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Edited by
MARTIN BLINKHORN

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FASCISTS AND CONSERVATIVES

The radical right and the establishment in twentieth-century Europe

edited by

MARTIN BLINKHORN

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1

Introduction
Allies, rivals, or antagonists? Fascists and conservatives in modern Europe

Martin Blinkhorn

During the last twenty years, prodigious scholarly effort has gone into the study of fascism and the right in twentieth-century Europe. Quite apart from the study of particular fascist and national socialist movements and of individual right-wing regimes (Fascist Italy, the Third Reich, Franco's Spain, etc.), scholars have striven to locate the essential nature of fascism; to determine what is distinctive about its ideas, programmes, policies and support; to identify what, if anything, differentiates it from other forms of rightism; and to decide whether a satisfactory definition of 'fascism' can be arrived at–or whether, indeed, the term has any descriptive or analytical value at all.[1]

This volume is intended to assist the further consideration of these and related problems. Whilst paying due attention to 'theories of fascism', the approach of its thirteen contributors is in the main empirical. Its starting-point is the recognition that there existed, in interwar Europe, at the very least a *subjective* distinction between the radical right, as represented in the main by fascism and national socialism, and the conservative right, as represented by constitutional conservatism and various strands of conservative authoritarianism closely or loosely linked to it. Our task has been to examine the relationship between these various strands of the right in a range of European settings, our purpose to analyse the correspondence, or lack of it, between this subjective distinction and objective reality. The settings in question include not only those where fascism or national socialism achieved, or at least shared, power (Italy, Germany, Spain, Austria, Romania) but also others (Portugal, France, Greece, the Nordic countries and Britain) in which the experience of radical fascism, and the fascist-conservative relationship, were in a variety of ways different.

First, it is necessary to go a little further in defining, or at least clarifying, our terms. This is neither an easy nor a satisfying task, since in cases such

as those examined here, the definitions, typologies and taxonomies beloved of social scientists tend to fit uncomfortably the intractable realities which are the raw material of the historian. The more closely the data relating to the European right are scrutinized, the more lines stubbornly refuse to be drawn or, when drawn, to remain straight and motionless; exceptions disprove more rules than they prove; and all too rarely do the subjective and the objective coincide.

At the very least, however, we need a point of departure. Let us take fascism first, and begin with what is (almost) incontrovertible: namely, that Italian fascism provides us with models of both a fascist movement and a fascist regime. More or less simultaneously with the emergence of fascism in Italy, there also emerged in other European countries, especially those, like Italy, affected by war, demobilization and revolution or left-wing militancy–Germany, Austria, Finland, parts of the Balkans–significant popular movements with sufficient in common with Italian fascism quickly to be bracketed with it. Then, as time passed and as fascism in Italy ceased to be a mere movement and became a securely established regime, the term 'fascism', and the values, goals etc. associated with it, began to be *deliberately* adopted by new, imitative movements, from London to Athens and from Lisbon to Helsinki.

So far, so good. The picture soon becomes blurred, however, by a number of additional and related factors. It is necessary to recognize, first, that on the interwar European right there existed a plethora of organizations with authoritarian goals, some actually founded before 1914, others newly emerging, some working through parliamentary machinery, others extra-parliamentary and paramilitary in character; and that within the political world of the right, the increasingly modish labels 'fascism' and 'fascist' were employed with little consistency. Secondly, during the course of the interwar period the whole of central, southern and eastern Europe succumbed to rightist, authoritarian regimes of one sort or another, of which few actually called themselves 'fascist' or 'national socialist' but most praised aspects of Italian fascism and Nazism and borrowed selectively from the examples they provided. Third, liberals and leftists, fearful of a general authoritarian trend of which Italian fascism was reckoned to be the standard-bearer, themselves began to apply the term 'fascism' loosely (but understandably) to a variety of right-wing movements, parties and regimes, by no means all of which saw *themselves* as 'fascist'.

To produce a rigorous and consistent definition of 'fascism' against such a background is difficult, perhaps impossible–if only because no single definition will satisfactorily embrace both movements and regimes. Since no definition of 'fascism' can ever be universally accepted or objectively 'correct', what is needed is rather a valid and useful *working approach* which will assist our understanding of the right in general, and of the complex relationships within it. For our purpose it would probably be wisest to

suggest (1) that movements and (much more rarely) regimes adopting the labels 'fascist', 'national socialist' and 'national syndicalist', or associating themselves with these causes, present no taxonomic problem; (2) that other movements of the authoritarian right–those, for example, with Catholic origins which claimed not to be 'fascist'–must be considered empirically, in terms of both their subjective and their objective relationship to the radical right; and (3) that ostensibly 'non-fascist' regimes of the right present the most difficulty, since many rightist regimes, not excepting those of Mussolini and Hitler, represented a compromise between self-confessed fascism/national socialism and other forces.

'Fascism' has at least been the object of analytical scrutiny; conservatism much less so.[2] The contributors to this volume have, for the most part, approached this part of their task empirically. The 'conservatives' discussed here are, in the main, those who in the period concerned organized politically or otherwise in order to achieve two principal goals. The first of these was the defence of established social and economic interests, elites, hierarchies, etc., whether within a political system dominated by themselves (Britain, the Nordic countries); within one in which their political grip was shaky and their socioeconomic position threatened (Italy after 1919, Austria under the First Republic, perhaps France in the 1930s); or within one in which sudden political change had handed power–or at least office–to the left (Germany under Weimar, the Spain of the Second Republic). The second goal was the pursuit of modernizing, developmental policies within a 'system of order' in which their own control could be guaranteed and perpetuated. In some cases, 'conservatism' was a largely pragmatic affair; in others, notably that of Germany, it was associated with considerable ideological paraphernalia.

To state what is admittedly obvious, the early twentieth century was an unprecedentedly volatile and turbulent period in the history of Europe. Between the later nineteenth century and the Second World War, although the details and the pace of the process differed considerably from country to country, the dominant classes throughout much of the continent–and those who represented them politically–found themselves facing the arrival of mass politics, political democracy, popular pressure for social reform, and the possibility, at the very least, of left-wing revolution. Two major historical events, the First World War and the Russian Revolution, massively influenced both the sociopolitical realities of Europe and the individual and collective political consciousness of its inhabitants. In the response of Europe's established elites to these and related challenges, fascism–that is, fascist movements and fascist ideas–sometimes played an important and complex part. Complex, since fascism, where it appeared, was at one and the same time a symptom and a product of contemporary change; a possible weapon whereby conservatives might deal with some of

the other, unappealing aspects of change, notably the challenge of the left; and a possible threat in itself.

Already before 1914, the confident control of Europe's incumbent elites, variously aristocratic and *haut bourgeois,* 'conservative' and 'liberal', was wavering. Industrialization and urbanization, the capitalist transformation of agriculture, population migration, cultural modernization and secularization: these and related contemporary phenomena were breaking down existing forms of hierarchical and clientelist politics, confronting the politically dominant with the uncertainties of popular politics, the often unwelcome prospect of more genuine democracy, and the fast-advancing threat of socialism. Under these pressures, confidence in existing, mainly liberal-parliamentary, principles and practices was liable to falter.

Throughout much of Europe, 'constitutional' conservatism was already, before fascism became a reality, subject to varying degrees of subversion by ideas and organizations of an authoritarian or corporatist character. The contributions in this volume illustrate, for example, how in the decade before the birth of fascism much of the German right was ideologically 'Pan-Germanized'; how strong was the influence of the Italian Nationalist Association, elitist social theory and the 'Return to the Statute' school in Italy; how Maurassian ideas extended beyond France–where, indeed, their practical importance may if anything have been overstated by historians–to influence conservatives in, for example, Greece and more particularly Portugal. In Austria, the conservative Christian Socials took with them into the 1920s a populist, corporatist, chauvinist tradition, effectively mobilized by Karl Lueger, whilst in Spain the 'alternative conservatism' of Catholic traditionalism continuously beckoned any conservatives whose loyalty to the liberal system was at all shaky.

Of course, it is important not to exaggerate the seriousness of the authoritarian infection *before* 1918. The process was uneven, going furthest in Germany but in several other countries, notably Britain, affecting only the fringes of the established right. Even so, the question as to how much the attachment of conservatives to constitutional, parliamentary systems was a matter of conviction as distinct from self-interest is a very real one. The point is not so much that European conservatism was riddled with authoritarianism before fascism itself came along, as that by then there existed within the broad church of conservatism an authoritarian *ingredient* which, in various ways, was to inform the conservative-fascist relationship from the early 1920s onward. In almost every case these illiberal, usually authoritarian ideas, and those who held them, envisaged little in the way of any surrender of effective power by established elites; rather they represented a variety of notions as to how change might be restrained, negotiated or even directed in such a way as to obviate any loss of real power.

Any authoritarian tendencies, whether ideological or merely pragmatic, already present among European conservatives were both intensified and, in some cases, popularized by the complex crisis which hit Europe from 1917 onwards. The scale of that crisis is impossible to exaggerate, involving as it did the Russian Revolution and its impact; the convulsive effects of war, peace and demobilization; the agony of defeat or disappointment with the fruits of victory; radically shifting frontiers and populations; and the advent of new regimes and transformed political circumstances.

In much of postwar Europe, conservatives found themselves operating within a suddenly altered political world in which the control of established elites was overturned or at least seriously threatened. The advent of the Weimar Republic may not have brought down Germany's social and institutional elites, but it deprived them of political dominance and seemed thereby to threaten their total destruction. Austrian conservatives found themselves left with a rump state of questionable national identity, in which socialism was ominously powerful. In Italy, the advent of virtually universal male suffrage and proportional representation thrust the country's 'liberal' and Catholic elites into a mass-political arena for which they were ill-prepared. Greece and Romania, as David Close and Irina Livezeanu respectively tell us, found their polities transformed, the former by the arrival of several hundred thousand refugees from Asia Minor, the latter through the country's doubling in size and population, and its loss of ethnic homogeneity. In both Romania and the newly independent state of Finland conservative anti-socialism was rendered all the more intense by the proximity of the Soviet Union. In situations such as these, in which liberal parliamentarism no longer offered a guarantee of lasting social hegemony, established elites and elements within conservative and sometimes even 'liberal' political parties were liable to find their devotion to parliamentarism wavering.

Nourished by the new climate, authoritarian ideas, groups, even movements and parties, operating on the margins of the 'established' right, proliferated during the 1920s and into the 1930s. The German 'conservative revolutionaries' discussed, from different angles, by Geoff Eley and Jeremy Noakes; the Austrian adherents of Othmar Spann and the assorted Spanish neo-traditionalists; the Portuguese Integralists and, later, the Acción Española intellectuals in Spain: these and other such groups built on existing intellectual and political traditions and stepped up their activities.

The appearance, out of the same postwar crisis–of which they were indeed the creatures–of fascism, Nazism and kindred radical-rightist movements complicated this situation immeasurably. It would be absurd to suggest that Italian fascism, the National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei: NSDAP), the Austrian

Heimwehr, the Romanian student nationalists and other 'new' movements of the 1920s owed *nothing* to previous right-wing, authoritarian ideas and organizations; on the contrary, in almost every instance a common ideological base is visible. Nevertheless in important respects–both ideological and social–they were *different*. For one thing, they were, in Geoff Eley's words, 'more extreme in every way': shriller in their nationalism, more plebeian in composition and style, less respectful of tradition and of established hierarchies, more violent in their behaviour and, specifically and crucially, their anti-leftism. In some, though admittedly not all, cases, they possessed something of a leftist ancestry themselves, and employed as one weapon in their mixed armoury a quasi- or pseudo-leftist rhetoric. This was certainly true of the two movements which must inevitably shape our perceptions of 'fascism', namely, Italian fascism and the NSDAP. At the very least what we may now classify as 'fascist' movements tended to differentiate themselves from what Mosley, in the next decade, was to label the 'old gang' of conservative and liberal politicians and notables. Whatever may have happened later, these were genuine differences, both subjectively and objectively speaking.

The more or less spontaneous emergence of radical-rightist movements in the 1920s–spontaneous in the sense of being autochthonous and non-imitative–was later, mainly after the onset of economic depression in 1929, followed by the much more deliberate, even calculated, foundation of fascist, national socialist, or clearly *fascisant* movements inspired by the example and supposed success, first of Italian fascism and later of Nazism. The British Union of Fascists, the Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista (JONS) and Falange Española in Spain, Norway's Nasjonal Samling, Portuguese National Syndicalism, the Parti Populaire Français: these are just a few examples of the imitative fascism of the 1930s. It is important to stress the obvious, but all too often ignored, distinction between organizations such as these, and their predecessors which grew, so to speak, organically out of the postwar environment.

Discussion of the radical and the conservative right from the start of the 1920s must take account of divisions within the latter among convinced authoritarians, convinced constitutionalists and those who oscillated somewhere between. As John Stevenson makes clear, the vast majority of British Conservatives never seriously faltered in their attachment to a parliamentary system which was long-established, had evolved gradually and was dominated for much of the interwar period by a powerful Conservative Party. Save on the most uninfluential fringes, Britain lacked an 'authoritarian' tradition, and its interwar social order was considerably less convulsed than was the case in much of continental Europe; politically and constitutionally speaking, interwar Britain appears to have been almost in its entirety 'conservative'. Although authoritarianism clearly exercised a

greater influence among Conservatives in the four Nordic countries examined by Stein Larsen, ultimately constitutionalism appears to have held firm there also, even in Finland where it was seriously threatened in the early 1930s. In France, too, as Roger Austin shows, the weight of influential conservative opinion seems to have remained somewhat unenthusiastically loyal to the Third Republic. And it would be unjust to deny that significant numbers of political conservatives, and 'establishment' figures generally, in other European states retained a genuine, and not merely contingent, attachment to liberal freedoms, whatever the alternative temptations or punishments.

The fact remains that in many of the countries examined in this volume, conservative parties and the interests they represented shifted perceptibly rightwards after 1919. Quite apart from the radicalization of the German conservative right, we may observe the shift of Austrian Christian Socials towards 'Austrofascism' from the late 1920s on; the welcoming of dictatorship in Spain (1923) and Portugal (1926); the Clerico-Moderates' embrace of authoritarianism in Italy; the Greek Populists' drift towards authoritarianism in the early and mid-1930s; and the failure of conservative republicanism in the face of Catholic corporatism in the Spanish Second Republic.

The relationship of this process to fascism is far from straightforward. Fascism's achievement of power in Italy probably could not have occurred without the complaisance of a variety of elite groups, conservative-liberal politicians, etc. While regarding Mussolini's movement with considerable suspicion, these elements were nevertheless impressed by its patriotism, youthful energy, mass base and strike-breaking capacity, and convinced that, even if given a taste of power, it could be manipulated in the establishment's interests. In this, as John Pollard writes of the Italian Catholic right, they suffered from an 'erroneous perception' of fascism. Something of a pattern was established in Italy in 1921/2 that was to be repeated elsewhere, though not always with the same outcome. A decade later in Germany, Conservative politicians and elite groups were just as confident that they could 'tame' Nazism, and even more mistaken. Other instances, however, were more favourable to the conservative right. The Austrian Christian Socials and sections of the fascist Heimwehr existed from the outset in a state of symbiosis. In the case of France, Austin shows how conservative manipulation of Doriot's Parti Populaire Français (PPF) seems to have fulfilled most of the aims which lay behind it, while more serious problems for the Fédération Républicaine and the Radicals arose when La Rocque's Parti Social Français (PSF) moved away from its earlier 'street' fascism towards a more orthodox position. The attractiveness of fascism as the hard edge of conservatism was even briefly apparent in Britain, though it is doubtful if Lord Rothermere's ephemeral enthusiasm for the British Union of Fascists (BUF) really reflected a much broader

Conservative position; this is not, of course, to suggest that in conditions of political instability and a deteriorating economy–the reverse of those which obtained in the Britain of the mid-1930s–the situation might not have been different.

It is not, however, simply a matter of what attitude conservative parties, their supporters and the interests they represented took towards autonomous fascist parties. The installation of the Fascist regime in Italy, especially after the erection of a dictatorship in January 1925, created a model which served not merely for would-be imitators such as Mosley or Quisling but also, albeit usually in a more selective way, for elements within the conservative right itself. This operated in a variety of contexts, affecting conservative parties within parliamentary systems as well as authoritarian regimes with non-fascist, essentially conservative, origins. Larsen shows the extent to which fascism and national socialism ate into Nordic conservatism, inspiring a rash of *fascisant* splinter-groups and interest associations, and in particular infecting conservative youth movements. He also shows, however, that constitutional conservatives successfully beat off the radical-rightist challenge. In Spain, the Confederación Española de Derechas Autonomas (CEDA), on behalf of policies which its leaders insisted were not fascist, employed a 'style' which certainly was; here too the party's youth movement, the Juventud de Acción Popular (JAP), suffered at the very least what Stanley Payne has called 'the vertigo of fascism'–and arguably more. Explicitly authoritarian movements of the conservative right were naturally even more prey to fascist influence, in terms of both style and acceptance of extreme solutions; just as Italian Nationalism and conservative Catholicism quickly found a home in the Fascist regime, so in Spain the monarchist right under the Second Republic developed its own brand of 'monarcho-fascism' and leaders such as Calvo Sotelo happily donned the 'fascist' label. The Austrian Heimwehr, while implicitly fascist in style and operation throughout its existence, adopted an explicitly fascist programme in 1930.

'Non-fascist' regimes, too, were affected, though by no means all in the same way. Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, in the Spain of the 1920s, may have originated in a straightforward military coup and been essentially conservative-paternalist in character, yet its luminaries borrowed selectively from the Italian model and in some cases explicitly sought to create 'fascism from above'; the pattern, unsuccessful in Primo's case, was to be followed, with varying degrees of superficiality and success, by others from Metaxas in Greece to King Carol of Romania. This last example highlights a further complication. Just as some dictatorships attempted to 'fascistize' themselves, so they or others sometimes found themselves at odds with more radical-rightist elements of what might be regarded as more authentically 'fascist' character. King Carol's suppression in 1938 of the Romanian Legion,

whose origins are examined here by Irina Livezeanu, is merely one of the more brutal examples of such a conflict and its resolution; in the dictatorship of Salazar, depicted by Tom Gallagher as predominantly Catholic in inspiration and conservative in character, Rolão Preto's blue-shirted National Syndicalists emerged as a radical fascist opposition–and were also unceremoniously, if in this case peacefully, suppressed.

Such developments created, during the course of the 1920s and 1930s, a situation at once simple and confused. For many on the left it was simple: since the 'objective' role of interwar right-wing authoritarianism was the defence of capitalism through the violent destruction of the left, all its manifestations could be regarded as 'fascist' whether they accepted the label or not; or, to put it another way, 'fascism' referred to the role of certain kinds of regime rather than to a particular kind of political movement or set of ideas, and 'fascists' were all those who, by whatever route and with whatever ideological inspiration, sought to create or perpetuate such regimes. Given the fate suffered by leftists at the hands of various kinds of rightist regime, not all of which devotees of analytical rigour would regard as fascist, such an attitude is at least understandable. For those seeking a more rigorous understanding of 'fascism', confusion reigned, since the differences among a whole host of rightist movements and parties, and an increasing number of rightist regimes, tended to be subtly nuanced and constantly shifting.

On the basis of what has been examined so far, it is clearly reasonable to confirm the existence of a distinction, at the level of ideas and movements, between the radical or 'fascist' right and the conservative right, even when the latter gave birth to authoritarian movements of its own. However, for the reasons just discussed, not merely was a boundary between fascists and authoritarian conservatives never drawn with total clarity, but it became more blurred with every year that passed. Matters become more difficult still, however, when we come to examine the fascist–conservative relationship in the context of those regimes to which fascist or national socialist movements made a major contribution or, indeed, which they actually created.

Few analysts of fascism would wish to quarrel with the proposition that the Italian Fascist regime provides us with a template for use in assessing the nature of other rightist dictatorships. Yet, as Roland Sarti points out, if the measure of 'fascism' in power is the power of the fascist movement within the regime, then Fascist Italy was an only partially fascist state. Both the contributions on Italy in this volume make it clear that Mussolini's regime represented a compromise between various forms of fascist radicalism, notably those associated with syndicalism, corporatism and *squadrismo,* but also embracing republicanism and anti-clericalism, and essentially conservative forces. The latter included powerful economic

interests (bankers, industrialists and *agrari*); the monarchy; the Vatican, the Church and their Clerico-Fascist supporters; and the 'new right' of Italian Nationalism. The results of this compromise included the resolution of the 'Roman Question'; the abandonment of syndicalist and, in any serious sense, corporatist radicalism in deference to the economic establishment; the retention of the monarchy; the creation of a state that conformed to Nationalist rather than strictly fascist prescriptions; and the allocation to the Fascist Party and its associated organizations of a role that, whilst undeniably important, stopped well short of the actual exercise of power, formulation of policy, or pursuit of a 'fascist revolution'.

Leaving aside for the moment the unique case of the Third Reich, other regimes of the interwar and wartime right arrived at their own compromises, though by a variety of routes and, naturally, with different results. The Franco regime–the only European regime with a *major* radical fascist ingredient to survive long beyond 1945, and studied here by Paul Preston–is a useful example. Notwithstanding the aforementioned *fascisant* tendencies within the Spanish Catholic and monarchist right, radical fascism, in the form of the Falange (fused from 1934 with the JONS), was weak until 1936 when it began to expand rapidly, not least through the recruitment of disillusioned JAP-ists. From the start of the Civil War the Falange's growth became explosive. In April 1937 Franco, as effective head of state of Nationalist Spain, fused the Falange with the Carlists, monarchists and the rest of the right to form the single party of his regime: a process, though differently conducted, somewhat similar to Italian fascism's fusion with Nationalism and Clerico-Fascism after 1922. The product, like the Italian Fascist regime, was a compromise between radical fascism and conservative authoritarianism, in this case with unambiguous military and Church support. As Preston indicates, Falangism played a superficially prominent and important role for as long as it suited Franco, that is, until the mid-1940s, thereafter to be shunted into the sidings of Spanish political life.

In both the Italian and Spanish cases, fascist radicals writhed with impatience at the non-appearance of the 'revolution' or total takeover of the state of which they dreamed. In Italy during the late 1930s, fascist radicalism was channelled into Germanophilia and racism, without the essential nature of the Fascist state altering significantly; as Sarti points out, there is as much reason to suppose that Mussolini was planning to strengthen the state *vis-à-vis* the Fascist Party as the opposite. The bizarre experience of the Italian Social Republic confirms both the existence of a distinctive 'fascism' and its marginalization during the previous twenty years. In Spain, the frustration of devoted Falangists from the late 1940s onward was unable to assume potent political form. In both cases, of course, vast numbers of fascist/Falangist activists settled contentedly for whatever rewards the regime could offer them.

Other regimes offer different perspectives. The Austrian *Ständestaat* studied by Jill Lewis was, as its origins made likely, a comfortable blend of Christian Social and Heimwehr elements: one form of fascism, she argues, confronted and ultimately confounded by another, Nazism. Vichy, as depicted by Roger Austin, whilst its ideological atmosphere may have betrayed its conservative origins, in its 'strongly executive character', attempts at mass mobilization, and surveillance policies appears to have advanced closer to 'fascism' than is sometimes supposed.

The vital feature of all these and other regimes, whatever their provenance and outward characteristics, is that in all of them conservative interests and value-systems proved either dominant or capable of coexisting with an official 'fascism'. This is not to suggest that in Italy during the 1930s or Spain during the early 1940s, conservatives, whether driven by monarchism, Catholicism, or material interest, were not often irked by fascist display, vulgarity and office-holding or, indeed, anxious lest full-scale 'fascist revolution' might yet be unleashed. The fact remains that no serious conservative attempt to overthrow Mussolini occurred until wartime defeat transformed political realities, while monarchist machinations against the Franco regime were both unsuccessful and dictated more by self-interest than ideology or principle.

The fall of Mussolini and the protracted final agony of Francoism may at first sight seem to have little in common. One feature, however, they do share: the willingness of conservatives to abandon dictatorship when its advantages cease to be apparent, just as they or their predecessors embraced it and lived with it when it seemed in their interests to do so.

Despite the fact that German national socialism appears to belong to the same category of political *movement* as Italian fascism, Falangism and the rest of the radical right, the Third Reich, whether or not we choose to classify it as 'fascist', stands on its own as a *regime*. Whilst the process remained incomplete (in twelve years, how could it be anything else?), the German state, and elite corps such as the army and the bureaucracy, were subjected to 'Nazification' in a way not approached, or even seriously attempted, by fascists elsewhere. Despite emulative gestures in the Italian Social Republic, under Vichy, and even during the Second World War in Salazar's Portugal, the advancing role of the SS *within* the Third Reich was also unparalleled elsewhere. If fascism was 'more extreme in every way', then Nazism and the Nazi regime were more extreme still. This is not the place to pursue very far the question of *why* Nazism produced a qualitatively different kind of regime, as it surely did, from Mussolini's or Franco's. Suffice it to say that Nazism possessed an ideological content and thrust which most if not all other fascisms lacked; that Nazi ideology, as both Eley and Noakes make

clear, represented the most extreme version, organized more successfully and externalized in more extreme ways, of an already radicalized nationalist ideology; and that many, probably most, German Conservatives had by 1933 also placed themselves at various points on the same broad radical-nationalist spectrum.

Jeremy Noakes illustrates graphically the complex relationship of German Conservatives with Nazism and the Third Reich. While mistrustful of Nazism's turbulent plebeianism and 'socialist' overtones, most of the individuals and groups he examines recognized in it a common yearning for national self-respect and *Volksgemeinschaft*. Confident of 'taming' Nazism, the Conservative elites allowed it access to power. The sheer extremism of Nazism, however, provoked more in the way of Conservative opposition, and ultimately resistance, than occurred, until the last minute, in Italy. The denial of human rights, determination upon war, and of course encroachment upon Conservative prerogatives: these were among the causes of Conservative divergence from Nazism. Even so, to suggest a sharp and consistent Nazi-Conservative cleavage in the Third Reich would be going much too far. Noakes is careful to point out that the individuals whose disillusionment, criticism, opposition, resistance and, in some cases, executions he itemizes were often anything but typical of the sectors–Junkers, army officers, bureaucrats–from which they came. Considering the extremes to which Hitler had driven Germany by 1944/5, what is striking is not the extent of Conservative resistance but its limitations and utter failure.

The authors represented in this volume make abundantly clear how complex, fluid and subtle was the relationship between the radical and the conservative right in twentieth-century Europe. In the light of what their chapters tell us, two extreme views of that relationship must surely be rejected. The first, taking fascist anti-conservatism as seriously as its anti-leftism, holds that fascism does not belong on the right at all, that it somehow stands outside the established left-right spectrum. The second holds that distinctions within the non-democratic right are so superficial as to be scarcely worth considering; fascism is either an appropriate term for all manner of authoritarian rightist movements and regimes, or else is meaningless as a term of definition or description. To accept the first view involves deliberately or unthinkingly denying the nature of a relationship resting upon a significant measure of common ground and shared antagonisms, and without which no fascist or Nazi regime, and significantly fewer conservative-authoritarian regimes, could ever have been created. To embrace the second involves artificially smoothing the contours of the right, and ignoring very real differences, tensions and downright enmities within the admittedly very broad church of European rightism.

It cannot seriously be denied that as movements, parties and political

ideologies, conservatism and fascism occupied very different positions within the early and mid-twentieth century European right, converging at some points and conflicting at others. In certain circumstances, especially characteristic of the 1919–45 period, convergence outweighed conflict, and the uneasy coupling of fascism and conservatism spawned a new kind of political regime. With fascists often showing a tendency to succumb to a cosy conservatism, and conservatives sometimes embracing the rhetoric (or more) of fascism, such regimes exhibited a kaleidoscopic variety of tendencies of which the rarest was what might be termed 'pure' fascism. In many cases, genuine–that is to say self-consciously radical–fascists were a negligible force and any 'fascist' elements at most merely cosmetic. Elsewhere, notably in Spain, assorted conservatives proved capable of displacing radical fascism. In Fascist Italy, surely the paradigmatic fascist regime, conservatives co-existed with fascists, survived largely unscathed, and when given the opportunity overthrew the Fascist regime. Only in Germany did the conservative right come close to being devoured by the tiger it had chosen to ride.

NOTES

1 The general bibliography on fascism is now vast. The following is intended merely as a selective guide: F.L.Carstens *The Rise of Fascism* (London, 1967); S.G.Payne, *Fascism. Comparison and Definition* (Madison. Wis., 1980); N.O'Sullivan, *Fascism* (London and Melbourne, 1983); M.Kitchen, *Fascism* (London, 1976); J.Weiss, *The Fascist Tradition. Radical Right-Wing Extremism in Modern Europe* (New York, 1967); E.Weber, *Varieties of Fascism* (Princeton, NJ, 1964); S.J.Woolf (ed.), *Fascism in Europe* (London, 1981) [an earlier edition appeared in 1968 as *European Fascism*]; S.J.Woolf (ed.), *The Nature of Fascism* (London, 1968); A.J.Gregor, *Interpretations of Fascism* (Berkeley Calif., 1974); W.Laqueur (ed.), *Fascism. A Reader's Guide. Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography* (London, 1976); H.R.Kedward, *Fascism in Western Europe 1900–45* (New York, 1971); N.Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship* (London, 1979); M.Vajda, *Fascism as a Mass Movement* (London, 1976).

On the fascist-conservative relationship, see H.Rogger and E.Weber (eds), *The European Right. A Historical Profile* (London, 1965); E.Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism* (London, 1963); Barrington Moore Jr, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy. Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modem World* (London, 1967).

Two recent volumes examine in detail the social base of fascism: S.U.Larsen, B.Hagtvet and J.Myklebust (eds), *Who Were the Fascists? Social Roots of European Fascism* (Bergen, Oslo and Tromsø, 1980) and D.Mühlberger (ed.), *The Social Basis of European Fascist Movements* (London, New York and Sydney, 1987).

2 On conservatism see H.Rogger and E.Weber (eds) *The European Right. A Historical Profile;* N.O'Sullivan, *Conservatism* (London, 1976); J.Weiss, *Conservatism in Europe, 1770–1945* (London, 1977); R.Kirk, *The Conservative Mind* (London, 1954); S.P. Huntington, 'Conservatism as an ideology', *American Political Science Review,* vol. II (1957), pp. 454–73; C.Rossiter, 'Conservatism', in D.L.Sills (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York, 1968), Vol. iii, pp. 290–4; P.Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited* (New York, 1965). See also two issues of the *Journal of Contemporary History* devoted to 'A century of conservatism': vol. 13, no. 4 (October 1978) and vol. 14, no. 4 (October 1979).

2

Italian fascism: radical politics and conservative goals

Roland Sarti

Explicit professions of conservatism have been fairly rare in Italian politics. Ever since national unification was achieved under conditions of near-revolution, political movements have sought to gain credibility and support by proposing strategies of change that were more or less radical in nature. Indeed, even in those few instances when the conservative label has been borne with pride the object has been to bring about change in the established political order. On the whole, Italian conservatives have shown little Burkean respect for institutions and processes received from the distant past. Conservatism in Italy may express itself as an abiding loyalty to family, local community, land, or religion, and to the values and social relationships based on respect for these institutions, but much less often as an attachment to specific political institutions and processes. The general reluctance to endorse specific political forms except in the very short run means that in Italian politics conservatism tends to reside largely in the eyes of beholders. Participants prefer to be known as advocates of change, modernization and progress.

The perceptions of beholders and participants were strikingly different in the case of fascism. In the early days of the movement left-wing critics of fascism found enough evidence of collusion between Fascists and landowners, particularly after 1921, to describe fascism as conservative or reactionary in spite of its origins in the revolutionary tradition.[1] The accusation was hotly denied by Fascists who insisted on the revolutionary character and mission of their movement. According to Giuseppe Bottai, fascism was the only revolutionary movement of the twentieth century because of its roots in the cultural reaction against nineteenth-century rationalism. More commonly, Fascist intellectuals preferred to emphasize the alleged uniqueness of their movement, which they claimed enabled it to transcend conventional distinctions between left and right. That view was perhaps stated most effectively by Sergio Panunzio who, while acknowledging the movement's conservatism on such matters as the importance of strong family ties, propagation of Catholicism among the masses, respect for the authority of the state, the role of women within the

family, and restriction of popular initiatives, argued nevertheless that 'in other respects fascism is innovative to such a degree that conservatives fear it, particularly when it affirms its commitment to establish the syndical state and demolish the parliamentary state'.[2]

Such subjective perceptions, whether favourable or unfavourable, help us to understand the nature of the political debate but not necessarily the nature of fascism or, least of all, any possible connections with conservatism. Discussion of their relationship is complicated by the fact that neither is easy to define. The common tendency to use the term 'fascist' as a political epithet and 'conservative' as a synonym for retrograde or reactionary does not help. But scholars who usually avoid such loose language also find it difficult to come up with generally acceptable definitions, probably because fascism lacks a clearly recognizable fountainhead in the world of ideas and conservatism encompasses attitudes and phenomena that go beyond ideology and politics. Clinton Rossiter's definition of conservatism, for instance, distinguished between three basic varieties. The first, temperamental conservatism, manifests itself according to Rossiter as a disposition to resist dislocating changes in the routines and structures of daily life. The second, situational conservatism, is said to reflect a more deliberate and systematic opposition to disruptive change in the realm of social mores, hierarchic relationships and religion. Political conservatism, the third form, differs from these other varieties in at least one important respect. Often referred to as 'the right', political conservatism can exist only in modern society, as an organized force surrounded by other organized political forces competing to direct the course of change.[3]

Let us dwell on this last definition. If it is true that political conservatism is indeed a modern phenomenon, then we would not expect conservative movements to renounce the principles and techniques of modern politics, including pursuit of popular support, development of mechanisms for mass mobilization, courting of specific interest groups for political purposes, and use of mass media to convey political messages. It may be suggested that in their acceptance of modern technology, such as the use of computers in our own time, and of mass-mobilization techniques, movements of the right are not basically different from any other movements. In modern politics massive assaults on the autonomy and conscience of individuals are not the prerogative of any particular current. While the forms may range from mass rallies to paid commercials, manipulative techniques are employed systematically from left to right. For that reason they are not particularly useful for purposes of distinction and classification. We can therefore express legitimate reservations about interpretations that place fascist regimes outside the conservative tradition because of their undeniably original use of mobilization and propaganda techniques.[4] Techniques are, after all, only means to an end. Our discussion of fascism concerns itself more with ends than means.

Using history as a guide, we can say that starting with the French Revolution conservatives have pictured themselves as defenders of established institutions, social relationships, or values against the forces of change. Describing conservative goals in this deliberately general manner is preferable to positing a necessarily antagonistic relationship between right and left, not only because right and left may often practise the same kind of politics but, more to the point in the case of Italy, because both conservatives and Fascists have perceived enemies on many different points of the political spectrum. In the context of Italian politics, the forces of change could be plausibly perceived as being represented by Communists, Socialists, liberals, or even politically active Catholics. Against the push for change orchestrated by one or more of these groups, conservatives have generally upheld the need for a principle of order, the value of social distinctions and the legitimacy of private property, and have expressed suspicion of purely rational remedies, majority rule and egalitarian notions. Probably the best way to approach a discussion of conservatism and fascism is to try to relate the choice of means to the attainment of such generic, but economically and socially meaningful, goals.

Efforts to present fascism as a specific form of conservatism have always run into difficulties, for fairly obvious reasons. To revert to Rossiter's distinctions, if we perceive conservatism as an attitudinal phenomenon we risk not being able to relate it to any specific form of political activity. The tendency to resist dislocations in the routines and structures of daily life manifests itself in most political movements, including the most radical. Fascists and communists can be equally adverse to changes in eating habits, pastimes and work schedules. Furthermore, we can safely assume that a movement like the fascist whose ideology professed enthusiasm for adventure, risk and aggrandizement must have attracted more than its share of temperamental iconoclasts. 'Me ne frego' ('I don't give a damn') is not a sentiment likely to appeal to temperamental conservatives.

In the case of Rossiter's second category, that of situational conservatism, it is perhaps easier to see similarities with fascism. Here we are dealing with attitudes towards aspects of the public order like religion, law, contract, and social hierarchy. Fascist legislation on church-state relations, relations within the family, the role of private property, and labour relations on the whole bolstered these principles, but anti-clerical, anti-monarchist and anti-bourgeois tendencies were never extinguished and actually served the regime by prolonging the hope, dear to some, that fascism would some day turn radical.[5] Attempts to see fascism as a projection of authoritarian personality traits raise troublesome questions. A good case in point is Theodore Adorno's *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950),

which ultimately blurs distinctions between conservatism, authoritarianism, fascism and totalitarianism.[6]

Distinctions being an essential part of historical reasoning, we should explore the relationship between conservatism and fascism with due regard for the specifics of place and time. That was the message of Karl Mannheim's well-known essay of 1927 on 'Conservative thought', wherein he cautioned that

> Conservative action…is always dependent on *a concrete sense of circumstances.* There is no means of knowing in advance what forms a conservative action in the political sense will take…how a conservative will react can only be determined approximately *if we know a good deal about the conservative movement* in the period and in the country under discussion.[7]

The country under discussion being Italy, we immediately face the problem of having to identify a conservative tradition in a context where, as previously noted, open professions of conservatism have been rare and a broadly based conservative movement has never materialized. Since self-confessed conservative Fascists were rarer than Venetian gondoliers in the Gulf of Naples, we must investigate the question by looking beyond the realm of stated intentions.[8]

We begin with Mannheim's observation that conservative action is always dependent upon a set of concrete circumstances. The circumstances of Italian political life after national unification made it almost impossible for leaders and governments to present themselves as conservative. In international relations Italy's position as the least of the great European powers put pressure on the political class and its representatives to come up with strategies of expansion and to test their effectiveness on a fairly regular basis. Italy's African campaigns in the nineteenth century, the Italo-Turkish War of 1911–12, the First World War, the reconquest of Libya in the 1920s, the Italo-Ethiopian War (1935–6), the intervention in Spain (1936–9), the annexation of Albania (1939) and finally the Second World War, make Italy the European power most ready to engage in combat during that period. The invocation of the *Hymn of Garibaldi* that Italy cease to be a land of music and song and resume its ancient role as a warrior nation was realized in the first half of the twentieth century with unexpected suddenness and intensity.

Such activism in foreign policy did not accord with conservatism at home. Long before the Fascists came to power the Italian state used its considerable resources to instil a sense of national pride in the people and to develop the economic muscle needed to play an active role far from home.[9] Protective tariffs, government subsidies and contracts on behalf of steel,

armaments and shipbuilding made the Liberal state the most revolutionary agent in Italian society.

Following Italy's humiliation at Adowa in 1896 the connection between activism abroad and radical change at home became explicit. Enrico Corradini's political review *Il Regno* (1903–6) called for reforms that would foster political unity at home to strengthen Italy's posture abroad. In the thinking of frustrated nationalists like Corradini, the stronger the desire to gain international stature the greater the propensity to demand radical transformations of the system of government. Members of the Italian Nationalist Association (hereafter referred to as Nationalists), which Corradini helped to found in 1910, thought along these lines, but so did many other figures and groups, including Futurists, D'Annunzians of various stripes, and even Liberal critics of Parliament like Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto, all of them considered precursors of fascism.[10] Although we often refer to them as belonging to the right, it was a right that showed little reverence for the institutions of government inherited from the previous generation of Risorgimento leaders. They were not conservative in that sense, but we should not rule out the possibility that, as Mannheim suggests, their politics may have been conservative in ways that must be understood in reference to a specific historical context.

The context is provided by the circumstances of national unification. Achieved against the wishes of the Church, the Bourbons and the Habsburgs, and without much popular support outside of urban society, national unification drove genuine conservatives out of national politics. The outcasts included legitimists who remained loyal to the deposed dynasties, clericals, segments of the nobility, the clergy and all but the wealthiest peasants. Most Italians were deliberately excluded from politics by a narrow franchise that gave the vote to less than 2 per cent of the population in 1861 and reflected the fear of the governing Liberal minority toward the rest of society. Conservatives who under different circumstances could have played a constructive role as a party of opposition were in fact absent from national politics for some forty years after national unification. They were present in local politics where they often found considerable support, but their presence at the grassroots level only reinforced the Liberals' fears towards the *paese reale,* the 'real society' that was seen as being hostile or indifferent to the laws and institutions that made up the *paese legale*.

The call to bridge the gap between the two societies came first from the conservative wing of the Liberal establishment. The use of the term 'conservative' is justified in this case by the fact that it was borne proudly by the movement's founder, Catholic senator Stefano Jacini. His conservatism was actually an idiosyncratic version of the dominant liberalism, for while criticizing the Liberals for misgoverning the country, Jacini accepted

national unification as irreversible and parliamentary government as desirable. Jacini feared that the gap between *paese reale* and *paese legale* would isolate the state from the people. His proposals for strengthening the state included extending voting rights, encouraging local self-government, and invigorating the economy by modernizing agriculture.[11] The National Conservative Party that was to promote this programme was virtually stillborn in the early 1880s, but Jacini's politically premature attempt at national reconciliation is nevertheless interesting as an anticipation of future expressions of conservatism. In this first manifestation, Italian conservatism displayed a recurring concern for strengthening the state, a suspicion of Liberal politicians elected by narrow constituencies and of political cliques entrenched in the elective Chamber of Deputies, and the expectation that disenfranchised citizens could be relied upon to help correct the abuses of government and the weakness of the state.

Conservative hopes of finding popular support would be undercut by political developments that followed the demise of the National Conservatives. By the early 1890s it was clear that the Socialists also enjoyed broad popular support. Parliamentary conservatives, fearful of popular support for both Socialists and Catholics, had to rethink their political tactics. Their goal was still, as it had been in Jacini's time, to strengthen the state, but now they sought to strengthen it by institutional reform at the centre of government rather than by electoral reform in the country at large. Several measures adopted during Francesco Crispi's second administration of 1893–6, most notably the purging of 847,000 voters from the electoral lists, were indicative of growing conservative fears of popular participation in public life. But the clearest expression of the new conservative fear of the *paese reale* appeared in Sidney Sonnino's call of 1897 for a 'Return to the *Statuto*', the original Piedmontese constitution of 1848 which gave the Crown far more independence than was the case in Italian politics in 1897. Like Jacini before him, Sonnino singled out the Chamber as primarily responsible for misgoverning the country, but his attack on the only elected branch of Parliament reflected a more general fear of popular participation in government and grassroots organizations. He confided these fears to his diary, writing that it was his ultimate intention to stop the gains of Socialists and Catholics, 'especially the former who are organizing powerfully', and to restrict those laws that gave 'dominance to the numerically larger classes'.[12]

The 'Return to the *Statuto*' approach signalled a quantitative rather than a qualitative shift in conservative politics, for conservatives like Sonnino and Antonio Salandra, the landowner from Apulia who served as Prime Minister in 1914–16, never abandoned attempts to secure broad popular support for a conservative programme. Sonnino's course during the protracted parliamentary crisis of 1899–1900 also envisaged, besides curbing Parliament and strengthening the Crown, launching a new

Conservative Party that would rally support for administrative and social reforms. The repeated failure of such efforts in years to come forced Sonnino, Salandra and their parliamentary supporters to remain within the Liberal camp, which was dominated by the more pragmatic and resourceful Giovanni Giolitti. In the Liberal camp they were neither fish nor fowl, for while profoundly at odds with Giolitti's tactics of dealing with Socialists and Catholics as parliamentary needs dictated, they were at the same time unable to play the role of consistent and principled opposition to which they aspired. Unable to emerge as a fully autonomous party of opposition, they may indeed have brought Italy into the First World War in May 1915 in the hope that a rapid victory would give them the political leverage denied to them by the normal course of parliamentary politics.[13] But whatever their intentions may have been in the spring of 1915, it seems clear that the absence of a Conservative Party firmly committed to parliamentary government opened the way to the emergence of new groups on the right who were both hostile to Parliament in principle and determined to bring about change by political action outside Parliament. This was the political vacuum that was filled 'first by Nationalists, and later by other forces among which fascism would eventually emerge the winner'.[14]

There were no organizational ties between this new right and the older right of Sonnino and Salandra. The old right was made up of seasoned parliamentarians who accepted the ground-rules of parliamentary government, the new right of brash young intellectuals who rejected Parliament and liberalism, and asserted the need for a bold, expansionist foreign policy.[15] They sought support not in the halls of Parliament or among the disenfranchised but, rather, among the intelligentsia, businessmen, and iconoclasts of all ages. But in some respects the old and new right were closer than is sometimes argued.[16] Both were suspicious of the political force that resides in numbers (and the number of eligible voters was growing: from 2 million in 1882 to 2.9 million in 1909 and 8.4 million in 1913); both saw the affirmation of socialism as a direct result of mass mobilization; both held liberalism primarily responsible for the country's alleged drift to the left; both believed that freedom of speech and association, and Giolitti's recognition of the workers' right to strike, led to the emergence of a state within the state by promoting the growth of trade unions, chambers of labour, co-operatives and rural leagues. In spite of their undeniable differences, old and new right were one in their commitment to a strong state capable of resisting popular pressures. It is that commitment that justifies placing both within the same tradition of conservative politics.

Probably the most significant difference between the old and new right was the latter's awareness that the dawning age of mass politics required new forms of political mobilization. That awareness was particularly

evident in the writings of Alfredo Rocco, the Nationalist jurist who elaborated the most systematic alternative to the Liberal state based on an integral view of society.[17] The strong state envisaged by Rocco had to reach deep into the *paese reale* without making concessions to the principle of independent initiative capable of resisting the power of the state. Achieving that goal required new forms of mass mobilization that did not exist in the Liberal state. Among Nationalists, designing those new forms became the task of theoreticians like Rocco, while devising the political tactics to achieve those goals became the concern of effective power brokers. In the latter role, Luigi Federzoni would distinguish himself when he became Minister of the Interior under Mussolini in 1924–6.

Although in the long run the Nationalists influenced fascism in decisive ways, their role was by no means predetermined. In its early years fascism was a movement of vigorously competing currents and factions. Thus, when the Nationalist and Fascist parties merged formally in February 1923, the former Nationalists encountered within the Fascist Party entrenched rivals who were by no means prepared to defer to the newcomers.[18] Among these competitors, the Nationalists stood out in many ways: they were committed to gradual reform of the state, were determined that any changes be carefully controlled by representatives of the state and believed that the state must assume important responsibilities to secure social justice for the people. They abhorred initiatives, popular or otherwise, that the state could not control, insisting that everything occur within, and nothing against, the state. They were conservative not in the sense of being opposed to change, but of wanting to retain control of those changes that were an inevitable part of the process of modernization. It is only in this sense that one can speak of Fascist conservatism: change carefully controlled from above, making no concessions to pluralism and independent initiative. For Rocco, who served as Fascist Minister of Justice from 1925 to 1932, this meant nothing less than carrying out a 'conservative revolution'.[19]

Most Fascist leaders preferred to avoid the conservative label altogether, concentrating instead on pushing alternative versions of revolution. The names of Giuseppe Bottai, Roberto Farinacci and Massimo Rocca come perhaps most readily to mind in this regard. Each played an important role in the 1920s in a race to see who would eventually dominate the course of the Fascist revolution. Their activities are well documented in the first two volumes of Renzo De Felice's ongoing biography of Mussolini. But none of them had convincing credentials as would-be revolutionists, and only Farinacci had an independent basis of power that gave him a measure of security. The former Nationalists' most serious and worrisome rivals were the syndicalists, some of them former Marxists who had found a place in fascism. They had experience, organization and support among workers

and peasants. The rivalry between these labour leaders and former Nationalists recreated within fascism some of the ideological and class tensions that had bedevilled the old Liberal regime.

In discussing the syndicalists' role within fascism the most difficult task is to ascertain their degree of influence. The revolutionary thrust of their ideas has been well demonstrated.[20] There can be little doubt that on ideological grounds they were the nemesis of all the conservative interests that flocked to fascism after the March on Rome. The rediscovery of this revolutionary component of fascism corrects crude Marxist interpretations of fascism as a pliable tool in the hands of capitalists. At the same time, concentrating attention on one strand of fascism raises the danger of an opposite distortion, for while it is sufficiently clear at the current stage of research that the syndicalists were indeed strong enough to leave their mark on the regime, it is no less apparent that their major proposals for restructuring Italian society were decisively defeated in the 1920s. The works that provide the best understanding of what the syndicalists did and failed to do are those that pay close attention to the rivalries, confrontations and compromises that marked the internal history of fascism.[21] Also useful but perhaps less definitive because of the difficult issues they address are works that try to assess the impact of the Fascist labour movement on wages, standard of living, popular perceptions of the regime, and economic development.[22] The Fascist labour movement played a significant role in these areas where the syndicalists had to devise strategies that reconciled the interests of labour with the political needs of the regime.

Regimes born of revolution face the dilemma of how to prolong their credibility as carriers of revolution while at the same time erecting a new system of order. All the currents present in fascism, whether potentially revolutionary or conservative, were dominated by the logic of a system that had to appear revolutionary while simultaneously implementing measures for law and order. The resulting dynamics made it expedient for conservative Nationalists to pose as a party of revolution and for revolutionary syndicalists to claim that their chief concerns were social stability and economic productivity. In both instances it was the apparent ability to reconcile contrasting claims that made them particularly useful to fascism and Mussolini. The original encounter between Mussolini and the revolutionary syndicalists occurred in 1914–15 when they all argued for Italian intervention in the war against the Central Powers. The founding of the Unione Italiana del Lavoro (UIL) in November 1914 gave the syndicalists a narrow basis among workers that they would expand after the war largely through the efforts of Edmondo Rossoni. Rossoni's recruitment among land-workers succeeded largely because of his working relationship with Fascist leaders, particularly Italo Balbo in Ferrara during 1921–2.[23] In January 1922 Rossoni became secretary-general of the