8 / *The Varieties of Italian Fascism*

Because Mussolini was the founder and leader of fascism, our initial tendency is to look to Mussolini when we seek to discover fascist purposes. But Mussolini was not the source of the dynamic element in fascism, the ongoing push in a totalitarian and corporativist direction that finally did destroy the liberal parliamentary system. Unlike Hitler, who struggled to develop a consistent world view and sought to implement his vision in practice, Mussolini was not an innovator desiring power in order to implement an ideological program. Mussolini tossed off varied, sometimes contradictory ideas from one day to the next, without trying to order them according to a consistent framework.[1] This lack of long-term purposes reflected basic traits of character in the impulsive, egocentric, and theatrical Mussolini; he was essentially an opportunist, content to deal with problems one day at a time.[2] His instinct was to avoid irreversible choices and commitments, to try to keep his options open. From the beginning, Mussolini understood fascism as his personal instrument, to turn loose or restrict depending on the short-term situation, to be used to achieve power, to intimidate his adversaries, to prove his own indispensability to the old elites. In the back of his mind, Mussolini saw himself as a "supertransformist" mediator, standing above the existing political forces in the country, including fascism, and providing a focus for consensus, an overall unity of direction. And so, despite everything, the advent of Mussolini did not wholly defy Italian political traditions. Thus sectors of the pessimistic ruling class were willing to acquiesce in Mussolini's rise to power. They hoped he was the man who could do what Depretis and Giolitti had done in comparable situations before: find new expedients and defuse a potentially dangerous movement in society. To have a new man like Mussolini in power signaled the opening up of the

system that was obviously necessary, but it did not have to mean fascist revolution against the system—quite the contrary.

Mussolini himself shared some of the traditional pessimism and cynicism of the Italian ruling class. However serious he was about his socialism before the war, there is no question that he was beginning to lose his intellectual bearings even before he jumped to interventionism in 1914. As events in Europe seemed increasingly to defy expectation, all the old principles and ideologies began to seem bankrupt, all of them seemed to have been shown up as phony in this era of war and revolution. Mussolini became less and less consistent, even less concerned with consistency, and began to espouse activism and relativism, to rely more and more on his own intuition, out of a sense that there was nothing left. Pessimism about principles, about other people, about life in general, determined his conception of his own role and affected his practice after he became the leader of Italy. Above all, from the outset of his regime, and perhaps increasingly as the years went by, Mussolini's outlook was colored by a profound contempt for his own people, for the Italians.[3] He was content to drift, living from day to day, because he sensed that nothing could really be changed in Italy anyway. Thus he never used the power he eventually accumulated as vigorously as he might have—to purge the old elites, to "fascistize" the country, to coordinate all elements in the national life. At his most optimistic, Mussolini felt that the most important thing was to endure, waiting for a new generation to grow up as fascists—with a greater sense of discipline and a deeper sense of the national interest. Perhaps something better could be expected of them.

Insofar as Mussolini had an intellectual framework, he viewed society in terms of the theories of crowd psychology and collective behavior that he had read in Sorel, Pareto, and, above all, Gustave Le Bon. He sensed the possibility of manipulating the masses through irrational myths—a perception that was consistent not only with his overall cynicism, but also with his low regard for the Italian people. But he did not even seek to exploit thoroughly the opportunities for galvanizing mass energies that seemed to follow from the new theories of collective behavior.

Ultimately, Mussolini ended up a mediator or balancer, standing above the heterogeneous collection of forces that composed the fascist mixture. He moved now this way, now that, giving just enough to convince each component that it was the heart of fascism—that its purposes were fascism's purposes. Mussolini's ambiguity, his ability to avoid irreversible choices, his skill at juggling groups and purposes—all were essential to maintain a regime composed of barely compatible

components. At the same time, he had to work hard to create the illusion of energy and purpose necessary to give his system the appearance of an ongoing raison d'être.

Thus the regime turned out to depend on the genius of Mussolini, even though he was not a dynamic innovator responsible for the degree of radical change there was. As the regime reached an impasse in practice, he became ever more the central figure, indispensable to all the components. And obviously Mussolini could increase his own power if he juggled successfully, convincing fascist radicals that he was radical enough and the old elites that he was conservative enough. The cult of the Duce that developed during the 1930s justified Mussolini's unique role, but it also contributed to the growing stultification in the regime. Mussolini relied increasingly on his own intuition, on energy, vigor, and high-spiritedness, on improvisation and personal magnetism as opposed to careful study and patient organization.

Institutional innovations continued, however, and despite Mussolini's cynicism, there remained a measure of genuine uncertainty and dynamism in the situation. As he established himself in power, Mussolini made many compromises—precisely in his effort to avoid irrevocable choices and commitments. As a result, the more powerful he became in one sense, the more circumscribed he became in another, for it was not clear that he was free to use all the power he managed to accumulate. Mussolini's major biographer has characterized his plight with a striking metaphor: "Believing himself to be the arbiter of everything, he did not realize that, from compromise to compromise, his margin of autonomy was becoming smaller and smaller and that the logic of the situation, with the underlying problems remaining unsolved, was progressively suffocating him and reducing him to a little Laocoön who appeared strong only because he could flex his muscles, but who was irremediably caught in a tangle of coils that slowly would have suffocated him."[4] This in itself made the situation explosive, for Mussolini, feeling himself trapped, was bound to react sooner or later.

Some of the resentment of the old Italy that had helped make Mussolini a revolutionary in the first place still burned within him. So there was always a possibility that he would commit himself at last and begin forcefully to implement the program which his old friends among the syndicalists were advocating. Mussolini seemed to have embraced some national syndicalist ideas as the war was ending, and he no doubt had then—and continued to have—some genuine interest in the left corporativist program.[5] These ideas were not uppermost in his mind as he established himself in power, and he was not the source of the corporativist thrust in fascism, but corporativist themes remained

among the secondary impulses in his mind. They helped to make Mussolini credible as a leader to committed fascist corporativists.

As it turned out, however, Mussolini sought to break out of the impasse not through corporativist revolution, but through foreign policy and war. By means of an unpopular war at the side of an unpopular ally, he gained vengeance against the established powers that had turned him into a Laocoön, but brought his regime down in the process.

In the uncertain situation at the end of 1918, however, Mussolini was simply trying to get his bearings and to regain a political base. At this point, he still hoped to woo the workers in the trade unions away from the political hegemony of the Socialist party, in the process reconstituting his own working-class mass base on the left.[6] The *Fasci di combattimento* were to be instruments in this struggle, helping Mussolini and his followers win support in the upcoming parliamentary elections, which were eventually held in November 1919. His mass base would have to come from the rank and file in the existing trade unions; there was no thought that the new Fascist movement might in itself provide a mass base. In his quest for renewed political prospects, Mussolini supported the UIL as an autonomous and antimaximalist labor organization and worked to separate the CGL from the Socialist party. His personal political needs were leading him toward the syndicalist position, with its emphasis on working-class autonomy vis-à-vis political parties. But Mussolini was forced into this position by circumstances; in times more promising for his personal fortunes, before the intervention crisis, he had considered the trade union rank and file as a mass to be manipulated by political leaders in the Socialist party.

Meanwhile, the problem of relations with Mussolini and his *Fasci* was damaging the cohesion of the UIL. Already in 1918, the UIL's syndicalist leaders had disagreed over what position their organization should take toward the existing state and toward political activity in general, and the founding of the *Fasci di combattimento* exacerbated this internal squabble. When De Ambris played a major part in drafting the Fascist program of 1919, he found himself in trouble with many of his union colleagues. At the UIL Congress of October 1919, Edmondo Rossoni reaffirmed the absolute incompatibility between the UIL and the political sphere and insisted that the *Fasci* were especially to be shunned, since they were guilty of reactionary activity. Protesting that the fascists were friends of the UIL, De Ambris resigned as the confederation's general secretary.[7]

Mussolini claimed not to understand the logic of Rossoni's position, but the persistent indifference or hostility of much of the UIL to fascism led Mussolini to wonder whether there was any possibility he

could renew his political ties with the workers. And then the November election produced complete failure for Mussolini and his fascists; Mussolini's leftist policy had come to nought. Disoriented, Mussolini began to drift, indulging in some reckless antistatist remarks, as well as some rather vindictive statements against the working class. His hopes for support from the existing labor movement had not died altogether, but it appeared, for now at least, that his political space might lie on the right. He had to be realistic, he said, and to recognize that his failure to patch things up with the workers necessitated a change of direction. So the second national congress of the Fascist movement, held in Milan in March 1920, disavowed both the CGL and the UIL.[8]

Agostino Lanzillo sought to oppose this antilabor turn, insisting that fascism must defend the struggles of the working class, although later in 1920 he discerned some utility for fascism as a kind of bourgeois mass party, a counterpart of the Popolari and Socialists, serving to represent middle-class sectors in parliament.[9] But it was not for this that Lanzillo himself had become an important fascist in 1919; nor had this anything to do with the revolutionary conception of fascism Lanzillo held later on. Fascism by 1920 no longer looked like the political supplement that the syndicalists were looking for.

Two new sets of circumstances during the fall of 1920 fundamentally altered the situation, immeasurably improving Mussolini's uncertain prospects. First, Mussolini unexpectedly found himself with a chance to get involved in the national political maneuvering centered in Rome. At the end of the last chapter, we saw Mussolini becoming cooler toward the Fiume movement and to De Ambris's attempts to forge a new revolutionary coalition. Between mid-October and mid-November he was adopting a whole new strategy, as he began to realize how he could exploit the Fiume situation for his own political ends.[10] Giolitti, who had succeeded Nitti as Prime Minister in June, was determined to settle the Adriatic question and have done with D'Annunzio's regime, which was a direct affront to the sovereignty of the shaky liberal state. Hoping to minimize domestic reaction against his Adriatic policy, Giolitti sought the journalistic acquiescence of Mussolini, who was widely associated with support for D'Annunzio and with a hard line on the Adriatic. Mussolini, for his part, saw a chance to enter the Giolittian majority that would emerge from the forthcoming elections; from there he would be in a position to make the most of the impending Socialist split over adherence to the Third International, luring some of the Socialists back into his orbit. He had privately been wary of revolutionary ventures in any case, since he desired to keep his options open, and since the leader of any movement growing out of the Fiume experience would necessarily be D'Annunzio, not he

himself. So Mussolini essentially abandoned D'Annunzio, De Ambris, and hopes for a new revolutionary coalition in exchange for a national political role within the parliamentary system. He hypocritically went along in principle with De Ambris's designs, while in fact delaying and vacillating in the expectation that, partly because of his own double game, the project would never come to fruition.

The immediate results of this understanding between Giolitti and Mussolini were satisfying to both sides. Mussolini proclaimed Giolitti's treaty with Yugoslavia to be acceptable, even though it gave Dalmatia to Yugoslavia and left Fiume, for now, an independent city-state; he offered only perfunctory protest when Giolitti dispersed D'Annunzio's regime in Fiume by force, in four days of fighting beginning Christmas Eve 1920. Five months later, in May 1921, thirty-five fascists, including Mussolini himself, were elected to parliament with Giolitti's anti-Socialist national bloc. Giolitti felt he had tamed fascism; Mussolini felt he had a foot in the door.

Mussolini could aspire to a national political role only because a second set of circumstances had also changed fascism's direction during the fall of 1920. With Mussolini taking his antilabor tack, the Fascist movement began to grow rapidly in the provinces, especially in the Po Valley, taking the form of violent reaction against the Socialists and workers. Now squads of young fascists—the *squadristi*—began their dread "punitive expeditions," setting fire to Socialist meeting halls and dispersing socialist and Catholic labor organizations by force.

As fascism moved simultaneously toward parliamentary maneuvering and violent reaction, most of the syndicalists began to doubt that it could play any long-term progressive role. Accusations that fascism had lost its initial, potentially revolutionary content and had become merely the instrument of bourgeois reaction dominated syndicalist literature on the movement from mid-1920 to mid-1921. The syndicalists generally portrayed fascism as a purely negative—though partly useful—reaction against maximalism and the *biennio rosso*, having no positive political future.[11] Ottavio Dinale, in the first extended consideration of fascism to appear in *Pagine libere*, doubted that the new movement could overcome the ambiguity and heterogeneity that had made it easy prey for the reactionary elements that seemed to be exploiting it. Nonetheless, Dinale discerned some possibility that fascism might become a coherent revolutionary force, and he challenged his old friend Mussolini to overcome the vacillation which had so far prevented this outcome.[12]

But Mussolini's deepening involvement in the parliamentary game, and the election of thirty-five fascists to parliament in May of 1921, seemed to indicate that fascism was being absorbed into the existing

system. Writing in the aftermath of the elections, Lanzillo observed that fascism was becoming the bourgeoisie's mass party, acting within the traditional parliamentary framework, just as he had anticipated a few months before.[13] Meanwhile De Ambris, joined now by A. O. Olivetti, was still seeking to organize a revolutionary coalition around D'Annunzio and the Fiume legionnaires, even though the Fiume regime itself had been suppressed. Bitter over Mussolini's betrayal, and still hopeful of winning greater working-class support, De Ambris sought to give his new organization of Fiume veterans, the *Federazione nazionale dei legionari fiumani*, a clearly antifascist color.[14] Especially after fascism abandoned its special status as a "movement" and officially became a party in November of 1921, De Ambris and Olivetti scorned fascism as just another ordinary political party. And Mussolini seemed merely a run-of-the-mill politician, interested primarily in the traditional parliamentary jockeying for power, not in the revolutionary renewal of Italy.[15]

De Ambris and Olivetti continued their fruitless efforts to put together a non-Socialist and antifascist revolutionary coalition even into 1923.[16] But in 1921 it began to seem to many of the young Fiume legionnaires—and to many of the syndicalists—that, despite everything, the best hope for radical change in a national syndicalist direction lay with fascism after all. Before we can understand why, we must examine the new provincial fascism of 1920–21 and establish the interpretive framework we need to grasp the nature of the intersection between syndicalism and fascism.

Fascism finally became a force to be reckoned with during the second half of 1920 in the reaction against Socialism and the *biennio rosso*. Much of this early fascism was nothing but narrow reaction, most brutal in the countryside. It included a significant dose of criminality and violence, partly symptomatic of the brutalizing side of the war experience, and plenty of the vulgar bullying that has been associated with fascism ever since. Yet fascism developed the potential for an ongoing "positive" push to create an alternative regime at the same time. Some of those involved in the fascist reaction did not see beyond it, but others understood fascism not merely as an immediate instrument against Socialism, but also as a vehicle to destroy and replace liberalism. Participants in this antiliberal reaction had important perceptions and objectives in common, but ultimately their challenge to liberalism stemmed from different, even incompatible values and concerns, which can usefully be characterized in terms of left and right, or populist and elitist. This difference in the basis of the antiliberal reaction corresponded roughly to social differentiation within the Italian bourgeoisie—between upper- and lower-middle-class elements. Italian fascism gained the force to go beyond short-term anti-Socialist reaction to a change of regime because important sectors of the "normal" bourgeois constituency for parliamentary government were breaking off simultaneously, from the bottom and from the top, and turning against the liberal parliamentary system.

We have already discussed the appeal of Nationalism to middle-class elements who saw beneath the immediate Socialist challenge a deeper problem of liberal weakness. Their perceptions and objectives found their most coherent expression in Nationalism, even though the Nationalists did not officially merge with the Fascist party until February of 1923. This right-wing variety of fascism, like the Nationalism which gave it doctrinal expression, was by no means homogeneous. Although right fascists shared a common elitist defensiveness vis-à-vis the mass society and a common desire to replace the liberal parliamentary system, they differed along a continuum from more conservative and authoritarian perspectives to those more radical and genuinely totalitarian.

Nearer the radical end were those like Alfredo Rocco who found the present threat more menacing and who grasped more fully the necessity—and the possibility—of a new kind of elitist politics in a mass industrial age. Others, like Luigi Federzoni and Francesco Coppola among the Nationalists, were departing from right liberalism in the same postliberal direction, but less thoroughly and consistently. Since they were closer to right liberal traditions and less troubled by the present crisis, they were willing to settle for a more conventional solution, closer to a mere restoration of law and order around existing institutions. They were less convinced than Rocco that national syndicates and other mass organizations were necessary. At the Nationalists' pivotal meeting at Rome in March 1919, Federzoni expressed misgivings about Rocco's corporativist proposals and, as an alternative, simply stressed that the existing unions had to be made to acquire a sense of limits and responsibility.[17] It was necessary to convince the workers that since they were living in a proletarian nation, they should subordinate class interests to the ends of the collective. At this point, Federzoni's antidote to the present crisis had not gone much beyond the exhortations of right liberals like Mosca. Even in February 1921, Federzoni was calling not for institutional change in response to the trade union challenge, but merely for the restoration of law and order.[18] While Rocco saw the *biennio rosso* and the Italian crisis as the inevitable outcome of the individualism underlying the European liberal tradition, Federzoni was content to blame particular, short-term factors like proportional representation and the recent policies of the Socialist party.

However, Federzoni shared the basic Nationalist perceptions about the nation as an economic organism, the importance of international competition, and the need for total coordination of the nation for production and international struggle—perceptions which implied that institutional change in a totalitarian direction was necessary. Speaking in Rome during the parliamentary election campaign in May 1921, he claimed that the solution to the present crisis of indiscipline and disorder required remaking the Italian mentality and that only Nationalism, as a doctrine of authority, could overcome the defects at the root of the crisis.[19] So Nationalism, even according to Federzoni, intended to create a new order by changing psychology and values, but unlike Rocco, Federzoni did not face up to the manipulative implication of this notion and propose institutional changes to make possible the essential indoctrination. Instead, he continued to call for the defense of Italy's established institutions and for the restoration of all the prerogatives of the crown vis-à-vis parliament.[20]

Federzoni, then, was less rigorous than Rocco, but from his place near the moderate end of the right fascist continuum, he was able to provide an important bridge between genuine, active fascists and conservative monarchists who were willing to acquiesce in fascism. Obviously those near Federzoni's end of the spectrum contributed much less than those like Rocco to the ongoing push toward radical institutional change within the Fascist regime. When in 1925 the chance came to make fundamental institutional change, Francesco Coppola, as a member of the Commission of Eighteen set up to offer proposals, favored little departure from traditional right liberalism.[21] And Federzoni himself, occupying the key post of Minister of the Interior during the same period, was more concerned with "normalization" than radical innovation; he sought especially to impose the authority of the traditional, monarchical state over the unruly society, including the Fascist party. On the other hand, Alfredo Rocco was not willing to settle for the outcome of the fascist revolution even in 1925, and so, as Minister of Justice, he proved one of fascism's leading innovators.

In his memoirs, published in 1967, Federzoni contrasts his own attempt to defend order and existing institutions with the naive, apocalyptic revolutionary projects of other fascists at the same time.[22] He even groups Rocco with extremists like Roberto Farinacci, implying that the fundamental differentiation within fascism was between those who sought radical change during the pivotal period from 1924 to 1926 and those who thought fascism had gone far enough. Although it is bizarre to lump the unruly Farinacci with the jurist Rocco, the axis of division which Federzoni proposes is valid and important on one level and helps us to grasp the uniquely important function that Rocco, as a

right fascist seeking radical change, was able to fulfill in the regime. He served as a bridge between, on the one hand, fascists who shared his values and perceptions but not his desire for radical institutional change and, on the other, fascists who wanted superficially similar institutional changes, but as a result of different values and goals.

In formally merging with the Fascist party in February of 1923, in the aftermath of the March on Rome, the Nationalist association did not envision an ideological compromise. The Nationalists were seeking to keep fascist radicalism in bounds, but they also had a more positive objective: they would give fascism the intellectual content and political direction it seemed to lack; fascism was the means through which the Nationalist program could be implemented. Both before and after the merger, the Nationalists continually insisted that their doctrine was the latent core of fascism; as Balbino Giuliano put it, "fascism is Nationalism not yet well understood."[23] Fascism's very confusion and immaturity, Giuliano felt, made it especially useful as a Nationalist instrument, for it was partly the empty gestures, the romantic rebelliousness, the vain phrases against the bourgeoisie that had made fascism so popular. Had fascism eschewed these non-Nationalist forms and embraced the Nationalist doctrine explicitly from the start, it could not have been such a useful instrument for Nationalist purposes in the long run. Meanwhile, Giuliano insisted, the Nationalists themselves should not compromise and move toward fascism, but rather maintain their vision in pure form, as a focal point helping the new nationalist consciousness take firm root and spread. Nationalism, then, was the intellectual vanguard of fascism, and ultimately Nationalism would determine what the Fascist regime was to become.

But not all of the anti-Socialist reaction with long-term antiliberal purposes found ideological expression in Nationalism. A heterogeneous populist current also emerged in the fascist reaction, as disaffected Italians with more modest middle-class backgrounds began turning against the liberal order for a different set of reasons. It is well known that fascism began to take on the proportions of a mass movement, losing the more limited and quasi-socialist character it had had in 1919, because of the influx of discontented lower-bourgeois elements which began late in 1920.[24] Any interpretation of the origins of fascism depends on what we make of this lower-middle-class revolt. The Nationalists were trying to exploit lower-middle-class fascism, denying that it had or could develop any force and consistency on its own. Obviously much depended on how well this current would be able to resist the Nationalists, to maintain its autonomy, to devise its own program, and to impose that program on fascism as a whole. And this meant that much of the drama was being played out on the level of ideas.

As we saw in the first chapter, it is widely assumed that these lower-middle-class fascists were subject to socioeconomic traumas that made them resentful of the industrial classes and susceptible to irrational nationalist appeals. Since these were apparently the losers in the process of modernization, they could not have developed a progressive, "universal" perspective of their own. Ultimately, it would seem, these rootless elements were merely "available" as a mass base for a reaction spearheaded by the Nationalists. At the same time, this new form of fascism is often viewed in terms of a dualistic conception of the political spectrum which identifies the left with Socialism and defense of the working class and assumes that any opposition to them must by definition be on the right. Since the Nationalists gave the most coherent expression to right-wing political anti-Socialism in this particular case, it is easy to assume that fascism was essentially a movement of right-wing reaction, with Nationalism its most lucid doctrinal expression. Moreover, when we focus sharply on the workings of fascism during the period from 1921 to 1925, we find mostly confusion, infighting, personal bickering, local power rivalries, and tactical disputes. Fascism as a mass movement seems to have been so chaotic, so splintered, that whatever consistency and continuity the regime had apparently must have come from elsewhere.

These perceptions and categories are unquestionably valid in part, but we can make better sense of what we know of fascism, especially what happened in the long term, if we recognize that the lower bourgeois revolt in postwar Italy gave rise to an autonomous, populist—even leftist—variety of fascism, with enough force and consistency to have had considerable practical impact. The thrust toward radical change that it produced was the result of a variety of pressures, which often worked at cross purposes in the short term, but which had enough in common to contribute to a single long-term movement for change. Taken as a whole, the left fascist current had an important measure of continuity and direction—not just the power rivalries, infighting, and juggling by the leadership that strike us if we focus on fascism at any one moment. Nationalism, then, was not the only component in fascism that transcended irrational activism and "availability." Petty bourgeois populists constituted another current pushing for radical change through fascism on the basis of reasonably serious purposes—and they kept pushing, even sometimes against Mussolini, despite temporary setbacks and compromises, right up until the fall of the regime in 1943. The populist current was largely responsible for the radical change that fascism did bring about—the destruction of the liberal parliamentary system and the beginnings of a totalitarian alternative based on corporativism and mass mobilization.

But the standard petty bourgeois traumas and the short-term power rivalries were important as well, so we must devise more complex and flexible ways of grouping the elements within this heterogeneous current. We need a conceptual framework that encompasses a variety of motives and purposes, a variety of ways of being a petty bourgeois fascist. Since the industrial workers did relatively well economically during and after the war, at a time when inflation and accelerating industrialization produced the classic insecurities in the Italian lower middle class, it is undeniable that the fascist assault on the socialist labor movement stemmed in part from socioeconomic resentments. Some of those involved on this basis were content merely to destroy by force the existing trade union movement, the source of labor's economic power, while others sought to pursue their interests by developing a political alternative that would, among other things, overcome the class struggle that seemed to be leaving them out.

But fascism emerged above all in response to a political crisis, one which did not stem primarily from the socioeconomic dislocations, but which had deeper roots of its own in the problematic features of the political life of liberal Italy. Some with lower-middle-class backgrounds saw fascism as a way to overcome this political crisis; their fascism was fundamentally a populist revolt against the old politics. Since political power and confidence are to some extent a function of socioeconomic position, it is not surprising that the petty bourgeoisie was overrepresented in this populist reaction. In this case the overrepresentation was especially pronounced, because most of the political discontent among the other "populist" sectors, the workers and the peasants, found an outlet in Socialism or political Catholicism. Yet this overrepresentation of the lower middle class can lead us astray. Because we find that a disproportionate number of those involved can be characterized in terms of a particular socioeconomic grouping, we are liable to infer that socioeconomic problems were the major source of the common response.

While the petty bourgeoisie was overrepresented in fascism, the fascist revolt obviously did not involve the entire class. And it was largely political perspectives and values that distinguished those who were involved from those who were not. Those who did help to create fascism constituted a kind of vanguard best characterized in terms of two substantially overlapping categories. First, they were political outsiders. Some had been politically indifferent or alienated before; others had been active in preindustrial populist and republican groupings hostile to the political establishment; many were young people just coming of age politically.[25] Second, they were war veterans, often from the ranks of the junior officers. Populist fascism was comprised espe-

cially of young, politically alienated war veterans who claimed to embody the moral legacy and promise of renewal bound up with Italy's war experience. Their enemy was not industrial capitalism but the Italian political system; they were alienated not because of declining economic prospects and social status, but because they felt excluded politically. Their resentments were directed less at the industrial classes than at the old political class, with its lack of confidence in the Italian people.

The young veterans in fascism are generally described as "military desperadoes" unable to readjust to civilian life or "dropouts" from the established order, which seemed to have no acceptable place for them.[26] But when we remember what the war experience had meant, and consider what these young veterans did not like about the established order, it becomes obvious that their reasons for revolting against the old Italy cannot be so easily explained away. To say that they could not readjust after the war is trivial and tautological: they chose not to adjust—first, because they believed, quite plausibly, that the situation called for significant political and cultural change instead; and second, because they believed, much less plausibly—but not absurdly—that they themselves could spearhead that change, because of their role in the war. Whatever their prospects of success, it was not merely petty bourgeois prejudice to insist on the value and the political implications of the war experience; and it may have been neither desirable nor possible for Italian society to return to normal, to traditional patterns. When the old liberals, the new politics of mass parties, and the "normal" Socialist alternative to the system all failed to fill the developing political vacuum, lower-middle-class outsiders and veterans set out on the perilous course of trying to develop their own political challenge—and political alternative—through the fascism of 1921. They based their claim to legitimacy on their wartime role; and it was Italy's wartime experience that gave them confidence enough—in themselves, and in the potential of the Italian people—to seek to create a new political order.

This is not to suggest that fascism fell heir to all of the moral idealism bound up with Italy's experience of World War I. Ultimately, the same ideals nourished the resistance to fascism, and in 1934 the distinguished liberal historian Adolfo Omodeo published his famous collection of letters from victims of the war—letters saturated with generous national idealism—in the hope of rekindling a moral legacy that could help his country go beyond fascism. But while Omodeo's negative assessment of fascism in 1934 was essentially correct, the cult of Mazzini, for example, which Omodeo found bound up with the idealism of the war,[27] helped to inspire the young veterans who turned to fascism. It is

striking evidence of the difficulties of thinking about these relationships that Alessandro Galante Garrone, in his otherwise very fine introduction to the 1968 edition of Omodeo's volume, fails even to consider the possibility that the wartime cult of Mazzini could have contributed to the creation of fascism, even though, following Omodeo, he certainly understands the tremendous significance which Mazzini's ideas had for disaffected Italians in the context of the war and the postwar crisis.[28] On the other hand, those who have linked the postwar cult of Mazzini to fascism have failed to grasp the significance of this Mazzinianism, dismissing it as a romantic petty bourgeois remnant from the past.[29]

It is generally true, however, that those who carried the Mazzinian idealism of the war into fascism did not have the same moral and intellectual qualities that we find in Omodeo and others of his generation who perceived the war in similar terms—men like Guido De Ruggiero, Carlo Rosselli, and Piero Gobetti. Thus the radical populism in fascism tended, on the one hand, to become extreme and totalitarian and, on the other, to get bogged down in petty personal resentments and place-seeking. But there were tensions of a different sort in the positions of postwar idealists who avoided these excesses. Most, like De Ruggiero or Omodeo himself, remained firmly within the Italian liberal tradition, but their ideals were vague, lacking precise commitments for social and political change. These cultivated liberals tended to identify the educated bourgeoisie with the Italian nation and state—and so tended to fall into a continuum with those who turned against the liberal parliamentary system from the right, also in the name of the war and a revitalized middle class embodying the national interest.[30] Others like Gobetti ultimately insisted on the hegemony of the working class and portrayed social forces in ways that were hardly compatible with the fundamental assumptions of liberalism.[31] It was symptomatic of the depth of the crisis of liberalism in Italy that even people of the quality of De Ruggiero and Gobetti were in danger of falling off the liberal tightrope to the right or left, precisely in their attempt to foster liberal values in the volatile postwar context.

Insofar as the Italian political system was genuinely in crisis, and insofar as the liberal parliamentary system in general has genuine defects, young fascist war veterans could at least attempt to make their own political discontents the basis for a new political program—transcending narrow class interests and having validity for the whole society. And there was a struggle for coherence, universality, and autonomy in this populist fascism, but the current proved fragile, its program clumsy and in some ways superficial, because of the social insecurities, the deficiencies of education, and the lack of experience

with the modern industrial world that resulted from the social background of those involved.

Although the fascist struggle with the Socialists and workers stemmed in part from socioeconomic resentments, it was above all a dispute over the value of the nation and the meaning of the war—and over the kind of change appropriate for Italy at that moment. The near civil war which gripped postwar Italy was partly a class struggle, but it was primarily a conflict of two different revolutions, operating on a collision course. In a sense, it was a struggle for hegemony in the process of political expansion that had to come in one form or another. In evaluating this bitter battle, we must remember that the Socialists were not yet offering the sensitive, flexible alternative which Antonio Gramsci later elaborated, partly in response to the inadequacies of the Socialists' postwar strategy. Rather, they proposed an alternative which historians have portrayed, with a rare measure of unanimity, as inflexible, insensitive, and inappropriate. Since the Socialists and workers ridiculed the veterans and the war and eschewed any national-political leadership role, the discontented young veterans did not have the option of following the Socialists. But under the circumstances, they felt, they did not have to wait for Socialist and working-class leadership anyway; they represented the new Italy of World War I, so they themselves could lead. And their alternative movement inevitably took shape first in opposition to the Socialists and workers, who seemed to be threatening the wrong revolution. In the short term, of course, this movement could be exploited for the purposes of others, especially reactionary landowners, but these fascists did not deny labor's right to full citizenship, nor were they seeking to erect a permanent apparatus of repression. It was not the workers' rising socioeconomic position that seemed appalling, but their denial of the war and the nation, their pretensions to superiority and leadership, their indifference to Italy's longstanding national and political problems at a time when solutions seemed possible.

The young fascists sensed that they would have to have labor's involvement if they were to create a viable alternative to the old order. Thus they sought to transcend a restricted class perspective and to find a basis of accommodation with the workers, a common denominator of basic goals and socioeconomic roles, to make possible a populist political challenge. By using the umbrella "producer" category, they insisted—somewhat defensively—that they too were valuable, productive members of society, just like the workers. They destroyed the existing unions not simply to undermine the advantageous economic position of some sectors of labor, but to force the workers into new unions organized for different purposes. They included petty bourgeois

"intellectual labor" in these organizations not simply as a means of static socioeconomic defense, but to forge an alliance of populist "producers" as the basis for a new order. The initial conflict between petty bourgeois fascists and Socialist workers deformed the popular political challenge at the outset, but it was impossible to foresee in 1921 whether this would be fatal.

Fascists with similar political resentments and wartime experiences differed in the quality of their political vision, so we must differentiate even among those whose concerns were primarily political rather than socioeconomic. The various possibilities can be arrayed along a continuum from personal to ideal-social kinds of motivation. Nearer the first pole were those with relatively limited horizons; they understood the fascist revolution largely as a mere change in personnel, one from which they themselves would profit, and tended to focus on short-term tactical questions and power rivalries which affected their personal fortunes. Those nearer the second pole acted on the basis of a principled and reasonably forceful critique of the Italian political system; they sought to develop a program of serious institutional change as a way of realizing their political ideals in the future. Of course, the place-seekers also had some broader social purposes, and those with political ideals to implement also had careers to make. But the proportions varied greatly.

Near the first, more familiar end of the spectrum, we find people like Achille Starace and especially Roberto Farinacci (1892–1945), the local chieftain, or *Ras*, of fascism in Cremona and the national party leader from February 1925 to March 1926. Farinacci was an especially unattractive type who is often portrayed as the archetypal fascist. The son of a small-town policeman, he was identified first with violent provincial fascism and ultimately with the Fascist party in its rivalry with the traditional state apparatus. But despite his extremism, Farinacci did not have the more coherent sense of problems and long-term solutions that we can find in other fascists of the same generation.[32] Those like Farinacci lacked the intelligence, the education, the idealism, or the breadth of vision necessary to understand present problems and to propose institutional alternatives. Propelled by personal ambitions and resentments, they sought merely an "empty" social revolution, enabling energetic new elements from the people, like themselves, to assume the leadership of Italy. They assumed themselves to embody the values of the war—so it was not necessary to have a long-term vision or a coherent program. They were new men from the people; they would do more for the people.

Even for those at this end of the spectrum, then, fascism was to be the vehicle for a kind of populist revolution, but one which would

merely create a new ruling class. They championed the new Fascist party vis-à-vis the old state apparatus because they were seeking to establish an institutional power base for themselves, not because they believed that new institutions could make possible a qualitatively different kind of democracy. As party leader, Farinacci sought to extend party control over the Fascist union movement, but more as an end in itself than as a means to foster ongoing revolutionary development in a corporativist direction.[33] He was simply unable to grasp the relationship between politics and economics that serious corporativists had in mind.[34] Still, personal ambitions and resentments like Farinacci's led important groups of fascists to keep pushing for a purge of the old elites and for a greater party role at the expense of the old bureaucracy, so this kind of motivation contributed to the measure of openness and dynamism there was to the regime.

The motivation involved at this end of the spectrum produced a variety of strategies in practice. While Farinacci's ambitions often led him to defy Mussolini, others satisfied their aspirations, and often found places for themselves, by identifying with Mussolini, linking their fortunes to his. It soothed their resentments to have their leader running the country, for he was a new man like themselves, and a man identified with the cause of the war. Some, like Achille Starace, were essentially Mussolinians from the start, but this identification with the Duce was operative especially in the 1930s, when it had become clear how limited even the empty social revolution, the circulation of elites, was to be.

If radical, populist, "petty bourgeois" fascism was only this, if Farinacci, say, really was the archetypal fascist, then obviously the interpretation of fascism would be much easier. But categories of interpretation which illuminate Farinacci's end of the left fascist continuum turn out not to be adequate to explain such major figures as Dino Grandi, Augusto Turati, and Giuseppe Bottai, although they too were new men of modest middle-class origin, basing their claim to leadership on their experience in the war. As we move along the continuum, leaving Farinacci behind, we begin to find a more coherent critique of the liberal parliamentary system and a more sensitive consideration of what fascism was to do with the power it sought.

The petty bourgeois current in fascism managed to offer a political program, envisioning not merely a change in personnel but a change in institutions, and it was derived—directly or indirectly—from the syndicalist tradition. Occupying the "ideal" end of the populist continuum, neosyndicalism enabled the alienated young veterans in fascism to give their vague, radical populist aspirations a measure of precision and content. They were looking for political guidance, and

the syndicalists, with their interventionist and heterodox leftist past, enjoyed considerable prestige among them. Moreover, the program of concrete institutional change the syndicalists offered seemed to provide the needed alternative to both liberalism and orthodox socialism. So the syndicalists had considerable success as they worked to shape this young fascist current, to give its energies a national syndicalist direction. As they mixed with these fascists, gradually losing their separate identity, the syndicalists found their natural constituency at last. From the beginning it had not been the industrial proletariat, as they had originally sought to convince themselves, nor the southern peasantry, as Antonio Gramsci later argued, but the politically alienated lower bourgeoisie, seeking a new political order based on an alliance with the industrial proletariat.

Most of the radical young war veterans like Dino Grandi, Italo Balbo, Augusto Turati, and Curzio Suckert, who were involved at various stages in the ongoing push for institutional change, became fascists not in the first, more obviously radical phase of 1919, but in the more problematic phase of 1920–21. Their social origins were generally petty bourgeois; many had radical or leftist republican pasts, and most, like Grandi and Balbo, participated in the vogue of Mazzini's ideas that accompanied the Italian war experience. They emphasized the value of the nation, glorified the war, and insisted that the fascist revolt must culminate in a kind of revolution, not in parliamentary compromise. Their vision was antipolitical—just as the syndicalists' was—and they were attracted to syndicalism as a way of transcending the apparently corrupting politics of the liberal parliamentary system.

Some of those near this end of the populist continuum were closer in style to the educated Nationalists than to the unruly fascists operating nearer the personal end, and thus the imprecision in some attempts to define the components in fascism.[35] Style, of course, can be a genuine basis for differentiation, and thus in his memoirs the Nationalist Federzoni could praise the "humanity" even of Italo Balbo, while he had no use for Farinacci.[36] But convergence on the level of style and tactics should not lead us to infer that there was a similar convergence on the level of motivating goals. It was not necessary to embrace the Nationalist program to dislike the style and tactics of a Farinacci.

We have seen that the *Carta del Carnaro* was at first the most important vehicle of syndicalist influence among the young populist war veterans in fascism. The day it was published, and just after he himself had returned from Fiume, the influential Venetian fascist Piero Marsich wrote to Mussolini to laud the document as "a very noble, magnificent thing" in which "all the postulates of fascism find their concrete application."[37] After Giolitti's government suppressed the Fiume regency in

December 1920, many of the Fiume legionnaires began gravitating to fascism, and more and more it began to seem that it fell to fascism to implement the ideals of Fiume. For example, the first issue of *Audacia*, which Edoardo Malusardi founded in January 1921 as the fascist newspaper of Verona, proclaimed the principles of the *Carta del Carnaro* to be the keys to fascism. In its third issue the newspaper endorsed the neosyndicalist doctrine as it had recently been outlined by Marsich in an article in *Il Popolo d'Italia*.[38] And Marsich was publicizing ideas undoubtedly drawn not only from the *Carta del Carnaro*, but also directly from syndicalist writings. Fascism's essential task—to reconstruct the state on a new basis—could be achieved by organizing society along economic lines and by giving the resulting syndicates legislative capacities and public duties.

We can better grasp the role of neosyndicalist ideas in the populist current in fascism if we consider four of its most significant and influential representatives—Dino Grandi, Giuseppe Bottai, Augusto Turati, and Curzio Suckert. These figures were dissimilar in important respects, but they shared a core of common values and purposes, and each played a major role—though in different ways and at different times—in the long-term push toward a postliberal political system within fascism. Because we have generally focused on aspects of fascism which manifest the differences among figures like these, we have tended to miss the deeper common purposes which differentiated them from other fascists and led each of them to contribute to a single long-term process. In approaching these exemplars, we must avoid assuming a priori that those whose political ideas had a measure of coherence were unrepresentative, an assumption which simply forecloses the possibility that petty bourgeois fascism could have produced something other than the expected irrationalities and prejudices. Relatively articulate fascists like Grandi and Bottai were young populist veterans speaking for and to a populist middle-class constituency, but one whose members varied greatly in intelligence and commitment.

The most coherent spokesman for the new radical fascism of 1921 was Dino Grandi, a war veteran and a *squadrista* involved in the violent "punitive expeditions" in Emilia-Romagna. In the words of one observer, Grandi "is ideologically and in fact a typical petty bourgeois."[39] He indulged in the sort of rhetoric that is usually seen as typically fascist —about, for example, the primacy of will over intellect for revolutionary change.[40] Because Grandi was typical in important respects, he was able to lead, to help others with less precise goals think more clearly about problems and solutions. And Grandi was a neosyndicalist.

Grandi was born in 1895 in the province of Imola, in Emilia-Romagna, where his father was an agricultural estate manager and later an agrarian in his own right. The elder Grandi was a passionate reader of Mazzini and held progressive views about agricultural management and about the value of organizations for agricultural workers. Grandi's mother was an elementary school teacher. Grandi distinguished himself during the war, winning three medals of valor, and ended up a captain. After the war, he completed his studies at the University of Bologna, then began practicing law. He found that wearing his uniform, complete with medals, led to encounters with antiwar Socialists and workers. According to Grandi himself, it was after one such episode, in which, he says, his life was endangered, that he joined the *Fasci di combattimento*. This was in September of 1920, just when fascism was starting to gather momentum in reaction against Socialism and the *biennio rosso*.[41]

But even before turning to fascism, Grandi was active in political journalism, anticipating a revolution linked to the war experience, and publicizing the national syndicalist vision he would soon seek to have implemented through fascism. He had encountered Italian syndicalism in theory and practice even before the war; he started reading Olivetti's *Pagine libere* while a high school student, and he was active in the interventionist *Fascio* which Panunzio headed in Ferrara. In April of 1915, he and Panunzio were two of the three featured speakers at a large interventionist meeting at the University of Ferrara that accompanied a student strike favoring intervention. Explaining his intellectual development after the war, Grandi numbered Agostino Lanzillo —as well as Georges Sorel—among his mentors.[42] Before the war, he admired syndicalism for remaining immune to the petty ambitions and compromises of political socialism, but he warned that syndicalism in its present form was too much a rigid class instrument.[43] Grandi sensed however, that a refined and more general syndicalist movement could play a central role in the future, and after the war, in July 1920, he made explicit his conception of the fundamental historical significance of syndicalism:

> The European revolution of the last century was a revolution of the individual, of the *ego*, of *man*. Luther, Kant, and Rousseau.
>
> The revolution of the twentieth century is the revolution of *a larger individual*.
>
> This larger individual is the *organization*, the *group*, the *syndicate*.
>
> The syndicate is not, as many believe, a *method*, an instrument. The syndicate is a *person* that tends to replace the old single physical person, who is insufficient, impotent, and no longer adequate.
>
> . . . The syndicate as person, as will, as an autonomous, dynamic, organic nucleus, is by now such a vital and living force that to deny it means to place oneself in absurdity, outside reality, outside the revolution, outside history. . . .

In the syndicate is the *true* revolution, and in it can be found already solidly constructed *the framework of the new state* of tomorrow. . . .

The syndicate will remain. New functions will gradually be entrusted to it and new ones will continually be born.[44]

Grandi's emphasis on the revolutionary role of organization was part of a wider vision linking syndicalism to the deficiencies of the Italian Risorgimento, to the ideas of Giuseppe Mazzini, to the possibility of a new kind of democracy, and to the revolutionary meaning of the war for Italy.

Already in 1919 and 1920, Grandi denied that the Socialists could bring about the radical change that Italy required. Socialism had made a major historical contribution in developing syndicalism, but the Socialist party failed to grasp the significance that the syndicates could have in the present context. This failure was symptomatic of the Socialists' more general inability to grasp the meaning of great contemporary events—the war, the Fiume episode, even the Russian revolution. Grandi's thinking indicated that those more lucid about present possibilities had to seize hegemony over the unions from the socialists, in order to make the right kind of revolution. Even in 1919, he envisioned a new party, opposed to both liberalism and Socialism, that would combine the productive economic elements of the nation with the young war veterans in a postliberal political alliance. He also called for free trade as a way to stimulate productivism, to overcome Italian bourgeois decadence, and to force capitalism to get on with its task of developing Italy.[45] Grandi wove all these themes together in the conception of fascism and its mission that he publicized in 1921.

As a fascist, Grandi portrayed Nationalism and syndicalism as aspects of a single deep Italian spiritual revival that had begun before the war.[46] The two movements had come together during the war, and now fascism would synthesize the principles of both as the basis of its own revolutionary program. Grandi numbered Alfredo Rocco among his mentors and no doubt derived his own national syndicalist vision from Nationalism as well as syndicalism. It was certainly possible to learn from both, partly because Nationalism and syndicalism had important features in common. But Grandi sometimes glossed over the deeper differences between them, and thus there was some ambiguity in his thinking at first. These differences could be blurred temporarily, while fascism was still gathering force in opposition to both Socialism and the liberal state, but for Grandi and others, the need to implement a positive fascist alternative soon posed fundamental choices and dissolved most of the ambiguity.

Nationalist influence is especially clear in Grandi's conception of Italy's international position and in his understanding of international relations in the short term. But here again there were tensions, for his vision included elements which pointed toward the syndicalists' neo-Mazzinian conception of international relations. Writing in December 1914, Grandi portrayed the war as but the first act in an international class struggle pitting proletarian against plutocratic nations.[47] Logically, the present war should have involved Germany, Russia, and Italy on one side against Great Britain and France on the other. Largely because it did not, it was but a confused episode which could be expected to solve only limited problems facing particular nations—the problem of the Italian irredenta, for example. A more sharply defined revolutionary war would soon follow. During the immediate postwar period, Grandi continued to anticipate that the next war would be a revolutionary class struggle pitting Germany, Italy, and Russia—the three proletarian nations "that work and have children"—against France and Great Britain.[48] The Russian revolution, in fact, was the vanguard of the revolution of the proletarian nations against English capitalism, "which has emerged from the war the tyrannical and absolute master of the world."[49]

But Grandi was not calling for autarky or glorifying perpetual war. He was a vehement free trader who believed in growing economic interdependence among nations—an international division of labor. Indeed, according to Grandi, "Humanity tends, with an irresistible inclination, to transcend conflict, moving simultaneously toward cooperation."[50] And since wars stemmed from economic factors—especially the need for raw materials and markets—only international economic freedom and cooperation could provide a viable basis for a lasting peace. However, this condition did not obtain at present; Grandi saw the League of Nations both as a conservative instrument to maintain the status quo in the interests of France and Britain and as a venture too utopian to be able to prevent further war.[51] Thus there was a place in Grandi's conception for a future "just war," but such a war for Grandi, as for the syndicalists, would move humanity closer to the ideal, a rational international configuration in which wars would no longer be necessary. Even though Grandi's thinking on international problems was subject to Nationalist influence, his vision ultimately eluded Nationalist categories and coincided with the neosyndicalist conception.

The young fascist who would spearhead the drive for a populist corporative state in the practice of the Fascist regime after the crisis of 1924–25 was Giuseppe Bottai (1895–1959). He was born in 1895, the same year as Grandi, into a modest middle-class family of "longstanding republican tradition."[52] As one of the elite *arditi* troops during the war, Bottai fought at the front, was wounded and decorated. In his memoirs, published in 1949, he linked his wartime experience to the

political maturation and idealism of his generation.[53] Bottai was politically active as a republican when he became a fascist in 1919, helping to organize the Rome *Fascio*. While he was not an old Mussolinian interventionist, like so many other leading fascists of 1919, neither was Bottai part of the new fascism of 1921, centered in Emilia-Romagna, with its violence and extremism. Because of his relative moderation in matters of tactics, he sometimes differed with the newer fascists, even those whose ultimate purposes for fascism were much the same as his own. In his conception of fascist ends, however, Bottai, too, was an extremist, one who gradually developed a vision of corporativism as a radical, postliberal kind of democracy.

Bottai's intellectual background was more literary and less political than Grandi's, and even in 1923 his ideas about the positive aims of fascism were not well worked out. At this point, he was bitterly hostile to parliament, and he shared the widespread notion that the war experience and the ideas of Giuseppe Mazzini were somehow important for creating an alternative.[54] But in introducing the first issue of his important review *Critica fascista*, Bottai portrayed the central task of fascism as merely to create a new fascist ruling class; he still did not have the corporativist content, the vision of concrete institutional change to create new political forms, that he would begin to develop in 1924–25, when basic decisions about the purpose of fascism could no longer be postponed.[55]

Like Grandi, Bottai learned from the Nationalists as well as the syndicalists, and sometimes there was ambiguity in his thinking over questions involving populism versus elitism and the relationship between state and syndicates.[56] But as he absorbed neosyndicalist ideas and came to view corporativism as the core of fascism, and as the regime began to implement a postliberal alternative to the parliamentary system, the ambiguity in his thinking dissolved. Fascist corporativism was to make possible the fulfillment of the democratic ideal, the immortal principles of 1789. By the end of the 1920s, Bottai had a fully developed corporativist vision and program, derived primarily from concepts the syndicalists had been publicizing for years.[57] His mature corporativism was indistinguishable in its essentials from the neosyndicalist conception, and he now became the major political leader of the left corporativist current in fascism which absorbed most of the syndicalists.

A major ally of Bottai in the struggle for a leftist corporativism was Augusto Turati (1888–1955), head of the Fascist party during the crucial period from 1926 to 1930. In background and style—and in the path which led him to fascism—Turati was typical of the new lower bourgeois fascism. The nearly insufferable froth and rhetoric that we associate with this current are much in evidence in his speeches as party

secretary. Nevertheless, while not an intellectual, Turati was reasonably intelligent and managed in these speeches to articulate the aspirations of the wider groups of fascists who looked to him for leadership. His vision of fascism's purpose, while not as well developed as Grandi's during the early years or Bottai's later on, still was considerably more coherent than Farinacci's and did include a radical, totalitarian form of democracy centered on economic groupings.[58]

After participating in the interventionist movement, Turati saw frontline service during the war, which he considered the decisive experience of his life. He was decorated several times and ended up a captain in the infantry. After the war he was active as a radical democrat before joining the Brescia *Fascio* in 1921.[59] He was one of the *squadristi* specializing in violent assaults on the socialist labor movement, but at the same time he played a major role in organizing an alternative Fascist labor movement in the province of Brescia. In 1925, as head of the Fascist unions there, he led the much-publicized strike of the Fascist metalworkers' union, which spread to Milan and Turin and ultimately involved almost 80,000 strikers. As a young fascist *squadrista* and organizer, Turati was strongly attracted to the neosyndicalist conception of the *Carto del Carnaro*. In 1922, in the aftermath of the strategic dispute within fascism, which we will consider in the next chapter, Turati supported Piero Marsich and other fascists disillusioned with Mussolini and hoped that D'Annunzio could be persuaded to lead a national syndicalist revolution.[60] This particular course did not materialize, but even as party secretary later on, Turati continued to understand the purpose of fascism largely in neosyndicalist terms.

Turati's conception of the place of the party in fascist corporativist development merits special attention, since it is easy to overemphasize the antagonisms between fascists associated with the party and those associated with the economically based organizations. In his speeches as party head, Turati insisted, plausibly enough, that both kinds of organization had essential roles in the fascist revolution; indeed, they were complementary. But this did not mean simply that the party was the revolutionary instrument in the political sphere, with the corporative system the revolutionary innovation in the economic sphere. The party had the central ideological role in "fascistizing" Italian society, which involved giving the corporations that constituted society the political values necessary for them to become autonomous political entities. For now the party had an essential role of education and surveillance, but Turati looked forward to the fulfillment that would be reached once the masses had learned to involve themselves with the great problems of the nation, once the fascist mentality had become universal in the society. The party would then no longer have any

special function, and Italy would be left with the kind of free corporativist order that De Ambris had envisioned in the *Carta del Carnaro*.[61]

While Turati, the party man, insisted on the central role of corporativism, Giuseppe Bottai, from an institutional base in the Ministry of Corporations, certainly did not deny that the party had a central role in implementing the fascist revolution.[62] Turati and Bottai did have potentially complementary roles, and they were allies in the ongoing struggle for serious innovation. They worked together, for example, to give the Fascist Labor Charter of 1927 a clearly leftist thrust. There was, to be sure, an important rivalry between the party and the corporativist current. It stemmed in part from a plausible difference in strategic emphasis, and of course those involved had careers to make and found their fortunes bound up with the power of their particular institutions within the regime. But if we focus on the ambitions and rivalries characteristic of the personal end of the continuum, important as these were for some aspects of the regime, we may miss the deeper, long-term thrust provided by those operating nearer the ideal end, including both party men and corporativists.

It is easy to overemphasize the contrast between party and neosyndicalist currents because Turati, like his predecessor as party chief, Roberto Farinacci, was hostile to the syndicalist Edmondo Rossoni, the leader of the Fascist trade union confederation from its inception in 1922. In 1928 Turati and others engineered the ouster of Rossoni, along with the breakup, or *sbloccamento*, of the confederation, which had provided Rossoni with a powerful institutional base. Those who define power in limited, immediate terms, and those who identify the syndicalist current in fascism with trade unionism and protection of working-class interests, tend to focus on Rossoni as this current's chief representative.[63] From this perspective, the hostility of leading party men to Rossoni seems evidence of a basic cleft between party and syndicalist factions.

Rossoni sought to make the Fascist unions genuine vehicles of working-class interests, and he did not hesitate to criticize business in surprisingly outspoken terms; his position, then, was leftist and syndicalist on a superficial level. In breadth of political vision, however, Rossoni could match neither the syndicalist intellectuals nor the most important of the other syndicalists who became major Fascist union leaders, particularly Mario Racheli, Livio Ciardi, and Luigi Razza. Although Rossoni was not devoid of ideals, and although he had played some role in the syndicalists' doctrinal revision, his conception lacked the totalitarian unity of politics and economics that we will find in the mature fascist conceptions of these other syndicalists. Partly

because of these intellectual limits, he was more involved in personal ambitions and rivalries than the others and so operated nearer the personal end of the populist continuum. He was seeking especially to keep the confederation as his own fief—as free as possible from party supervision and influence—and to enhance its power within the regime. But it was possible to understand the purpose of the Fascist unions more broadly, in terms of an integral, totalitarian conception of the fascist revolution—one which required a more complementary relationship between the party and the socioeconomic organizations. It was not only the party leader Turati, but also long-time syndicalists like Olivetti and younger corporativists like Bottai, who questioned Rossoni's priorities.[64] When the party leader Turati spearheaded the opposition that led to Rossoni's ouster, this did not constitute a basic difference between party and syndicalist currents, but a difference along the personal-ideal continuum. In this case the party man Turati was more the radical idealist than the syndicalist Rossoni, just as, for example, the corporativist Bottai was more the radical idealist than the party man Farinacci. And more generally, emphasis on those like Farinacci and Rossoni, with their limited conceptions of fascism and their conflicting personal ambitions, makes it difficult to see the convergence of fascists like Turati, Bottai, Olivetti, and Panunzio around the neosyndicalist conception at the ideal end of the left fascist continuum.

The contrast between the party leaders Turati and Farinacci points to a related obstacle to clear thinking. In delineating the components of fascism, historians often distinguish "moderates" from "extremists" on the basis of tactics and focus, for example, on differences over the utility of further violence after the March on Rome. Emphasis on tactical differences, however, makes it easy to miss more fundamental axes of division over the basic purposes of fascism. Radical purposes did not necessarily correspond to extreme tactics. When Turati replaced his enemy Farinacci as party secretary in 1926, it seems at first glance to have been a victory for moderation, for Farinacci was more radical on the level of tactics. But Turati had a more radical conception of the ends of fascism. Although he insisted that further fascist violence could only be counterproductive, he was not assuming that the fascist revolution had gone far enough and was essentially over. Nor can we infer from his opposition to the pretensions of the rebellious Farinacci that Turati was acquiescing in mere personal dictatorship under Mussolini. Rather, Turati sought to implement, from within the power base fascism had already won, his vision of a totalitarian corporativist superdemocracy. So the extremist Turati played a major role in the ongoing push for

serious institutional change, while Farinacci, despite his tactical extremism, operated largely on a day-to-day level, without a comparable long-term vision.

Again, focus on tactical differences may lead to the assumption that those who deplored the renewed *squadristi* violence of 1924 thought fascism had gone far enough. There was indeed sharp dispute over the legitimacy of further violence in 1924, but there were also differences in ultimate objectives that were more fundamental than such differences over methods. Some who opposed the extremists in 1924 nevertheless had revolutionary objectives for fascism, while many among the extremists sought to achieve goals that were primarily personal rather than ideal. Operating near the personal place-seeking end of the left fascist continuum, such violent fascists were frustrated by the mild outcome of the March on Rome. By resorting again to violence, they hoped to force fascism to go further in the direction of "empty" social revolution, purging the old elites to make way for themselves. This sort of frustration fueled one kind of extremism, but the push toward radical change based on an ideal populist vision constituted another kind of extremism within fascism, even though it was not always associated with radical methods. At the same time, there were radical differences in ends among those calling for moderation and opposing Farinacci's unruliness. For example, we cannot lump Turati, because of his conflict with Farinacci, with Farinacci's other great antagonist, Luigi Federzoni, the former Nationalist and Minister of the Interior in 1925–26. The only way to make sense of Turati and others like him is to develop a set of criteria for differentiating fascist components that is complex enough to transcend differences in tactics and short-term concerns; the populist, petty bourgeois current in fascism must be viewed as a continuum with an ideal pole that cannot be understood in terms of those like Farinacci. Only thus can we recognize that such fascists as Grandi and Bottai and Turati and Panunzio, despite differences in tactics, contributed to a single current for change having a significant measure of continuity and consistency.

The issue of extremism in means and ends leads to the fourth young fascist idealist, Curzio Suckert, who later became a well-known novelist under the name Curzio Malaparte. In considering Suckert, we approach the idealist component in left fascism from yet another angle, for he was an ally of Farinacci during the pivotal period from 1923 to 1925 and at first considered apparently moderate fascists like Giuseppe Bottai to be his enemies. Suckert played a major journalistic role in the struggle to push fascism beyond neotransformist compromise and toward serious institutional innovation during the first few years after the March on Rome. He was willing to support extreme methods,

including the dread second wave of *squadristi* violence, to implement his vision of fascist ends, which he derived primarily from neosyndicalism.[65]

Born into a lower-middle-class Tuscan family in 1898, Suckert was attracted to Corridoni's syndicalism while a teenager. He fought and was wounded in the war, which he found an overpowering experience, and became active in fascism in 1921.[66] In his journalistic pieces after the March on Rome, he found an irreconcilable conflict between genuine revolutionary fascism, an expression of the real nation out in the provinces, and the compromising, bourgeois, parliamentary, political fascism centered in Rome.[67] At first glance, Suckert's emphasis on the provinces seems to indicate that the mainspring of his fascism was a desire to preserve traditional local or even rural culture against the inroads of urbanization and modern values. What especially bothered Suckert, however, was the unpopular quality of the Italian liberal state, which, he emphasized, had been imposed from above during the Risorgimento, not created in collaboration with the people in the provinces. The new state, soon centered in Rome, was able to keep the society weak, even in a kind of subjection, and so the people continued to perceive the state as something extraneous to them. Socialism had emerged before the war as the spearhead of a popular movement for revolutionary political change, but Giolitti had managed to domesticate it through his network of transformist compromises. Nevertheless, the political awakening of the people out in the provinces had continued, giving birth to fascism, which Suckert claimed had fallen heir to what was still viable in the socialist tradition. But now, after the March on Rome, fascism too was becoming ensnared in the existing political system, as ambitious fascist politicians began to compromise fascism's guiding purpose, the full-scale populist conquest of the state.[68] So for Suckert the conflict within fascism between the March on Rome and the crisis of 1924–25 pitted the genuine, popular fascism of the provinces, still aiming to replace the liberal state, against the pseudofascism of those being absorbed by the old political system. Obviously, then, "Rome" to Suckert did not mean modern urban civilization, but the old Italian state. And "provincialism" did not mean a defense of traditional patterns, but the chance to overturn them. Nor was Suckert in any sense antiproductivist; syndicalism attracted him partly as a way of ordering and enhancing production.[69]

Although Suckert sometimes juxtaposed syndicalist themes with bizarre and rhetorical notions characteristic of the petty bourgeois litterateur,[70] he was quite serious about neosyndicalism, which seemed to offer fascism the means to create the necessary populist alternative to the liberal state. Writing in Italo Balbo's newspaper *Corriere padano* in

December 1925, Suckert stressed that his vision of a popular conquest of the state, and his important part in pushing fascism in a postliberal direction in practice, had been inspired above all by Sergio Panunzio's ideas.[71] According to Suckert, in fact, Panunzio's conception had given fascism the direction it had lacked even after the March on Rome. In his vision of the purpose of fascism, then, Suckert went far beyond Farinacci, despite their convergence as extremists on the level of tactics in 1924. And even though Suckert and Bottai differed sharply over tactics, they shared a belief that the long-standing Italian political problem could be overcome in a populist way through neosyndicalism. Even through his extreme tactics of 1924–25, Suckert was contributing to the ongoing corporativist thrust in the regime, the same thrust which involved Giuseppe Bottai.

Fascists with similar long-term goals could plausibly differ over tactics and immediate priorities. There were disputes, for example, over how much party interference in the affairs of the economic organizations was necessary, or over how fast it was necessary to go if fascism was to change the old political system and avoid being absorbed by it. In 1924, when much of fascism seemed to have gotten bogged down in politics as usual in Rome, Suckert believed that only renewed extremism in the provinces could save fascism and force it on to serious change. So he became a leading journalistic supporter of a violent second wave, converging with Farinacci and diverging from Bottai. But he was not making a long-term commitment to Farinacci: in the wake of Farinacci's dismissal as party secretary in 1926, Suckert criticized him for the same reasons "moderates" like Bottai did, accusing him of demagoguery and indiscipline, of seeking a kind of petty personal dictatorship in the provinces.[72] Suckert correctly perceived that Farinacci, for all his tactical intransigence, was not the man to lead the implementation of long-term radical fascist goals.

The case of Italo Balbo dramatizes the fragility of the left fascist current. On the continuum Balbo was somewhere between Farinacci and Grandi, his colleague and rival in the new fascism centered in Emilia-Romagna in 1921. Born in 1896, the son of a school teacher, Balbo fought in the war, then was active in the Republican party until he joined the Fascist movement in February 1921. Like so many fascists of his age and background, Balbo was a Mazzini enthusiast, earning his university degree in October 1920 with a thesis on Mazzini's social thought. He publicized Mazzinian ideas, emphasizing especially the antithesis between Mazzini and Marx, in lectures he gave in the Romagna in November, before becoming a fascist.[73] Balbo had also been attracted to syndicalist ideas well before joining fascism. Writing on the death of Michele Bianchi in 1930, he recalled the great impact that

Bianchi and revolutionary syndicalism had had on him as a youth in Ferrara before the war; the fascism of 1922, he insisted, could not be separated from the syndicalism of 1911.[74] Balbo and Panunzio had known each other since 1914, when they were both active in the interventionist *Fascio* in Ferrara.[75] The two remained close enough for Panunzio, who was ten years Balbo's senior, to exert an important political influence on the young student. In 1923, Panunzio even contributed a biographical sketch of Balbo for a series on young Fascist leaders. This rhetorical propaganda piece symbolizes the link between the young veterans and the old syndicalists and manifests especially clearly the deep resentment of the war's detractors which helped to bring fascists like Panunzio and Balbo together. As Panunzio put it, "The fascists came onto the stage of Italian history after the Italians, and because the Italians, had lost their sense of liberty and had fallen into license, into dissolution, had insulted the war veterans and had dared to despise the Victory and its Heroes: the immense, magnificent Victory—unique in the history of the world—of 'all' the Italian people."[76]

Propelled by the same kind of resentment of the Socialists, Balbo led the *squadristi* assault in the province of Ferrara and elsewhere in northern Italy in 1921 and 1922. But he also sought to develop new Fascist labor organizations to replace those being destroyed. At the much-publicized meeting on corporativism in Ferrara in 1932, he stressed that his destructive and constructive activities in 1921 had been two sides of the same objective—which now, eleven years later, was finding its fulfillment in corporativism.[77] In becoming a fascist in 1921, Balbo complained of the lack of ideals in Italian parliamentary politics, and thus he opposed Mussolini's moderate strategy of 1921 in the name of a radical alternative based on the principles of the *Carta del Carnaro*.[78] Still, Balbo's vision of an institutional alternative to liberalism was only rudimentary at first; in a speech in Rome in April 1923, for example, his longing for a hard-working, productive Italy was evident, but he exalted above all the value of the new Fascist militia for engendering a sense of discipline, duty, and sacrifice in the Italian people—for engendering a new military spirit.[79] Nevertheless, Balbo was a capable and energetic young man, and he could have made a major contribution to the struggle for populist institutional change in the Fascist regime. In a sense, he could have gone either way, depending on the effectiveness of the populist current overall. When fascism in practice got bogged down in petty squabbling and infighting in the mid-1920s, Balbo turned away, devoting his energies almost exclusively to technical and administrative matters.[80] He worked effectively to build the Italian Air Force and later to engineer Italian colonization in Libya. So

the impatient and ambitious young fascist who had done so much to destroy the institutions of liberal Italy contributed little to the attempts to create populist alternatives. Balbo's case indicates that fascists who were not merely place-seekers from the beginning, but who failed to translate their motivating ideals into a program of thoroughgoing institutional change, could end up settling for the advent of new personnel and for the mere trappings of change, especially if they were given a kind of militarized veneer. Since Balbo was relatively able and intelligent, it was easy for him to see a circulation of elites, bringing people like himself to power, as genuinely revolutionary, and as the key to implementing the barely formed vision of a new order that had led him to fascism in the first place. Looking back on his relationship with Balbo during the 1930s, even the former Nationalist Federzoni could praise the "humanity" of the once violent younger fascist.[81] Balbo had mellowed; he was not such a radical and dangerous fellow after all.

Others of his generation had a more coherent vision, but Balbo's case exemplifies the "instability" of positions along the left fascist continuum. Depending on how the regime developed, those beginning with genuine social ideals could settle for mere place-seeking; place-seekers could settle for a mere cult of the Duce. Commitments near the ideal end were real and effective—and account for much of what we seek to explain about Italian fascism. But at the same time, these ideal commitments could be sporadic—operative sometimes, but not at other times, even in a single individual. And given the problematic side of the background of many of those involved in the petty bourgeois current, these commitments were often fragile as well; under certain circumstances, they could degenerate or dissolve altogether. We will see that the circumstances of the regime, as manipulated by the skillful tactician at the helm, fragmented the ideal current, exploited it, undermined its effectiveness, but never buried it altogether. Leading subordinates like Grandi, Balbo, Farinacci, Turati, Bottai, and Rossoni were in and out of favor, in and out of influence, but the radical corporativist thrust remained until the end, picking up new supporters among young fascists in the 1930s as the energy or influence of some of the earlier supporters waned. The regime survived by leaving things open.

9 / *Beyond Liberalism, 1921–1925*

To understand why the Fascist regime finally moved in the direction it did, it is essential to grasp the continuity and unity of the period from 1921 to 1925. Through continued pressure, and despite setbacks, the radical fascism that became a major force in 1921 did manage to overcome the more limited, "parliamentary" fascism during these years, and fascism began to move toward a corporative system to replace the liberal parliamentary state. But difficulties of conceptualization, and the complex realities of this tortured period, make it easy to miss the essential element of continuity. We can better understand what was at stake if we focus at the outset on the highly indicative dispute over strategy that gripped fascism between August and November of 1921, threatening to tear the movement apart. At issue was whether fascism had a place in the parliamentary system, or whether it was to be the vehicle for a postliberal, even antipolitical system, replacing parliament altogether. And it was not clear until the end of 1925 that fascism was going to change institutions and move beyond the liberal parliamentary system once and for all.

Having skillfully engineered a place for fascism in the National bloc which Giolitti put together for the elections of May 1921, Mussolini suddenly found himself in the national political mainstream. When the elections produced significant success for the fascists, with thirty-five of them elected to the Chamber, Mussolini began to perceive a unique role for himself within the parliamentary system, as the "supertransformist" who could work with a wide variety of political forces—reformist socialists as well as fascists, Popolari as well as liberal democrats—and put the country back together after the postwar crisis. The system would still require a political master to balance forces and provide direction, but he would have to be a new man, identified with the war and capable of working with the new political forces that the war had