the ruling class who had favored the war, Orlando understood its value for Italy in terms of her international position: the war was not the beginning of radical domestic change, but the culmination of both Italian territorial unification and the long process of Italy's affirmation as a world power.[16]

Orlando's successor as prime minister in 1919–20 was Francesco Saverio Nitti, an economist whose hard-headed practicality contrasted with Orlando's sentimentalism. But Nitti failed even more completely to grasp the import of the war experience. With much justice, he was widely perceived as the heir of *giolittismo*—and thus was bitterly opposed by interventionists of both left and right. He was essentially an opportunist lacking an overall conception of the difficult postwar situation. As a result, he tended to vacillate, to let things slide, to look for expedients, adjusting to events as they occurred. Ultimately, he failed not only to lead serious renewal, but also to respond coherently as the threat to the liberal system itself began to gather force out in society.[17]

The one major attempt at political innovation was the institution of proportional representation to replace the old system of single-member constituencies, in time for the first postwar elections in November 1919. Proportional representation favored the emergence of relatively disciplined mass parties and thus seemed to portend the eclipse of the old transformist system based on individual bargaining. But in the volatile postwar situation, the new system only produced the instability which the old political managers had sought through transformism to avoid. The elections of November 1919 gave the Socialist party 156 seats and the new Catholic Popular party (Popolari) 100. Together, these two modern mass parties had a majority of the 509 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, yet they failed to form a joint government to make the sweeping reforms which much of the country desired. Such a course—which might genuinely have revitalized the liberal parliamentary system—was never remotely a possibility. In the first place, the Popolari were seriously divided between progressive and very conservative elements. Collaboration with the Socialists was anathema to the strong conservative faction, as well as to the Vatican, which could obviously exert a strong influence despite the party's nonconfessional character. But the Popolari never had the option of collaboration with the Socialists to form a workable parliamentary majority anyway. The Socialist party was anticipating a Bolshevik-style revolution in Italy and thus was not concerned with translating its 1919 electoral success into an immediate reform program. Proportional representation made it difficult to forge an effective parliamentary majority and thus did not prove an adequate vehicle for filling the political vacuum. Since its outcome only tended further to discredit parliamentary government, the reform played into the hands of those like the Nationalists and syndicalists who had advocated a more radical change, moving beyond parliamentary government, in the first place.



Nitti's successor in 1920, and the last hope of the traditional political system, was none other than Giovanni Giolitti, now seventy-eight years old. The return of Giolitti was symptomatic; the system was nearing its bankruptcy. Giolitti did set about earnestly to bring the rapidly deteriorating situation under control, although he worked through the old manipulative methods, seeking to fragment the emerging mass parties so that he could treat with individuals or small groups. But the advent of universal suffrage and proportional representation inevitably strained the old system; and now, as a result of the elections of 1919, two modern mass parties had an absolute parliamentary majority. But Giolitti hung on. He had always sought to impede the development of a Catholic mass party, and it is not surprising that he and Don Luigi Sturzo, the Sicilian priest who led the Popolari, were constantly at loggerheads. In addition, Giolitti sought to "transform" and bend to his purposes the new Fascist movement through an electoral alliance in 1921, but like the Popolari, this new force had too much internal consistency to be fragmented by Giolittian manipulation. Ultimately, Giolitti's outlook and method had changed too little. Unable to transcend the pessimistic and rather narrow perspective that had made him a neutralist, he did not really understand the psychological impact or the potential significance of Italy's war experience.[18] To the young idealists emerging from the war, Giolitti remained the epitome of the old politics of pessimism.

The frantic backroom political maneuvering which characterized the period from 1920 to 1922 represented the death throes of the old politics based on personal clienteles and alliances. Finally, after Giolitti fell in 1921, secondary figures like Ivanoe Bonomi and Luigi Facta were elevated to power, while those with real political weight bargained behind the scenes to determine who had sufficient support to put together the next ministry. By October 1922, the old political system was bankrupt, and the old political class knew it. Thus it was willing to acquiesce in the advent of a new man, Benito Mussolini. Renewal had to come from outside the system, but it was hoped that Mussolini could be domesticated. Perhaps he could play a role analogous to those played by Depretis in 1876 and Giolitti in 1901, opening up the system but preserving the basic institutions of the state. This was a considerable gamble, but for now, at least, there seemed to be no other choice.

Thus the traditional ruling class failed to bring about the necessary renewal from within the system.[19] Sensitive contemporaries who were by no means favorable to fascism have left us much eloquent testimony that the old liberal system was simply losing its legitimacy. The noted liberal historian Adolfo Omodeo, seeking to come to grips with the Italian crisis early in 1920, saw Nitti and Giolitti as manifestations of the basic Italian problem—the lack of confidence in their country on the part of those in the political class.[20] Omodeo admitted that Giolitti's pessimism had not been without foundation. But Giolitti—and now Nitti—had made no consistent effort to overcome the defects in Italy's political culture; these leaders were satisfied to work with those defects and thus ended up reinforcing them. Omodeo believed very deeply in the potential value of the war for Italian renewal. In the resistance after Caporetto, he argued, the nation had found itself and come together at last. The contact between elites and masses that had been lacking before had finally developed in the trenches, and this contact, he felt, could be the key to bridging the long-standing gap between the people and the state. But now the bitter and frustrated Omodeo could only denounce the Italian political class, which was letting slip this precious chance for Italy to come to grips with her long-term problems. Given the bankruptcy of the existing leadership, he insisted, the young Italians who had fought the war could legitimately see themselves as the spearhead of the new Italy and claim the right to lead the national renewal.

The decline of liberal Italy had deepened considerably by December of 1921, when the astute young liberal Guido De Ruggiero analyzed the divorce between state and society at the root of the Italian crisis; Italy, he argued, was experiencing

> the uneasiness of a society that feels that it is not being governed by itself, but, instead, by minorities now necessarily exhausted; of a society in which the most significant elements are outside the state, and express, each one individually, their own private authority, which strike out in conflict with their adversaries and with the marginal authority of the state. Given this situation, all the useless remedies—changing ministries, transferring ten prefects, recruiting a thousand new royal police—are ridiculous.
>
> The crisis of authority afflicts the whole substance of our political life. This crisis thus can be resolved only by the gradual absorption into the state of those forces which now express themselves outside it. Only then will we be able to have a strong state—thus enabling us even to reduce the immense armies of police that we have today.
>
> . . . The strength of the state is nothing but the resultant of the forces which converge in it. Give to the great masses the clear, concrete sensation that the state is not aloof from and opposed to them, and they will obey the state, because they will feel themselves to be obeying their own law. . . .
>
> And given the situation of relative strength today, we must understand by "the masses," in large part, the socialist masses, the only ones who have up to now a clear definition and a solid organization, and who, as such, can constitute a permanent support for the state.[21]



But those who led these "socialist masses" did not view the Italian crisis in anything like De Ruggiero's terms. Indeed, the role of the Italian Socialist party during and after the war severely complicated the crisis—and severely complicates historical evaluation of its outcome. If the old politics was bankrupt and the old political class exhausted, if the society had become mature enough for a more genuinely popular political system, then surely the Socialist party was one possible vehicle for renewal. As it happened, however, the Socialist party did not seek to promote a national political revolution or to embrace the cause of the idealistic young war veterans. The Socialists had remained aloof from the war from the beginning, expressing both indifference and strategic uncertainty through Costantino Lazzari's ambiguous formula "Neither support, nor sabotage." They simply were not able to come to terms with the war, assessing its meaning for their country and its implications for their own postwar role.[22] In the aftermath of Caporetto, it is true, Turati and the reformist wing began to reexamine their position and finally, during the spring of 1918, declared their support for the war, embracing Woodrow Wilson's interpretation of its meaning and explicitly repudiating Lenin's. But as they moved toward the democratic prowar position of Leonida Bissolati, Turati and his colleagues found themselves increasingly isolated within the Socialist party. The large majority of Socialists, led by the intransigent or "maximalist" wing, continued even after the armistice to scorn the war, denying it had any special meaning for Italy and making fun of the war veterans and their aspirations.

There were, to be sure, serious obstacles to any populist alliance between the soldiers and veterans, on the one hand, and the Socialists and workers, on the other. Not only had the two groups long differed over the meaning of the war, but the veterans resented the fact that so many workers had spent the war years not in the trenches, but in the factories making what seemed to be very high wages. Industrial workers were generally exempt from military service during the war, and many of them did enjoy rising real wages as they manned the factories.[23] But whatever the obstacles, the Socialists made no effort to win over the veterans and to articulate their aspirations. Instead, they became infatuated with the Russian Revolution and talked incessantly about a Bolshevik-style revolution in Italy, although they neglected the planning and organization that were necessary if Italy was to have such a revolution.[24] Socialist leaders were simply waiting for the bourgeois state to become moribund.

Socialist propaganda gave a revolutionary cast to the remarkable

wave of strikes, land seizures, and factory occupations that gripped Italy during the *biennio rosso*—the "two red years" of 1919 and 1920. Some of this popular ferment stemmed from the expectations aroused during the period after Caporetto. Often those expectations were frustrated, for the advent of peace only led to worsening economic circumstances; with the end of artificial wartime conditions, including interallied exchange controls, Italy faced a grave economic situation involving inflation and shortages. Membership in the CGL, still the largest trade union confederation, swelled from 249,000 at the end of the war to 1,258,000 in October 1919 and up to 2,150,000 when the *biennio rosso* reached its climax during the fall of 1920. The number of strikes and strikers also shot up to record levels.[25] The strike wave included several serious general strikes, including the imposing *scioperissimo* of July 1919. In some areas of the Po valley—Ferrara, for example—Socialists and unions were strong enough virtually to control local economic life. Finally, during the fall of 1920, the Socialist and labor challenge reached its culmination with a series of factory occupations which exacerbated tensions but which ultimately failed, signaling the end of the *biennio rosso*. Throughout this tumultuous period, Socialists continued to ridicule the war experience as they exalted bolshevism and exhorted the workers to revolution.[26] Soldiers and veterans who wanted to follow the Socialists were often barred from party membership.[27]

In his classic analysis of the Socialist party's postwar failure, Pietro Nenni insists that the Socialists had no irreducible conflict of interest with the veterans, who, he feels, would have accepted enthusiastically a Socialist offer to embrace their cause.[28] In the fluid situation of postwar Italy, the old divisions could have been overcome, but the party lacked the flexibility to make its revolution a national revolution, one with a place for nonproletarian war veterans. Nenni's negative assessment is not unique, for the Socialist posture has drawn criticism from a wide variety of historians.[29] Costanzo Casucci, for example, insists that the Socialist stance was neither appropriate nor realistic, given the political problem at issue in postwar Italy and given the cultural legacy of the war experience. Prone to demagoguery and abstraction, the Socialists and workers failed to acquire the "universal" consciousness worthy of a ruling class and so could not legitimately claim to replace the old liberal elite.[30]

If the Socialist alternative was insensitive and inflexible, then the discontented young war veterans did not have the option of following the Socialists after the war. In fact, they faced a political situation that seemed to offer no exit. The old politics of personalities was bankrupt; the new mass-party politics, represented by the parliamentary Socialists and the Popolari, was apparently at an impasse. And those in control of the established revolutionary channels seemed unsure of what they were doing but threatened, nevertheless, to make a revolution which was inappropriate and impractical for postwar Italy. If neither the established parliamentary system nor the normal Socialist channels for revolutionary change were viable, then some sort of third way had to be created—a vehicle for the appropriate kind of radical change.



The fundamental question was whether the vague ideals of the war could develop sufficient coherence to provide the foundation for a viable alternative to both liberalism and Socialism. By the end of the war, there were many proposals for political change more radical than proportional representation but short of Socialist revolution. Most envisioned changes in institutions as well as changes in the personnel of the nation's political elite. This renewal would have to respond not only to the long-standing problems of the Italian state, but also to the changes in the relationships between bureaucracy and parliament, and between private interests and public power, that had taken place during the war. There was widespread interest, especially, in some sort of professional representation, or system of technical councils, to replace or supplement existing parliamentary institutions.[31] The Nationalists and the syndicalists offered the most thoroughgoing proposals for postliberal and non-Socialist change to those searching for a way out of the present impasse. Each group was seeking to interpret the meaning of the war and to offer an immediately relevant program that would enable Italians to create a healthier political system. The essentials of the two programs were already beginning to crystallize before fascism emerged as a serious political force.

The Nationalists were preoccupied with Italy's international economic position in the new industrial age, and especially in the new situation emerging from the war. Because the war had spurred a sharp increase in industrial capacity throughout the modern world, the international economic struggle would inevitably take on new dimensions in the future. If Italy adjusted quickly, taking advantage of her industrial development and her tempering by war to reorder herself domestically, she might be able to compete on more favorable terms than before. The Nationalists found encouraging the greater emphasis on productivity and economic values that seemed to characterize Italy during the war. But they warned repeatedly that Italy's economic situation was precarious, given the objective limits and weaknesses of her industry.[32] The rapid industrial expansion during the war had been based on state orders that could not continue indefinitely. Italian businessmen were

themselves responsible for some of the difficulties they faced; we have seen that during the war especially, growth in certain industrial sectors was chaotic and had nothing to do with long-term productivity. Things would be bad enough, the Nationalists felt, even if Italy were a well-integrated nation, but in fact her congenital defects as a nation made her particularly vulnerable. Italy, then, could not afford the luxuries of others. If she was to meet the challenge and survive as an autonomous nation, she would have to discipline herself in an especially thoroughgoing way. In the new era, Italy could no longer maintain her ambiguous position on the fringes of great power status: she would either become a fully viable nation, reordering herself for production and international competition—or she would become a kind of colony.

The domestic program the Nationalists proposed was designed to make this reordering possible. The fundamental premise was national solidarity and cooperation, but more specific changes were also necessary—to replace the old liberal elite, giving political power to those more aware of the needs of production, and to coordinate the society's energies from the top, making the workers, and the Italian people in general, instruments of the nation's essential economic purposes. Ultimately, as Alfredo Rocco argued explicitly in 1919, the whole nation had to organize itself for the imperialist struggle that the terms of Italy's economic and demographic situations made necessary.[33]

It is easy to see why Italian Nationalism is generally interpreted as an ideological expression of the interests of certain sectors of Italian big business.[34] During the war, close links had developed between the Nationalist movement and such firms as Ansaldo, and the Nationalist vision reflected the inherent precariousness of large-scale industry in a country that offered a limited domestic market and few raw materials. The Nationalists' postwar program, aiming to subordinate all the nation's energies to the requirements of production, responded to the needs of firms facing an uncertain future after the chaotic wartime expansion. Nationalism articulated the perceptions and convictions of certain business leaders—the belief, for example, that Italy could not afford a strong labor movement, given her relatively weak position in international competition. So to portray Nationalism as an Italian capitalist ideology is a plausible and useful beginning. It does not, however, constitute a fully convincing interpretation, and it can easily become a formula that obstructs understanding in depth.

Italian Nationalism grew out of traditional Italian right liberalism but finally split off from it, repudiating its genuinely liberal component and giving new form to the elitist, defensive component. Nationalism made more explicit the traditional right liberal identification of the state and the long-term national interest with an elite, operating beyond the reach of the untrustworthy Italian people. In many respects, however, the Nationalists' doctrine was more modern and forward-looking than the right liberalism they left behind. They were seeking changes appropriate to the modern industrial world, with all the new possibilities it offered, with all the new dangers it brought in its wake.



The old liberals had lacked confidence in Italian society, and thus they had devised a relatively restricted political system. But they had not considered Italy's flaws to be permanent. Italy could hope to become ever more like Great Britain, with its pluralistic liberal parliamentary system. In Nationalism, social sectors that had formerly supported liberal institutions were giving up on a political system that had come to seem simply inappropriate for Italy. The Italian problem was too deep; and besides, whatever the chance that Italy might ultimately develop the preconditions for a viable liberal system, her present international economic situation was so precarious that she could not wait, living from day to day by means of transformist expedients. Alfredo Rocco, like the right liberals, admired Great Britain, but he denied that it could offer a model for Italy. The liberal democratic state, he said, had done well in the Anglo-Saxon countries because there the people had qualities the Italians lacked, qualities which compensated for the serious problems inherent in liberalism. Above all, in the Anglo-Saxon countries and in France, there were great national traditions, which meant that "the idea of the state has been strengthened through centuries of struggle sustained by the state in order to affirm its supremacy."[35] But Italy had been divided and dominated by foreigners for centuries, and indiscipline and political indifference were now deeply rooted among the Italian masses. The liberal democratic state had not been able to provide the necessary political education and discipline. This sense of a special Italian weakness was basic to Nationalism. Even Francesco Coppola, who was less thoroughgoing than Rocco in supporting postliberal solutions, stressed that the centuries of foreign domination in Italy had produced a mentality that prevented the major political virtues from being consolidated among the Italians.[36]

In Nationalism, the relatively authoritarian relationship between elitist state and untrustworthy society which the liberals had seen as a temporary expedient became a brutal and permanent fact of nature. Only an elite could ever grasp the long-term interests of the nation; the masses must always be led—by the elite, securely anchored in the state. There would be no need for the expedients of transformism—to mediate between political elite and society—once this overtly elitist relationship had been cemented. In order to justify it, the Nationalists portrayed the nation as an organism having interests which transcended those of the finite, contingent individuals who happened to

be alive at any particular moment. The national interest was not merely the arithmetic sum of their individual interests. And it was up to the state, understood as an enduring focus of stability, existing prior to the society, to discern and promote the nation's permanent interests. As Rocco put it, the Nationalists advocated "the concept of government of the most capable, that is, of those who through tradition, through culture, through social position, are able to raise themselves above the contingent interests of the generation to which they belong and to discern and to realize the great historic interests of the State."[37] The alternative, popular sovereignty, led only to a kind of anarchy, with each individual seeking his own well-being, unconcerned about the survival of the national species. In opposition to liberal individualism, the Nationalists insisted that existing individuals had to be understood as instruments for the nation's long-term ends, as determined by the elitist state. The individual had, for example, no natural right to liberty; the state could concede liberties to him, insofar as this was consistent with its aims.[38]

The Nationalists, however, were not simply authoritarians seeking to undo the damage that Depretis and Giolitti had done. If the state was to pursue the long-term interests of the nation, maximizing Italy's productivity and capacity for international struggle, the masses would have to be involved and would have to identify with the state and its purposes in a much more thoroughgoing way. Liberalism had to be transcended in part because of its inability to galvanize the energies of the masses for great national enterprises.

The Nationalists dared to oppose Giolitti and the established patterns of Italian politics because they were confident that through industrialization, especially, the society was developing the capacity for a more effective system. The first step in reconstructing the national state was to bring elements from the new industrial bourgeoisie into the state, to give them political power. In contrast to the lawyers of the old political class, these products of the emerging industrial world would understand the terms of the international economic challenge and thus would grasp the changes which Italy required. Such people would assume political leadership at the expense of parliament, which seemed to have little grasp of the world of production and international economic competition.[39] In fact, of course, parliament had remained relatively weak in liberal Italy, but it had been the potential power of parliament that had made transformist expedients necessary. But now Italy did not need—and could not afford—the pure politics bound up with the old parliamentary system.

The new ruling class was not to be composed solely of the new industrial bourgeoisie, but would be a kind of hybrid, reflecting the



Nationalists' hybrid origins and sensibilities. They were seeking to replenish the political elite with more productive elements, but they also wanted to restore the power of the conservative, nonparliamentary sectors of the state—especially the upper bureaucracy—vis-à-vis the political, parliamentary sector, including those like Giolitti who had been willing to compromise with parliament. The Nationalists sought to act as mediators between the newer industrial and the older bureaucratic sectors, helping them to recognize their common mission. Together they could pursue the long-term interests of the nation.

Again and again in his wartime speeches and writings, Enrico Corradini called for these two groups to overcome their long-standing separation and join together, forming the basis for the new dynamic state that would emerge from the war.[40] He spoke frequently to business groups, exhorting the new industrial bourgeoisie to organize, to become politically active, and to grasp its mission of national leadership. Corradini was seeking to promote the self-confidence and political vision which the Italian industrial bourgeoisie had traditionally lacked. The war, he recognized, was already bringing about the necessary interpenetration of the state and the productive bourgeoisie, although this phenomenon seemed to him to be less pronounced in Italy than elsewhere in Europe. So the present wartime situation offered grounds for optimism, but there was still much goading to be done.

Increasingly, as the war dragged on, Corradini envisioned not merely increased political participation by business, but an entirely new regime, based on the logic of production, structured to serve the interests of the national economy.[41] The state had to provide the more thoroughgoing economic coordination that was now becoming necessary. Luigi Federzoni, speaking in Rome in March 1917, blamed the dominant economic liberalism, the absence of coordination from the state, for the chaotic quality of Italy's recent economic growth.[42] In the new postwar situation, he warned, Italy would require a far greater measure of economic regulation and planning; new productive sectors had to assume political power precisely to make this possible. Moreover, all of Italy's social and foreign policy would have to be coordinated with the needs of the economy. Federzoni's thinking in this speech, and Nationalist thinking in general, pointed toward totalitarian coordination of the entire society to meet the requirements of production and international competition.

Corradini insisted on calling the regime the Nationalists envisioned a "national democracy," but he left no doubt that it would be something quite different: "The state will finally create a true national democracy . . . in which the bourgeoisie will occupy the leading positions of power and the lower classes will participate in a well-coordinated way,

with everybody, the former and the latter, subordinated to the ends of the nation." So the masses were not to be left outside the new regime: "To them, too, belongs a part of the power that is held above. They are the base of the pyramid."[43] In this harmonious productivist order, Corradini felt, universal suffrage would simply wither away "through the force of reality" sooner or later, but in the meantime, the productive bourgeoisie would have to work to keep the system under control. In the same way, Corradini assumed that, once political parasitism had been eliminated, objective laws of production would come into play, revealing beneath the class struggle the deeper basis for the natural collaboration of classes.[44] For now, however, the productive bourgeoisie must strenuously wage the class struggle. Indeed, Corradini was seeking to exhort the bourgeoisie, to enhance its confidence, not only vis-à-vis the old political elite, but also vis-à-vis the labor union challenge.

Trade unions posed a serious danger to the nation's production, but they also afforded an opportunity. Alfredo Rocco grounded Corradini's wartime visions in more concrete proposals for institutional change by showing how the syndical phenomenon could be transformed from a threat into the basis for the new productivist order. In Rocco's thinking about the modern labor movement, we can see clearly the hybrid quality of Italian Nationalism—the juxtaposition of defense and dynamism, of desperation and confidence, of traditional and modern concerns. For Rocco was of two minds about the advent of economic organization and trade union power, and he had two converging, but distinguishable, purposes in mind when he advocated first a Nationalist system of labor organizations and ultimately a corporative state to replace the liberal state.

As early as May of 1914, Rocco proposed that the Nationalists develop a union movement of their own, for a system of national syndicates could be a valuable means to foster class collaboration and to cement a permanently hierarchical system.[45] But Rocco's proposal had to wait until after the war to be formally adopted as Nationalist policy. Consideration of the national syndicalist idea dominated the pivotal meeting which the Nationalist Association held at Rome in March of 1919, amid all the anticipation of radical sociopolitical change in Italy. Now the purpose of the proposed Nationalist unions was clarified, and a variety of syndicalism was integrated into the Nationalist program as a basis for a serious change in Italian institutions.[46]

Corradini called explicitly for the formation of Nationalist unions in the meeting's opening speech, while Rocco sharpened the argument in the discussion that followed, stressing the precariousness of Italy's economic situation and insisting that national syndicalism would enable



her to survive in the new era.[47] Through a network of organizations based on economic function, the state could mobilize the society and foster, or even impose, the class collaboration in production that Italy's economic vulnerability made necessary. The new unions would make the workers understand the community of interests among all classes in the production process. But the syndicates were to be extended to the employers as well, making possible the coordination which each economic sector required: "Only through this kind of unitary organization will each industry be able to confront foreign competition in international markets, to produce more—and more cheaply—and to eliminate internal competition and create a harmonious fusion between the interests of the workers and those of the industrialists."[48] Rocco applauded the concentration of industry into large organizations like Ansaldo and Fiat which the war had brought about, but the process of economic organization had to be extended further.[49] Ultimately, the political order itself had to become the vehicle for economic coordination, and the emergence of syndical organizations provided the state with the mechanism it needed to pursue its economic ends.

Rocco proclaimed the twentieth century to be "the era of syndicates."[50] The modern industrial system had given rise to these economic groupings, which could not be encompassed, politically or juridically, within the framework of liberal individualism. By giving structure to the mass society of atomized individuals, such organizations could enable the nation to compete effectively, as long as they were properly directed from above. And so Rocco advocated that the "organic" economic groupings replace "amorphous" individuals as the basis of political life. For now, he proposed merely a corporative senate as a check to the chamber, but it was clear that his position implied a more thoroughgoing departure from parliamentary liberalism.

The Nationalists, then, were by no means nostalgic for the earlier period of mass political apathy and disorganization in Italy. In their desire to make use of the energies of the masses, especially the new industrial proletariat, they were moving beyond traditional authoritarianism, which is happy with mass indifference, and toward modern totalitarianism, requiring mass involvement and enthusiasm. But the masses could be allowed to participate only within a rigidly hierarchical system, controlled and manipulated from the top. Through the corporative state they soon proposed for fascism, the Nationalists intended to involve the masses more constantly, but to give them less potential for real political power. Modern social organization was tremendously valuable, but as a way to mobilize the society, not as a way to educate the people for fuller political participation. The Nationalists deeply

desired a more dynamic, richer, healthier Italy, but the other aspects of their thinking—their deeper defensive and elitist conservatism—determined their criteria of national viability.

As the labor organizations came to seem more threatening during the *biennio rosso*, the purely conservative side of the Nationalist doctrine became more explicit. To organize the masses through national syndicates was not only a means to Italian national integration, but also an end in itself, a response to a more universal problem. The advent of labor unions was a major manifestation of the threat which the masses posed to order and value in modern society. The modern crisis, stemming from the long-term rise of the masses, was presently more threatening in Italy than elsewhere; but Italy was not unique, and the crisis by no means afflicted her alone. As we penetrate to his deepest concerns, we find not Rocco the Italian, seeking a more viable nation, but Rocco the threatened, conservative, elitist psychological type—a man who deeply needed order and who, to an extreme degree, perceived institutions as vulnerable and fragile. Still, the Nationalists' uniquely Italian concerns deepened and hardened their universal conservative sensibility. The Italian masses were especially threatening, partly because their antinational traditions made them especially susceptible to socialist demagoguery.

From the Nationalist perspective, the liberal ideas of 1789 had been doubly ruinous: the dogma of egalitarianism had led the masses to a counterproductive challenge to the natural hierarchical order; the dogma of laissez-faire had made the liberal state first too indifferent, and then too weak, vis-à-vis the society. Thus the masses had been left free to organize out in society—and ultimately to mount a dangerous challenge to the sovereignty of the state itself. The advent of syndicates enabled the society to get out of hand, for now it was no longer a mass of atomized individuals, capable of acting only sporadically, chaotically, by means of popular insurrections. Organization enabled people to pursue their special interests, even at the expense of the state and the general interest. So the same qualities which made the syndicates potentially valuable instruments of the state's purposes made them particularly threatening in the present context—because of the weaknesses inherent in the liberal political order. The trade union threat highlighted the inability of the state in its liberal form to pursue the long-term interests of the nation.

The Nationalist critique of liberalism and the liberal state became especially shrill and bitter in light of the *biennio rosso*. Left liberals like Giolitti had compromised the state's sovereignty in a foolish attempt to undercut the threat of socialism through bargaining and deals. The liberal ruling class had been so eager to avoid tough measures that



Italian society was now in danger of coming apart altogether. Speaking in Milan in 1922, just a few weeks before the March on Rome, Luigi Federzoni insisted that the wrong-headed conciliatory policy toward the socialists stemmed from a habit of mind and a method of government which had dominated the whole of Italian public life for twenty years.[51] The problem was not merely a political compromise that could be reversed by changes in tactics. Even for the relatively moderate Federzoni, the socialist threat seemed to call for a postliberal response. But it was Rocco who denounced the liberal mentality most bitterly, as, for example, when he warned early in 1920 that liberal weakness in the face of the present socialist threat was "paving the way for the collapse of the state, the disintegration of social life, and the ruin of civilization itself."[52] In an influential lecture at the University of Padua later that year, Rocco portrayed the current crisis as a return to medieval anarchy.[53] The weak liberal state found itself unable even to keep order, as the organized groups in society pursued their own interests, resolving conflicts by private force. The dissolution that resulted was not only an evil in itself; it also undermined the national organism's ability to compete effectively in the international struggle.

Since, from Rocco's perspective, the syndical phenomenon had become so threatening only because liberalism allowed the unions to become "states" above the national state, a short-term restoration of order within the liberal framework would not be sufficient.[54] But neither would a greater dose of old-fashioned authoritarianism serve to restore the sovereignty of the state, for the masses had risen for good. They had learned to organize, and the organizations they had created to pursue their particular interests would not go away. The situation called for both a more aggressive ruling class and a more totalitarian form of state—one which organized the mass society. The state could use the intermediary organizations that had emerged spontaneously in society to mobilize society from the top, from the preexisting elitist state, in order to keep the masses permanently under control.

Rocco envisioned not merely juridical recognition and regulation of the existing unions, but a much more sweeping transformation. There must be new mixed syndicates in each industry, under resolute state control, with membership obligatory.[55] Moreover, given the terms of the modern crisis, restoration of the state's sovereignty required extension of its sovereignty. First in an article in *Politica* in April 1919, and repeatedly thereafter, Rocco called for a Magistracy of Labor to extend the state's sovereignty to labor relations.[56] No longer would salaries be determined "anarchically," through supply and demand or through a test of power in a strike. Instead, the state would prohibit strikes and impose through law the level of salaries which it determined

to be in the nation's economic interest. This was the most obvious example of the way the Italian state would move in a postliberal, totalitarian direction, extending its sovereignty over the new areas of social life, both to keep the society under control and to coordinate the nation's activities for the long-term international struggle.

So Rocco's two basic purposes in calling for a new corporativist order converged, and thus in part the great force of his argument in the postwar Italian context. By organizing society from above, it would be possible to regiment the society for production and international expansion while simultaneously checking the dangerous threat which the masses posed through their unions. The Italian problem of insufficient national integration and the universal problem of the rise of the masses could be solved at the same time. Given the realities of the modern industrial world, solutions to both sets of problems pointed toward totalitarianism, with expanded state sovereignty and more constant mass involvement.

It was above all the menace of trade union power during the *biennio rosso*—and the apparent weakness of the liberal state in the face of it—that brought the differences between liberalism and Nationalism into sharp focus and made the Nationalists' proposals attractive to wider middle-class sectors. Even before World War I, Giolitti's strategy of state neutrality in labor conflicts had led many right liberals to worry about the implications of strikes, especially public service strikes, for the sovereignty of the state.[57] The *biennio rosso* intensified these concerns, but now the older, relatively conventional right liberals—such as Gaetano Mosca, Oreste Ranelletti, and Umberto Ricci—simply did not have very imaginative or convincing solutions to propose. In the second edition of his classic *Elementi di scienza politica*, Mosca merely called for a larger dose of patriotism—to provide the moral cohesion which he found the only antidote to the syndicalist peril.[58] The old liberals generally disapproved of proposals to make economic groupings the basis of political life, fearing that the merely "material" socioeconomic sphere would thereby contaminate the "ideal" political sphere.[59]

Perhaps the most bitter critique of the *biennio rosso* from within the liberal tradition was Giustino Fortunato's *Dopo la guerra sovvertitrice*, published in 1921. Given Italy's backwardness, Fortunato argued, the Italian masses were especially egotistical and materialistic, and particularly unable to grasp the collective interest or the liberal idea.[60] Thus they had proven easy prey for Socialist demagoguery, and the excesses of the *biennio rosso* had been the result. As far as Fortunato was concerned, all the current proposals to give the labor unions direct political power stemmed from this same illiberal, particularist mentality. The triumph of this mentality, he warned, would lead not to greater



social harmony, but to a new syndicalist feudalism—an order "in which the sovereignty of the state is broken up into so many groups, with each of them obedient to its own syndicate and directed to its own particular benefit."[61] Fortunato contemptuously criticized the Italian bourgeoisie—with its smugness and cynicism—for failing to oppose socialism and the rise of the masses, but he found little hope for the future in the current crisis. All the confident pronouncements about postwar renewal, all the talk about the great potential of the latent forces of the country, seemed to him nothing but the empty rhetoric to which Italians were especially prone. This rhetoric, he felt, only obscured the real economic and demographic problems of the country, which in fact he grasped quite well.[62]

It is not surprising that Fortunato, writing in 1921, dismissed the young Fascist movement as a confused petty bourgeoisie expression. Of greater interest is his high-handed dismissal of Nationalism as "noisy" and "purely French in origin."[63] The latter charge was simply untrue. Others who shared Fortunato's concerns, but who were younger and less embittered and resigned, were beginning to find the Nationalists' responses to the same problems more convincing than his sane but bland calls for realism. Indeed, it was not such a big step from Fortunato's conception of Italian problems to Nationalist proposals for solution. For example, Fortunato felt that the Italian masses had remained backward and illiberal because Italy's capitalist bourgeoisie had been so weak. He noted that socialism, contrary to Marx's expectations, was strongest in countries that lagged economically. Moreover, he complained about the ambitious lawyers and others extraneous to the world of production who had gradually come to dominate Italian political life.[64] These were the people who had proven willing to compromise with socialism. It would be possible to develop some novel proposals for political change on the basis of these conceptions of Italy's problems, but Fortunato himself refused to follow the logic of his diagnoses in a post-liberal direction. The old liberalism seemed to have reached an impasse; Fortunato's gloom was symptomatic.

The Nationalists saw Italian problems in terms much like Fortunato's, but they proposed postliberal solutions to younger middle-class Italians who doubted that Fortunato's gloom had to be Italy's lot. The Nationalists, too, deplored the composition of the old ruling class, but they worked to change it, to give political power to more self-confident bourgeois sectors involved with the new world of industrial production. The Nationalists, too, perceived the difficulties of Italy's postwar economic situation, but they insisted that Italy could make it if all the national life were coordinated and subordinated to the needs of production. Most important, the Nationalists, too, were alarmed by the

threat of labor union power to the sovereignty of the state, but they proposed a way to transform the syndical phenomenon from a threat into a useful instrument of the state's purposes. Thus it was easy for people who agreed with Fortunato's conception of problems to respond to Nationalist proposals for solution.

Rocco's proposals in light of the trade union challenge were offered partly in polemic with the traditional liberals. His influential inaugural lecture at the University of Padua in November of 1920 responded to a much-discussed lecture which Oreste Ranelletti had given earlier that year, and which Rocco himself had published in the Nationalist review *Politica*.[65] Insofar as the right liberals' suggestions had any substance at all, they seemed to point—haltingly, to be sure—to precisely the kinds of change that the Nationalists were seeking to promote. So in calling for a new ruling class, and a new form of state based on national syndicalism, the Nationalists could claim to be more consistent and systematic than the old liberals—and could erode the liberal constituency from the right.

An overall explanation of Nationalism, of why it emerged in this particular context, must begin by recognizing that the Nationalist program included a core of plausible responses to genuine problems. It was reasonable to be concerned about Italy's international economic position, about Italian emigration, and about the quality of Italy's old ruling class. It was reasonable to believe that nations are here to stay, to emphasize the rationality of collaboration in production, and to worry about the implications of strikes, especially public service strikes. It was not merely because of ideological distortion that the Nationalists believed that the richer countries enjoyed a position of international economic privilege which tended to perpetuate itself, keeping poorer countries like Italy in their place.[66] There were plausible reasons to insist that Italy required a more forceful foreign policy. Indeed, given the difficult economic and demographic situations which Italy faced, it was not anomalous to consider imperialism and to suggest that the nation must be ordered for imperialist struggle.[67]

Up to a point, then, the Nationalist doctrine need not be explained away in terms of socioeconomic ideology or psychological maladjustment. In important respects, however, the program was excessive, and its extremism indicates the admixture of "ideological," psychological, and traditional Italian elitist components. The Nationalists' preoccupation with the problems facing vulnerable sectors of Italian industry did color their thinking. Italy had to move toward totalitarianism to enable the state to coordinate all aspects of the national life for production and expansion. It is possible to recognize, without falling into a schematic reductionism, that the Nationalists were in part "ideological" spokesmen in very nearly the classic Marxist sense. However, the extremism of their doctrine also resulted from traditional Italian sensibilities and doubts, which persisted independently of the more modern problems of Italian capitalism. At the same time, a more universal psychological admixture also contributed to this extremism. Nationalism responded to the frustrations of individuals with an especially low tolerance for disorder and conflict and an especially great need for order and structure. These were individuals who, to an extreme degree, perceived social institutions—and even the cultural bases of society itself—as fragile and vulnerable. Psychologically, Rocco clearly had a good deal in common with Charles Maurras of the *Action Française*, despite the greater dynamism of the Italian Nationalist conception. It was not a common "ideological" perspective, based on common socioeconomic interests, that linked men like these, but common psychological characteristics cutting across social class lines. This psychological extremism led Rocco and his colleagues to perceive the threat to order and value as so serious that it was necessary, here again, to move toward totalitarian control of society from the top. From their perspective, totalitarianism was the only alternative to anarchy; rigid hierarchy in society was the only alternative to leveling.

The Nationalists tended to overestimate the dangers inherent in essential contemporary phenomena. Speaking in 1909, Enrico Corradini condemned the egalitarianism underlying the democratic ideas of 1789, accusing it of undermining the very reason for being of the collective life, which is the diversity of individuals.[68] Nationalism, he stressed, lauded inequality and differentiation. Similarly, Alfredo Rocco feared that what he considered to be the logical implications of democracy would soon be drawn out, producing absolute equality among individuals and the abolition of hierarchical social differentiation.[69] Only through inequality could discipline and organization in society be preserved. And despite his desire to revitalize the Italian ruling class, Rocco's accent was on the value of traditional hierarchies. His preoccupation and dread were so extreme that he ignored altogether the middle level between the total "equality" he feared and the traditional hierarchy he sought to preserve—namely, equality of opportunity to produce a legitimate hierarchy or meritocracy. Even in this overreaction, however, there is an element of plausibility that should not be overlooked. The Nationalists feared that the "leftist" demand for equality and justice, if admitted at all, would lead ultimately to the extreme, to complete leveling, because they sensed, with Maurras and others involved in the European conservative tradition, that the democratic aspiration was itself ambiguous and poorly thought through. Democrats, too, would ultimately neglect the middle level, for they were

unlikely to admit that equality yields legitimate inequalities. Rocco feared, in other words, that democrats would find any differentiation and hierarchy as inherently illegitimate, as a violation of the equality imperative. So Rocco viewed traditional hierarchy as the only alternative to complete leveling because he sensed an ambiguity that can indeed be found in some expressions of the democratic imperative in the twentieth century. But since twentieth-century reality has remained so far from leveling, and even from genuine equality of opportunity, we must judge Rocco's fears on this score obsessive. We can understand his overreaction only in terms of "ideological" distortion, traditional cultural lags, and psychological extremism. It was only because of his own place in society, and because of a psychological propensity, characteristic of extreme conservatives, to assume that situations tend to be carried to their absurd extremes, that Rocco could have seen reality as he did. And in general, the Nationalists' priorities, their preoccupation with some problems facing Italy and their neglect of others, resulted from these kinds of distortions.

Because it synthesized a variety of concerns and perceptions and developed a rigorous program in response, Nationalism became a major focal point during the postwar crisis, as Italians seeking to transcend the old order looked about them for convincing diagnoses and proposals. It was not necessary to share all the fears that went into Nationalism to find the doctrine a useful indication of the direction in which Italy must begin to move. Indeed, since Nationalism was so obviously important, it is tempting to see all the national syndicalist, nationalist, prowar, procapitalist, anti-Socialist, and antiparliamentary ideas at work in Italy's postwar crisis as variations on Nationalist themes. The syndicalists, however, were developing a program which also pointed beyond parliamentary liberalism toward totalitarian corporativism, but theirs resulted from an altogether different set of needs and aspirations. Their neosyndicalism became the other main focal point for those who sought a convincing alternative to both liberalism and Marxism in the confused situation of postwar Italy.

# 7 / *The Neosyndicalist Program, 1917–1921*

We have seen that the Italian revolutionary syndicalist doctrine which began to emerge in 1902 started to break down between 1910 and 1917, as tensions and ambiguities crept into it. But despite their doubts about the workers, despite their support for the war and their concern for the nation, despite their increasing preoccupation with Italian political problems, the syndicalists' stated objective continued to be proletarian revolution against bourgeois capitalism. They had not yet made a definitive theoretical step toward fascism. In 1917, however, the tensions reached the breaking point; confusion and ambiguity remained, but now the syndicalists managed to combine elements of their underlying populism with elements of their original syndicalism, creating a blueprint for change which they claimed was appropriate to immediate problems in postwar Italy. The Italian war experience after Caporetto, the Italian Socialist response to the Bolshevik revolution, and the theoretical revision which Panunzio led, all pushed the syndicalists in the same direction: away from the orthodox proletarian revolution against capitalism and toward a new populist revolution against liberalism, to be spearheaded by a new elite defined in terms of values or psychology rather than socioeconomic class. This doctrinal reconstruction took place before the syndicalists began to mix with fascism for good, and certainly it was not the result of Mussolini's influence. Ultimately, however, it did enable the syndicalists to encounter and influence a new constituency within the Fascist movement.

Italian syndicalism had been an unstable combination of Marxism and populism from the beginning, and the process of doctrinal revision involved evolution toward a new position from both directions at once. The syndicalists were not simply repudiating a tenuous Marxism in order to embrace explicitly a deeper populism. While the war experi-