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Martin Blinkhorn is Professor of Modern European History at Lancaster University. His publications on Fascism include *Fascists and Conservatives* (Routledge, 1990) and *Fascism and the Right in Europe, 1919–1945* (2000).

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*SETTEXT**SETTEXT*

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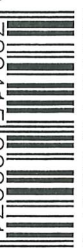
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MUSSOLINI AND FASCIST ITALY THIRD EDITION



**MUSSOLINI
AND FASCIST ITALY**

THIRD EDITION

MARTIN BLINKHORN

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morning changed his mind. Vittorio Emanuele's reasons remain less than crystal clear. He may well have been concerned that fascist sympathies within the army officer corps would provoke embarrassing acts of disobedience. Perhaps, and understandably, he was fearful of outright civil war that might put the monarchy's very future at risk. With even better reason he may have been fatalistic regarding the inevitability of fascism's entry into government and, like many more privileged Italians, at least half persuaded of its desirability. Finally, he was certainly aware of the pro-fascist sympathies of his cousin, the Duke of Aosta, and what this might mean for his personal position were he actively – and unsuccessfully – to oppose fascism. Whatever the explanation, Facta was placed in an unsustainable position and promptly resigned. The possibility of a government led by Salandra, or anyone else, with Mussolini in a subordinate position, collapsed when the fascist leader refused to join any government he did not lead. On 29 October 1922 Mussolini, having 'marched' to Rome by overnight train from Milan, was rewarded with the premiership. Only then, as a decidedly ragged and rain-soaked celebration, did the March on Rome actually take place.

The road to dictatorship, 1922–5

Italy now had a Fascist prime minister but not, strictly speaking, a Fascist government and certainly not a Fascist regime. For over two years Mussolini was to preside over coalition governments from which, of the major parties, only the PSI and, later, the *popolari* were excluded. The future in October 1922 was utterly uncertain. No clear consensus existed among leading Fascists and their active supporters as to whether Fascism implied something temporary or permanent, eventual 'normalization' or a genuine revolution. Equally confused, albeit in a different way, were all those influential Italians who were (in widely varying degrees) content enough to have Fascists in the government, and even Mussolini at the head of it, without desiring a lasting change of regime.

For all his willingness to compromise, at least temporarily, with the Italian establishment, Mussolini himself certainly had no wish or intention to relinquish the power he now held. Nor, however, can he be regarded as one of those Fascist maximalists like Farinacci, Rossoni or Balbo who – in their different ways – from the start dreamed of a radical 'Fascist revolution'. Probably, at this early stage, Mussolini envisaged, rather than a complete political revolution, a drastic revision

of the existing system to ensure the repeated renewal of his authority. For a time at least this would have satisfied his new conservative supporters, for whom a Fascist-led government may have been a blessing, and the prospect of greater authoritarianism attractive, but for whom the idea of an outright Fascist regime remained disturbing. For many conservatives the ideal was a 'normalization' of politics once the balance of power had tilted decisively against the left, the unions and the lower classes. Until then they would not exercise the power they still possessed to unseat Mussolini. The dream of 'normalization' was shared by more authentically liberal politicians, who refused to make serious moves against Mussolini in the hope that he might stumble and the way be reopened for a return to old ways and leaders. For them, however, times were changing ominously, as their local clientele, especially in the south, deserted them for Fascism. Ostensibly more threatening to Mussolini, by virtue of their surviving popular support and their ideological conviction, were the *popolari* and the left. In the event, however, the PPI largely disintegrated after first being dropped from the government in 1923 and then abandoned by the pro-Fascist Vatican. For its part the left, already on the defensive before Mussolini's appointment to the premiership, was then further weakened by the continuing attacks of Fascist squads, the haemorrhaging of trade union membership, and persistent divisions among moderates, radicals and Communists.

The weakness of opposition and the complaisance of most other political forces allowed Fascism to seize the initiative immediately on Mussolini's assumption of office, and to retain it until the summer of 1924. This said, quite what 'Fascism' meant, and might promise for the future, was anything but clear. As it entered the corridors of power, Fascism was a highly fluid coalition, within which five principal but not always sharply defined or distinct strands were discernible. What might be regarded as the most 'typically' Fascist were *ras* like Farinacci and the tens of thousands of *squadristi*, an unruly force most of whom were far from satisfied with merely a share of power. Even if prepared to view the March on Rome and Mussolini's assumption of the premiership as a revolution (which was stretching the term to its limits), these militants now looked towards a 'second revolution' which would sweep away the personnel of liberalism, bringing greater power to themselves and the social layers they represented. Many nevertheless were as yet unclear or even in some cases unconcerned as to the actual purpose of power. The second strand consisted of those who nursed a rather different, and on the whole better thought-out, conception of

'Fascist revolution': what might be termed the Fascist 'left' led by ex-syndicalists like Rossoni and Michele Bianchi, the PNF's first party secretary. The Fascist syndicalists, who had given early fascism much of its radicalism and (unlike many of their comrades), had struck with the movement despite its lurch to the right in 1920-2. As workers left defenceless through the destruction of their unions by *squadristi* began to join the Fascist unions set up by the syndicalists, the latter found themselves with a new power base. Their hope now, as in 1919, was for Fascism to supersede the 'old' left and construct a 'national-syndicalist' state capable of stimulating popular energies and enthusiasm. The third element within Fascism at the end of 1922 comprised 'technocrats' such as Giuseppe Bottai and Augusto Turati, who wished Fascism to be an elitist force of intelligent and educated zealots whose task would be to lead and direct the modernization of Italy. Fourth came the Nationalists, whose political association, the ANI, merged with the PNF in 1923 in the hope of guiding it along pro-capitalist, authoritarian and imperialist paths. Still wedded to the notion of 'influencing the influencers', Nationalists like Alfredo Rocco and Luigi Federzoni applied themselves to using their contacts among the nation's elites to draw Fascism in a direction that would strengthen the state and weaken its own *squadrista* and syndicalist radicals. In this the ex-Nationalists were close to the fifth strand: that made up of conservatives, Catholic 'clerico-fascists' and mere opportunists, all of whom in their different ways were driven by a desire for eventual 'normalization' and an attachment to the socio-political status quo.

As far as dealing with his own movement was concerned, Mussolini's most pressing problems were with the *squadristi* and their provincial bosses, the *ras*. This was because, within a party that remained anything but monolithic, it was in their hands rather than his that much of the real day-to-day power and initiative rested. Their demands for a full-scale Fascist takeover embarrassed a still constitutional prime minister anxious to move cautiously in his relations with conservative elites — the Crown, the bureaucracy, the armed forces, the business magnates and the *agrari*. The dilemma facing Mussolini was a delicate one. While eager, for both personal and political reasons, to establish over the *ras* and their disorderly followers a secure control that had eluded him since the day of Fascism's birth, he was conscious of needing this self-same disorderliness as a warning to enemies and false friends of what might happen if they misbehaved. By the end of 1923, he had made his intentions clear in a manner that conveyed two messages. By unifying the *squadristi* into a national Fascist militia, the MSVN, and by creating

a Fascist Grand Council to bring the *ras* within a formal framework he hoped to control, Mussolini went some way, though not yet very far, towards creating a more disciplined party. At the same time, the very creation of these bodies signalled his intention that Fascism should play a permanent role in Italian political life.

The fulfilment of this vision nevertheless demanded a stronger political position than Fascism commanded in the early stages of Mussolini's premiership. Despite parliament's prompt concession of emergency powers to Mussolini and the broad amenability of a comfortable parliamentary majority, this situation might easily change and Fascism's meagre parliamentary representation prove a real weakness. Electoral defeat would of course be even worse. Mussolini's determination to remove such nightmares and strengthen Fascism's political position was soon evident with the passage in July 1923 of an electoral reform, the Acerbo Law, designed to give the leading party or alliance at a general election two-thirds of the seats in parliament. In the event the insurance policy of the Acerbo Law proved unnecessary. At the general election held in April 1924 the official, Fascist-led list of candidates polled 66 per cent of the votes and won 374 out of 535 seats. In the south, where Fascism had been weak before October 1922, the movement was now able to use the customary election-rigging machinery in order to ensure a triumph for the official list; in the north, on the other hand, the contest remained sufficiently real for the left, despite its battering over the previous four years and Fascist violence during the campaign, to poll too well for the government's comfort. Even its own strongholds, Fascism's grip was still not total.

The unprecedented — and quite shameless — Fascist violence which had accompanied the election provoked bitter opposition protests when parliament, now with a crushing and exuberant Fascist majority, reopened. Both inside and outside parliament, the Fascists were now bent on making things unpleasant for their critics. One of the most outspoken was Giacomo Matteotti, a moderate socialist, independent of the PSI. In June 1924 Matteotti was kidnapped by a gang of Fascist thugs and stabbed to death, his body remaining undiscovered until August. When the Fascists' guilt was exposed, Mussolini's moral if not actual complicity was inescapable.

The murder of the greatly respected Matteotti gave a much-needed focus to a widespread unease regarding Fascism that had been present since October 1922, but which many members of Italy's political class had been trying to ignore or pretending not to feel. The ensuing 'Matteotti crisis' proved crucial to the development of a Fascist regime.

Amidst a wave of anti-Fascist sentiment, much of the socialist, Catholic and democratic opposition withdrew from parliament in protest: the so-called 'Aventine secession'. Mussolini panicked and would have resigned the premiership had the king required it. The king did no such thing; his inaction exemplifying the unwillingness of conservatives even now to abandon Mussolini. It is not difficult to understand why. The left's performance in the spring election had been sufficiently robust to feed conservative fears of a 'bolshevist' revival were Mussolini to lose office and Fascism to be discarded. Almost as worrying was the possibility that a rejected Fascism might itself resort to a 'second revolution' scarcely less threatening to their interests and commitments than a resurgence of the left. Instead, Vittorio Emanuele and other members of Italy's establishment probably hoped to exploit Mussolini's sudden vulnerability in order to increase their influence over him and reduce the possibility of a full-scale Fascist takeover. Without conservative help the opposition forces were powerless, even when reinforced by the belated recruitment of prominent liberals like Giolitti, who finally committed himself late in 1924. Mussolini thus weathered the storm and retained office, only to find himself faced with near-mutiny in his own party. The *fas*, now officially known as 'consuls', saw the crisis as justifying not concession to opposition but its elimination; not further compromise with the old political world but its replacement by a new order. In December 1924 they collectively demanded that Mussolini, on pain of deposition as leader of Fascism, move decisively towards a dictatorship. On 3 January 1925 Mussolini made it plain to what remained of parliament that this was now his intention.

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Italy under Fascism

Party, state and Duce

Considering the uncertainties of the previous two years, the speed with which the dictatorship, once launched, was cemented during 1925-6 was remarkable. The process was both punctuated and assisted by four unsuccessful but highly convenient assassination attempts against Mussolini. The total power effectively granted to him by a law of December 1925 was reinforced by a battery of repressive measures. Political opposition and free trade unions were banned; the free press surrendered to a combination of censorship and Fascist takeover; elected local governments were replaced by appointed officials known as *podestà*; and the essentials of a police state were created by extending the government's powers of arrest and detention, increasing the scope of the death penalty, introducing a special court for political 'crimes', and forming a 'secret' police force, the OVRA (Organizzazione Vigilanza Repressione dell' Antifascismo).

With the PNF now the sole actor on the Italian political stage, it might have been expected that these measures would hand it effective political power. The reality was very different, for the true beneficiaries of the changes were, on the one hand, the apparatus of the Italian state, still manned largely by non-fascists, and, on the other, Mussolini himself: the newly designated head of government or Duce. This outcome was no accident, its principal architects being the two most prominent

ex-Nationalist Fascists: Federzoni, who served as minister of the Interior until November 1926, and Rocco, who occupied the ministry of Justice from 1925 to 1932. In obstructing a PNF takeover of the state, Rocco and Federzoni acted in conformity with Nationalist belief in a state strengthened rather than revolutionized. Mussolini's support for their course was crucial, since not surprisingly they antagonized influential elements in the Fascist party itself.

The PNF's condition remained fluid. Its most vociferous members were the intransigent *squadristi*, whose most conspicuous representative was Roberto Farinacci. Their conception of Fascism was what might loosely be termed a 'populist' one, deriving from a collective experience of non-stop, activist excitement involving assemblies, rallies and punitive expeditions, and nursing a belief in the quasi-mystical, pseudo-democratic bond between leaders and led. Although the potential tension between this kind of movement and the responsibilities of power was plain enough, these militants now yearned for a Fascist capture of the state and especially of its repressive apparatus. Other Fascists were by now embarrassed or even repelled by the persistent raucousness and violence of a *squadristo* they considered negative and outdated. This was particularly true of those who possessed some sort of constructive vision of what Fascism might become: the ex-syndicalists around Rossoni whose interest lay in developing Fascist unions, rather than the party, as the basis of a new order; and sophisticated technocrats such as Bottai who, while seeing an important role for the party, wanted it to abandon the spirit of *squadristo* in order to become an elitist nursery for Italy's future leaders. By 1925, however, all of these Fascists combined were probably outnumbered by those who, since 1920 and especially since October 1922, had been scrambling aboard the Fascist bandwagon out of conservative or blatantly opportunistic motives. For this ever-expanding body of Italians, the party's organization represented little more than a new route to self-advancement – important as this was, and was to remain, in ensuring and retaining their loyalty.

In January 1925 Mussolini took the surprising step of appointing Farinacci, *squadristo* incarnate, to the post of PNF party secretary. The move proved an astute one, especially since the Duce detested Farinacci personally and held totally different views concerning the desirable relationship of party and state. For even as Farinacci continued to press for a Fascist takeover, his enthusiastic centralization of the party – intended to prepare it for its revolutionary destiny – actually had the effect of undermining the power and autonomy of provincial bosses

like himself and neutralizing the *squadristo* of which he had previously been chief spokesman. By the time he was manoeuvred into resigning in April 1926 he had fulfilled what Mussolini had expected of him and the PNF was well on the way to being domesticated. The PNF's new orderliness and its future role were enshrined officially in the revised Party Statute of October 1926, whereby the Duce became explicitly – and for the first time – head of the party. The Statute also confirmed the Fascist Grand Council's power (however theoretical this was to prove) to formulate policy. Of more practical significance was the Statute's decree that all party posts should henceforward be filled by appointment from above rather than, as had often been the case at provincial and local level, by election or acclamation. By the end of 1926, given Mussolini's parallel assumption of state-based powers, the party's potential for capturing or even more gradually absorbing the Italian state was thus severely curtailed. Only via a complete change of heart on the Duce's part or some other, barely imaginable, change of national circumstances, could this situation alter. Instead, during the late 1920s and the early 1930s the Fascist Party's subservience to the state became increasingly evident. The process, expressly required by Mussolini, was deliberately assisted by repeated purges of party members conducted by Farinacci's successors in the post of party secretary, Augusto Turati (1926–30) and Giovanni Giuriati (1930–1). While the purges were motivated partly by a desire to reverse the uncontrolled growth that had taken place since the March on Rome, the most notable victims were not so much bandwagon-jumpers as 'old guard' intransigents whose temper and views were out of keeping with the regime's emerging style. During the Turati and Giuriati secretariats, perhaps as many as 170,000 Fascists, mainly of the 'old guard' variety, were expelled from the PNF. Party office now fell more and more into the hands of those who, like Bottai and Turati, desired a highly professionalized party equipped, if not for a swift takeover of the state, then at least for the subtler strategy of creating a new ruling class by which, in the longer term, the state would be transformed.

Subtler this strategy may have been, but it failed to survive the Turati and Giuriati secretariats. By the mid-1930s the PNF far from being the active, dedicated, professionalized party of Turati's dreams, had reverted to its earlier pattern of unrestrained growth. Already by the end of 1933 its membership stood at 1,400,000 and by 1939 it had almost doubled again to over 2,600,000. As it grew it irresistibly became what amounted to an over-inflated bureaucracy, largely devoid of a creative political role. The majority of its office-holders

were time-serving careerists, bereft of vision or idealism beyond the hyperbolic nationalism and idolizing of the Duce that were the regime's most salient features. Achille Starace, party secretary for most of the decade (1931-9), was a truly representative figure: utterly defential towards Mussolini and concerned with propaganda and parades rather than political or social initiatives. The Party's condition was reflected in the social flavour of its membership. Whereas in 1921-2 perhaps a third of PNF members were workers and peasants, as early as the late 1920s it had become an organization overwhelmingly of insecure and ambitious public employees, professionals and white-collar workers; in parts of the south public employees made up 75-80 per cent of members. Farinacci had feared that the PNF, if deprived of the vitality of *squadristo*, would lapse into a cosy middle age; in this at least he was proved correct. The renewed expansion of the 1930s, even if bringing with it a somewhat more representative social mix, could do little to alter a situation that was by this time firmly established. The Fascist Party and its affiliated organizations had many roles to play, as we shall see, but decision-making power was not among them.

Fascist Italy may thus have been a one-party state, but it was not a party state along the lines of Soviet Russia or even, eventually, Nazi Germany. This should not be taken to mean, however, that the PNF's role within the regime was unimportant, far from it. Quite apart from its mundane yet important role of providing job opportunities for the Italian lower middle class, the Party came to perform numerous vital administrative and politically educative tasks which, given more time and greater support from the top, might conceivably have transformed Italy more profoundly than Fascism actually managed to do. Through such bodies as the Fascist Youth and the *Balilla* or children's organization, it attempted to raise Italy's youth in the patriotic and martial spirit of Fascism. Through the elaborate bureaucracy of the *Dopolavoro* ('After-work') organization it supervised and even enlivened the leisure and social activities of the working population, seeking to compensate workers for their falling wages with a variety of fringe benefits and in the process to 'cure' them of socialism. Finally it created, through the mounting of rallies, parades, sports events and other propaganda-filled activities, a distinctive new 'climate' which immediately struck visitors to Italy and penetrated all but the country's remotest rural areas. What remain in doubt, and much debated by historians, are the extent, profundity and durability of this new climate's transformative character. Whatever the immediate significance and long-term implications of the PNF's role, however, most of the actual power that really mattered

in Italy resided elsewhere: in the traditional apparatus of the state — to which, moreover, the police system remained subordinate; in autonomous centres of influence such as private industry and the Church; and of course in the Duce, an essential ingredient of whose role was his ability to deal personally and separately with these interests. Mussolini's preference for state over party and his taste for personal power were manifested by his own tenure of several ministries. From 1926 he occupied the Interior ministry continuously, while between 1926 and 1929 he held no fewer than eight ministries himself. The deliberately constructed cult of the Duce, which reached new heights (or depths) under the party secretaryship of the fawningly absurd Starace, did not therefore mislead: by the 1930s Mussolini's regime was as personal as propaganda suggested. Whether or not it was also, as that same propaganda claimed, 'totalitarian' will be considered later.

The Corporate State in theory and practice

Italian Fascism's chief claim to political creativity lay in the construction between 1925 and 1939 of the Corporate State, a system purporting to be revolutionary yet socially unifying, to guarantee economic progress and social justice by bringing employers, managers and workers together within a legally constituted framework. Fascist corporativism enjoyed sincere commitment among a minority of regime activists and aroused genuine interest and even admiration abroad. In the non-Italian academic world, eminent political scientists, particularly in the United States, published books examining its supposed workings, while its many political admirers and would-be emulators included the British fascist leader Sir Oswald Mosley and Juan Domingo Perón, future dictator of Argentina.

Corporativism was not the invention of Fascism, however. Its pedigree was long and complex, two main strands requiring mention here. One descended from nineteenth-century Catholic ideas concerning modern society. Socially concerned Catholics such as Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903) were deeply disturbed by the growing social conflict of the day and even more by the advance of 'godless' socialism. For social Catholics, society was naturally harmonious, with conflict due largely to a combination of greed among the rich and the manipulation of the poor by unscrupulous agitators. Society's ills and divisions were curable, but only through energetic, imaginative and above all religiously inspired action to curb greed and exploitativeness on one side, ingratitude and militancy on the other. The answer was to bring together

employers, managers and workers in each sector of economic activity within 'mixed unions' or 'corporations'. Thus, for example, all agriculturalists, from the largest landowner, through the estate manager, the smallholder, the tenant farmer and the sharecropper, to the poorest farmhand, would belong to one 'corporation', and all factory owners, plant managers and shop-floor workers to another. These bodies, it was argued, would not only replace class conflict with class cooperation but might also replace geographical constituencies and ideological differences as the basis of parliamentary representation. Catholic corporatism was fashionable and influential throughout much of Catholic Europe from the late nineteenth century down to the middle of the twentieth, and in Italy helped foster a climate of acceptance for a Fascist form of corporatism that was actually very different.

The second source from which Fascist corporatism drew inspiration was syndicalism, with its rejection of party politics and its stress on trade unions as agents both of revolution and of future social and political organization. Initially apostles of class war, many of Italy's revolutionary syndicalists turned to corporatism when they abandoned class conflict and workers' revolution in favour of class collaboration and *national* revolution. Collaboration between employers and workers, they concluded, would assist the entire nation by increasing industrial production. Between 1919 and 1920 this conviction, increasingly termed 'productivism', was incorporated into the constitution of D'Annunzio's Fiume republic. The Italian Nationalists borrowed from both Catholic corporatism and syndicalism in formulating their own theories, whereby corporations would be used to enhance capitalist wealth and state authority.

Corporatist ideas were widely held, if often vaguely grasped, among early Fascists. Between 1919 and 1925 their most enthusiastic and articulate advocates were ex-syndicalists like Michele Bianchi and Edmondo Rossoni, head of the Fascist Labour Confederation (CLF) until 1928. Where 'party men' such as Farinacci wished the Fascist *Party* to dominate Italy, Rossoni and the Fascist 'left' sought to achieve popular identification with the Italian state through 'national syndicalism'. This would involve employers and Fascist unions coming together within 'integrated corporations' designed to control labour relations, determine economic policies and channel public opinion. Other leading Fascists, while no less enthusiastic about corporatism, viewed its purpose rather differently. The 'moderate' Bottai, for example, embraced corporatism with typical technocratic zeal, as an entirely rational, practical way to achieve social cohesion, boost

production, and altogether modernize Italy through a kind of 'managerial revolution'. To ex-Nationalists like Rocco, however, it meant little more than a means of disciplining labour in the interest of employers – a perception much of the business community was happy to share.

Although the shifting conditions preceding the firm establishment of Mussolini's dictatorship permitted Rossoni and the Fascist 'left' to pursue their goal of 'integral corporatism' with some vigour, actual progress was fitful. On one side, continued competition from the still active free trade unions deprived the CLF of the labour monopoly its leaders craved. On the other side, employers, and especially those organized in the *Confindustria* (Confederation of Industry), showed themselves predictably unwilling to surrender their independence to the kind of corporations desired by Rossoni and his CLF comrades. The Chigi Palace Pact, negotiated and signed between *Confindustria* and the CLF in December 1923, promised the latter exclusive bargaining rights with employers – an important step along the road to a labour monopoly – in return for backing down over its pursuit of 'integral corporatism'. Although, foreshadowing the future distribution of power within the regime's corporative system, the employers then failed to keep their side of the bargain, the setback for the Fascist unions proved only temporary. After January 1925, membership of the increasingly beleaguered socialist and Catholic unions collapsed and the Fascist unions were promptly revitalized. In October 1925 the newly buoyant CLF accordingly reached a new agreement with *Confindustria*, the Vidoni Palace Pact, whereby the two sides recognized each other as the sole representatives respectively of labour and capital.

While the Vidoni Pact, with its naked recognition of power realities, contained as much promise of conflict as it did of collaboration, Rossoni and the ex-syndicalist Fascists chose to see it as a staging post en route to 'integral corporatism' and the institutionalized partnership between capital and labour. Over the next two years they were to be sorely disappointed. Even as the membership of the CLF swelled, the reality of the regime's attitude towards labour relations became apparent. Rocco's labour relations law of April 1926 and the much-trumpeted Labour Charter of 1927 brought the Fascist unions firmly under state control and installed a labour relations system decidedly favourable to employers. In 1928 the CLF, now almost 3 million strong, was broken up into six parts, depriving Rossoni of his power base and effectively extinguishing Fascist syndicalism as a serious force. The

undermining and eventual *sbloccamento* ('break-up') of Rossoni's empire is best viewed as a stage in the consolidation of an increasingly confident, centralized regime, aimed – successfully – at enhancing Mussolini's position by eliminating a possible source of opposition or difficulty. Not only was it carried out ruthlessly, but such was the growing power of the Fascist state that it took effect with minimal opposition. Rossoni, the voice of the Fascist 'left', like Farinacci, the voice of *squadristimo* before him, found himself reduced to political impotence.

Official discouragement and eventual vetoing of Rossoni-style 'integral corporatism' thus had more to do with power politics than with corporatist theory. In fact it went hand-in-hand with official commitment to *some* sort of corporatism, a commitment embodied in the ministry of Corporations set up in July 1926. Over the next thirteen years the Corporate State came unsteadily into being. In 1930, with its sincere and fervent advocate Bottai as minister of Corporations, a potential corporative parliament was introduced in the form of a National Council of Corporations. Four years later what were by this time the long-promised 'mixed corporations' of employers and employees were finally created: twenty-two of them, each ostensibly empowered to determine wages and conditions within a specific area of economic activity (for example textiles, grain production, the merchant marine, etc.). Lastly, in 1939, a full-scale Chamber of Fasces and Corporations was inaugurated in place of the moribund parliament. It had been a long journey, but the Corporate State was now a reality.

Or was it? Even if corporatism did offer a rational alternative to the conflicts within capitalist society, the Italian attempt to implement it, for all the enthusiasm of the syndicalists and the sincere efforts of Bottai and others, was never a serious one. Once the early thrust of Fascist syndicalism had been blunted and any serious prospect of a 'worker-based' version of Fascism destroyed, corporatism, in practice if not in theory, tilted in the employers' favour. From 1928 the workers' side within the corporate structures was manned not by genuine workers or their chosen representatives but by Fascist officials. Although these officials operated mostly in the employers' favour, it is only proper to acknowledge that it was not an entirely one-way street. Within the corporative bureaucracy lurked a minority of genuine idealists and former syndicalists whose effort on behalf of labour registered at least a few victories. Such exceptions nevertheless did little more than prove the general rule within a system that was soft on

employers. The latter, moreover, unlike the workers in the CLF, were allowed to retain their own organizations, notably *Confindustria*. This enabled them to defend their interests effectively not only within the corporations but also by dealing directly with the government and other state agencies. Corporatism in practice, especially during the depression of the 1930s, thus represented a means of disciplining labour in the interests of employers and the state. As this last statement illustrates, the very phrase 'corporate state' is a misnomer, since the Italian state itself was never 'corporate', instead standing apart from and, crucially, above the elephantine edifice of corporatism.

Mussolini's personal responsibility in all this was considerable. Before 1925 he had sometimes flirted with the idea of a Fascism based on the power of labour, and to this end he continued to claim (at least in public) that Italian Fascism worked even-handedly between capital and labour. This was untrue, not only of corporatism but also of Mussolini himself. In reality, whenever confronted with employer resistance, either to labour pressure or, between 1930 and 1934, to the possibility of genuine and potentially far-reaching corporatist advances, he backed down. For the Duce, corporatism was a matter of pragmatism and propaganda, not of principle. On a theoretical level it was something to which most Fascists could subscribe and over which, indeed, they could even be permitted to engage in limited debate. On a propagandistic level it represented an apparent social, economic and political experiment that was useful for bestowing respectability on his regime in the eyes of foreigners. More mundanely, but no less usefully, it constituted an elaborate façade behind which corruption and exploitation could flourish while the Duce pursued the very different goals which, by the 1930s, interested him far more.

Fascist economic policies and their impact

Fascism was not, and never claimed to be, an economic system. From the start, and despite the earlier left-wing, even in some cases Marxist, loyalties of many Fascists, it rejected the notion, held in varying forms and degrees by most on the left, that the 'ownership of the means of production' – that is, financial and economic power – constituted the fundamental or at least the principal determinant of human relations and politics. Throughout the life of the Fascist regime, it is true, a minority in the Party and the corporate structure continued to feed the guttering flame of Fascist 'leftism' with somewhat qualified

anti-capitalist rhetoric. Such restlessness, and the implicit challenge to private wealth it contained, had its uses for Mussolini in his dealings with the captains of industry, agriculture and finance – just as long as he could be seen to possess the power equally to suppress, control or release it. This Mussolini was eminently successful in doing. From his crucial initial compromise with big business and the *agrari* in 1920–2 down to his fall in July 1943, Fascist 'leftism' was never allowed significantly to influence major policy decisions or initiatives.

For all his own former socialism, Mussolini himself knew little of economics and possessed only generalized economic ideas. By 1922 his views on economics, like those of many Fascists, amounted to little more than a commitment to 'productivism': the maximization of industrial and agricultural production in the national interest. Precisely what this meant – how it would be achieved and to what concrete ends it would be directed – was as yet unclear. What can be said, at least with the benefit of hindsight, is that productivism, especially when combined with the 'statism' pursued by the ex-Nationalists and happily embraced by the Duce, did contain significant implications for the long-term relationship between Italian capital and the Italian Fascist state. To put it in a nutshell: Fascism would never *threaten* capitalism but, as the price of survival and, for its individual exponents, continued personal enrichment, capitalism would have to accept a growing measure of state intrusion.

This reality, while perhaps inevitable given the strength of Fascist authoritarianism, was nevertheless slow to take shape. To begin with, Fascism simply had to fit in with a financial and economic framework inherited from liberalism. The ground rules of what passed for Fascist economic policies were therefore laid by such dominant characteristics of the Italian economy, clearly visible even before the war, as the close bonds between state and heavy industry, the selective favouring by governments of some interests at the expense of others, and a weak consumer sector caused by the state's attempts to divert personal incomes, through taxation, into industrial investment. Significantly, there was little here with which Mussolini and other leading Fascists felt uncomfortable.

Even to talk of 'Fascist' economic policies before the start of the dictatorship in 1925 would be misleading. While Mussolini to-ed and fro-ed his way towards greater political power, he and his *laissez-faire* finance minister, De Stefani, satisfied themselves with simply allowing Italy to share in Europe's post-war boom. Only during 1925–6, with the dictatorship in the process of creation, did serious inflation, balance

of payments difficulties and a depreciating lira (Italy's unit of currency until its adoption of the euro) force De Stefani's replacement by Giuseppe Volpi, an industrialist and banker. Volpi's deflationary and protectionist policies set the tone for the rest of the Fascist era, as did the personal intervention of an increasingly confident Mussolini. In 1927, at the Duce's instigation, the lira was fixed at the artificially high level of 90 to the pound sterling. 'Quota 90' had less to do with financial or economic necessity, as conventionally understood, than with Mussolini's conflation of national *interest* with his own perception of national *pride*. The latter demanded 'Quota 90', which instantly became a feature of Fascist sloganeering and propaganda. High tariff barriers were now erected to protect Italian heavy industry and selected agricultural products. From the late 1920s down through the 1930s, Italy's industrial and agricultural exporting sector was largely sacrificed in favour of a sluggish domestic economy stabilized by cartels, price-fixing and, increasingly, state intervention. This last development took place both directly, through the actions of government ministries and agencies, and more insidiously, via the channels provided by the corporate system. General deflation, wage-cutting and the suppression of free trade unions not only implied Fascism's rejection of a vigorous domestic market but also provided a strong indication of its social priorities. These were dominated by a preference for stability over mobility. New and continuous mobility, both vertically up and down the social scale and horizontally from countryside to urban centres, was actively discouraged. None of this meant that these social shifts ceased, which they emphatically did not.

While plainly damaging to some sectors of the economy, Fascist policies unquestionably benefited other, powerful interests whose ability to influence government long predated Fascism and on whose continued acquiescence the regime's chances of permanence partly depended: heavy industry, the *agrari* of the Po Valley, and the less enterprising big landowners of other regions. These agrarian interests were, for example, the principal beneficiaries of Mussolini's much-trumpeted 'battle for grain'. This characteristic combination of policy and propaganda campaign was launched as early as 1925 in the same ultra-patriotic spirit as 'Quota 90', its goal being to free Italy from the cost of importing grain by turning more land over to wheat. In its own terms the campaign achieved considerable success – but only by reducing the range of Italian agricultural production and, therefore, restricting the diet of less well-off Italians. With farmers abandoning olive groves, fruit orchards, vegetable gardens, vineyards and pasture in

favour of grain, 'Let them eat carbohydrates', if not one of Fascism's slogans, might just as well have been.

The Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the subsequent onset of the world depression had the effect of nudging the Fascist regime along paths which, it is probably fair to say, many of its leaders in any case found perfectly congenial. The weakness of Italy's banks and their vulnerability to possible collapse led the government to intervene more frequently, and more directly, in the economy. A vital stage in this process came in 1933 with the creation of the Institute for Industrial Reconstruction (IRI), a state holding company for private funds which, in the course of the decade, increasingly took over from private banks the task of investing in industrial development and activity; naturally, it did so along lines consistent with general government policy. The Ethiopian war of 1935-6 (see pp 61-4) gave renewed impetus to a concept that had always been implicit in productivism, the 'battle for grain', etc., and in 1936 became Mussolini's declared policy: namely, 'autarky' or economic self-sufficiency. The Fascist goal of autarky, total in theory but failing that as close to total as possible, had its roots in pre-1915 nationalism and imperialism. For Mussolini, autarky was essential for a warrior nation that simply could not afford economic dependence on others. The proposition was conveniently reversible. Since within its existing borders Italy - unlike, it was argued, Britain with its vast empire - had no chance of achieving autarky, it followed that those borders must be extended to obtain what Italy required: vital raw materials, land for settling its 'surplus' population and captive markets for home-produced goods. It further followed, given the unlikelihood of such gains falling peacefully into Italy's lap, that territorial expansion would necessitate military conquest. The fact remained that it would all take time.

From 1935 onwards the Fascist state's role in industrial financing, raw material allocation, the replacement of imported by home-produced materials, and direct control of major industries increased. By 1939 it effectively controlled over four-fifths of Italy's shipping and shipbuilding, three-quarters of its pig-iron production and almost half that of steel. This level of state intervention greatly surpassed that in pre-war Nazi Germany, giving Italy a peacetime public sector second only to that of Stalin's Soviet Union. The difference between Fascist Italy and the USSR lay, of course, in the survival in Italy of a private sector that remained substantial even if restricted in its freedom and increasingly concentrated: for example, two firms, Montecatini and SNIA Viscosa, monopolized the entire chemical industry. The

individuals who comprised Italy's financial, industrial and agrarian oligarchy may have mistrusted and even resented the state's growing role, not to mention the dangerous purposes towards which Italy's still uneven economic resources were by the late 1930s being directed. They were nevertheless too compromised, too fearful of a 'bolshivist' bogey the regime worked hard to nourish, and perhaps, at bottom, too *comfortable* to wish to embarrass themselves of a still largely rewarding commitment.

Disputes continue to rage among historians as to the effects of Fascist economic policies, and in particular their relationship with the 'modernization' of Italy. The issue of 'modernization' will be explored further later; what bare statistics (even if they could be believed) on growth and productivity conceal, however, is the sometimes deliberate and sometimes accidental unevenness with which Fascist economic policies, and the social priorities informing them, affected different areas of Italian society. The most obvious beneficiaries have already emerged: cosseted northern industrialists, rural landlords and agrarian capitalists; their products protected and their wage bills held down by Fascist labour policies. Between the curbing of inflation in 1925-6 and its return in the late 1930s, substantial elements of the urban upper and lower middle class also had cause for satisfaction. Even during the depression of the 1930s, expanding state and party bureaucracies provided opportunities for employment and improved status; an expanding education system created new posts for would-be teachers and qualifications for a rapidly increasing number of middle-class students. In addition, moreover, these middling layers of urban Italian society gained a new sense of security and status from the disciplining of organized labour. The mood of urban middle-class confidence even extended to women. Despite Fascism's ideologically traditionalist and culturally chauvinist view of female roles, economic and social changes proved more powerful than official prejudice. Because expanding educational, medical and clerical services created jobs and positions that women - for subtler discriminatory reasons - were considered best suited to fill, Fascism witnessed an unintended and paradoxical rise in female professional and white-collar employment.

The rural counterparts of the urban middle classes, those small agricultural proprietors, tenant farmers and sharecroppers, many of whom had looked to Fascism for betterment, were much less fortunate. Under Fascism the numbers of peasant proprietors, which had been increasing since the war, declined again, while rising numbers of tenants and sharecroppers found their terms and conditions deteriorating. Fascist

propaganda, with its stress on social stability, idealized rural life to the extent of advocated 'ruralization' — a return to the land rather than continued urban growth. Propaganda was nevertheless at odds with the realities of rural existence under Fascism, which, far from reversing the chronic flight from the land, caused it to accelerate. This process, and the similarly discouraged tide of emigrants from south to north, was intensified by the still widening gap between northern Italy, which under Fascism continued to develop and enjoyed relative prosperity, and the south, devastated by policies such as the 'battle for grain' and now deprived of its traditional emigration outlets in the United States and South America. Some headed south to Italy's new 'fourth shore', Libya, though nowhere near enough to satisfy Fascist colonialists or vindicate official propaganda. Even fewer, when the opportunity presented itself after 1936, chose to settle in Italy's new empire in Ethiopia.

The effects of Fascist policies on the working class were mixed, recent historical research suggesting that they were less harsh, in purely material terms at least, than used to be believed. On the one hand, working-class Italians were no longer defended by their own trade unions, were forbidden to organize in their own interests and, as we have seen, derived only limited and uneven benefit from the machinery of the corporate state. Industrial workers suffered officially imposed wage cuts, only partially mitigated by more general deflation, in 1927, 1930 and 1934, while agricultural labourers' money wages declined during the early 1930s by between 20 and 40 per cent. Nor, it is important to stress, did a regime much admired abroad for its 'efficiency' render Italy as immune from the 1930s depression as its propaganda strove — with considerable success — to suggest. Official figures admitted to the existence of a million unemployed by 1933; the true figure was certainly much higher, with millions more (especially in agriculture) *under-employed*, and working-class women forced back into the home. In contrast to the aforementioned growth in middle-class female employment, this last 'development' certainly suited most Fascists (and quite possibly much of the male labour force). The fact remains that once the depression was over this trend began to reverse itself.

Although money wages in Italy may have declined dramatically, it is only proper to recognize, first, that real wages, thanks to falling prices during the early and mid-1930s, held up better, falling between 1925 and 1938 by an average of at most 10 per cent (a figure that some historians would consider too high); second, that the level of

unemployment would have been higher had it not been for the regime's investment and public works policies; third, that while the corporate state proper may have done relatively little for workers, the Fascist unions, or syndicates, not only continued to function alongside the corporations but also managed to provide their members (whose numbers increased considerably during the 1930s) with some protection and benefits; fourth, that the Fascist state increased the provision of social insurance (against unemployment, injury, etc.) available to workers; and finally, that new institutions like the *Dopolavoro* undoubtedly did something to cushion the effects of hardship and slightly to enrich otherwise monotonous working-class lives.

Reaching an assessment of Fascism's economic performance is bound to be problematical. The regime was highly skilled at headlining successes and concealing failures, especially during the depression when the shortcomings of more open governments were brutally exposed. Claims for the regime's triumphant weathering of the depression, as well as often depending on false comparisons with far more industrialized economies, can be regarded as testifying to Fascism's success in presentation as much as in hard achievement. Overall, the Fascist regime shared in the European boom of the mid-1920s and the general recovery of the late 1930s, arguably failing to make the best use of either. In developmental terms, and even allowing for the impact of the depression, its twenty-year record was inferior to those of the liberalism that preceded it and the democracy that followed. We cannot know how a liberal-democratic Italy would have performed over the two decades in which Fascism ruled the country, but there is no reason to suppose it would not have done better: probably at less personal cost to individual Italians and certainly with fewer vainglorious claims to be doing something special. Yet in the end much of this may not matter as much as it seems to do. This is because Mussolini, certainly by the 1930s, was simply not drawn to the goals of what might be termed conventional economic policy: increasing Italian exports, stimulating the domestic market, defeating unemployment, raising living standards, or even improving the diet of poor Italians. Ever more a martyr to his own digestive system, the Duce deluded himself that leaner Italian males would also be fitter and more aggressive. This fantasy was of a piece with his conviction, rationalized via the case for autarky, that the ultimate purpose of economic policy was to help prepare the country for its ultimate test: war.

Fascist totalitarianism: myths and realities

The word 'totalitarian' and the concept of 'totalitarianism' were invented by Italian Fascism and remain among its more enduring legacies. Nowadays, thanks chiefly to its association with Nazism and Communism, 'totalitarianism' carries mainly negative connotations. For Italian Fascists, who it must be recognized coined and disseminated it well before the evil excesses of Hitler and Stalin could be predicted, the term and the ideas it conveyed were wholly positive. According to official propaganda and the Fascist theory painstakingly constructed over the years by Party luminaries like minister of Education Emilio Gentile, Fascism was a 'totalitarian' system requiring not just the passive conformity of all Italians but their sincere commitment to, and active participation in, a heroic enterprise of national regeneration. Totalitarianism was viewed as both a concrete goal that would take time to achieve and a 'myth' that in the meantime would inspire Italians onward. For the more visionary Fascists, 'total' dedication to Fascism and its aims would eventually produce not only a new Italy with a new kind of regime, but a new civilization and a new kind of humanity.

Most Italians – and of course most foreigners – paid little heed to the more extravagant maunderings of Fascist theory, much of which was turgid and intellectually mediocre. Many observers of Italian life during the 1930s, especially undemanding foreign ones, none the less concluded from what they saw and heard that the goal of a totalitarian order was well on the way to being realized. It is not difficult to understand why. Whatever Fascism's failures, when it came to presentation it was an extraordinary success. Propaganda, employing sophisticated modern techniques to brilliant effect and cleverly combining traditionalist with ultra-modernist imagery, was all-pervasive. Its dominance went unchallenged owing to the effectiveness with which alternative views were censored and opposition suppressed. The cult of the Duce with its liturgical slogans – 'Mussolini is always right', 'Believe, Obey, Fight!' – was inescapable, managing like other personality cults to transcend an essential absurdity that insulted the intelligence of those who devoured it (and those who still do). Fascist uniforms, officials and militia were everywhere. Trains – at least on the main lines used by people who mattered – ran on time. Malarial marshes were drained and cultivated – chiefly near Rome where the results could be proudly shown to visiting foreigners. Genuinely innovative architecture like that of EUR spoke of Fascism's claim to be

'the movement of the twentieth century', while the exposure of Roman remains linked it with a glorious past. Even the country's sportsmen obliged with success: in addition to the triumphs of its track and field athletes and its cyclists, Italy's footballers won two World Cups (1934 and 1938) and an Olympic gold medal (in 1936) under the aegis of a Fascist regime that exrolled physical fitness and prowess.

Italy under Fascism certainly looked, sounded and somehow 'felt' different – different, that is, from the country it had been in pre-Fascist times and different from most other countries in the Europe of the 1920s and 1930s. Only other countries ruled by what Sir Oswald Mosley admiringly called 'new movements' – the Soviet Union and the Third Reich – seemed to exude a similar energy and confidence. For those Fascists – and they certainly existed – who possessed a driving, radical vision of a new Italy, a new civilization and a 'new Fascist man', the changes just referred to were more than a veneer; rather they represented the early stages of an ultimately profound cultural and 'anthropological' transformation. For party maximalists, Fascism, with its stress on faith and insistence on obedience, was to all intents and purposes a new religion. For an admittedly untypical minority within this minority, it possessed a world role that had nothing to do with crude conquest. Fascists like Ugo Spirito dreamed that Italy would be the birthplace of a new Europe and of a Fascism whose applicability would be 'universal'. The one attempt at a 'Fascist international', held in Montreux, Switzerland, in 1934, confirmed in its squabbling and backbiting what to others seemed obvious: that 'fascist internationalism' and 'universalism' were terminologically contradictory.

How Italy might have looked had Fascism been blessed with more time and a leader more in tune with radical totalitarian ideas we can never know. Nor, for reasons that should become clear in the next two chapters, would we be wise to expend much effort in counterfactual speculation. The Fascist regime must ultimately be understood and judged in terms not of what some Fascists vainly dreamed it might become, but of what most Fascists pragmatically settled for and what it actually was. In truth Fascism fell well short of the totalitarianism claimed – whether as an accomplished reality or merely as a dynamic process – by its disciples, by some contemporary and later political scientists, and even by a number of present-day historians. It is also important to emphasize that the unevenness of Italian Fascism's drive towards totalitarianism and the incompleteness of its accomplishments were due not to extraneous or circumstantial factors but to an *intrinsic* feature of the regime as it developed from 1922 onwards. This was,

quite simply, early Fascism's need to make compromises with powerful established interests in order to have any chance of obtaining access to power itself. That need, it may be suggested, was due in turn to Fascism's varied, shifting and confused character and its related lack of an ideology and programme coherent enough to sustain a truly profound revolution. Nor was this a matter of mere short-term, disposable tactics. Throughout the years of his regime's emergence and consolidation, that is from 1922 to 1929, Mussolini maintained his strategy of compromise with Italy's wielders of financial, economic and, later, religious power. The economic and syndical policies pursued after 1925, for example, were in part adopted to placate uneasy industrialists and landowners. It was in 1929, however, following careful preparation, that Mussolini achieved his greatest political stroke thus far. The Lateran Accords between the Kingdom of Italy and the papacy brought to an end their sixty-year-old feud, created the Vatican state, and erected a complete framework for Italy's Church-state relations. For Mussolini the agreement, as well as constituting a massive diplomatic triumph in itself, sealed his alliance with conservative forces and ensured the support – even if often passive – of countless Italian Catholics who might otherwise have been half-hearted or hostile towards him.

The existence of autonomous, conservative interests – monarchy, industry, *agrari*, armed forces and Church – was thus integral to Mussolini's regime as it entered the 1930s. Their continued influence made the regime, in its essential character, less profoundly 'fascist' and less totalitarian in scope than it claimed to be and than outward appearances suggested. Just as Mussolini, admittedly to his perpetual and intensifying frustration, remained until 1943 constitutionally subordinate to the king, so despite all efforts to the contrary on the part of militant Fascists – and, occasionally, of Mussolini himself – his other conservative allies retained considerable autonomy within their respective spheres of operation. To cite merely the most serious example: the Church, notwithstanding sometimes bitter disputes with the government, maintained a powerful hold over two areas of Italian life crucial to a would-be totalitarian regime that made quasi-religious claims on individual loyalties: education and the private consciences of believers. The effect of this diluting of the regime's supposed totalitarianism, ironically, was to enhance Mussolini's personal authority. In return for preserving some autonomy, his conservative allies effectively abandoned any idea of concerted action and surrendered to the Duce an awesome freedom to formulate and implement general, and especially foreign, policy.

Even among the population at large, Fascism's impact was uneven, especially for a regime supposedly set on altering the nation's whole mentality. Throughout much of rural (and especially southern) Italy another of Fascism's compromises allowed existing power structures to survive, either alongside or actually disguised as those of the Party. The village of Gagliano in the southern region of Lucania, immortalized in Carlo Levi's classic memoir, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, exemplifies Fascism's failure to impinge on everyday rural life, save as the latest in a long line of devices for perpetuating the control of the local oligarchy. Urban Italians might be exposed to Fascist propaganda through school, press, radio, cinema and the various organizations of the Party, but such things barely penetrated the southern countryside. With one southern power group, however, the Fascist regime refused to compromise. In Sicily the Mafia, whose ability to operate its own system of administration and 'justice' was plainly incompatible with 'totalitarianism', was resolutely pursued and apparently suppressed. Yet here, too, appearances were deceptive. As we shall see, the Mafia, an essentially conservative institution with local roots Fascism could neither equal nor destroy, proved capable of surviving underground and of having the last word in its private war with Fascism.

While the hyperactive atmosphere of urban Italy may have suggested otherwise, Mussolini was in reality, and perhaps not too reluctantly, obliged to settle for obedience and conformity rather than the universal activism supposedly central to totalitarianism. On this restricted level, at least, the Fascist regime during the early and mid-1930s recorded considerable success. The coercive capacities of police, OVRA and Fascist militia played a major part in this, as did the enervating effects on potentially troublesome elements of occupational insecurity and the destruction of old political and trade union networks. Fear of dismissal ensured the quiescence of the rising numbers of public employees, most notably the great mass of school-teachers and university professors who swore an oath of loyalty to the regime in the 1930s. Only 11 out of 1250 professors refused the oath – an apparently shameful piece of cowardice that actually betokened Italian academe's shoulder-shrugging acceptance of a regime that offered little intellectual challenge to established academic orthodoxes. Among Italian youth and young adults, propaganda, the 'fascistization' of education and the conditioning effects of youth organizations, the *Dopolavoro*, etc., if not creating as many passionate Fascists as was intended, did help secure acquiescence. If official organizations and activities failed to win popularity for a party widely and

rightly considered corrupt, they did, at least for a few years, make a popular hero of Mussolini. And it is essential to recognize that for many Italians the regime's achievements seemed very real; social peace at home and respect abroad were agreeable novelties to politically conscious Italians previously accustomed to social uncertainty and international humiliation. Fascism's appeal – and it was not to prove permanent – as a regime of order was assisted by the fact that, for all the high-sounding talk, its ideological demands on individuals involved little more than ultra-patriotism and veneration for the Duce. What appears to have been a widespread passive acceptance of the regime during the early 1930s inspired a leading Italian historian of Fascism, Renzo De Felice, to call these the 'years of consensus'. The notion understandably offends both Italians and non-Italians for whom outward consensus cannot be disentangled from the censorship, deliberately misleading propaganda and downright repression used to enforce it. The criticism is a reasonable one, since consensus – if it is to mean anything – implies an active freedom of choice which not even De Felice can convince us was enjoyed by Italians under Fascism.

For two categories of Italians, passive consensus, however achieved, was anathema. The opposition to Fascism, composed from the late 1920s of isolated individuals, small clandestine groups and trade union cells, was courageous but weak, barely succeeding in keeping alive a flicker of resistance which would later grow into something much greater. Many of its leading figures were driven into foreign exile, foremost among them the Roselli brothers of the *Giustizia e Libertà* ('Justice and Liberty') organization. Others, like Carlo Levi, were punished by internal exile to remote parts of their own country. Treatment of active opposition was ruthless, but before the Second World War stopped well short of the excesses that were commonplace in Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany. Neither pre-war concentration camps nor the casual use of the death penalty for political purposes were among Fascism's repressive devices.

At the other extreme stood those Fascists for whom the regime's accomplishments were insufficient. Resentful of the continued power of the Crown, capitalists and Church, acutely aware of Fascism's failure to bridge the gulf between state and people, and envious from 1933 onwards of the more extreme course being pursued by Nazism in Germany, radical Fascists insistently demanded further advances towards true totalitarianism. Malcontents on what remained of the old party 'left' looked for greater progress in a socially radical,

neo-syndicalist direction, but remained just as disappointed. Nothing more graphically illustrates Fascism's limitations as a totalitarian regime than the endless yearnings of its own militants for a 'Fascist revolution' that never came. Only from 1936 did signs of change start to appear.