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

brought forth. Mussolini could claim to be the new helmsman because he was the leader of fascism, the most novel of these new forces. But fascism for Mussolini was still only one component in the situation; it had no exclusive claims—it had no genuinely revolutionary role. Now that Mussolini had a personal foothold in the political system, he was even willing to consider giving up fascism altogether if the movement should impede his personal political maneuvering.[1] He preferred to keep fascism available, but it would have to be a more respectable fascism, more content with a parliamentary role and less prone to rhetoric about revolution.

In his attempt to become the new political arbiter, Mussolini sought to promote a coalition government of fascists, Popolari, and reformist Socialists, in which he himself would remain the mastermind. But this strategy required the cessation of fascist violence in the provinces, so after considerable debate within fascism, he engineered a "Pacification Pact" with the Socialists—signed by the two parties on 2 August 1921. Reflecting Mussolini's conception of fascism, this agreement implied that fascism's extralegal tasks had essentially been completed; fascism could now work with other political forces—including, Mussolini felt, the existing labor movement.[2] For Mussolini, despite his new prospects, still clung to the hopes of 1919 for a political alliance with the workers. One of his most intimate collaborators at the time and a major advocate of the Pacification Pact was Cesare Rossi, who seriously hoped to link fascism to at least part of the existing labor movement, including his old friend De Ambris and the UIL. Fascism could play an ongoing role as a kind of nationalist labor party. The Pacification Pact, then, was a legacy of 1919-style fascism, intended in part to return fascism to its leftist origins.

It is well known that the original fascism of 1919 had a leftist and syndicalist tone and that the influx of new elements in 1920–21 ended up altering the character of fascism permanently and fundamentally.[3] The vaguely syndicalist potential seems to have fallen away as fascism became—apparently—pure right-wing reaction, fueled by petty bourgeois resentments but serving the purposes of the large landowners. By mid-1921, Mussolini and collaborators like Cesare Rossi from the fascism of 1919 felt the reaction had gone far enough and thus engineered the Pacification Pact. But a revolt against the pact and Mussolini's strategy of parliamentary compromise immediately developed, involving new provincial fascists who wanted to complete the task of destroying the existing labor organizations. It is easy to assume that, whatever vague ideals they may have had in their heads, those who opposed Mussolini's strategy were essentially the tools of those right-

wing elements, especially the landowners, who wanted the reaction to go all the way.[4] Some of the opposition surely did stem from such reactionary motives. But mixed with this impulse, and hard to distinguish from it in short-term practice, was opposition to compromise within the parliamentary system in the name of a fascist revolution to replace the system. Most fascists disliked Mussolini's preoccupation with conventional parliamentary politics and insisted that if fascism intended to create something new, it should seek power through an insurrectionary march on Rome.[5]

The revolt against the Pacification Pact was led by Dino Grandi, Italo Balbo, and Piero Marsich, who inferred from Mussolini's tactics that he did not believe fascism to have a further revolutionary role. Frustrated by fascism's prosaic parliamentary outcome, they insisted that Italy's crisis required an extraparliamentary solution, a nonsocialist revolution to create entirely new political forms.[6] Now especially these and other young fascists affirmed their commitment to the neosyndicalist principles of De Ambris's *Carta del Carnaro*. Some even contemplated abandoning Mussolini in favor of D'Annunzio; Grandi and Balbo visited D'Annunzio in August 1921, urging him to lead fascism in an insurrectionary march on Rome.[7]

The crisis of fascism during the second half of 1921 seemed to enhance considerably the chance for the D'Annunzian, neosyndicalist alternative to fascism that De Ambris and Olivetti had been working to promote. Here if ever was the opportunity for national syndicalists and radical young war veterans to come together around D'Annunzio instead of Mussolini. But nothing came of it. D'Annunzio was evasive when Grandi and Balbo visited him in August; disillusioned, they began the gradual process of patching things up with Mussolini which would lead to a compromise in November. In December 1921, D'Annunzio refused support for the continuing activities of De Ambris and Olivetti, especially their plans for a new D'Annunzian, national syndicalist publication. In fact, D'Annunzio's perpetual hesitation undermined their efforts throughout 1921 and 1922. He refused to commit himself, because he was seeking to save himself as a unique figure above ordinary parties who could offer himself at a moment of crisis and save the nation.[8]

Meanwhile, in August of 1921, Mussolini wrote in *Il popolo d'Italia* that the provincial fascist opposition to the Pacification Pact left him "more or less indifferent," for fascism, he insisted, was not an end in itself, but only a means to ends of national reconstruction that had largely been achieved.[9] In fact, fascism was beginning to show signs of degeneration, but the Pacification Pact offered the movement a chance

to go beyond the sterile class hatred that threatened to suffocate it. Fascism had to make up its mind. If it was to be nothing but reaction, Mussolini claimed to be prepared to wash his hands of it.

Despite his solicitude for the national political situation, however, Mussolini was chiefly concerned with his own immediate prospects. He knew that D'Annunzio's appeal was greater than his own for the young provincial fascists; should fascism move in the direction Grandi advocated, explicitly embracing the principles of the *Carta del Carnaro*, there was a serious danger that Mussolini would end up losing out to D'Annunzio. Yet Mussolini did not want to abandon fascism, his political trump card, so despite his brave talk in *Il popolo d'Italia*, he was willing to give up the Pacification Pact in order to compromise with the dissidents and keep the movement together. At the same time, given the obscurity of D'Annunzio's intentions, the young radicals did not want to cut themselves off from Mussolini. They had concluded that, for better or worse, the chances for their fascist revolution depended on Mussolini, since he seemed to be the only fascist with sufficient national prominence to lead fascism to power. So gradually the dispute was patched up between August and November of 1921, when the Fascist movement held its third national congress at the Augusteo in Rome.[10] There the Pacification Pact was formally renounced, but the Grandi-Marsich group was forced to accept both a more conservative program than it preferred and the official transformation of fascism from a movement into a political party, a change which seemed to blunt its revolutionary thrust.

The leading spokesman for the anti-Mussolinian position was Dino Grandi. From his first days as a fascist in 1920, Grandi saw how heterogeneous fascism was and how some were seeking to exploit it, but he insisted that potentially, there was more to fascism than bourgeois reaction.[11] By the time of the dispute over the Pacification Pact, however, Grandi was growing impatient. Writing in October 1921, he found the electoral alliance with Giolitti and the Pacification Pact to be symptoms of the ongoing disarray in fascism, which seemed to lack doctrinal coherence and clear purposes.[12] Merely to transform fascism into a party, as some were proposing, was no solution. But Grandi insisted that through national syndicalism, fascism could realize its potential, bring to fruition the vague aspirations of the young veterans, and overcome the fundamental Italian political problem. By organizing society into economic groupings, fascism could fashion a new form of state, one which would make possible a more intense kind of mass participation.[13] Throughout the dispute over the Pacification Pact, Grandi contrasted the "national" and antipolitical vision of this program with the emphasis on parliamentary politics of Mussolinian fascism.

Grandi's national syndicalism was not confined to theory, for he and Italo Balbo were especially instrumental in developing a new system of labor organizations, broadly under the aegis of fascism, during 1921. That January, Grandi and Gino Baroncini set up a new Syndical Chamber of Bologna and called on the veteran syndicalist organizer Mario Racheli to direct the organization. Balbo followed suit in June of 1921, establishing a similar organization at Ferrara, which he entrusted to Edmondo Rossoni.[14]

Racheli and Rossoni would have preferred an alliance between fascism and the neosyndicalist UIL to the further development of this system of fascist unions. Along with Panunzio, they worked to win support within the UIL for such an alliance—especially prior to the confederation's fourth national congress, held at Rome in September 1921.[15] But by this time antifascist sentiment was too strong in the UIL, especially among the rank and file, but also among some of the leadership. For example, the General Secretary Guido Galbiati criticized fascism for reactionary violence against the workers in the speech which inaugurated the congress.[16] The UIL's inflexible position sparked some bitter criticism from Sergio Panunzio, who insisted that the confederation must not have understood the principles of Olivetti's *Manifesto dei sindacalisti*, even though the congress had unanimously adopted the document as the program of the UIL.[17] On the other hand, Olivetti defended the UIL, disputing Panunzio's charges.[18] But as it became apparent that there could be no alliance between the UIL and fascism, and as the fascists continued to develop unions of their own, more and more of the UIL's original leaders decided to follow Rossoni and Racheli into fascism.

Throughout 1921 fascist violence was essentially forcing the workers out of the old organizations and into the new ones controlled by fascists. As a result, fascism soon had a substantial trade union movement of its own. Mussolini was by no means responsible for these efforts, which were incompatible with the conciliatory strategy—envisioning accommodation with the existing labor movement—that he had in mind. Grandi opposed the Pacification Pact in part because he feared, quite plausibly, that the new Fascist syndical movement centered in the provinces of Ferrara and Bologna would be undermined if Mussolini's strategy were to succeed.[19] If fascism was to fulfill its long-term populist mission, it seemed, the violent seizure of hegemony over Italian labor had to continue. In pursuing trade union development, Grandi constantly emphasized the long-term political import of the new organizations. Speaking in Bologna in October of 1921, at a national meeting which established a federation of Fascist railroad workers' unions, he portrayed the new syndicates as the building blocks for the antipar-

liamentary state which fascism had a mission to create.[20] To achieve this political purpose, fascism had to organize producers of all varieties —not only manual labor, but also capitalists, managers, technicians, and the like.

At its national congress at the Augusteo in November, the Fascist movement formally ended the dispute over strategy with a typically ambiguous compromise. It can even be made to appear that both sides lost and that the only winners were the landowners who were exploiting fascism. Since Mussolini was forced to abandon the Pacification Pact and let the reaction continue, the outcome is often portrayed as Mussolini's surrender to the agrarian bloc.[21] At the same time, however, Mussolini was hardly embracing Grandi's national syndicalist conception of fascism; so the outcome was not an unequivocal victory for the dissidents, despite the repudiation of the Pacification Pact. They lost out to Mussolini on several important questions.

Mussolini, in fact, had not done badly. He emerged with his prestige and authority within fascism enhanced; the challenge to his personal ascendancy within the movement had fizzled, and he would have, in some ways at least, more freedom of movement from now on.[22] Moreover, fascism became a party as a result of the November compromise, abandoning its more ambiguous and potentially subversive status as a movement. This made fascism seem more respectable and made it in fact more readily controlled by the leadership. The compromise, then, in some ways facilitated Mussolini's continuing political maneuvering, although now, with the Pacification Pact scrapped, he could no longer hope to find allies on the left.

To be sure, it was Grandi who made the most notable speech to the Congress; soon published under the title "The Origins and the Mission of Fascism," it won him a good deal of applause and helped to publicize his revolutionary conception of fascism.[23] Grandi was not conciliatory on the issue of fascism's ultimate purposes; he roundly condemned the recent political heresy which had threatened to divert fascism from its revolutionary path. But for Mussolini, Grandi's speech about long-term goals was a small price to pay; he himself was now firmly in control of the immediate fortunes of the party, which was really all that mattered. Who could tell, after all, what might happen in the long term? And so, for Renzo De Felice, Grandi's speech at the Rome congress was nothing less than his swan song; the success which Grandi enjoyed was purely personal, not political.[24] In the same way Ferdinando Cordova considers Grandi to have been "defeated" at the Augusteo, while for Adrian Lyttelton, the national revolutionary current would reach its definitive end a bit later, early in 1922, when a follow-up challenge to Mussolini failed to get off the ground, partly

because this time Grandi refused to go along.[25] But there were very few swan songs and definitive defeats in Italian fascism. Before accepting such judgments as these, we must look more closely at what Grandi said at the Augusteo and at what happened in the months—and years—that followed.

In his speech Grandi indulged in a good deal of rhetoric, exalting, for example, "the heroic and Mazzinian beauty of sacrifice," but he still was able to rise to a political perspective, placing his fascist national syndicalism in the context of fundamental Italian problems. He linked the fascist revolt back through the Fiume experience and intervention to the deficiencies of the Risorgimento and stressed the continuity between the Mazzinian vision and fascism. Mazzini's idea of a tightly knit people's community had not been realized during the Risorgimento, but the war had been the catalyst for the long-awaited civic revival of Italy.[26] The broader, more idealistic perspective that Italians had gained through the war was a prerequisite for a more meaningful kind of popular political participation, which had to involve a vision of long-term goals, transcending immediate interests and hardships. A genuinely popular political movement like fascism had to have such a great moral end, or myth, to capture the imagination of the people, just as modern "popular" wars were experienced as great moral crusades. In the new order Grandi envisioned, "the people will participate in the political struggle just as they participated in the war."[27] His conception of popular politics, then, pointed toward totalitarian mobilization for great popular political projects, to be accompanied if necessary by military trappings and rhetoric.

This syndrome conforms to a widespread conception of fascist totalitarianism linking popular mobilization, grandiose projects to provide a kind of perpetual dynamism, and ultimately war. But Grandi's case makes clear that this pattern in Italian fascism cannot be explained in the conventional way, in terms of the rulers' need to manipulate the masses in order to keep the regime together—and enhance their own power. These notions came together in Grandi's mind because he was seriously searching for a way to overcome the separation of the people from the political order which seemed to be inherent in the liberal system, especially in Italy. For Grandi and other young fascists, war and "militarized" projects were ways to politicize people more fully, not merely ways to divert energies and keep people in check. To some extent, to be sure, Grandi's emphasis on the value of the war was rhetorical and implausible; to this extent, it cannot be taken at face value but requires deeper interpretation in sociopsychological terms. But Grandi's notion also had some basis in the actual Italian wartime experience, the major impact the war had had on popular political aware-

ness. It is still true, of course, that under certain circumstances fascism as a movement born of war might seek to return to its origins, to war as a source of popular purpose and virtue.

For Grandi, however, dynamism and myth were hardly sufficient in themselves; the key was institutional change. Fascism, he insisted, "has the responsibility first of all of resolving the great problem, before which socialism increasingly manifests its practical impotence: *that of making the masses adhere to the National State*. A solution possible only if fascism, casting aside the old liberal and collectivist conceptions, becomes the basis and instrument of a *national syndicalism*, which considers the individual no longer as a subject or citizen, but as a producer, and recognizes in the syndicate the cell of a new and more vast social function . . . destined to transform . . . the decaying parliamentary state of today."[28] Grandi bitterly attacked the recent involvement in parliamentary politics as a betrayal of fascism's revolutionary mission.[29] It was especially foolish to have gotten mixed up with Giolitti, the incarnation of all that Fascism was to overcome. Despite Giolitti's sinister temptations, however, fascism had not been ruined; mass fascism had remained hostile to parliamentary fascism—and thus the rebellion against Mussolini and his parliamentary strategy. So as the dispute over the Pacification Pact came to an end, Grandi was claiming victory.

Compromise between Mussolini and Grandi was possible because the two leaders were operating on different levels and thus saw the dispute and its outcome from different perspectives; each could believe he had gotten the better of the bargain because the compromise left the situation sufficiently open for each to pursue his own course. It removed the immediate source of conflict without settling the deeper issue over which there could be no compromise—whether fascism was to be parliamentary or revolutionary.

The radicals had forced Mussolini to abandon the immediate strategy he had envisioned, involving compromise with the Left, but not his overall strategy of parliamentary compromise, so Mussolini continued his political maneuvering, unleashing or restricting his newly established party according to short-term tactical considerations. But while the radicals had not converted Mussolini to a revolutionary position, they had achieved a crucial success in sabotaging Mussolini's chances to maneuver on the parliamentary left and to establish ties with the existing labor movement. Since the reaction was to continue, he was more or less stuck on the right. And as far as their goals were concerned, it was not parliamentary maneuvering in general, but accommodation with the established Left that threatened immediate strangulation. By compelling Mussolini to abandon the Pacification Pact, the

dissidents had won the opportunity to continue the process they had already started—forcing the workers out of their old unions and into fascist unions. Since Mussolini had to abandon his version of a leftist fascism, they still had the chance to develop their alternative, more grandiose kind of leftist fascism, which seemed to require new syndical organizations and hegemony over the rank and file of the existing left.

Because the more limited and more obviously leftist fascism of 1919 died with the Pacification Pact in 1921, and because Mussolini, as a result, found space for his immediate political maneuvering on the right, the outcome of the crisis of 1921 has usually been understood as the definitive turn to the right of both Mussolini and fascism. For Renzo De Felice, the negative reaction to the Pacification Pact indicates an irreconcilability with socialism which puts fascism in 1921 clearly on the right. Mussolini quickly followed his movement and moved to the right when he realized it would not accept the Pacification Pact.[30] Ernst Nolte portrays Mussolini's abandonment of the Pacification Pact as his moral capitulation to Nationalism, as the end of his unsuccessful struggle to maintain intellectual continuity with his leftist past.[31] Similarly Carlo Vallauri finds it no accident that Grandi and those supporting the new national syndicates opposed the Pacification Pact and struggled to undermine the autonomy of the labor movement.[32] To him the whole pattern is evidence of the hegemony of Nationalism within fascism.

These formulations, with their rigidly dualistic conceptions of left and right, are all seriously misleading. The dissidents ruined whatever chance fascism had to establish links with the existing labor movement, but from their perspective fascism would have far more potential for radical populist innovation if it developed its own syndical movement. They had undermined the possibility of one kind of left fascism in the name of a more sweeping and all-encompassing left fascism. This forced Mussolini to maneuver on the political right for now, but that was incidental as far as fascism's long-term purposes were concerned. The future remained open after the November congress, but it had become more uncertain, potentially more revolutionary, with higher stakes for fascism than Mussolini had ever imagined. The new radical fascism, with its links to the Fascist labor movement, had held its own, manifesting sufficient strength to survive even Mussolini's opposition. For the moment, Mussolini might seem to have regained the initiative, but the process the radicals envisioned was a long one. And they had served notice that they did not intend to settle for compromise within the old political system. Grandi's speech at the Augusteo was not the swan song of radical, populist, neosyndicalist fascism, but its definitive inauguration.

To be sure, the new Fascist program of December 1921 contained virtually nothing of Grandi's national syndicalism, only a vague reference to corporations.[33] However, it had not been a now-or-never situation in 1921; in the aftermath of the November congress, the Fascist unions were not a major factor in the immediate power configuration or in Mussolini's political maneuvering, but Grandi and the others were operating on a different level, concerned with the long-term ends of fascism. So despite the vagueness of the 1921 program, they continued to develop the fascist syndical movement as the institutional basis for a new order and to insist that fascism's ultimate raison d'être was revolutionary.

This revolutionary goal did not require revolutionary tactics—a coup d'état, an insurrectionary March on Rome. So Grandi, more the flexible politician than some of his colleagues, began to accept a moderate, "reformist" tactic in 1922, above all because he saw the need for tactical compromise with Mussolini. The tactical issue led to a split between Grandi and Piero Marsich, who had been more deeply opposed than Grandi to the transformation of fascism into a party in 1921, and who continued to insist that the process of replacing the liberal state could only be initiated by extralegal action. When Mussolini continued to maneuver within the system after the November congress, Marsich concluded that fascism had no revolutionary future and left the movement altogether early in 1922. To the observer preoccupied with tactics and the short-term level, Grandi's agreement with Mussolini, and Marsich's disillusionment, seem to confirm that the radical fascists had been defeated for good in November of 1921.[34] But Grandi emphasized explicitly that his disagreement with Marsich was over tactics and methods, not over the ultimate goals of fascism.[35] There was no reason why fascism could not implement its revolution gradually, from within the old state. So Grandi was not giving up his major political objectives, which remained quite different from Mussolini's and essentially the same as Marsich's.

Ultimately, we can understand the stakes in the Pacification Pact dispute only if we manage to grasp the implications of the objectives of both "syndicalists" like Grandi and the wider groups of lower-middle-class fascists who were making fascism a mass movement. It is essential to recognize the extent to which their objectives converged, giving the new radical fascism a measure of coherence and force. Grandi's neosyndicalism was not merely a variety of trade unionism concerned with immediate working class interests, and his chances for success did not require that he immediately develop an autonomous power base within the working class.[36] Only if we manage to avoid a preoccupation with short-term class interests and a rigidly dualistic, left-right

conception of the political alternatives, can we grasp the broader political purposes underlying Grandi's theoretical position and practical strategy. Those purposes complemented the vaguer ideals of the wider groups of young fascists who also disliked Mussolini's moderate strategy of 1921.

Many observers have recognized that there was more to the new fascism of 1921, even to the violent *squadrismo*, than pure agrarian reaction. For Renzo De Felice, for example, those involved were often threatened middle-class elements who saw fascism as a force for moral renewal in opposition to the capitalists and the workers, both of which seemed to be egotistical forces.[37] These fascists were deeply resentful when Mussolini and lieutenants like Cesare Rossi claimed that fascism had become mere class reaction and terror. But implicitly for De Felice, "this confused and contradictory amalgam" of fascist aspirations could have no positive outcome; those aspirations stemmed more from a psychological-moral crisis than from real political awareness. Elsewhere De Felice discerns in the new fascism a "reactionary anarchism"—"a kind of antipolitical anarchism" viewing politics as the source of all Italian problems—that he finds simply absurd.[38] Apparently, then, this form of fascism had no real potential for political development.

It is certainly valid to characterize this petty bourgeois fascism as antipolitical, and no doubt this impulse was absurd in some ways, for it was both excessive and partly unrealizable. But the antipolitical impulse developed enough coherence to guide the actions of some fascists over the long term; it was possible to try, at least, to create an "antipolitical" order, repudiating not only conventional politics, but also class particularism. This was precisely what Grandi envisioned through the neosyndicalist program that he proposed for fascism. And despite the compromise of November 1921, many fascists continued to dream of replacing the liberal parliamentary system with an order transcending politics and class particularism. Their aspirations were not very coherent, but the potential for a neosyndicalist direction for fascism remained —and remained to be drawn out and shaped. Prospects for a radical fascism did not depend on such matters as the autonomy of the fascist syndicates vis-à-vis the new Fascist party or the enthusiasm with which the workers joined the Fascist unions in 1921 and 1922. To understand the new fascism of 1921, we must grasp the relationships among all the components—petty bourgeois resentments, violent *squadrismo*, fascist trade unionism, the antipolitical impulse, the ideals of the war, and the neosyndicalist idea. All of them had their place in Dino Grandi's conception of fascism.

The possibility that this conception could have led to something other than reaction is obviously hard to grasp, given the aura of inevita-

bility that hindsight casts on events. Certainly, however, a different outcome is theoretically conceivable, and it was possible for contemporaries to envision an alternative that could be pursued in practice. And only practice—over the long term—could indicate how much chance of success there was. Grandi and the others were in many ways naive, but their conception was capable of further implementation in practice, and they went on with it even after November 1921, and even after Grandi himself accepted tactical moderation. Despite temporary setbacks, tactical compromises, and changes in strategy, the radical populist push continued after 1921 and reached a climax only late in 1925. The period must be seen as a whole, for an unbroken chain links the dispute of 1921 to the commitment to institutional change that had been made by late 1925.

Continued pressure during 1922 forced Mussolini to countenance further outbreaks of *squadrismo* although, typically, he managed to manipulate the ongoing threat of fascist violence to further his own political ambitions. But because the struggle for control of the labor movement was still going on, and because an insurrectionary conquest of the state remained a serious possibility, discontents with Mussolini's parliamentary maneuvering and rightward orientation did not prove debilitating.[39] For now, deeper questions about the purpose of power remained in abeyance, but they could not be postponed indefinitely.

Nevertheless, Mussolini and the fascist labor organizers were frequently at odds, and the union leaders could not agree among themselves how "Fascist" and "political" the new organizations should be. Those like Rossoni and Racheli who most feared contamination by the Fascist party, with its focus on parliamentary politics, sought to maximize the autonomy of the new unions. The matter came to a head in January 1922, when representatives of the fascist syndical organizations met at Bologna and formed the National Confederation of Syndical Corporations, to be headquartered in Bologna. The confederation was to be nominally autonomous—the term "Fascist" was omitted from its name—but it was to maintain close links with the Fascist party. The leaders of the member unions had to be party members, although the rank and file were not required to be. The overall compromise was essentially in accord with Grandi's position, though it represented something of a victory for Michele Bianchi and Massimo Rocca, who represented Mussolini and the party at the meeting, and something of a defeat for those like Rossoni and Italo Balbo who had sought greater autonomy for the confederation.[40]

But ambiguity was in a way the essence of Italian fascism, which generally eschewed clear-cut victories and defeats, and which had an uncanny knack for leaving things open despite the appearance of a definitive decision. In this case the loser Rossoni was promptly made head of the new union confederation, a position of considerable power which he held until being forced out in 1928. Meeting in Milan on 10 February 1922, the party directorate and the provisional central committee of the confederation elected Rossoni general secretary and decided to publish a newspaper, *Il lavoro d'Italia*, also under his direction, to serve as the confederation's journalistic organ.[41] *Il lavoro d'Italia* immediately sought to develop a firmer doctrinal basis for fascism's socioeconomic organizations; the long-term direction and purpose of fascism still seemed to be open, even though certain tactical problems had been more or less settled. So Rossoni, seeking a theoretical statement for the first issue of *Il lavoro d'Italia*, turned to Sergio Panunzio.

By this time Panunzio had become much concerned with the tangled relationships—on the level of practice—among socialism, the labor movement, fascism, and postwar Italian renewal. We find him grappling with this set of problems, for example, in a confused but highly indicative article published in July of 1921 in *Cultura sindacale*, a nonfascist journal designed "to educate the workers."[42] After stressing that socialism, despite the excesses of the *biennio rosso*, must be revived and not buried, Panunzio warned that those who sought to create socialism must have the courage to oppose the proletariat for the moment, "in order to restore its sense of limits." He also suggested that fascism could perhaps play a crucial role in the long-term creation of socialism. At some points in the article, Panunzio seems to have expected fascism to promote socialism only indirectly, as the strong conservative bourgeois party necessary to restore the healthy class struggle crucial for proletarian maturation. Other Italian leftists, including Enrico Leone, were beginning to envision the same useful role for fascism.[43] But Panunzio, still in a period of ambiguity while on his way to fascism, also implied that fascism might play a more direct role, that fascism itself might create socialism. He found it essential to warn, however, that fascism must not become an end in itself; it could only be a means—to essentially the same socialist objective which he had always held.

We have seen that Panunzio was bitter over the UIL's repudiation of fascism at its congress of September 1921, which Olivetti had urged him to attend. At issue was not only the question of the immediate relationship between fascism and the UIL, but also the deeper problem of whether nonmanual workers should be included in the neosyndicalist union movement. Panunzio insisted that technical, "intellectual" employees, like those in banking, for example, were indeed "practical and positive" forces with essential parts to play in the neosyndicalist

order that Olivetti had outlined in his *Manifesto dei sindacalisti*. The UIL had adopted this *Manifesto* as its program, but it continued to insist on proletarian exclusivism nevertheless, so Panunzio concluded that the congress had not really understood the principles of Olivetti's document: "It is no longer a matter—and this the congress failed to grasp—of *pure* professional Syndicalism—isolated, localistic, partial, negative, prone to indulge in strikes—but of general, integral, organic, reconstructive Syndicalism; not of *a single* class—the workers—but of *all* the working classes—manual and intellectual—of the free proletariat and of the administrative proletariat."[44] Panunzio's verbal gymnastics here are typical and indicate the syndicalists' reluctance to admit the populist or petty bourgeois underpinnings of their position. Syndicalism was for a wide spectrum of the society, not just the workers; lots of socioeconomic sectors had progressive roles to play. But the proletariat proper was by no means to be excluded; the syndicalists genuinely wanted its support and participation. Meanwhile, young fascists like Marsich and Grandi were also insisting on the need to include non-manual, "intellectual," middle-class labor in the organizational network they were developing.[45]

In pondering the UIL's recent congress, Panunzio concluded that this particular confederation ought to disappear, but he was not yet ready to give up on the existing labor movement.[46] He felt that the CGL itself might still have a progressive role, since it seemed to be—and was—moving away from its long-standing relationship with the Socialist party. So the future, as Panunzio saw it in October 1921, depended in part on the direction of the CGL, but it also depended on what happened within fascism—whether fascism evolved toward national syndicalism.

Panunzio expanded his ideas about fascism and the labor movement in March 1922, in his contribution to the first issue of Rossoni's *Il lavoro d'Italia*. His article, in the form of a letter to Rossoni, called on fascism to organize the masses as the basis for a neosyndicalist state.[47] A single, unified "labor" movement had to be created, but the problem, Panunzio recognized clearly, was how to go about this in practice. Viewing the current ambiguous situation in fascism, Panunzio was not at all sure about the value of the Fascist unions and still hoped that fascism could work through sectors of the existing labor movement, especially the CGL. Perhaps the CGL could be brought intact under fascism's nationalist and antipolitical umbrella. But he emphasized that "antinational" organizations would have to be excluded, and Rossoni commented at the conclusion of Panunzio's article that his own newly established National Confederation of Syndical Corporations would now become the center of attraction for all the national elements.[48]

Panunzio wanted to consider working with the CGL because he had doubts about Rossoni's prospects, given the partly reactionary purposes fascism was presently being made to serve. He feared that fascism would simply destroy the old unions and disperse the workers, rather than develop alternative organizations that could be used to integrate the laboring masses into political life. It seemed clear to him that the neosyndicalist potential in fascism might be dissolved altogether by those exploiting fascism's anti-Socialist activity for their own ends. He had no sympathy whatsoever for the purposes behind this reaction: "Only fools and deluded people, only niggardly conservatives and defenders of 'obscure and shady interests' can take delight in and hope to exploit the 'dispersal of the workers.'"[49] In general, Panunzio's concerns in this article manifest his conviction that despite everything—the workers' neutralism and quasi-Bolshevism, the syndicalists' repudiation of Marxism—proletarian involvement was essential for the Italian renewal he had in mind.

Although his conception of fascism's role was still ambiguous, Panunzio was obviously well aware of the gamble involved in joining forces with fascism. But despite the risks, fascism seemed to offer great possibilities if the syndicalists worked to push it, to shape it, to give it direction. Like Panunzio, most of the other syndicalists had also begun moving to fascism, one by one, during 1921, although Olivetti held out until 1924, and De Ambris remained in opposition. It was evident that fascism included many of the idealistic young war veterans. It was also clear that these fascists were quite responsive to neosyndicalist principles, which they had discovered especially in the *Carta del Carnaro*. And they envisioned a radical, antiparliamentary direction for fascism, as the dispute over the Pacification Pact made clear. At the same time, many Fiume veterans, activists at first in De Ambris's organization of exlegionnaires, began passing to fascism in 1921, as the futility of waiting for D'Annunzio to lead the third-way, "national" revolution became clear.[50] They obviously felt that fascism could become something more than pure agrarian reaction. Moreover, fascism's own trade union activity indicated at least the potential for some kind of link between fascism and sectors of the working classes.

The fascists were seeking to force the workers into Fascist organizations by any means necessary, but Fascist union leaders, in 1922 and during the years that followed, did pursue the interests of their members and did not hesitate to criticize the employers for failures of collaboration.[51] During 1922, there was much friction between union

leaders and the agrarians, who dragged their feet in respecting agreements they had made with the Fascist unions. Mussolini, attuned to short-term power considerations and still suspicious of the Fascist union movement, forced the labor organizers to ease their pressure on the agrarians to abide by these accords. The resulting frustrations led the Fascist unions to a major strike in the province of Ferrara in May 1922.[52] Indeed, the strike remained a tactical option for several more years; in March 1925, for example, Augusto Turati led the Fascist metalworkers' union of Brescia in a strike which quickly spread to other major industrial centers.[53]

As fascism developed during 1921 and 1922, the syndicalists began to believe that it had the potential to become something other than a narrow reactionary instrument or a limited parliamentary party. The Fascist movement seemed to be the nucleus of the new nonproletarian revolutionary force, linked to the war experience, which the syndicalists' revised doctrine required. To be sure, fascism as a movement and doctrine was still being formed, but the syndicalists themselves could shape it, giving its uncertain radical tendencies a definite national syndicalist direction.[54] In becoming fascists, then, the syndicalists were adopting no new principles; no further theoretical evolution was required. Neither did they place any particular emphasis on the personality of Mussolini as they passed to fascism. The neosyndicalist doctrine had no place for charismatic leadership concepts, nor did Mussolini, with his political maneuvering and tactical concerns, seem to embody the revolutionary potential which the syndicalists saw in fascism. The syndicalists, then, were not making some sort of new intellectual commitment, only a political decision based on their assessment of fascism's potential for radical change.

It was this assessment that Alceste De Ambris did not share, even though he had been a full participant in the syndicalist intellectual evolution from 1917 to 1921. He diverged from his colleagues simply because he did not think fascism could achieve their common goals. De Ambris proved correct in his belief that fascism would never implement the neosyndicalist revolution, but he rejected fascism on the basis of an interpretation that was not entirely accurate. Fascism, he felt in 1921, would merely strengthen the existing political caste led by Giolitti.[55] By September 1922 he shared the view of many Italian leftists that fascism would soon disintegrate because of its internal contradictions, the incompatibility between its revolutionary and reactionary components.[56] Although these internal contradictions were real enough, fascism did not disintegrate but ended up moving much further in the direction of radical change than De Ambris had thought possible in 1921 and 1922. The other syndicalists had greater confidence

in the potential of fascism's revolutionary component, but they felt that it could come to fruition only if they worked to shape it. The future was still open.

De Ambris went into exile in France in 1923, never to return to Italy. After the failure of an antifascist general strike in August 1922, he had worked hard to promote the unification of the Italian labor movement, proposing to rebuild from the bottom, through a constituent assembly of labor. As a basis for unity, De Ambris proposed common acceptance of both the "national principle" and the principle of union independence from political parties. He blamed the CGL for the failure of these efforts in a bitter postmortem published in *Sindacalismo*, a weekly which he and his collaborators Rinaldo Rigola and Guido Galbiati put out from January through April 1923.[57] This publication not only called for a constituent assembly of labor, but also claimed title to the legacy of Mazzini, Corridoni, and the *Carta del Carnaro*, seeking to preserve the national syndicalist patrimony from what seemed to be contamination in fascism.

From his exile in France, De Ambris continued to portray fascism as too divided against itself to have any positive prospects, despite the sincerity of some of those involved in it. In a perceptive article in *Mercure de France* in February 1923, he explained to a French audience that fascism did contain a revolutionary component, which had developed largely from the war experience of the junior officers. De Ambris was still bitter over the Socialist party's uncomprehending, mocking attitude toward these young veterans and the war experience. But fascism also contained a component committed to stopping any radical change; if it managed to break out of its present equivocal position, it could not survive. One way or the other, fascism would probably degenerate into a mere reactionary dictatorship.[58]

De Ambris had given up on fascism for good, but fascism had not given up on him. To those involved in the ongoing struggle for a corporative state, De Ambris continued to seem a potential ally. Twice serious attempts were made to enlist his efforts. The first of these endeavors, late in 1923 and early in 1924, even involved Mussolini himself. Seeking to maximize his freedom of maneuver after the March on Rome, Mussolini hoped to diversify his political base by establishing more genuine links with the working class. De Ambris perhaps could provide a kind of bridge, helping fascism win over more of the workers, so Mussolini seriously but indirectly sought to convince him to return.[59] Mussolini's intentions are hard to gauge, but no doubt De Ambris was to have a major post in the regime, perhaps Minister of Labor, or perhaps a position in the Fascist labor movement at the expense of Rossoni, for there was still friction between Rossoni and the leadership in the

party. At any rate, De Ambris had a wider vision than Rossoni, and he was not personally tied to the existing Fascist union confederation, so perhaps he could have promoted an understanding between fascism and the CGL.

The fascist most directly involved in this overture to De Ambris was Curzio Suckert, who even visited the veteran syndicalist in Paris seeking to convince him to return. From his national syndicalist perspective, Suckert obviously envisioned De Ambris as an ally in the ongoing struggle within fascism for popular corporativist development. But De Ambris refused to go along, explaining his reasons in a letter to Suckert late in January 1924.[60] Genuine innovation, he said, required syndical autonomy, the repression of unjust violence, and, above all, corporative representation, the only way that fascist antiparliamentarianism could transcend mere demagoguery. At present, too much of the old Italy remained, and De Ambris saw no probability that fascism would return to its radical origins and carry out a real revolution in Italian values and institutions.

De Ambris was one of thirteen anti-Fascist exiles stripped of their Italian citizenship in 1926, but his presence continued to be felt, especially with the debates surrounding the development of the corporative system in the 1930s. The law of 5 February 1934, setting up corporations for the first time, aroused widespread interest abroad, even in the Italian exile community in France. De Ambris felt he should make his opinions known, and his niece suggested that he write a full-length book on corporativism. In his letters to her early in 1934, De Ambris expressed the same old scorn for the liberal parliamentary system and considerable pride in having been the first to offer a design for a corporative state, in the *Carta del Carnaro*.[61] He admitted he lacked solid evidence about fascist corporativism, but he feared that conservative interests within fascism were exploiting the corporativist label, developing a system lacking vitality and purpose. When some of De Ambris's old syndicalists friends within fascism learned of his intention to write a book on corporativism, they let him know that they might be able to use his ideas to influence Mussolini, and thereby to give fascist corporativism a clearly leftist direction. De Ambris apparently took this possibility into account, though the book was certainly not favorable to fascism. *Dopo un ventennio di rivoluzione: il corporativismo* [Corporativism after twenty years of revolution] was completed just before his death in December 1934 and published posthumously in France a few months later; it was not allowed into Italy.

So De Ambris watched from a distance as his long-time colleagues sought through fascism to implement the neosyndicalist vision which he had helped to elaborate. They had an important measure of success;

their continuing efforts assisted the process of self-definition going on within fascism and helped to push the movement into radical change during the period from 1921 to 1925. Especially after the March on Rome, it was hard to avoid the key question—power for what?—and the syndicalists were among the few who had some convincing answers.

Fascism's purpose was still very much up in the air when Mussolini became prime minister in October 1922. During his first year and a half in power, Mussolini seemed to be more concerned with containing the radical energies in his own party than with directing those energies toward radical change. The old elites tolerated Mussolini as the man who could keep order, and this required that he be able to control not only Socialist radicalism, which was no longer much of a threat anyway, but above all fascist radicalism, the revolutionary pretensions—and the violence—of the militants in his own party. Mussolini was generally willing to oblige. When it was tactically expedient, he indulged in some tough talk, including talk about further revolution; and probably he really did vacillate, since the anti-establishment revolutionary in him was not entirely dead. But he had no desire to jeopardize the unique position of power he had managed to achieve. So the March on Rome had brought to power Mussolini the legitimate prime minister, wearing the traditional frock coat and top hat for his weekly consultations with the king, not Mussolini the black-shirted Duce of revolutionary fascism.

As prime minister, Mussolini wanted to persevere—to stay in power indefinitely if possible—but not in order to implement a coherent set of objectives. He certainly did not set out to "coordinate" all elements of the national life, to make them instruments of his purposes, the way Hitler did at the outset of the Nazi regime. Mussolini felt as many Italians did that the pacification of the country had been completed after the dislocations of the war and the *biennio rosso*, and that now Italy could return to normal. With Mussolini as prime minister, there would be some changes, but not revolutionary changes. Government would become more vigorous and efficient; the swollen Italian bureaucracy would be streamlined; there would be more emphasis on authority and law and order. There would be less party squabbling and less of the consequent governmental instability. The trains would run on time. As we saw in the last chapter, Mussolini seems to have seen himself as uniquely qualified to serve as political mediator and unifier. But there was no suggestion that the parliamentary system was to be undermined, that the masses were to be mobilized through a variety of Fascist party organizations, that Italy was soon to be on the way to a monolithic, quasi-totalitarian state.

Mussolini was not seeking to eliminate all the competing political forces, but to absorb them.

The most radical measure which Mussolini's government sponsored during its first year and a half was the Acerbo electoral law, which was passed late in 1923. Replacing the proportional representation established in 1919, the new law specified that the party winning a plurality of the vote—as long as it was at least 25 percent—would gain two-thirds of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies. At first glance, this appears a means to make fascism the exclusive master of the country, but it was intended to eliminate the governmental instability that can ensue when a multiple party system is combined with proportional representation. Thus it had considerable support even among liberals. Mussolini, in his strategy for the elections of April 1924, used the new law not to give his party absolute power, but to lure a wide variety of existing political forces under the fascist umbrella through a broad electoral coalition.

In a perceptive article written just after the elections, the young liberal Piero Gobetti pointed out that the 1924 elections had been in the same tradition as the national bloc elections of 1921, except that the pupil Mussolini had proved more adept than the teacher Giolitti. Mussolini had become the "super-Giolitti"; his neotransformism was bringing to nought the aspirations for serious change that Gobetti admitted could be found in fascism. Gobetti's interpretation of the outcome of fascism's first eighteen months constituted an implicit challenge to serious fascists: "The most obvious result of the Ministry's electoral victory, then, is the defeat of fascism. The March on Rome has been for nothing."[62]

Given Mussolini's course in power, it is hardly surprising that there was much frustration among those who expected a radical change in the Italian political system after the March on Rome. The syndicalists worried aloud that fascism might settle for a foothold within the system and not fulfill its revolutionary mission.[63] It seemed obvious to radical fascists that they had to keep pushing, to emphasize that the defeat of maximalist Socialism and the advent of Mussolini's ministry did not mean it was time to return to normal. In an article in *Gerarchia* in the aftermath of the March on Rome, the tactically moderate Dino Grandi emphasized that the real fascist revolution had scarcely begun and now had to be carried forward—toward the definitive transformation of the Italian state.[64] Giuseppe Bottai, speaking in Rome early in 1924, cautioned that fascism was presently still cleaning up the problems left by others; it had not yet begun its original phase, becoming the instrument of a radical democracy.[65]

Writing in December 1923, Sergio Panunzio urged his countrymen

"to be the first to give Europe a real, living example of a national state based on syndicates, which is the ultimate end and the primary and essential spirit of fascism."[66] In his numerous speeches and newspaper articles, he sought to indicate the place to start, calling for obligatory syndical membership, juridical recognition of the syndicates and their collective contracts, and a magistracy of labor.[67] The syndical network would gradually become the foundation of the state, the source of all private and public law. It was Panunzio, especially, who injected these proposals into the ongoing discussion among Fascist union leaders and idealists about the role of the Fascist union movement in the process of change that fascism was supposed to be initiating. In May 1924, for example, he spoke at a meeting of the national council of the Fascist union confederation, which included some of his proposals, including the labor magistracy, in its final resolution.[68] As some Fascist union leaders began calling on the government to bring collective labor contracts under the sphere of law, as a preliminary to full juridical recognition of the unions, Panunzio asserted that these measures would necessarily lead to obligatory syndical membership and a neosyndicalist state.[69]

Panunzio's proposals, however, certainly did not win universal acceptance. "Volt" (Vincenzo Fani-Ciotti) disputed Panunzio's arguments from a Nationalist perspective,[70] anticipating the objections that Carlo Costamagna would raise, in a more systematic way, during his important polemic with Panunzio in 1926. Even left-leaning fascists who agreed that the syndical movement had to play the central role in fascism did not always agree with the strategy Panunzio suggested. For example Silvio Galli, writing in Bottai's *Critica fascista*, attacked the coercive features of Panunzio's conception, especially the notion of obligatory syndical membership.[71] Emphasizing syndical autonomy, freedom of association, and the basic right of individuals to determine their own interests, Galli argued that Panunzio's program would merely intensify class hatreds; even the labor magistracy would lead to overcentralization and corruption. Augusto De Marsanich similarly objected to Panunzio's design out of concern for the individual and for spontaneous development in the unions.[72] Although he agreed that fascism should be based on its syndical organizations, De Marsanich feared that the relationship between state and syndicate that Panunzio advocated would invite bureaucratic interference. He even insisted that strikes would continue to be useful. Galli and De Marsanich were more liberal than Panunzio, but Panunzio's more thoroughgoing and totalitarian conception would have greater influence on subsequent development.

Despite much discussion, the institutional harvest of 1923 was

hardly encouraging for fascist radicals. Rossoni's attempt to extend his organizational network over the employers through a system of mixed syndicates came to nought in December with the Palazzo Chigi pact, which established that separate organizations for workers and employers would be maintained. There were tentative attempts to develop *gruppi di competenza*, or technical councils, to supplement the parliamentary system, yet even this mild innovation got bogged down in the infighting among tactically moderate fascists like Bottai, extremist provincial leaders like Farinacci, and union leaders like Rossoni.[73] Fascism hardly seemed to be on the way to a postliberal, totalitarian corporativism, but an extraordinary event in 1924 changed the situation dramatically, enabling the disparate energies at work within fascism to fall, temporarily, into more effective alignment. As a result, fascism moved unequivocally beyond liberalism at last.

When Panunzio enthusiastically proclaimed a few years later that "the Fascist state is in essence the syndical and corporative state," he admitted that this happy outcome had required the severe crisis occasioned by the Matteotti murder in 1924, for it was only in this context that fascism had finally managed "to free itself from conservative ties and impediments."[74] And indeed the Matteotti murder and its aftermath constituted the real turning point in the history of the Fascist regime. Giacomo Matteotti was a moderate Socialist deputy and an outspoken antifascist. In June of 1924, not long after he had courageously risen in the Chamber to denounce the fascist violence that accompanied the April election, Matteotti was murdered by fascist thugs. A great public outcry followed, keeping Mussolini's government in serious jeopardy during the rest of 1924. Mussolini seems seriously to have considered resignation at first, but after he weathered the initial shock and uncertainty, he decided to persevere, to play for time. At first his political survival seemed to require a more explicit commitment to moderation, so he took a number of steps to bring fascist extremists under control. Even when the Mazzinian syndicalist Armando Casalini was murdered on a Rome trolley in September, apparently in retaliation for the murder of Matteotti, Mussolini insisted on rigorous discipline and nonviolence. At the same time, however, those discontented with the mild outcome of the fascist revolution saw the crisis as a precious opportunity to force fascism beyond parliamentary compromise and on to a new order. Some, like Curzio Suckert, stood ready to condone further violence; others, like Agostino Lanzillo, insisted that more violence could only be counterproductive. The situation was now so dynamic, however, that the efforts of radical fascists who disagreed over tactics were complementary. All agreed that fascism could—and should—survive only if it finally committed itself to a definite course of radical change and forcefully began to implement it. And now, finally, Mussolini's predicament provided an opening. Since his personal prestige had been severely shaken, he could no longer justify his government on the old basis. If he was to remain in power, fascism would have to prove its credibility as an innovative political force by embarking on a program of institutional change.[75]

In this uncertain situation, ideas could have a real impact on events, since there was a vacuum to be filled and the content, or a credible illusion of content, had to come from somewhere. And it was now, with the future of Mussolini's government in doubt, that A. O. Olivetti became an active fascist publicist; he was hardly jumping on a bandwagon. Olivetti had remained skeptical of fascism's revolutionary capacity after the March on Rome, feeling that fascism would settle for power within the parliamentary system: "The so-called fascist revolution is up to now nothing more than a parliamentary revolution and represents little more than did the coming of the Left to power in 1876. It was accomplished by Fascist politicians, and the syndical corporations have so far remained outside. No government program has yet been developed that could lead one to foresee an integral renewal of Italian life; if such a program were to be developed, we would be the first to applaud the fascist takeover."[76] Olivetti anticipated a struggle within fascism between neosyndicalism and conventional politics, but he was not yet prepared to lend his energies to the former current. But in mid-1924, with fascism in crisis, he began, tentatively at first, to identify himself and his ideas with fascism.[77] While he deplored the Matteotti murder and warned against further violence, Olivetti felt that now fascism could no longer settle for the uncertain compromise of its first twenty months in power.

Since Mussolini realized he needed help, he probably made a personal effort to win over Olivetti, no doubt making certain commitments to him. One contemporary report suggested that Olivetti was to replace Rossoni as the head of the Fascist union confederation.[78] There was considerable dissatisfaction with Rossoni's leadership within the movement, and the appointment of Olivetti would have signaled a new, potentially more radical beginning. Rossoni managed to survive, but meanwhile Olivetti became a regular collaborator on *Il popolo d'Italia* and soon was named to the commission to propose institutional changes which was an immediate fruit of the crisis. In his first articles in *Il popolo d'Italia*, he adopted a pseudonym—"Lo spettatore"—which indicates that he still had reservations; in any case, the style and content of these articles surely made the identity of this "spectator" clear

to contemporaries. Olivetti's first article under this pseudonym, featured on the front page of *Il popolo d'Italia* on 11 July 1924, was prefaced by an editorial note, no doubt by Mussolini's brother Arnaldo, which introduced "Lo spettatore" as "an expert on Italian politics" and "a rigorous student of social and syndical questions." After noting that the author had neglected unnecessarily fascism's achievements of the past two years, the editor stressed that the article contained some profound truths.

Olivetti sought to place the present crisis in historical perspective.[79] Given the bankruptcy of the old ruling class after the war, he claimed, leadership in creating a new Italy should have fallen to the Socialist party, which could have brought together the workers and the young veterans in a broad national democracy. But the Socialists had preferred instead "the puerile satisfaction of trying to show that they had been right with their neutralism," and fascism had fallen heir to their mission. Now, however, fascism was merely drifting and could not long survive unless it took on a more precise commitment—which for Olivetti, of course, could only be the neosyndicalist revolution. It was up to fascism to spearhead "the organic, national transformation of the forms of production, of the system of representation, of the parliament, of the entire life of the country—to minimize the political and to maximize the economic." A few days later, in another featured article in *Il popolo d'Italia*, Olivetti proposed syndical representation as the first concrete step on the way to a postliberal order.[80] He insisted, however, that before anything positive could be accomplished, extremist fascist violence, which simply kept the country in an uproar, had to be eliminated for good.

The other syndicalists took similar positions during the crisis of 1924, calling on fascism to intensify its activities in the face of liberal criticism, to get on with the positive tasks of national syndicalist revolution.[81] Lanzillo condemned the extremists and their "second wave" of violence, but he went on to remind fascists of the mission of their movement: to bridge the gap between the workers and the state, to create a society based on collectivist law.[82] Late in December 1924, as pressure for change was reaching a climax, he wrote to Mussolini advocating modification of the electoral system, to depart from liberal democratic procedures.[83] He stressed that the discontents in the Fascist party which had led to the present crisis—and even to the new wave of violence—were not without foundation. So despite his repudiation of extremist tactics, Lanzillo was trying to push Mussolini to abandon the liberal parliamentary system once and for all. It is worth emphasizing that Lanzillo, who had been the syndicalist closest to Sorel, always stressed that violence was not inherently creative; it was only an instrument, and its value depended on the value of the ideal to be implemented. Late in 1925, he acknowledged that there had been much useless violence in fascism and insisted that now, with fascism solidly established in power, further violence could only be counterproductive.[84] Moreover, Lanzillo considered violence and terrorism to be atomizing forces which could only undermine the mass political education and the social unification that fascism was seeking to promote.

Pressures for fascism to commit itself to thoroughgoing change focused on the meeting of the National Council of the party, which brought together Fascist deputies and local party leaders early in August 1924.[85] And it was indeed at this meeting that fascism finally made its formal break with liberalism. Since Mussolini recognized that fascism had to appear, at least, to have some coherent political proposals to offer if it was to justify its continuance in power, he was open at last to the suggestions of fascists who advocated serious institutional change.

Panunzio played a major part in the council's deliberations; he called for juridical recognition of the syndicates as the first step toward a neosyndicalist state and worked with Curzio Suckert for a resolution with an explicitly revolutionary thrust.[86] Right fascist objections forced a compromise, however, so the outcome of the meeting was by no means an unequivocal victory for left fascist idealists. But the compromise motion offered by Panunzio, Suckert, and the right fascist Carlo Costamagna, and unanimously adopted by the council, did commit fascism to reform the parliamentary system, and this resolution began a process that eventually led to new institutions.[87] Fascism's postliberal commitment was now sufficiently explicit that the right liberal leader Antonio Salandra finally turned against fascism for good, although he did not make his opposition public until later. At last fascism would have to go it alone. The immediate result of the resolution was the appointment, in September, of a Commission of Fifteen to devise institutional changes. Olivetti, Lanzillo, and Rossoni were members, but so were Enrico Corradini and several conservative senators. Suckert complained about the commission's excessively conservative composition; it was becoming clear that the struggle for a radical populist fascism was only beginning.

Mussolini finally announced the beginning of a new regime and accepted responsibility for all that happened in his famous—or infamous—speech to the Chamber of Deputies on 3 January 1925. The chain of circumstances which followed from the murder of Armando Casalini in September led Mussolini finally to cut himself off from the old political system.[88] But even now, the alternative remained open. The Commission of Fifteen had begun its labors in October and was

proceeding slowly. At the end of January it was reconstituted, with eighteen members and broader responsibilities. The majority favored a corporativist transformation of the state, but there were thorny questions about the measures to be adopted. There was even sharp disagreement among the three veteran syndicalists on the commission. Nevertheless, Panunzio was gratified that now, after Mussolini's speech of 3 January, fascism was free to develop its own institutions, and he expressed confidence that the commission was designing the kind of neosyndicalist system which he himself had proposed for fascism. The measures presently being discussed, he insisted, were essentially those he had publicized at the National Council meeting of August 1924 and throughout the early period of fascism.[89] Olivetti similarly stressed continuity, portraying the present course as a victory for neosyndicalism, in his speech to the conference on fascist culture held at Bologna in March of 1925.[90] When this speech provoked the socialist labor leader Gino Baldesi to accuse Olivetti of political and intellectual incoherence, Olivetti responded that the corporativist system which the Commission of Eighteen was devising was identical to the regime outlined in the *Carta del Carnaro*.[91]

Meanwhile, in the May 1925 issue of *Gerarchia*, Mussolini himself published an article, entitled "Fascism and Syndicalism," which stressed the value of the Fascist organizations for educating the workers and for bringing them increasingly into public life.[92] He also emphasized that fascism should consider juridical recognition of the syndicates and the institution of a magistracy of labor. So Mussolini helped to focus attention on neosyndicalist themes as the process of constructing a fascist order began, but his formulations were not precise, and they left open the major questions about practice. These were proposals long associated with the syndicalists, and especially with Sergio Panunzio, but they were also associated with Alfredo Rocco. And Rocco had been made Minister of Justice on 6 January, just after Mussolini's decisive speech to the Chamber of Deputies.

Rocco quickly achieved considerable power, for Mussolini was much impressed by his energy and technical competence. Rocco obviously knew what he was doing. And it turned out to be Rocco, and not the Commission of Eighteen, who formulated the law which initiated development toward corporativism. After a good deal of internal squabbling, the commission issued a majority report proposing new provincial professional councils as the basis for a relatively open and pluralistic corporativist system.[93] This program drew criticism from a variety of sectors within fascism, partly because of plausible differences over how to proceed, partly because of personal power considerations. Rossoni, for example, opposed the majority report because he feared

the new institutions it envisioned would undermine the power of his own existing institutional structure. In any case, discussion of the commission's blueprint generally concerned methods, not the ends of fascism or the direction in which the regime should begin to move. When in October of 1925 the Fascist Grand Council respectfully buried the commission's specific proposals, opening the way for Rocco's syndical law of April 1926, it was not really a victory of Right over Left, but rather a victory for the more extreme, potentially totalitarian course which such disparate fascists as Rocco, Panunzio, Rossoni, and Farinacci desired, each for reasons of his own. It was a defeat for those like Olivetti, Bottai, and Costamagna, who favored a more flexible and pluralistic approach. Even though its specific proposals did not prevail, the Commission of Eighteen had played an essential role in focusing attention on corporativism during the crucial year when fascism was beginning to choose its own path. From now on, the purpose and the future of fascism would seem to be indissolubly bound up with corporativism, although it was not clear at the end of 1925 what this was to mean in practice.

Rocco's role was uniquely important under these circumstances. He was respectable, yet at the same time he was a radical, willing to implement change in some ways more systematic than the Commission of Eighteen had proposed. Whatever Rocco's own purposes, the essentials of his syndical law were neutral; their meaning depended on subsequent practice. The law had four related but distinguishable elements: first, juridical recognition and discipline of the syndicates; second, juridical discipline of collective labor contracts, which meant that labor contracts had to be made collectively and would be legally binding and enforced by the state; third, prohibition of strikes and lockouts; fourth, a magistracy of labor to impose state justice in labor conflicts.[94] In principle, these measures were by no means incompatible with syndicalist objectives; indeed, they could even constitute the entering wedge for the long-term neosyndicalist transformation of the state. So the struggle over direction would continue, and there was plenty of room for those like Olivetti and Bottai who had favored a more moderate outcome in 1925 to continue to try to influence the practical implementation of corporativism.

In December 1925, during the Chamber debate on Rocco's proposed syndical law, Paolo Orano rose to praise Rocco's bill, which he portrayed as the fulfillment of the Italian syndicalist tradition, the culmination of all the syndicalists' efforts since 1903.[95] Panunzio lauded Orano's speech for its "brilliant and impassioned" demonstration of the historical connection between revolutionary syndicalism and fascist corporativism.[96] Orano and Panunzio were seeking to cast the Rocco

law in the best possible light, to arouse expectations, and thereby to influence further development, including practice under the new law. As part of their campaign, the syndicalists could claim considerable credit for all that had happened so far. It was largely because of their efforts that corporativism had become credible as the postliberal alternative that wider groups of fascists had been seeking since 1921—and that the regime itself required in the wake of the crisis of 1924. Throughout this period, the antiliberal proposals of Panunzio, Olivetti, and the others had drawn the fire of such leading liberal spokesmen as Guido De Ruggiero, Luigi Albertini, Umberto Ricci, and Vittorio Emanuele Orlando.[97] Such polemics enabled the syndicalists to show other fascists that they had alternatives to liberalism that the liberals took seriously—and did not like at all.

By December 1925, for better or worse, fascism was on its way to something new, and it seemed to Curzio Suckert a time for taking stock. Suckert had played a major role in the ongoing extremist pressure after the March on Rome. He had remained skeptical even after Mussolini's speech of 3 January; he approved the decisive break with the past which Mussolini promised, yet the first measures of implementation under Minister of the Interior Luigi Federzoni seemed to herald only a conservative police state, not revolutionary corporativism.[98] But writing in Italo Balbo's *Corriere padano* in December 1925, Suckert looked back with satisfaction on all that had happened since the March on Rome and anticipated the fruition of the seeds which now seemed securely planted. It seemed to him to be the triumph of the ideas of Sergio Panunzio. In outlining Panunzio's contribution, Suckert stressed explicitly that ideas had played a crucial role in the recent Italian drama, for fascism, when it assumed power, had been uncertain about how to proceed to reform the state. At first, in fact, many had confused the ultimate purpose of the fascist revolution with a mere seizure of state power. "It is in the context of this indecision and unpreparedness on the part of fascism—both the party and the government—that the work of criticism, of stimulation, and of ideal construction carried out by Sergio Panunzio must be considered."[99] It had been Panunzio who had indicated, in specific, concrete terms, the course that fascism had to follow if it was not to wither away. Suckert stressed that his own intransigent role during the 1924 crisis, and at the pivotal National Council meeting of August 1924, had been inspired by Panunzio's conception of fascism. And now, Suckert insisted, Panunzio's revolutionary blueprint was being implemented; his ideas revealed the true meaning of the Rocco law and the real substance of fascism.

Suckert had particular praise for Panunzio's recent collection *Lo Stato fascista*; Panunzio had first given the title essay as a speech, on

Giuseppe Bottai's invitation, to inaugurate the Roman Center for Fascist Studies in March 1925. Suckert found the categories of this book "definitive and essential for the objective study of the fascist revolution." But not all fascists agreed. In a review of the same book, Carlo Costamagna criticized Panunzio's conception of fascism, sparking a polemic which attracted considerable interest. Although he had not been a Nationalist, Costamagna worked closely with Rocco during this period,[100] and he and Panunzio interpreted in radically different ways the process of change that fascism was now initiating. Their debate raised the most basic questions about the nature of fascism and made quite explicit the fundamental difference between its populist and elitist components. Only now, with fascism finally embarked on an original course, did such sharply focused debate begin to develop.