# Modern Italy

## 1871 to the present

THIRD EDITION

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reason why economic growth was so slow, and why the 'spurt' of the 1880s petered out. Italy lacked an entrepreneurial middle class, nor could the deficiency be supplied from below. Her skilled artisans were being squeezed by international competition, and in any case lacked the finance, contacts and literacy essential for founding successful businesses. On the other hand, Italy was over-endowed with a host of officials and clerks, squabbling among themselves for the spoils of office; and the holders of economic power were still mainly a landowning 'gentry' class, living off the peasants. Over most of Italy the upper and middle classes were not 'modern', not educated or travelled or enlightened. Many of them disliked and feared industry. They prized unearned income above earned, relied on rents or governments for their prosperity and clung firmly to 'traditional' values. They even preferred to settle their quarrels by duel, to great public acclaim. In short, they were not 'middle class' at all, but aristocrats *manqués*.

And the real aristocrats were still numerous. Sicily alone could boast of 208 princes, 123 dukes, 244 marquises and 104 counts; and the mainland South (the old Kingdom of Naples) did even better, with 172 princes, 318 dukes, 366 marquises and 81 counts. There were 321 patrician families in Rome, 28 of them with the title of prince. The other regions, especially Tuscany and Piedmont, were also well stocked with noble blood. Throughout Italy there were 7,387 noble families, plus 318 *signori* in Piedmont and 46 hereditary *cavalieri* in Lombardy and Veneto.

What role did all these aristocrats play in society? The Prefect of Naples, when asked this question by Carpi, gave an uncompromising answer:

> *The ancient and modern nobility is powerless, uneducated, generally poor and with little influence, counts for nothing in politics, is honest in character, incapable of any initiative whatsoever, not at all diligent, and consists of a large number of needy families, a few moderately well-off ones, and a rare wealthy one.*[15]

This seems fair comment for Naples, but the Italian aristocracy was by no means a spent force elsewhere, especially in the countryside. The princes and noblemen may not have enjoyed the social prestige or political power of their Russian, Prussian or English counterparts, but they still owned vast tracts of land, especially in Sicily and the Agro Romano near Rome: ten families owned 17 per cent of all Latium. The acquisition of Church lands enabled some of them to *extend* their landholdings in the



1860s and 1870s; this was true even of the Papal aristocrats in Rome, including those closest to the Vatican.

Moreover, as cities grew larger, there were plenty of opportunities for aristocratic landowners to benefit from property ownership. This was particularly the case in Rome, where the building boom was most intense. Via Veneto, for example, was built on the site of the former Villa Boncompagni Ludovisi, which Henry James had thought the finest park in Europe. Aristocrats were welcome on the boards of the banks that financed these operations. Then there were forests to be sold off for railway sleepers, and rich heiresses to be married. In hard times, too, there were certain Court posts, in diplomacy or the army, where outdoor relief was available for the upper classes: at least one-third of the diplomats in the foreign service were noblemen. Even politically some aristocrats survived. By 1879 the Papal aristocracy controlled local government in Rome again, and in 1882 Prince Leopoldo Torlonia became acting mayor. In short, aristocratic landowners retained much of their wealth, and formed an important, if often underestimated, part of the social élite.

## 2.4 Making Italians

The Liberal élite that ruled Italy may have been divided on many issues, but on one thing it was agreed: the need to create a unified nation. Its inspiration was d'Azeglio's famous saying: 'We have made Italy; now we must make Italians.' This was a formidable task. 'Italy' in 1871 consisted of a number of very different regional societies, with different economies and ways of life, different cultures, different histories and different religious practices. Even 'regional' is too broad a term: there were plenty of economic and cultural differences within, say, Sicily, and the rivalry between the Tuscan towns was proverbial. Most of the Southern 'regions' were, in fact, invented in 1864 by the Statistical Office, to group its data more conveniently: they had no cohesion, and arguably the mainland South consisted of several differing rural economies, all dominated by their capital city of Naples. Furthermore, 'nation-building' was hampered by economic backwardness, by clerical hostility and by the fact that most Italians could neither read nor write.

In one sense, of course, d'Azeglio's phrase was nonsense. There were plenty of Italians already – 26.8 million of them, according to the 1871 census – and the birth rate was high. In 1871 there were 160.5 live births per 1,000 women of child-bearing age, and in 1881 there were 160.9. The birth rate in the South was higher than elsewhere, but not all that much.

One-third of the population was aged below 15, and the proportion would have been much greater had it not been for the high level of infant and child mortality: 22.7 per cent of the children born alive in 1871 died in their first year, and almost 50 per cent died before reaching their fifth birthday. But infantile mortality declined later in the century: 'only' 17.6 per cent of the children born between 1891 and 1900 died in their first year.

The general death rate, also high in 1871 at 30 per 1,000 inhabitants, was down to 24.2 by the last decade of the nineteenth century, although the decline was much slower in the South. In other words, deaths decreased sooner and faster than births, an obvious recipe for population growth. By 1881 there were 28.5 million inhabitants, and by 1901 32.5 million. The picture is one of the early stages of the 'demographic transition', from a high birth–high death 'equilibrium' to a new equilibrium based on low birth and low death rates – a new equilibrium that was not achieved anywhere in Italy until the twentieth century.

Considering the rural nature of the economy, Italy's people were remarkably urban even in 1871. The census of that year found nearly 18 per cent of them living in municipalities (*comuni*) with more than 50,000 inhabitants; 31 per cent of them lived in *comuni* which contained a 'centre' of at least 6,000 people. Northern and Central Italy were covered by small and medium towns, each with its own proud history and traditions. As time passed, most of the Northern towns grew, some becoming important centres of industry. In the South, on the other hand, the end of brigandage gradually made the countryside safer, and the proportion of people living in 'scattered houses' increased quite markedly (from 10.7 to 16.6 per cent in Campania, and from 11.3 to 17.3 per cent in Calabria, between 1871 and 1901). In short, the North became more urbanized, the South more 'rural'. Both processes showed economic progress. Certainly many Southern peasants welcomed the chance of saving their daily two or three hours' travelling between house and fields, and possibly also the need to keep a mule.

The largest city in Italy was in the South. In 1871 the city of Naples was reckoned to have 415,000 people, almost twice as many as Rome, and more than twice the figure for Milan or Turin. But the city had problems. It had lost its Court, and therefore most of its *raison d'être* as an administrative, legal and diplomatic centre. It was grossly overcrowded, with housing and hygienic arrangements among the worst in Europe. And its hinterland, i.e. the rest of the mainland South, on which it had lived for centuries, had suddenly been brought into direct contact with the rest of Italy. It is not surprising that late nineteenth-century Naples grew far more slowly than Rome or most of the Northern cities, or even than some of the Southern ones (e.g. Catania). It could not hope to absorb the Southern population surplus, and this fact had important demographic and economic consequences, particularly affecting emigration (see §8.1).



Emigration was not a new phenomenon even in 1871. Probably around 120,000 Italians emigrated in that year. The 1871 census tried to count Italians living abroad and came up with the figure of 400,000, but some countries refused to supply information. There were two kinds of emigration. Mostly it was temporary, consisting of male peasants moving from Northern hill or mountain areas into France, Switzerland or Austria-Hungary for a season's work on building sites or the like. This was a well-established practice in parts of Piedmont, Veneto and Lombardy, and included some skilled workers (stonemasons, carpenters, etc.). The other main type of emigration was more permanent, and consisted essentially of Ligurian and other Northern emigrants settling in Brazil or the Argentine. Over half the Italians on the American continent in 1871 were Ligurians: clearly the spirit of Columbus was not yet dead. Both these kinds of emigration were still Northern. The great age of mass movements of Southern peasants had yet to come.

The broad picture of emigration after 1876 is as follows. Emigration to Europe rose slowly from about 80,000 a year in the late 1870s to just over 100,000 a year in the early 1890s. It became very characteristic of the Veneto, which provided practically half the European migrants by 1886–88, and nearly two-thirds ten years later. Piedmont, Lombardy and Liguria provided diminishing numbers of seasonal or temporary migrants, as economic growth began to be concentrated there. Transatlantic emigration rose much more dramatically, from about 20,000 a year before 1879 to 130,000 in 1887, and to nearly 205,000 in 1888. By 1891 it was officially estimated that over 1.4 million Italians were living in the Americas. Most of them were still from the North, but by the late 1880s certain areas of the South – Abruzzi, Molise, Basilicata, the province of Salerno – had begun to provide significant numbers. Coletti estimated that in 1886–88 around 57,000 people a year left the South for America, slightly more per head of population than came from the North or Central Italy.

Why did they go? The short answer, and a true one, is 'poverty'. Looking at conditions in rural Veneto or Calabria, or even in Piedmont and Lombardy, the surprising thing is not that so many went away, but that so many stayed behind. Overpopulation, unemployment, land

hunger, high taxation, conscription – all these could be avoided, but only by emigrating. The poor hill areas provided the most emigrants, for they were the zones of peasant landownership, where there was constant pressure on limited resources and where the chances of significant agricultural 'improvements' were small. However, other reasons besides poverty were also important. Many rural Italians, especially the day-labourers, had long been accustomed to seasonal migration into other regions of Italy; they were more mobile, and less attached to the land, than peasants are often supposed, by townsmen, to be. This tradition could easily turn into a preference for another country, if conditions and rewards were better 'over there'. As early as July 1871 the Prefect of Macerata had told one investigator that the peasants in his province had long been accustomed to find seasonal work in the Roman *Campagna*, but it gave them malaria, so now they sensibly preferred to go to America.[16] And, of course, the 'pull' was as important as the 'push'. There had to be somewhere for the emigrants to go, and some means of getting there. The crock of gold across the Atlantic, and the invention and spread of the steamship, 'explain' the emigration figures just as much as do rural conditions within Italy herself.

Above all, there were the agents acting on behalf of steamship companies or foreign employers, and getting their cut of 20 lire per head. They were the vital middlemen at local level – the lawyers, the teachers and mayors who advertised the voyage, arranged the passports, booked the passages, lent the money for the fares (at usurious rates) and sold the peasants' houses (for a commission). Those Italians who regarded emigration as an unmitigated disaster blamed it all on these venal speculators, trafficking in human flesh. The argument was convincing: how else could an illiterate peasant have got to America? The small-town 'political class' had a vested interest in emigration, which was an important unofficial source of income. This interest conflicted with that of the big landowners, who worried in case mass emigration put up wages; where the big landowners controlled local government, there was noticeably less emigration. But attempts to limit emigration were rarely successful in the long run. By the 1890s the middle class in most of the South was busy enrolling peasants, hiring ships and choosing destinations; sometimes it even managed to export its social dominance across the Atlantic, to reappear in America as 'bossism'.

It is an obvious fact, but usually overlooked until very recently, that half the Italian population were women. Surprisingly little is known about the position of women in nineteenth-century Italy. Certainly they were less educated even than men, as the illiteracy figures show. Novelists like Giovanni Verga and 'folklorists' like Giuseppe Pitré depicted a rigid



patriarchal society, preoccupied by honour and sexual fidelity. This may have been true in parts of Sicily, but was not necessarily so elsewhere, even in the South. Our main source of contemporary information is Carpi, who in the early 1870s asked the Prefects about the 'woman of the people'. The Prefect of Foggia informed him that the women of the plain were cleaner than those in the hills, and less likely to be beaten. The Prefect of Bari reported that 'an ass, an ox, a sheep, are almost always worth more than a wife to the peasant, and the wife obeys her husband like a slave'; although he admitted that the slavery began only on marriage, and that girls were brought up on an equal footing with boys. In Sardinia, on the other hand, 'the woman is loved and respected, and is considered an integral part of the family, in which ties of kinship are greatly esteemed'. In Milan, the women were very religious (this was true almost everywhere) and of good sexual morality. But the Prefect of Agrigento was less favourably impressed: 'superstitious, gossipy, quarrelsome and turbulent, the women pay little attention to their personal cleanliness and none whatsoever to that of their houses'.[17]

In general, it seems that 'the family' was an unchallengeable institution. It was also the economic unit. In share-cropping areas family size was much larger for this reason: many hands were needed on the land. Indeed, in many areas women were expected to play their full part in agricultural work, even as hired labour (e.g. the rice-growers in Piedmont); and where this was not so, the women carried on domestic industry like weaving. The 1881 census reported that 5.7 million women (out of 11 million aged 10 or over) were 'active', a very high proportion by European standards. Ellena's survey of industry in 1876, which excluded domestic industry, found 230,000 female industrial workers out of a total of 382,000. Thus women and girls formed around 60 per cent of the industrial *factory* workforce.

The main job available to middle-class girls was schoolteaching, especially at primary level. The majority of the 45,000 elementary schoolteachers in the early 1870s were women; by 1901, there were 97,000 such teachers, two-thirds of them women. Many of them had an extremely difficult time. They had to teach unruly pupils, much given to truancy, with no support from parents or clergy, and often much obstruction from local officials. The fate of attractive single schoolmistresses in Southern towns was a constant theme of high-minded concern and low-minded gossip.

Very few other jobs were open to women, except telegraph-operator, domestic servant and, of course, prostitute. The indefatigable Carpi reported that there were 9,098 prostitutes in Italy at the end of 1875, but this figure refers only to the officially-registered prostitutes operating in

licensed 'houses of tolerance' and subjected to compulsory medical inspections. There must have been far more working freelance. William Acton, visiting Naples in the 1850s, saw thousands in special suburbs near the English cemetery. We know, in fact, very little about this subject, nor about the incidence of syphilis (which became a notifiable disease only in 1925). Apart from the usual obstacles to research in this field, the dominant school of positivist sociologists had little respect for women in general and regarded prostitutes, in particular, as innately primitive, like Red Indians or Negroes. They had 'strong jaws and cheek-bones, sessile [*sic*] ears, hypertrophy of the middle incisors, atrophy of the lateral teeth, and dullness of the sense of touch'.[18] One wonders how they secured customers. About the only credible finding to emerge from the contemporary research is that nineteenth-century Italian prostitutes, who took ample food and little exercise, soon ran to fat.

## 2.5 Education and literacy

One obvious obstacle to realizing d'Azeglio's dream of 'making Italians' was the fact that most people could barely speak the Italian language, or understand what anybody from another region was saying. There were several minority linguistic groups scattered throughout the country – 80,000 French-speakers in the Valle d'Aosta, 96,000 Albanian and 30,000 Greek-speakers in the South, perhaps 30,000 Slav-speakers in Friuli and Molise – but these amounted to only about 1 per cent of the population, and were not the real problem. Far more important was the fact that most of the other 99 per cent spoke regional dialects and nothing else. This was true even among the upper classes: King Victor Emmanuel II himself nearly always spoke in Piedmontese, even to his Cabinet ministers. His famous remark on arriving at Rome, which the history books record as '*ci siamo e ci resteremo*' ('here we are and here we shall stay'), was actually '*finalment i suma*' ('we're here at last') – said after a long and tiring journey! In most of Italy Italian, like Latin, was a dead language, used occasionally for literary purposes by the intellectual élite. Only in Rome, which had long been a centre of immigration for Italians from other regions, and in parts of Tuscany, where the Italian language had been created from the Florentine dialect, was 'Italian' spoken by the man in the street. Tullio De Mauro has estimated that outside Tuscany and Rome perhaps 0.6 per cent of the Italian population knew Italian; even including them, the proportion goes up only to 2.5 per cent, i.e. 400,000 Tuscans, 70,000 Romans and 160,000 others, out of a total population of 26.8 million.[19] There is no



more impressive index of how 'regional' Italy was in 1871, of how few economic, social or political links had been created throughout the centuries. Many aspects of late nineteenth-century Italian history – the slowness to eradicate illiteracy, the low circulation of newspapers and journals, the amazing willingness of Italians to emigrate to foreign countries with strange tongues and stranger manners – become more comprehensible if one remembers that Italians did not normally speak the same language, and could not communicate with each other.

As long as 'Italian' remained only a written language, to be illiterate was to be ignorant of Italian. Conversely, since school readers and textbooks were written in Italian, and since the medium of instruction in schools was supposed to be Italian, to be ignorant of Italian was to be, and remain, illiterate. The illiteracy figures are, indeed, impressive. According to the 1871 census, 68.8 per cent of the Italian population aged 6 and over were illiterate (61.9 per cent of the men, 75.7 per cent of the women). As usual, this national figure disguised considerable regional variations (see Table 2.1). Among Southern peasants illiteracy must have been well-nigh

**TABLE 2.1** *Illiteracy by region: 1871, 1881, 1901 and 1911*

| | *Illiterates per 100 inhabitants aged 6 and over (male and female)* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *1871* | *1881* | *1901* | *1911* |
| Piedmont | 42.3 | 32.3 | 17.7 | 11.0 |
| Lombardy | 45.2 | 37.0 | 21.6 | 13.4 |
| Veneto | 64.7 | 54.1 | 35.4 | 25.2 |
| Liguria | 56.3 | 44.5 | 26.5 | 17.0 |
| Emilia-Romagna | 71.9 | 63.5 | 46.3 | 32.7 |
| Tuscany | 68.1 | 61.9 | 48.2 | 37.4 |
| Umbria | 80.2 | 73.7 | 60.3 | 48.6 |
| Marches | 79.0 | 74.1 | 62.5 | 50.7 |
| Latium | 67.7 | 58.2 | 43.8 | 33.2 |
| Abruzzi-Molise | 84.8 | 80.6 | 69.8 | 57.6 |
| Campania | 80.0 | 75.2 | 65.1 | 53.7 |
| Apulia | 84.6 | 80.1 | 69.5 | 59.4 |
| Basilicata | 88.0 | 85.2 | 75.4 | 65.3 |
| Calabria | 87.0 | 85.0 | 78.7 | 69.6 |
| Sicily | 85.3 | 81.2 | 70.9 | 58.0 |
| Sardinia | 86.1 | 79.8 | 68.3 | 58.0 |
| Italy | 68.8 | 61.9 | 48.7 | 37.9 |

Note: The figures are those of the censuses, as given in the census reports, in the various issues of the *Annuario Statistico Italiano* and in *Annali di Statistica*, s. viii, no. 17 (Rome, 1965), 300. Females were always more illiterate than males: the excess ranged from over 20 per cent in Veneto and Abruzzi-Molise in 1871 and 1881 to only 1.2 per cent in Lombardy in 1911.

total. However, it was by no means confined to the countryside: even in the provincial capitals over half the population was illiterate. Moreover, the official figures were certainly an underestimate, since if you could write your name legibly and read a short passage you were regarded as 'literate'. Still, other sources of information about illiteracy give roughly similar results. For example, 56.7 per cent of the youths born in 1851, and conscripted into the army in 1871, could neither read nor write; a further 4.7 per cent could read only. In 1871 67.2 per cent of people getting married did not sign the parish register (57.7 per cent of the men, 76.7 per cent of the women). This may perhaps be compared with a civilized country like Scotland, where the figure was 14.8 per cent; even in England and Wales, only 23.1 per cent failed to sign.

What incentives were there to become, or to ensure that your children became, literate? Very few, in the 1870s and 1880s. There was no popular press; and since little was written in dialect, there was no point in most Italians learning to read. Only conscripts had a real motive for learning to read and write, for otherwise they might not be discharged from the army after serving their time. According to the army's own figures, only 7 per cent of the 1871 conscripts were still illiterate when discharged three years later. If so, the regimental schools were the most successful educational institutions in Italy. However, in the early 1880s the army stopped enforcing longer service on illiterates, and its success rate dropped sharply: 22 per cent of the 1884 conscripts were discharged illiterate. And in 1892 the regimental schools were abolished. However, army service was still important indirectly. It brought thousands of young men each year into contact with the Italian language, and thus helped to lay the foundation for later literacy.

The persistence of illiteracy is less surprising if we look at the state of Italian education, especially in the primary schools. Only in Piedmont and Lombardy was there any tradition of lay education, and over most of the country there was not much tradition of education at all. Official figures showed 33,556 public (i.e. municipal) elementary schools existing in 1871–72, with 34,309 teachers and 1,545,790 registered pupils. There were also 8,157 private schools (mostly clerical), with 9,114 teachers and 177,157 pupils. As usual, these figures hide more than they reveal. Over 13,000 of the public elementary schools were in Piedmont and Lombardy; Apulia, Basilicata and Calabria had 2,228 between them. Many of the 'schools' had no actual building, the pupils being taught in the teacher's house or elsewhere. Over 6,000 of the teachers in the public schools, and 4,700 in private schools, were unqualified, according to Carpi. Finally, the



'pupils' were those who registered at the beginning of the year, not those who actually attended school regularly.

All aspects of public primary education were run by the local municipalities (*comuni*), which were obliged by the Casati Law of 1859 to provide school buildings, appoint and pay teachers, etc. Many local councils, especially in the South, failed to show much enthusiasm for this task, and in any case had very little money available. As time went on, the central government made loans and subsidies available to help the local authorities, but in niggardly proportions, and most of it went to the wrong regions. The result was not only inadequate buildings. Teachers were poorly paid and although the pay scales were laid down centrally, small rural *comuni* would come to an 'agreement' with teachers to pay them less, sometimes giving them another job, e.g. as municipal secretary, to compensate.

Primary education was not legally compulsory until 1877, and even then children only had to attend two years' schooling. In 1888 this was raised to three years, but was still regarded by most educationists as inadequate to prevent illiteracy. But the legal compulsion was a fiction. In the South truancy was often well above 80 per cent. Nobody seriously tried to enforce attendance, and in any case children left school, quite legally, by the age of 8 or 9. Local councils were indifferent, the teachers were demoralized, the parents were uncooperative and the local clergy were actively hostile. Furthermore, the education dispensed was often excessively formal, and quite irrelevant to most children's needs.

The most debated educational issue was not so much illiteracy as religious instruction. This was supposedly compulsory in elementary schools, although non-Catholic parents could opt out. It usually meant the catechism, taught outside school hours for one hour a week by a layman (since priests lacked teaching certificates); and whether even this was given in practice depended on the policy of the municipal council. Religious teaching was often a dead letter, at least in towns run by anticlerical politicians. The whole issue provided a great incentive for Catholics to fight local elections, stimulating the rise of 'clerico-moderate' alliances at local level (see §5.6). Even many Liberals, like Pasquale Villari, were uneasy at the thought that the new generation of Italians might grow up without any moral instruction at all. To reassure an anxious public, the Minister of Education issued a famous circular in 1886 recommending moderate religious instruction as the source of property rights: 'We must not forget that the primary school aims at rearing a population as instructed as possible, but principally honest, hardworking, useful to the family and devoted to the Country and to the King.'[20]

It is a mistake, therefore, to regard the elementary schools primarily as institutions devoted to combating illiteracy. Their real aims were rather different. From the point of view of the Liberal ruling class after 1870, the problem was to 'make Italians', and Italians who would be patriotic and free from clerical domination.

So a single State school system was gradually created. Furthermore, it was relatively free from class divisions and petty snobberies. Most elementary schools, at least in the Northern cities, had a reasonable social mix. The middle and upper classes were often reluctant to send their children to Church schools (although the really rich preferred to employ private tutors, until the children were old enough to go to the State *liceo*). De Amicis's famous book of school stories, *Heart* – a sort of Italian version of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, set in a primary school in Turin in the 1880s – shows this clearly. It also shows how schools purveyed a constant, relentless diet of patriotism. Religion is barely mentioned throughout the book, and Church festivals are ignored. The pupils write essays on such subjects as 'Why do you love Italy?' The monthly stories are nearly always about heroic deeds done by boys on battlefields, preferably during the Risorgimento; the school bully is expelled, not for smoking or swearing, but for laughing during the commemoration of King Victor Emmanuel II; and the teacher, introducing a new boy from Calabria, warns that 'if one of you were to offend this comrade because he was not born in our province, he would render himself unworthy to raise his eyes from the earth when the tricoloured banner passes'.[21] This was nation-building, with a vengeance.

However, primary education enticed so few children into regular attendance that arguably it made little difference what was taught there. The secondary schools were rather more important, since some of them trained the country's future leaders. There were two main kinds of State secondary school. The *ginnasio* provided a five-year academic education, mainly in classics, which could lead on to a further three years at the *liceo* and thence to university. These schools, especially the *licei*, were the cradle of the new governing class, the lay, State-run equivalent of public schools in England. Although formally open to all, in practice poorer parents rarely sent their children to them, since they were not free (the fee at the *liceo* was 295 lire p.a.) and, above all, since they gave no worthwhile qualification in themselves: there was no point in starting at them unless you could afford to go on to university eight years later. The other major type of secondary school was the 'technical school'. This was much more popular with less affluent parents, for the technical schools' course was shorter (three years),



the instruction was more useful in itself, and the pupil could go on to the four-year 'technical institutes' and thence to specialist qualifications in agronomy or commerce, or to university courses in mathematics or engineering. The 'technical schools' were perhaps still too bookish. Half the timetable was devoted to Italian and French, and the rest taught mathematics and science rather than crafts. Essentially they trained an engineering and accounting élite. Finally, there was a third type of secondary school, the *scuola normale*, training future primary teachers. Many girls were sent to these three-year schools simply to receive a general secondary education.

To receive any kind of secondary education was to be privileged. In 1870–71, according to Barbagli, the State *ginnasi* and *licei* had 12,000 pupils between them; by 1881–82 there were 20,000, and by 1891–92 34,700. The technical schools and institutes had 13,000 pupils in 1881–82, and 29,000 ten years later; the *scuole normali*, at the same dates, had 6,000 and 14,200. Private schools, which were normally run by Church organizations, were much more important in secondary than in primary education. Girls' secondary education, in particular, was still largely carried on in the convents. In the South the seminaries provided much of the secondary education available for boys, taking many pupils who did not intend to enter the priesthood. Barbagli, again, estimates that in 1881–82 there were over 27,000 pupils receiving private *ginnasio* or *liceo* schooling, usually in convents or seminaries.[22] Government inspectors were often not allowed into these schools, and in general it was extremely difficult for the State to 'control' them. The Ministry of Education, and most progressive Liberals, regarded them as centres of clerical subversion.

Even so, in nineteenth-century Italy the important distinction within secondary education was not really between State schools and private ones; it was between the 'classical' schools (*ginnasi* and *licei*) and the 'technical' ones. The development of the State technical schools, and of secondary education generally, formed a striking contrast to the situation in the primary schools, and also to that in other countries. In Italy, both kinds of secondary education could lead on to university, and so the technical schools had far more prestige than those of, say, Britain. Many educationists, indeed, complained that the technical schools were too successful, and that there would be no jobs for all the newly-qualified engineers and accountants. The economic breakthrough achieved after 1896 must have owed something to the men trained in the technical schools, and to the new educational opportunities that had been provided for at least some of the lower middle classes. And technical, scientific education was certainly the

terrain on which the traditional clerical dominance of secondary education could best be challenged. Even so, only a tiny minority of children (less than 10 per cent) attended any kind of secondary school.

At the top of the educational ladder stood the universities. For a country with a backward economy and a high rate of illiteracy, these were embarrassingly numerous. There were, in fact, seventeen State universities, plus four other private or province-run ones, as well as various other institutions of comparable status (e.g. the Istituto Studi Superiori at Florence, founded in 1872, or the Accademia Scientifica e Letteraria in Milan). All of them, except that in Naples, were far too small. Bologna, for example, which boasted of being the oldest university in Europe, had 577 students in 1872–73, and that was relatively large: Macerata had 47 in 1877, and Sassari 74. At Urbino, there were more staff than students in the Faculty of Science. However, nothing is more difficult than to purge the professoriat. All attempts – and many were made – to close down the smaller universities were beaten back by outraged local interests. Altogether, perhaps 13,000 students were attending the universities at any one time in the 1870s and early 1880s. Just under 40 per cent of them studied law, and just under one-third read medicine. Most universities had at least these two faculties, and some also had Faculties of Letters and Philosophy and Faculties of Science and Mathematics, as well as courses in pharmacy and veterinary medicine. The Theology Faculties were abolished in 1872. Students of mathematics and physics tended to stay at university only for a couple of years, and completed their applied studies (in engineering, for example) at specialist institutions like the Istituto Tecnico Superiore in Milan.

It is difficult to estimate what impact all these universities had on Italian society. Certainly doctors were badly needed in 1871, although the training was fairly primitive even by normal medical standards; but whatever happened to all those law graduates? Moreover, student numbers increased rapidly after the early 1880s, almost doubling by the end of the century. In 1881–82 the universities and similar institutions produced 2,625 graduates; in 1895–96 there were 4,560. The plethora of universities clearly diverted resources away from other needs. The education budget in 1873 made provision for the universities to cost 6.2 million lire, compared with 4.5 million lire for the secondary and 2.7 million lire for the primary schools. In other words, Italian education was incredibly top-heavy. It produced both too many illiterates and too many graduates. Few were called, but many were chosen.

This education system obviously had a great influence on the press and popular literature. Newspapers in the 1870s and 1880s were local and



provincial, not national. They were often subsidized by the government (via advertising and subscriptions from public bodies, 'loans' from friendly banks, etc.) and they were read only by the élite. Circulations were small: *Il Secolo* of Milan boasted of 30,000 in 1871, and that was easily the highest in Italy. The prestigious *La Perseveranza*, regarded as the mouthpiece of the Lombard conservatives or even of the Establishment *tout court*, sold between 8,000 and 10,000 copies, as did the other main Liberal paper, *L'Opinione*. All the main papers in Rome were financed by politicians. Crispi's *La Riforma* was reckoned to cost him 100,000 lire a year in the mid-1880s. Why did he think it worth while to spend so much to influence so few? Partly because the 'political class', and the electorate itself, was so small; mainly because, in the absence of organized parties, the press provided virtually the only forum for the discussion of public issues. Only through his newspaper could he gain the support of deputies. Thus the press, despite its small circulation, was influential in faction politics. Similarly, the local papers, with even smaller circulations, filled the need for local political organization. There were literally hundreds of daily 'newspapers' in the provinces. They consisted mainly of local gossip and political comment, and were often written by one man. National and international news, when included at all, was lifted out of the French press that had been sent by post from Paris. But there was not much news. Italian papers emerged from the 'literary' rhetorical traditions of Italian political debate. They were written for leisurely gentlemen in cafés, not for merchants or diplomats who needed reliable information.

As time went on, a 'seditious' press appeared. In 1881 Angelo Sommaruga began publishing his *Cronaca Bizantina*, full of anti-government gossip. Despite frequent libel actions and duels, it survived for four years. The first really successful weekly in Italy, *Le Forche Caudine*, was also run by Sommaruga. It reached a circulation of 150,000, before being closed down by libel proceedings in September 1885. It was a harbinger of things to come, but it was unique. Most of the 1,600 registered weeklies in 1887–88 were serious political, economic or educational organs, catering for a very restricted educated readership. What strikes a British observer is the absence of the 'pullulating variety' (Geoffrey Best's term) of periodicals to be found in Victorian Britain. But then, who could read them, and in what language?

## 2.6 Leisure

In this respect, at least, the press accurately reflected realities. If there was no rich variety of periodicals catering for a range of leisure interests, it was

partly because most people simply did not have the time or resources for leisure pursuits. Rural leisure focused on the traditional Church feast days, and on the processions and sacred dramas that were enacted on them. These passion plays, or lives of patron saints, were the most important public events of the year, and were firmly under clerical control. About the only non-religious recreation available was the wine shop, and even wine was expensive. Fishing and shooting were also common, but for most people had a utilitarian rather than a recreational purpose. In the towns, the wine shops were not alone, although they were, of course, very popular. Some games, for example *pallone* and *bocce*, were widely played on Sundays, and there were always the brothels. Milan and some other big cities even had cheap dance-halls open on Sunday afternoons. Above all, there was much free, or almost free, entertainment to be had on the streets, as anyone who has walked round, say, Naples will appreciate. Ballad singers told their epic tales of human passion and brigandage, using themes and musical forms that had changed little since medieval times. Street musicians were popular with all classes: the famous 'Barbapedanna', who went round the restaurants of Milan, was even invited to sing before the queen. There were also the special local festivals for which Italian cities were and are renowned – the Palio in Siena, the Calcio Fiorentino; and there were fairs and circuses, often held in the town's main square. The Italian circus was not, perhaps, what it had been in the days of the Grimaldi, most of its star performers having been enticed abroad by higher rewards, but there were plenty of very popular one-family shows going the rounds. And there was a host of smaller-scale performers: weight-lifters, bearded ladies, sword-swallowers, quack-medicine sellers, conjurors and hermaphrodites, who turned up at markets or performed regularly in the cities, and who shaded imperceptibly into the criminal sub-world.

In short, popular leisure activities were still traditional in kind. This point becomes clearer if we look at what was *not* available – seaside holiday resorts, for example. At a time when the English factory hands were already flocking to Blackpool or Llandudno, Rimini was still a small provincial town, renowned for its anarchists rather than its beaches; and Ostia was a malarial swamp. Most sports were not available either, except to eccentric aristocrats or English immigrants. The one important innovation of these years was the State lottery. Extraordinary excitement centred round this institution, which was the subject of much popular mythology and superstition. All right-thinking Liberals deplored it for that reason. Successive Ministers of Finance deplored it too, yet none of them abolished it, for it brought in 7 per cent of their revenues between 1862 and 1896. Psychologists and functionalists have seen the lottery as an



essential safety-valve, providing many Italians with their only chance of escape from an intolerable situation; sociologists of religion regard the cults surrounding the lottery as important evidence for popular religiosity; cynics say that it was the only official institution of late nineteenth-century Italy that actually offered the common people something. All agree that it was more than just a leisure activity.

Perhaps there is a more general lesson to be drawn. Since Gramsci's day, left-wing historians in Italy have worried about the apparent absence of working-class or peasant sub-cultures and institutions, about the lower orders' distressing willingness to ape their betters and accept 'bourgeois hegemony'. As Asor Rosa has written, 'the people, in short, have neither ideologies nor viewpoints, except what is suggested to them by the bourgeois classes'.[23] In fact, a popular culture existed all right, but the forms it often took – gambling, drunkenness and superstition – did not commend themselves to the high-minded then and do not do so now.

The picture is rather different for the urban middle and upper classes. The theatre was well patronized, perhaps because it was one of the few places where well-bred ladies could be seen in public – although, when gas-lighting replaced candles, they could no longer be seen so clearly during the actual performance. And, of course, this was still the golden age of Italian opera. Verdi's *Aida* was first sung in Cairo in 1871; *Otello* had its triumphant premiere at La Scala in 1887, and *Falstaff* in 1893.

But perhaps the most characteristic middle-class leisure institution was the café. Sometimes Bohemian, more often unnecessarily respectable, the café (or its Southern equivalent, the *circolo*) provided practically the only informal meeting occasions for middle-class men, just as the wine shops did for peasants and artisans. It was in the cafés that newspapers were read (and sometimes written), that politics was discussed and 'public opinion' was formed. The cafés were more than just centres of conspicuous leisure. They were places where middle-class values were created and diffused, and where the new ruling groups of united Italy sustained that self-confidence, that reassuring sense of being right among like-minded friends, that is so necessary for the comfortable exercise of power over others. They were, in short, the places where 'Italians' were 'made'.

## Notes

1 O. Vitali, *Aspetti dello Sviluppo Economico Italiano* (Rome, 1970), pp. 152 and 294, and my calculations from *Censimento Generale della Popolazione 1871*, iii, pp. xviii–xix.

2 S. Jacini, *Relazione Finale sui Risultati dell'Inchiesta Agraria*, vol. xv of the *Atti della Giunta per la Inchiesta Agraria e sulle Condizioni della Classe Agraria* (Rome, 1884), pp. 5–6.

3 E. Carnevale, 'I Demani e gli Usi Civici in Sicilia', in *Inchiesta Parlamentare sulle Condizioni dei Contadini nelle Provincie Meridionali e in Sicilia*, vi, tomo 1 (Rome, 1910), p. 267.

4 C. Cingari, *Il Mezzogiorno e Giustino Fortunato* (Florence, 1954), pp. 92–93.

5 S. Sonnino, in L. Franchetti and S. Sonnino, *La Sicilia nel 1876* (Florence, 1877), ii, p. 286.

6 G. Lorenzoni, 'La Sicilia', in *Inchiesta Parlamentare sulle Condizioni dei Contadini* cit., vi, tomo 1, p. 222.

7 E. Morpurgo, in *Atti della Giunta per la Inchiesta Agraria* (Jacini) cit., iv, fasc. 2, p. 367.

8 R. Eckaus, 'The North–South differential in Italian economic development', *Journal of Economic History*, xxi (1961), 306–07; G. Orlando, in G. Fuà (ed.), *Lo Sviluppo Economico in Italia* (Milan, 1969), iii, p. 20; P. Ercolani, ibid., p. 401; R. Romeo, Risorgimento *e Capitalismo* (Bari, 1958), pp. 111–12, 120–21; idem, *Breve Storia della Grande Industria in Italia* (Bologna, 1961), pp. 29–30, 46–47; G. Toniolo, in *Lo Sviluppo Economico Italiano 1861–1940* (Bari, 1973), p. 7; M. Romani, *Un Secolo di Vita Agricola in Lombardia* (Milan, 1963), pp. 34–35, 37–38, 107.

9 Jacini, *Relazione Finale* cit., p. 163.

10 E. Pani Rossi, *La Basilicata* (Verona, 1868), p. 253.

11 V. Ellena, 'La statistica di alcune industrie italiane', *Annali di Statistica*, s. ii, vol. 13 (Rome, 1880), p. 60.

12 A. Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), p. 75.

13 S. Fenoaltea, in A. Caracciolo (ed.), *La Formazione dell'Italia Industriale* (Bari, 1969), p. 109.

14 L. Cafagna, 'Italy 1830–1914', in C. Cipolla (ed.), *The Fontana Economic History of Europe*, vol. iv, pt. 1 (London, 1973), p. 287.

15 L. Carpi, *L'Italia Vivente* (Milan, 1878), p. 162.

16 L. Carpi, *Delle Colonie e dell' Emigrazione d'Italiani all'Estero* (Milan, 1874), pp. 31–48.

17 Ibid., pp. 161–78.

18 C. Lombroso, *The Female Offender* (London, 1895), p. 98.

19 T. De Mauro, *Storia Linguistica dell'Italia Unita* (Bari, 1963), p. 43.



20 Coppino circular of 7 Feb. 1886, quoted by D. Bertoni Jovine, *Storia della Scuola Popolare in Italia* (Turin, 1954), p. 389.

21 E. De Amicis, *Heart* (English edn of *Cuore*, London, 1894), p. 8. This book was a great success in Italy, and was soon translated into most other European languages. A Welsh edition appeared as recently as 1959.

22 M. Barbagli, *Disoccupazione Intellettuale e Sistema Scolastico in Italia* (Bologna, 1974), pp. 106–07.

23 A. Asor Rosa, *Scrittori e Popolo* (Rome, 1965), p. 64.

CHAPTER 3

# The Liberal State

This chapter is about the Italian political system in the late nineteenth century. Domenico Farini, President of the Senate, wrote in his diary during the grim days of insurgency and rioting in 1898:

*Italy was united by the army (i.e. the material strength of the Italian people, her volunteers and soldiers) and by the plebiscites; and she can only be kept intact by the army and by parliament. From parliament must come the means needed to govern her, and to strengthen, where necessary, the activities of the government.*[1]

The two bases of the regime, therefore, were coercion and consent. Similarly, the State's institutions may be separated, for purposes of analysis, into two branches – that of 'High Politics', revolving around the Crown and the army, much concerned with foreign affairs, internal order and sound administration, and that of 'Low Politics', revolving around parliament and local government, a grey, ignoble business of granting favours and buying support, of job-seeking and compromise. The two interacted, of course, and each 'side' needed the other's support; yet there was always some tension between them, and by the 1890s a latent hostility had flowered into an overt 'debate on the State', on how to reconcile the conflicting claims of the two branches.

## *A. HIGH POLITICS*

### 3.1 The Crown and its prerogatives

The constitution of the new State remained the *Statuto*, granted by King Charles Albert in 1848. This document is remarkable mainly for the



considerable powers that were formally retained by the monarchy. Article V proclaimed:

*The executive power belongs to the King alone. He is the supreme head of State; he commands all the land and naval forces; he declares war, he makes treaties of peace, alliance, commerce, etc., informing parliament of them as soon as the interests and security of the State permit.*

These were no empty phrases. In the late 1860s Victor Emmanuel had used the Civil List to finance a virtual 'Court party', and had chosen his ministers from among these men. However, lack of money soon put a stop to 'personal rule', and the Lanza government that took office in December 1869 insisted on a purge of the royal household. Thereafter governments were led by men who commanded the confidence of the Chamber of Deputies, for only the Chamber could vote taxes. Even so, there was nothing to stop the king appointing some reliable Piedmontese general as Prime Minister in time of emergency, and in fact General Pelloux was so appointed in 1898.

Moreover, the fact that governments were short-lived, and that there were no established parties, also increased the king's influence. When governments fell, the king had the task of consulting the most prominent deputies, and of appointing a Prime Minister-designate. Whenever there was no obvious candidate as next Prime Minister, the royal choice could count for a great deal; and so could Court intrigues. The same was sometimes true of the choice of individual ministers, especially the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, of War and of the Navy. The 'royal prerogative' remained considerable in these spheres, and ministers had to be acceptable to the Crown. In December 1893, in what appears to have been normal practice, the Prime Minister-designate suggested three names of potential Foreign Ministers to King Humbert. The king objected to all of them, and persuaded the leading candidate, General Baratieri, to withdraw. Sometimes, of course, the king's influence was useful, as when he persuaded di Robilant to accept the Foreign Ministry in 1885 after the Prime Minister had twice failed to do so. In any case, Foreign Ministers came and went, and did not bind their successors; they were usually cautious fellows, forever worried about diplomatic niceties. When there was a big decision to be taken, the king and his soldier-advisers were usually involved, together with the Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister. The other ministers, even most Prime Ministers, had little interest in foreign affairs. Depretis once remarked that diplomats were the most boring people on earth, except of course for academics. The politicians always had to accept a

given foreign policy, however distasteful, for the alternative was to undermine the throne, and hence the unity of Italy. This was a classic, recurring pattern. In 1899, when Italy threatened to use force against China, parliamentary opposition was muted. Senator Rattazzi wrote to Giolitti to say that however much one might deplore the foolish behaviour of the Foreign Minister, one could not vote against him without striking somebody much higher.[2] A similar situation had occurred in 1870, and recurred with even graver consequences in 1914–15 (see §9.2).

## 3.2 Foreign policy

In the circumstances it is surprising only that Italy's diplomacy was as professional and successful as it was. The main reason is that neither King Victor Emmanuel II nor his successor Humbert could be bothered too much about it, once they realized there was no money for a good war. Hence foreign policy was left to the diplomats – Visconti Venosta (Foreign Minister until 1876), Tornielli the director of the political division of the foreign office, the Secretary-General Artom and a number of aristocratic ambassadors, usually Piedmontese or Savoyard. Their view of the world was perhaps too cautious to qualify as 'High Politics'. Italy had enough problems at home; she should therefore seek peace, and not draw attention to herself. In the years after 1870, the main worry was the Papacy. Would the Catholic Powers intervene to restore Rome to the Pope? Was the Pope intriguing with Catholic Powers against united Italy? It was essential to reassure Catholic Europe. Rome had been occupied, explained Visconti Venosta, in order to prevent rioting and disorder, perhaps even a Mazzinian Republic. Now that the city was the capital of a united Kingdom of Italy, order was assured. The Pope was safe in the Vatican, and the Church's position was guaranteed by the generous concessions of the 1871 law (see §4.5). These arguments were naturally well received. In any case, the Papacy's main protector, France, had just been defeated by the Prussians and was in no position to intervene.

The other major problem for Italian diplomats was in fact France, at least once French power began to revive in the late 1870s. Italians resented French pretentions to be the tutor of Italy; they also, paradoxically, suspected that the French wished to break up united Italy. France was, after all, a republic, and might favour republicanism elsewhere. There were quarrels, or potential quarrels, over Nice and Savoy, over colonial possessions, over trading agreements and tariffs, and indeed over control of the Western Mediterranean. The French occupation of Tunis in 1881, in



particular, was a bitter blow to Italian prestige. There had been at least 9,000 Italian settlers there, compared with 200 Frenchmen. Moreover, the port of Bizerta might prove a useful French base in the Mediterranean.

Italy therefore sought friends elsewhere. In May 1882 she signed the Triple Alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary. Italy promised to help Germany in the event of a French attack, or if Germany or Austria-Hungary were attacked by two Great Powers (clearly France and Russia were meant). In return, the Germans and Austrians promised to defend Italy against any French attack. Bismarck's Germany was a powerful ally. It was Protestant, and thus provided an excellent guarantee against French or clerical claims; it was military, industrialized and progressive. The alliance with Austria had less to be said for it, but it encouraged international conservatism and provided some 'guarantees' against revolutionary threats at home. The Triple Alliance was mainly a conservative, defensive alliance, which ensured that Italy was not isolated. It remained the basis of her foreign policy for over thirty years, and was still in force in 1914.

This unheroic foreign policy made sense, but undeniably it lacked glamour. There was a general feeling of disillusionment in post-1870 Italy. Rome had been won, but ingloriously; the Risorgimento had succeeded, but after too many lost battles; Italy had a large army, but other Europeans did not take it seriously. Furthermore, Italy came back 'empty-handed' from the Congress of Berlin in 1878. Could she ever become a really unified nation without a successful war? Sometimes the call took an 'irredentist', i.e. anti-Austrian, form; sometimes it was 'Mediterranean', i.e. anti-French; sometimes it was for colonial expansion.

We can see here two constant themes of Italian history. Firstly, Italians could never agree as to where their national interests really lay. Should Italy look southwards towards North Africa, especially Tripolitania, and aim at making the Mediterranean once more *mare nostrum*? Or should she look northwards towards the European power-game, and towards becoming one of the major industrialized States of north-west Europe? The debate has continued to this day, and of course it partly reflects the differing interests and expectations of different regions. When Northern (Piedmontese) politicians dominated Italy, her foreign policy was usually 'Eurocentric' (e.g. from 1861 to 1881); when Southerners held office, there was more emphasis on the 'Mediterranean' (e.g. 1881–85, 1887–1900). Secondly, many young Italians – and some older ones, like Crispi – saw Italy's conservative foreign policy as a 'jackal tradition'. High Politics, they proclaimed, should be high and noble, not cautious and base. They demanded, therefore, that there should be a more active interventionist

policy, and that there should be greater democratic control of, or rather impetus to, foreign policy-making.

The first real response to these demands occurred in colonial policy. The acquisition of African colonies was fashionable, forceful and activist. Moreover, it avoided direct conflict with another Great Power, while being nonetheless directed largely against France and providing proof of a search for greatness among the nations. It appealed to important industrial interests, especially those connected with shipbuilding and the navy; and it appealed to the Court, to Catholics anxious to establish missions and to Southern landowners worried about the increasing land-hunger of their peasantry. Colonies were a potential 'safety valve' for Southern peasants: they would find a secure plot of land and a modest prosperity, and social unrest at home would be defused. Italian colonialism was not founded on any need to secure raw material supplies, and even less on any need to export excess capital or excess industrial production; it was the agricultural crisis of the mid-1880s and the need to export social problems that underlay it, together with a frustrated desire for self-assertion.

The earliest colonial settlement was by the Rubattino shipping company at the port of Assab on the Red Sea coast in 1869, but Italian colonialism really only began in February 1885, with an expansion along the coast to Massawa (see §5.4). This was the first real shift away from the austere, fastidious Piedmontese diplomatic policy towards some attempt to meet 'Southern' or 'popular' demands; and it occurred when a Neapolitan, Mancini, was Foreign Minister. Mancini presented the case for colonialism in 'Mediterranean' terms. The Red Sea, he told a bewildered Chamber of Deputies, was the key to the Mediterranean. He presumably meant that taking Massawa might be a useful counter against French interests in North Africa. The only valid point in that kind of argument was that colonial disputes might easily upset the balance of power in Europe, and if they did then ships and armies might be needed nearer home. That was certainly the view of the Piedmontese Count Carlo di Robilant, who succeeded Mancini as Foreign Minister in June 1885. Yet even di Robilant was drawn into the Mediterranean. He signed the First Mediterranean Agreement with Britain in 1887, and insisted on clauses concerning Tripoli being included when the Triple Alliance was renewed the same year. Germany agreed then to help Italy if the French threatened Tripoli or Morocco – i.e. if the French took Morocco, Italy could have Tripoli. Even Piedmontese aristocrats had to take account of popular emotion, however much they might insist that Italy's real north-west frontier was in the Alps, or that Italy's real interests lay in Europe.



## 3.3 The army

The other major sphere of royal prerogative, and of High Politics, was the army. Successive kings were often tempted to take their formal command of the Armed Forces literally; whereas most Prime Ministers and other government members had little interest in such matters. Military policy (armaments, recruitment, etc.) was normally decided by the military themselves, in consultation with the monarch; until 1907 the War Minister was always a general, and the Navy Minister invariably an admiral. In the early years the army was run directly by the War Minister and by his Secretary-General. After 1882 strategy and army administration became the responsibility of the Chief of Staff, leaving the Minister of War as 'the spokesman within the government for the needs of the army',[3] a spokesman, moreover, who could always point to expert technical advice. Of course, the Crown did not always get its own way. General Ricotti was disliked by both Victor Emmanuel II and Humbert, yet was Minister of War off and on for nearly ten years – although admittedly Humbert got rid of him in 1896.

Parliament's part in military affairs was normally restricted to voting the money, although there were some parliamentary inquiries into the more notable scandals. Military expenditure was high. Giorgio Rochat has calculated that nearly 25 per cent of all State expenditure between 1862 and 1913 was on the army and navy. But a further 42.5 per cent of expenditure was on interest and capital repayments of State bonds, and another 10.5 per cent went on the expenses of tax collection; so the Navy and War ministries spent more than all the other ministries combined (23.7 per cent of the total, compared with 22.8 per cent on education, public works, the economy, administration of justice and ordinary administration).[4] Moreover, much capital expenditure on public works – railways, ports, the Terni steelworks, shipbuilding – had an avowedly military purpose. These facts are especially important in considering popular disaffection. Italy seemed overburdened with taxes, and these taxes were used to support armed forces over which parliamentary control was minimal.

Why did Italy spend so much on her army and navy? There were sound reasons, including the soundest of all, a desire to keep up with the neighbours. Italy was surrounded by other Powers that spent a great deal more on their defence than she did. Italy could not, in fact, afford to be a Great Power, and in military terms never became one. But her kings felt themselves bound to maintain the military traditions of the House of Savoy. Victor Emmanuel II, his successor Humbert and indeed Victor Emmanuel

## 3.7 Parliament

What was true of local government was also true of parliament. Most nineteenth-century writers agreed that the Chamber of Deputies – the lower House of the Italian parliament – was essentially the home of 'influence' in domestic matters, the arena where political favours were traded. Deputies were elected in order to advocate their constituents' interests to the central administration in Rome. If a deputy failed to put pressure on a minister, he risked losing votes back home; if a minister refused a deputy's request, the government risked losing the deputy's vote in parliament. But in a world of scarce resources requests sometimes had to be refused. So deputies' allegiances were temporary, and governments were unstable.

The art of government, therefore, consisted between elections in conciliating deputies by granting them favours whenever possible ('buying deputies'); and at elections in using government favours to secure the right deputies ('buying votes'). The Prime Minister's job was largely that of 'parliamentary management', of creating and holding together a shifting coalition of support by persuasion and patronage. Some Prime Ministers – notably Agostino Depretis, who held the post for all but two years between 1876 and 1887 – were very effective at this activity, but their manoeuvres tended to bemuse the public and discredit the system. Governments were short-lived (by 1892 there had been 28 governments in the 32 years of the united kingdom's history) and were not bound by any convenient doctrine of collective Cabinet responsibility. They fell either when some faction or powerful individual had withdrawn support, or when the Prime Minister needed to rid himself of a minister so as to give the job to someone else. During the ensuing 'ministerial crisis' the king would consult the leading parliamentarians and then appoint a 'Prime Minister-designate'; the latter would put together a new government, usually looking remarkably like the old one. Occasionally the Chamber would reject the king's nominee, as happened to Sella in 1880, but normally the deputies respected the Crown's choice – for a time. In practice, a few dozen men held the various ministries, almost in rotation. When parliament became really unmanageable, the king might be persuaded to dissolve it. At that point the Prefects and the Interior Ministry came into their own. Italian Prime Ministers nearly always held the Interior Ministry as well: parliament had to be managed, but so did elections.

All this helps to explain the complexity, but also the essential stability, of parliamentary politics. The one major political change in this period



was the fall of the 'Right' government in 1876, although arguably that, too, was a classic example of this kind of politics. In the 1874 elections the right-wing *ministeriali* had won 275 seats, as compared with their opponents' 233. A majority of 42 is fairly healthy in British terms; but in Italy it meant that only 22 deputies needed to change votes, and the 'Right' government was lost. Soon the Tuscan deputies became dissatisfied, mainly over the government's failure to rescue Florence from her financial problems. In March 1876 the government finally fell over a bill to nationalize the railways, and the 'Left' came to power. There had, of course, been no election. One was called shortly afterwards, and was managed carefully by the Left's Interior Minister: the new government's supporters won 414 seats out of 508. That was *too* large a majority. There were not enough jobs or favours to go round, and the squabbles among the various 'Left' factions became intense. Hence the 1880s was the classic period of *trasformismo*, i.e. of governments led by Depretis 'transforming' opponents into supporters, of factions being 'absorbed' into the government arena, and of the collapse of the old distinctions between 'Right' and 'Left'.

In assessing the deputies, one may perhaps distinguish, very roughly, between Northern and Southern ones, between 'Right' and 'Left', and between the periods before and after 1876. The archetypal 'right-wing' deputy was a Northern landowner, aristocratic both by birth and temperament. He was devoted to the House of Savoy and to the 'general interests' of the country; and he regarded himself, sometimes justifiably, as one of the architects of Italian Unification. He was a member of the Liberal Establishment, and might well have served in the civil service or army. Often he was admirably competent and disinterested. The long series of probing parliamentary inquiries – into agriculture, industry, strikes, tariff reform, railway administration, the merchant navy, the Southern problem, the banks – were usually inspired by such men. Most of the criticism of parliament came from them too. These fastidious deputies of the 'Right' regarded the necessity for requesting favours with distaste. Sometimes they refused to soil their hands with such matters. So the atmosphere of kinship and personal friendships, of links with local notables and local authorities, did not always imply subservience to constituency interests. There were many deputies who were big enough names, or had important enough connections, or owned enough property, to be able to take an independent line. Luigi Pelloux, for example, was 'chosen' to sit for Livorno in 1881 by the former deputy, his brother-in-law Admiral Brin. He did not want the job, but 'the Prime Minister insisted so much that I had to resign myself to it, on condition however that I did not hold a single election meeting,

that I did not put myself forward as a candidate, and that I did not even declare my willingness to serve if elected'.[22] At Cuneo, a year later, Giovanni Giolitti was more eager to become a deputy. He actually condescended to visit the place, and talked to the mayor for an hour. All went well at the election, because his cousin was mayor of nearby Dronero, and at Peveragno, in another part of the constituency, the mayor had been born in the Giolitti family house: he received a unanimous vote there.

The archetypal 'left-wing' deputy, on the other hand, was rather closer to Gaetano Salvemini's description of the Southern deputies of his day: 'unscrupulous manipulators and common fixers, with no personal convictions and no dignity'.[23] He was middle-class rather than aristocratic, Southern rather than Northern, lawyer rather than landowner. He was less devoted to the Crown, less likely to have fought in the Risorgimento, and more concerned with his constituency. He probably regarded the State as a milch-cow, and he was more anticlerical. After 1876 such deputies became more numerous. By 1892 40 per cent of the deputies were lawyers; by 1913 it was 49 per cent.

These stereotypes are no doubt crude, but they have some validity. The nature of the Chamber did change after 1876: half the deputies elected in that year were new. Still, 'Right' and 'Left' were vague and confusing labels. The 'Right' stood for social progress, i.e. free trade, a strong army and balanced budgets. The 'Left' also stood for progress: lay education, a wider franchise and public works. The essential difference was over taxes and government spending. The parsimonious 'Right', with Sella and Minghetti at the Treasury, pursued far more austere and unpopular policies than did the Left's Magliani, with his 'cheerful finance' and his deficit spending. This was understandable. The 'Right' represented, after all, the rentiers of Northern Italy, who wanted sound money; the 'Left' represented the Southern bourgeoisie, who wanted public works and public jobs. Yet it was the 'Right' that favoured nationalization of the railways, State intervention in the economy and social welfare schemes; it was the 'Left' that expanded the navy and engaged in colonial wars. Neither group had any coherent doctrine or organization, and each was split into factions clustered around some leading personality with influence. Every government contained men from different factions.

The issues of political debate were few, became fewer, and those few more prosaic. By 1883 the 'Left' had carried out its major promises – compulsory primary education, abolition of the grist-tax and reform of the suffrage. There was really very little left to argue about, at least within the conventions of 'normal' constitutional politics and of 'normal' foreign and



religious policy. As usually happens when there are no serious disagreements, men fussed instead about the economy. Parliament investigated agriculture, debated public works schemes and tariffs, and reorganized the railways. The leading politicians were men who knew, or claimed to know, about such matters. It was all rather dull, but it was a type of politics admirably suited to the small-town, backward Italy of the day. It was 'Low Politics': yet, even then, the navy was expanded and colonial wars began. While politicians squabbled over jobs and spoils, the real decisions were taken outside parliament.

The characteristics of the Chamber of Deputies naturally reflected those of the electoral system and of the electorate. Before 1882 deputies were elected in single-member constituencies on the 'ballottage' system, i.e. a run-off ballot was held when the leading candidate failed to secure 50 per cent of the votes at the first ballot. The voters had to be male, over 25 and literate. They also had to pay 40 lire a year in direct State or provincial taxes, although there were some exceptions in favour of those living off government securities, or with professional qualifications. The electorate at parliamentary elections consisted of just over 500,000 men in 1870, rising to 622,000 by 1880, i.e. about 2.2 per cent of the total population (or 8 per cent of adult men). Less than 60 per cent of them bothered to vote; turnout in the South was consistently higher than in the North. Catholics were forbidden by the Pope to vote for the usurping parliament; and the Republicans also advocated abstention on principle. The effect of a limited electorate and a low turnout was that in 1874, for example, the median successful candidate received only 426 votes (the median constituency had over 50,000 population). Every vote counted, which was one reason why deputies were so solicitous of their electors' interests. The restricted suffrage also ensured that, in Sidney Sonnino's words,

*the vast majority of the people, more than 90 per cent of them, feel estranged from our institutions; they see themselves as subjects of the State, constrained to serve it with blood and money, but they do not feel that they form an organic, living part of it, nor do they take any interest in its existence and development.*[24]

One of the main planks in the Left's platform in the 1870s was their proposal to widen the suffrage. In 1882 the voting age was lowered to 21, and the tax-paying requirement came down to 19.80 lire annually. Those who had successfully completed two years' elementary schooling were exempt even from this, as were certain categories of tenants. The literacy requirement was maintained. Thenceforth over 2 million people had the

vote – although that was still less than 7 per cent of the population. The educational qualification meant that the electorate was larger in the North and in the towns, where there were schools, than in the South or rural areas. In 1882 8.2 per cent of Northerners had the vote, compared with 5.5 per cent of Southerners; to put it another way, 53 per cent of the electorate was Northern, 16 per cent lived in Central Italy and 31 per cent in the South. A big political divide had suddenly opened up, and it grew wider as time went on: by 1895 the North had 56 per cent of the electorate, the South only 26 per cent. Some historians have written of two forms of parliamentary representation co-existing after 1882 – a reactionary, minority system in the South, a wider and more 'progressive' type in the North.

It was one thing to reform the franchise and quite another to redistribute the seats. The South may have had many fewer voters than the North after 1882, but its deputies remained as numerous as ever – 144 from the mainland South, plus 59 from Sicily and Sardinia, out of the total 508. In 1882 the successful Northern deputies received an average of 5,651 votes each; in the South the figure was 3,991, despite the higher turnout. This outcome suited the Left very well. Their own position was maintained, that of their Northern right-wing rivals undermined. Furthermore, they could claim to have pushed through a modern progressive reform. The wider suffrage helped to preserve the Left's power. It was the intelligent Right and landowners who had wanted a much wider suffrage again, so as to increase the political weight of the rural areas; the Left deliberately restricted rural representation, so as to combat the Right and/or the clerical threat. The Southern 'political class' dug itself into power, and survived with remarkably few changes until the 1950s.

The Chamber of Deputies was not, of course, the only House of the Italian parliament. However, the Senate was less significant. Senators were 'life-peers' appointed by the king, on the recommendation of the Prime Minister. A seat in the Senate was a political reward – it was a frequent consolation prize for unsuccessful pro-government candidates for the Chamber. On the other hand, a certain regional balance had to be maintained, and a certain gentlemanly tone had to be preserved. Giolitti caused great scandal in 1892 by nominating unworthy Senators. The Senate also served as a club for elderly gentlemen from various respectable élites – military, diplomatic, academic or landowning. It had little influence on domestic 'Low Politics', despite its constitutional right of veto; if it tried to oppose government policy, as it did in 1890 over Crispi's law on charities, it could always be overwhelmed by a huge influx of new Senators. The



Senate's voice was influential, however, in foreign and military affairs, and on constitutional issues. On these 'High Political' matters it acted as an effective conservative counterweight to any dangerous proposals from the lower House.

The parliamentary system described here had some obvious weaknesses. By the late 1870s a host of commentators were complaining that elections were fixed, that deputies were corrupt, that the civil service was subjected to constant 'interference' and that the executive was too weak. Gloomy prognoses abounded. In 1884 Ruggiero Bonghi proclaimed of parliament, 'this is a man who will die'.[25] In the same year an eminent constitutional lawyer, Orlando, sighed for a '*Deus ex machina*, a man of such unarguable superiority, of such untamable valour, as to grasp the helm of State with an iron hand'.[26] What could be done to improve the system?

One possible answer, much favoured by thoughtful statesmen out of office, was to decentralize the civil service. If there were no centralized government machine in Rome to secure favours from, the deputies would revert to honest debate and to zeal for the common good. Parliament would never work properly unless there were flourishing and independent local governments. This was a plausible view. Yet it was impractical. Nineteenth-century Italians were too Liberal to do without parliament; but they were also too Jacobin to abandon centralization, or to trust the Catholics and Radicals in the 'real country'.

Another possibility was to extend the suffrage even further. Deputies might have been less willing to press their constituents' case if more people had had the vote, or if they themselves had not sometimes owed their election to one or two local landowners or notables. Yet the suffrage could not be extended to illiterate Catholic peasants with any safety; nor could the Southern gentry be suddenly deprived of their local dominance, if their support for the new State were to continue. This remedy might prove worse than the disease, and destroy all the achievements of the Risorgimento.

The third remedy often proposed was sometimes associated with a wider suffrage. Deputies were too free to switch allegiances and too dependent on the local notables. Both traits could be avoided if only there were disciplined national parties, organized throughout the country, with Whips in parliament to keep dissident deputies in line. This was, again, a plausible argument, but quite unrealistic. There were no serious issues dividing the small political élite, and no real clash of interests or ideologies around which parties could coalesce. Strong left-wing parties arose

only later, as labour became more organized. Furthermore, the Vatican's rooted opposition to the whole idea of Italian unity ruled out religion as the basis of any effective conservative force. Mass parties emerged only in the 1890s, and transformed the political system only after universal male suffrage was brought in, in 1912; even then they proved no remedy against 'interference' in administration.

So, despite all the criticism, the Italian parliament continued on its unregenerate way. Perhaps the real problem was that Italians were not 'citizens' but subjects, and were treated as such by the State. Deputies could mitigate this in the short term, but could not alter it. Yet gradually things did change. Parliament may have been ineffective as a legislature, it may have failed to provide stable government, it may have been responsible for bending administrative decisions; but it provided a forum for discussion, and above all it helped to 'absorb' some of the disaffected groups into the political system. The Southern deputies in 1880 were, as Giustino Fortunato remarked, 'expressing the profound discontent caused by the Right's work of unification'.[27] Through parliament, these men were given favours and allowed to become ministers, or at least friends of ministers. That was an important part of Italian nation-building, however corrupt it may have appeared, or been. As Namier remarked, no one bribes where he can bully. Arguably it was better that governments should 'buy off' the Southern élites, rather than simply ignore them, or repress them. This was parliament's real function in the new united Italy: to make Piedmontese rule acceptable elsewhere.

I began this chapter by quoting Farini's view of parliament's task: to 'legitimize' government action. Yet in order to 'legitimize', parliament had to act 'illegitimately', and thus fall into disrepute. Northern Liberals always had to worry that the price of winning wider acceptance might be too high. The *people* (as opposed to the Southern bourgeois) might also demand concessions; and if the people accepted parliament it would only be through mass Socialist or Catholic parties, which would be a real threat to the whole system. So Liberal statesmen might easily be tempted, or panicked, into authoritarianism. Men might have to bully where they could not bribe.

## 3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how influential the traditional organs of 'High Politics' were, and how small was Italy's ruling élite. Yet the State institutions never really dominated the rest of society. 'State' and 'society' interacted constantly, each trying to influence the other. The 'State' used its Prefects, police, courts, tax-gatherers and conscription-sergeants to intervene in 'society'; 'society' responded via elections, deputies' recommendations and so forth, to say nothing of riots and demonstrations. Political influence at the centre often rested on local power, especially after 1876. Furthermore, there was no centre from which the rest of Italy *could* be dominated. Rome herself – the very capital of the new State, the embodiment of civic dignity and ancient virtue – was in dispute, her people unreliable and *clericaleggiante*. Rome was no dynamic Jacobin centre of commerce or intellect, from which men could be ruled with a stern hand; she was a peaceful haven, where sheep grazed in the Villa Borghese gardens, and where agricultural labourers were hired by the day in piazza Montanara. Eternal Rome remained indolent, indifferent and sceptical: a city of bureaucrats, where men took the broad, long-term view and gossiped among themselves. Gradually the *genius loci* imposed itself upon the austere Piedmontese incomers. They were trying to 'absorb' their rivals; but Rome absorbed them.

After 1876 the old élite of the Right became ever more pessimistic. They were out of office; and, as landowners, they suffered from the agricultural crisis of the 1880s. They were frightened of industry, Socialism, cities, emigration and the Vatican. They lamented the fate of the lay State, still beset by its many enemies and now in unworthy hands. As for the Left, we know remarkably little of these professional middlemen and politicians, or indeed of the 'Southern political class' in general. What, for example, were its relations with the big landowners? And why was it not more powerful than it was, in national politics? Why did the Left accept Depretis as Prime Minister for so many years – a Piedmontese, trusted by most Northerners? Why were the Southern notables apparently content with a subordinate role – local power, plus the occasional perk from Rome? My answer is necessarily speculative. The Southerners needed united Italy more than united Italy needed them; and they could never be quite sure of Northern support. The Left was nervous too, and with good reason.



## Notes

1 D. Farini, *Diario di Fine Secolo* (Rome, 1961), p. 1302 (entry for 5 June 1898).

2 Rattazzi to Giolitti, 10 Apr. 1899, in G. Giolitti, *Quarant' Anni di Politica Italiana*, i (Milan, 1962), p. 360.

circulated widely in Italy; *émigré* circles and *émigré* newspapers were often dominated by anarchist ideas. And it was Italian anarchists who carried out many of the political assassinations of the late nineteenth century – of the President of France in 1894, of the Prime Minister of Spain in 1897, of the Empress of Austria in 1898 and of King Humbert himself in 1900.

## 4.3 Socialism and labourism

The anarchist decline after 1878 provided an opportunity for rival doctrines and rival organizations to spread. 'Legalitarian', 'evolutionist' Socialism had never died out, even though its supporters had been outnumbered by the anarchists during the quarrels between Marx and Bakunin. In Milan, Enrico Bignami's *La Plebe* was influential, and in October 1876 another 'evolutionist', Osvaldo Gnocchi-Viani, founded the Upper Italian Federation of the International, to act as a rival to the anarchists and perhaps as an embryo of a Social Democrat Party on the German model. However, the Federation was dissolved in the police crackdown of 1877–78. It is mainly of interest as the forerunner of the later labour movement in Lombardy, and for its early attempts to organize the landless labourers in Mantua province.

The great problem for the early 'legalitarians' was that they were too respectable, too 'gradualist', to have much appeal when popular disaffection was high, and yet they were far too 'Socialist', too 'Marxist', in quieter times. After all, Italy had a number of 'respectable' workers' institutions already. Co-operatives, for example, existed for a variety of purposes, and many were founded in the 1880s to carry out public works schemes during winter unemployment. Dairy co-operatives were invented in Italy, and flourished in the mountainous areas of the Veneto, normally run by Catholic organizations. Small credit banks were especially important. The economist Luigi Luzzatti began founding these in the 1860s, and there were 171 of them by 1881. Rural credit banks also appeared during the 1880s, and they helped peasants with seed purchases, improvement works and crop insurance. And, of course, there were a host of normal consumer co-operatives on Rochdale lines. These institutions often owed much to upper-class organizers and patrons: the king himself lent 10,000 lire to the Ravenna labourers' co-operative. They are evidence for the non-revolutionary, sometimes even conservative, outlook of the Italian lower classes.

Above all, there were the mutual-aid societies, which provided a rudimentary social insurance – old-age pensions, sick pay, funeral costs –



for urban artisans. They were essentially charitable institutions, and were particularly important at a time when traditional (ecclesiastical) charities had been disrupted, and when the State had not yet introduced its own social security. In 1873 official figures gave 1,447 societies; by 1885 there were 4,896, with 804,000 members. However, they were not workers' organizations in any strict sense. Their members included the master-craftsmen as well as the employees, and nearly 10 per cent of their members were reckoned to be 'honorary', i.e. non-workers – professional people, clergy, charitable gentlewomen and the like, who often (as in other countries) dominated and ran the whole society. Moreover, most mutual-aid societies were committed to particular political views – conservative, clerical or Republican – and there was little chance of their agreeing on any concerted action.

One of the major aims, therefore, of early Italian Socialist organizers was to create their own 'autonomous' mutual-aid societies, free from 'bourgeois hegemony', and preferably limited to a single trade. Single-trade societies had the potential to develop into some kind of local trade union. Moreover, 'legalitarian' organizers tended to extend the work of existing mutual-aid societies whenever possible, from charity to agitation. In education, for example, free lectures and distribution of books could easily lead to calls for better schools and free textbooks; and it was a short step from organizing unemployment relief to protesting against arbitrary dismissals. These efforts at transforming the nature of mutual-aid societies, and especially at founding new ones, had most success in Lombardy. The Lombard legalitarians – the 'Sons of Labour' – were committed to economic struggles, to organizing strikes and 'resistance'; they regarded political activity as a bourgeois delusion. Even so, they campaigned in Milan at the 1882 general election, and in 1885 the various Lombard institutions became branches of a new 'party', the Italian Workers' Party (Partito Operaio Italiano, POI). The party was open only to 'manual workers of both sexes, either in the fields or in the workshops, who are wage-earners and directly dependent on their bosses, entrepreneurs or capitalists'.[5] In fact, many of the party's urban members seem to have been artisans rather than wage-earners.

The POI was the first real 'class' organization of respectable North Italian artisans and peasants, protesting against capitalism as such (it regarded factory work, for example, as inherently degrading), and fighting strongly against the traditional dominance of working-class organizations by middle-class Radicals and political meddlers. It insisted on the independence of the working class, on the need for trade unions and on the right to

strike. Yet it accepted most of the Radical platform on political issues – universal suffrage, tax reforms, freedom of the press, etc. – and indeed it rejected some 'Socialist' demands. The Workers' Party was opposed, for example, to State monopolies, or to any State mediation in disputes between capitalists and workers. It is also noteworthy how successful the party was among the peasantry. The Milanese workers helped to found 'leagues of resistance' and preached emancipation by the peasants themselves; they found a ready response in the Po valley. In 1886 a frightened government dissolved the POI, but it revived between 1887 and 1890, and became one of the main components of the Italian Socialist Party in the 1890s (see §5.7). Indeed, the Lombard labour movement retained its 'Workers' Party mentality' (*operaismo*) for many years. Some of the subsequent strength both of syndicalism and reformism in Milan and of peasant unions in the Po valley is attributable to the early propaganda efforts of men like Gnocchi-Viani.

Yet perhaps the main reason why, when organized agitation revived, it revived as 'Socialist' rather than as 'anarchist' lies not in the activities of the Lombard Workers' Party, but in the spectacular conversion to Socialism of the anarchist leader in the Romagna, Andrea Costa. Costa had fled abroad after 1877, and had been imprisoned in France. On his release, he wrote a famous letter 'To My Friends in Romagna'. Costa did not renounce his revolutionary views, but he admitted that insurrections like that of the Matese were imprudent. For the next two years Costa continued his agitation in the Romagna, winning over more support from the anarchists.

In August 1881, at Rimini – nine years after the famous anarchist congress there – Costa founded the Revolutionary Socialist Party of Romagna (PSRR). Its programme is worth looking at in some detail, because very similar proposals recurred later in the history of the Italian Left. It looked forward to a revolution, in which the working class (of town and country) would seize political power. But that would not occur immediately – 'the revolution generally achieves only what has already entered the consciousness of the majority, and if it is not to be exploited by the present ruling classes it must be preceded by successful spreading of social-revolutionary ideas'.[6] Hence the need for a political party, to spread the doctrines and to 'prepare' and lead the insurrection; the most effective thing this party could do in the short run would be to agitate peacefully for social, political, economic and educational reforms. Reforms were welcome, because they would increase 'Socialist consciousness'. Thus peaceful agitation was a means to revolutionary insurrection. After the



revolution, there would be a temporary dictatorship of the working classes; but eventually a state of anarchy would be attained, with collective ownership first of the means of production, and later of the products of collective labour. These ideas were obviously aimed at a largely anarchist audience, but they were also clearly influenced by Marxist thinking, some ten years before the 'Communist Manifesto' was first published in Italian (by two Milanese anarchists, as a historical curiosity!).

In practice the PSRR – which in 1884 became the PSRI, the *Italian* Revolutionary Socialist Party – tended to emphasize the first steps along the road to revolution. It advocated universal suffrage, economic reforms, trade union rights, abolition of the standing army, i.e. many of the ordinary demands of Radicals and democrats. Soon Costa began to urge that Socialist candidates should stand for parliament, and in 1882 he himself became a deputy for Ravenna. Yet the word 'Revolutionary' in the PSRR's title was not entirely propaganda, and indeed the party's programme was criticized by the POI as being far too 'revolutionary'. In any case, there was no chance of the party's minimal, reformist aims being implemented by parliament at that time. Costa continued to support extra-parliamentary agitations and strikes, as well as using parliament as a platform for his Socialist convictions.

## 4.4 The Republicans, Radicals and Garibaldini

This chapter has so far been mainly concerned with the 'opponents of Mazzini'. The anarchists, the POI and the Socialists all aimed to provide alternatives to the kind of mutual-aid and co-operative societies advocated and set up by the great Republican. Mazzini's failure to support either the grist-tax riots in 1869 or the Paris Commune in 1871 strengthened his rivals. Yet Republicanism did not die out, even though Mazzini himself died in 1872. The Republicans had a martyr, Pietro Barsanti, who had been executed in 1870 – despite a petition signed by 40,000 people – for his part in a raid on Pavia barracks. Throughout the 1870s policemen worried about what the Republican 'Barsanti Circles' might be up to, and certainly propaganda for a 'Constituent Assembly' was maintained. Above all, the Republicans controlled many of the workers' mutual-aid societies. In November 1871, 150 societies met in Rome and reconfirmed the 'Pact of Brotherhood' signed in 1864 – a characteristic Mazzinian programme, including agricultural credit, co-operatives, free lay education for all, extension of the suffrage and the emancipation of women; it also called for some State social reforms, including pensions and accident insurance.

But the Rome Congress envisaged the workers' societies essentially as organs of *self*-emancipation. Little was to be expected from the State or from parliament as long as the monarchy survived. At the next congress, in 1874, over 200 societies were represented, and they discussed tax reforms, unemployment assistance and the founding of consumer co-operatives – which already existed in areas of Republican strength like Romagna, the Marches, Tuscany and Liguria.

Most Republican activity was concentrated on these workers' societies, and five more national congresses were held up to 1889. The aim was to 'educate' the working man to be sober, industrious and monogamous. Members of the societies were forbidden to carry guns, to get drunk or to gamble – especially on the 'royal lottery'. The Mazzinians never accepted collectivist ideas, nor the class struggle, nor even the strike; and perhaps their hope of representing working-class interests while rejecting these developments was bound to fail. Yet, even so, they retained much influence among the independent artisans, and a century later Molinelli remarked: 'even today, anybody who spends some time in provincial Republican circles, even working-class ones, will be astonished at the unpopularity of terms like "class", "class struggle", "nationalization" etc'.[7] The Republican leaders were often honest, austere professional men – doctors and the like – who had suffered exile for their beliefs and were much respected locally.

The rivalry between anarchists and Republicans did not prevent the police from suspecting an alliance, or from arresting most of the Republican leaders in August 1874 on suspicion of plotting to join the abortive rising organized by the anarchists at Bologna (see §4.2). One of the main reasons for government concern was that the Republicans were often involved in 'irredentist' campaigns. 'Irredentism' meant, at the least, the 'national liberation' of Italians living in the Habsburg lands to the north or north-east of the Italian frontiers (Trent and Trieste); irredentists also sometimes laid claim to the Swiss canton of Ticino, to Nice and Savoy, and to Corsica. In 1877 a leading Republican, Matteo Imbriani, founded *L'Italia Irredenta*, an association to further these aims, and it soon had over 500 branches. In 1878 the irredentists tried to provoke war over Trent, and the Italian monarchy was bitterly criticized in 1882 when Italy allied with Germany and Austria-Hungary in the Triple Alliance. Irredentist passions grew even stronger in December 1882, when the Austrians hanged Guglielmo Oberdank, a Trieste student, for planning to assassinate the Emperor Franz Joseph. However, nationalist Republicanism had a fatal weakness. The House of Savoy was the main guarantee of the maintenance of national unity, and nearly everyone knew it.



By the 1880s Republicanism was in crisis. The old 'intransigents' clung to their anti-monarchism, to anti-parliamentarism and to their nostalgia for Mazzinian insurrections, but they seemed increasingly old-fashioned and became, indeed, increasingly respectable. The Republican leader, Aurelio Saffi, was Professor of Public Law at Bologna University; as 'scholar, publicist and statesman' he was given an Honorary LL. D. at the tercentenary celebrations of Edinburgh University in 1884, and spoke feelingly of 'the harmony, the union, the intimate union, between religion, patriotism and science' that was so evident in Edinburgh.[8] Clearly governments did not have to worry much about *him*. A few students also played briefly at Mazzinianism, before taking government posts on graduation. But the movement was clearly in decline, and backsliding soon began. Leading Republicans began to come to terms with the monarchy, stood for parliament, took the oath of loyalty required of deputies and even sometimes supported the 'Left' governments after 1876. Cairoli's government in 1878 enticed many prominent Republicans, including Carducci, away from the lost cause. These *transigenti* soon became known as Radicals, rather than as Republicans; in parliament they formed the *Estrema* (Extreme Left), urging on the 'Left' governments towards more extensive social reforms.

In accepting the monarchy, the Radicals were only following in the footsteps of the greatest democrat of all, Garibaldi; and Garibaldi himself played an important part in the affairs of the Radicals and democrats during the 1870s. In 1872 he issued an appeal to all Italian democrats to defer the 'political question' (i.e. the Republic). He also organized a Congress of Unity, to be held at the Colosseum, with a programme of universal suffrage, free compulsory lay education, tax reforms, land reclamation, female emancipation, a people's militia and abolition of the clerical privileges enshrined in the Law of Guarantees. Although the government prohibited this congress, a truncated assembly was held in the Teatro Argentina, and the programme was approved. It was indeed a radical programme. But it was not too remote from political realities – after all, by 1877 there was a law for free compulsory lay education, and an extension of the suffrage was promised by the Left. Hence Garibaldi could accept the regime, after 1876, and become a deputy. It was all part of the lengthy process of inserting the 'democratic forces' into the machinery of State – the Radicals' historic role.

By April 1879 Garibaldi had become disillusioned with the 'Left' governments, mainly because of their failure to reform the suffrage or to abolish the grist-tax. In that month he founded a League of Democracy –

the first real attempt to found a single party of the Extreme Left, including the Republicans. The League had the usual Radical programme, including administrative devolution and abolition of the parliamentary oath, but it also advocated support for irredentism and for the 'nation in arms'. Some Republicans, including Saffi and Campanella, joined the League initially, but were soon forced to resign by their supporters. Thus the League did not succeed in reconciling the 'pure' Republicans with the more conciliatory Radicals.

Still, the distinctions between Radicals, Republicans and other 'democrats' were always vague. The main areas of Radical strength were in Lombardy and Liguria, with other pockets in Emilia-Romagna and at Rome. There were some links with Freemasonry, and many more with journalism. Their newspaper *Il Secolo* had the highest circulation in the country. In the South, which conspicuously lacked a modern-minded middle class, Radicalism was always weak, although some of the leading Radical individuals were Southerners – Giovanni Bovio, Mario Rapisardi, Matteo Imbriani. Radicalism in Italy (unlike France) remained an urban phenomenon. Indeed, many Radicals were worried about universal suffrage, as it would mean superstitious peasants getting the vote; whatever they might have said in public, in practice the 1882 compromise solution suited them very well. In short, the Radicals were enlightened bourgeois. Like most liberal intellectuals, they somehow regarded themselves as representing the interests of artisans and workers. In Milan, Antonio Maffi ran the 'Working Men's Consulate', and several of the later Socialist leaders, including Leonida Bissolati and Filippo Turati, started their careers as Radicals.

Throughout the 1880s the Radicals campaigned on such diverse issues as foreign policy (against the hated Triple Alliance), colonial policy (against any 'African adventures'), anticlericalism, civil rights and social legislation. After 1887 these issues became even more acutely debated, and the Radicals were poised to become a major force in the country and in parliament. Yet they also faced a real threat. The 1882 reform of the suffrage might have enabled them to represent, for decades to come, the newly enfranchised artisans and workers of Northern Italy. It did not do so because of the rise of the Workers' Party, which firmly resisted 'bourgeois paternalism' and put forward its own candidates. The 1886 general election saw bitter quarrels between Radicals and 'Workers' in Milan. The Radical leader Cavallotti, angered by what he regarded as betrayal by the POI, even accused the Workers' Party of acting as the instrument of the government. This row between the POI and the Radicals lost the



Radicals a good deal of working-class sympathy. The workers, in the largest industrial city of Northern Italy, had evaded the Radicals' grasp – and the surrounding peasantry, too, was far more influenced by the POI than by the Radicals.

## 4.5 The Church and her influence

The most serious 'subversive' organization in the new united Italy was the Church. Informed Liberal opinion and successive governments – especially those of the Left, after 1876 – were hostile to the Church, and her role in society was a constant theme of angry political debate. A lay education system was set up, deliberately designed to combat clerical influence on the young. Civil marriage was instituted, and couples who married in church were forced to go through a second marriage ceremony in front of the mayor, in order to have their marriages legally recognized. 'Legal separation', even of spouses married in church, could be granted by the civil courts, and the judges could issue decrees concerning maintenance and custody of children. Various attempts were made in parliament – even by Ministers of Justice, like Villa in 1881 – to introduce a divorce law, giving separated couples the right to remarry. Education and matrimony were just illustrations of a more general theme. The State claimed to represent a 'lay morality', of liberalism, rationality and progress, that was novel in a country where morality had always derived from the Church's teachings.

The Church naturally resisted the new doctrines, both explicitly – as in Pius IX's 'Syllabus of Errors' in 1864, especially Error no. 80 – and by making every effort to maintain her presence in civil society. This effort was made easier by the fact that some right-wing politicians supported the Church – or rather, sought her support. If religion were the foundation of morality, they reasoned, how could a stable State survive without it? Religion might not be true but it was necessary, to educate people to their duty; and doubly so in a country where the mass of people were Catholic, illiterate and excluded from political life. Moreover, there were always the susceptibilities of foreign Catholic States to be considered. And so caution prevailed, and the worst excesses of anticlericalism were avoided. There was no actual persecution of priests, legislation on sensitive subjects like divorce was unsuccessful, and the catechism was taught in State primary schools. Despite the occasional rhetoric of both sides, there were never two 'irreconcilable Italys' – just an uneasy cohabitation, punctuated by many petty quarrels.

If we examine the State's legislation on strictly ecclesiastical issues, we find the same picture. On the one hand, pilgrimages were prohibited, and military service was introduced for priests. The ecclesiastical estates were expropriated, and their lands sold off at auctions. Male religious orders with a 'communal life' were disbanded, their goods confiscated and their members 'dispersed' – i.e. forbidden to live communally. These provisions were extended to Rome in 1873, which meant that the headquarters of the various religious orders were closed, and that the goods of the Congregation for the Propaganda of the Faith – which financed foreign missions – were seized. The mendicant and contemplative orders were particularly badly affected by these measures. Over 4,000 religious houses were suppressed in all. To this day official buildings in Italy – schools, hospitals, prisons – are often housed in former monasteries or convents.

On the other hand, most charitable foundations (teaching, hospitals, etc.) were not affected, nor were institutions concerned with the 'cure of souls'. Moreover, the 'right of free association' remained as valid for monks as for other citizens. This all left plenty of legal loopholes. The Jesuits, for example, characteristically managed to save their priceless library in Rome by claiming it was the private collection of their General, Beckx. A monastery might become a national monument, and the monks would be left in it as 'custodians' – the Benedictines did this at Monte Cassino; it might become a cathedral, and the monks would then turn into officials of the chapter – as at St Paul's Without-the-Walls; it might become registered as a charitable organization; it might become the private house of an individual monk, who left it in his will to another – the Rosminians and Salesians survived by using this device; or, most commonly of all, it might become a private landholding company. The Trappists, for example, took over 485 hectares of the Agro Romano in 1879, and cultivated them silently and successfully for over fifty years with the help of convict labour (they are now part of the EUR district of Rome). As time went on, there was a gradual return to the old monastic houses; available figures for membership of religious orders show a marked rise after 1880. The female orders were unaffected by the new laws, except that when any community's numbers declined to six, the remaining members were to be rehoused in larger communities. That implied – but did not state explicitly – that they should not recruit new members, but the implication was widely evaded: novices were presented as servants. In any case, teaching and charitable orders *were* allowed to recruit, much to the annoyance of anticlericals and officials. Nursing remained in the hands of nuns, as did nursery teaching. By 1900 there were over 40,000 nuns in the country, 12,000 more than in 1880.



The main result of all this legislation was that the more old-fashioned kind of religious life – the contemplative closed community, the mendicant order – was discouraged or suppressed. Instead, energies were diverted into activity within Italian society. The teaching orders, for example, had to secure professional qualifications, i.e. pass State examinations; so Church schools acquired for the first time a qualified body of teachers. The revival of Italian Catholicism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries owed much to the anticlerical laws of the 1860s and 1870s.

This picture of fractious cohabitation between Church and State is also valid for the vexed issue of ecclesiastical appointments and benefices. Liberal politicians agreed that in principle the Church, as an autonomous 'separate' institution, should be free to order her affairs as she wished. In practice, things were not so easy. Could the State tolerate the appointment of a turbulent priest or intransigent bishop, who might denounce government policy from the pulpit and even stir up peasant revolt? And could the Pope really be allowed unfettered dominance over the clergy, who after all were Italian citizens? Moreover, parish priests and bishops normally enjoyed considerable 'temporal benefices' – at the least a place of residence, often extensive lands. Should the State have no control over how this property was used? On these issues politicians were greatly, even bitterly, divided. On the whole, the moderate Right (Lanza, Minghetti, Visconti Venosta) was 'Separatist', but the Left was reluctant to give up traditional royal prerogatives and State control.

The legislation on this topic passed in 1871 was therefore a compromise. The Law of Guarantees laid down that, although the Church was normally free to make her own appointments, the income (benefices and ecclesiastical goods) associated with episcopal sees or parishes could not be enjoyed without a royal decree of *exequatur* or *placet*. This was more important than it sounds, for it was difficult for a bishop to carry out his duties without access to the bishop's palace. Refusing the royal *exequatur* for episcopal benefices meant a *de facto* veto on episcopal appointments; and, of course, it was an easy way of increasing the State's revenues. Moreover, the Law of Guarantees also laid down that in those regions (e.g. Sicily) where some bishops had traditionally been royal nominees, the king would maintain his rights – although in practice the State made concessions on this point. There were other concessions too. Bishops no longer had to take an oath of allegiance to the Crown. Above all, bishops or priests could not be controlled once they had been appointed. Could the

*exequatur* be revoked? For some years nobody was quite sure, but in 1885 the Council of State said it could not. These disputes between Church and State, and among politicians, generated a good deal of warmth. The Law of Guarantees remained one of the most controversial pieces of legislation in Italy. Even so, the new Italian State was probably less interventionist, less 'jurisdictionalist', than the various previous States in Italy had been, or than other Catholic Powers still were.

The key issue affecting Church–State relations was, of course, the 'Roman question'. Pius IX and his successors took the view that the former Papal States had been annexed by brute force, and that some territorial sovereignty – some 'temporal power' – was necessary in order to guarantee the Pope's independence. The Pope must be subject to no man. But no Italian government was willing to abandon Rome to the Papacy. On this issue, too, the Law of Guarantees represented an attempt at compromise. It recognized a kind of Papal sovereignty. The Pope was accorded all the rights of a sovereign, including even diplomatic representatives being accredited to him; he was proclaimed immune from arrest or trial; his person was declared sacred and inviolable, on the same footing as the king's; and separate postal and telegraph offices were guaranteed. The Pope retained the Vatican and Lateran palaces in Rome, and his villa at Castelgandolfo. Yet these enclaves, immune from taxation and interference as they were, were part of the Italian State. The Pope's 'sovereignty' was personal, not territorial. Finally, the Pope was offered compensation for the loss of his territories, in the form of an annual payment of 3,225,000 lire.

That was quite unacceptable to Pius IX, who had no intention of becoming 'chaplain to the House of Savoy'. In any case, what was guaranteed by the Law of Guarantees? It was simply an Italian law like any other, liable to repeal or amendment at any time; it did not even have the status of an international treaty. The Pope could not be beholden for all time to the goodwill of Italian parliaments. He therefore rejected the law and the compensation. He proclaimed himself a 'prisoner in the Vatican', and the Italian government a usurper. Millions of Catholics agreed with him, a huge handicap to the fragile new State. So on this issue the attempt at compromise failed. Or did it? The argument that 'temporal power' was essential for Papal independence became less and less convincing as time went on, especially as the modern State began to take over far wider responsibilities than previously. As Binchy has remarked, the Papacy was lucky to lose its lands, for its renowned incompetence as a secular government would otherwise have discredited its spiritual claims. Instead,



the influence and reputation of the Papacy greatly increased after 1870, and 'it was surely no mere coincidence that the masterly Encyclicals on the relations between the Church and the modern State should have come from the pen of the first Pope for centuries who had no State to govern'.[9]

At all events, the Roman question embittered Church–State relations for many years after 1870. In March 1871 the Penitentiary Tribunal was asked whether it was 'expedient' for Catholics to take part in parliamentary elections. The reply became famous: *non expedit*. This formula was repeated in 1874, with specific reference to the general election of that year. It was not, perhaps, a total prohibition, but in April 1881 Leo XIII removed all doubts. *Non expedit*, he declared, meant a 'true and proper prohibition', and in 1886 a decree of the Holy Office laid down again that *non expedit prohibitionem importat*. Catholics were thus formally forbidden either to vote or to stand as candidates at parliamentary elections – although both were allowed, even encouraged, at local and provincial elections. What effect this may have had on voting is difficult to estimate, but the *non expedit* certainly prevented the rise of any 'national conservative' party with mass Catholic support, such as was dreamed of by some Roman aristocrats and conservative gentry. And abstentionism had some advantages. It was a proud slogan for all Catholics outraged by the Liberal State's treatment of the Papacy; it focused attention on the Roman question, and maintained it as a live political issue. It became, too, a refusal of political clientelism and corruption, of parliamentary jobbery and intrigue. Above all, it had the advantage that the Church could claim to represent the 'real country', the *paese reale*, without ever having to submit this claim to be tested in the field.

I have written of 'the Church', yet in 1871 there was no Italian Church. There were several regional Churches, with different organizations, different traditions of piety and observance, and different attitudes to the laity and to the civil authorities. In Tuscany (except Lucca province) there was a tradition of State control. 'Liberal Catholicism' survived longer there than elsewhere, 'intransigent' Catholic organizations were weak, Catholics were important in local government, and pressure for 'reconciliation' with the State was always strong. In the South there had never been a strong parish structure. Bishops had little authority over priests, and in their tiny dioceses were little more than parish priests themselves. Most clerics were monks or friars. The 'cure of souls' had often been entrusted to 'sanctuary-clergy' attached to some local monastery or chapter. They were local men, usually members of a religious order; they lived in the family home, supported other members of their family and were invariably immersed

in family rivalries and parish-pump politics. When the new Italian State dissolved ecclesiastical corporations and confiscated their property, it destroyed the Church's whole foundations. The Southern Church thereafter was absent from political or even much social life, for a generation or more. She simply did not have enough resources at local level, and in any case the clergy were often suspected of sympathy with the Bourbons. The Church languished, cut off from her revenues, cut off from the sources of patronage and harassed by the men who had taken over her lands and who now controlled local government. As for her influence, Bakunin's remarks are famous:

*Your peasants are superstitious, but not at all religious. They love the Church because she is very dramatic and interrupts, with her theatrical and musical ceremonies, the monotony of country life. The Church is for them a ray of light in a life of hardship, backbreaking toil, grief and poverty.*[10]

These remarks were confirmed by many other clerical and lay observers in the nineteenth century, and some of them went further than Bakunin. The German Protestant scholar Thomas Trede thought that in the South Catholicism had long since been defeated by Graeco-Roman paganism, which he found still flourishing in many local cults – pilgrimages, miraculous images, exorcism, the *jettatura* (evil eye) and so forth.

In Northern Italy there was apparently more religious observance among the peasant landowners of the hill and Alpine zones than on the cities of the plain. In the Veneto, the parish structure was strong, and the clergy retained their traditional social prestige and political power. The loss of Church lands merely prevented the Church from running as many charitable organizations as before, and thus made life for the peasants even more insecure. The priests became the natural spokesmen for the peasants' discontent against the new order. There were no anarchists or Socialists in the Veneto, no labour leagues or strikes, not even any riots; instead, a resentful 'clerico-populism' settled over the static and traditional countryside. The peasants sought their salvation elsewhere on earth, and in Heaven. Even so, the clergy were not satisfied. A study of manuals of devotion used in this period reports a constant uphill struggle to transform 'popular', 'social' observance into something more akin to 'true piety'; religious sentiment often seemed indistinguishable from superstition.[11]

Whether or not the Church represented the 'real country', she was determined to do so in future. Just as 'legal Italy' had become united under the House of Savoy, so did the Church endeavour to become a



united organization under the Papacy. The year 1870 may have seen the loss of the temporal power, but it also saw the proclamation of the doctrine of Papal Infallibility; and the First Vatican Council (December 1869 to July 1870) was the first occasion for centuries when bishops from different regions of Italy had met together to discuss common problems. After 1870, there was a new generation of bishops: 135 out of the 298 dioceses in Italy were filled between May 1871 and May 1875. The new men were predominantly 'intransigent' Papalists. Many of them came from prosperous families – after all, they had to live for some time without temporalities – or from the religious orders; they were pious, zealous and determined. Their task was to reform the seminaries, to train and supervise a new generation of priests and to purge the existing clergy. By the 1890s the Church was a far more centralized and far more effective organization throughout most of the country.

Nor were the laity forgotten. Catholic laymen had long been organized, for pious or charitable purposes, in local 'confraternities' – Congregations of Mary, 'third orders', Christian Mothers, etc. Italian Unification led to changes. The laity were to be the front-line troops in the Catholic *reconquista* of civil society. National laymen's organizations were founded, on an 'intransigent' Papalist basis, with far more central control. They, like earlier bodies, had charitable or religious aims – looking after roadside Madonnas, buying out priests from military service – but their real work was in education. They were to teach the young, run journals and libraries, provide leisure facilities, influence the local schools and so forth. The most influential lay organization, the *Opera dei Congressi e dei Comitati Cattolici*, was founded in 1874. It had a structure of lay committees based on the parish or diocese, quasi-annual congresses and a national standing committee whose president was appointed by the Pope. It was much stronger in Northern Italy, especially in Veneto and Lombardy, than elsewhere: in 1883–84 there were 993 parish committees in the North, 263 in Central Italy and only 57 in the South, including Sicily and Sardinia. As time went on, the *Opera dei Congressi*'s activity tended to move away from education towards more directly political and economic ends – cooperatives, rural credit banks, organizing petitions against divorce bills; this was particularly marked in the 1890s. But it was always consistent in one thing – it was 'intransigent' on the Roman question. It always defended the Papacy, and it always sought to organize the laity according to the Syllabus of Errors. Its leaders' attitudes were admirably illustrated by *L'Unità Cattolica*'s famous headline on the death of King Victor Emmanuel II: 'The King Is Dead; The Pope Is Well'.

How important was the *Opera dei Congressi*? It was certainly not very numerous in the 1870s and 1880s – even in Northern Italy, only about one parish in ten had a committee, and many of them were inactive. However, it showed the Church's determination to preserve, or create, a Catholic 'sub-culture' outside the Liberal State. It was the lay counterpart of the new generation of bishops and clergy. As in the Church herself, the new centralized organization enabled Catholic leaders from different regions of Italy to meet more often, and thus helped to create a more 'national' Catholic movement, opposed to the nation-state.

Above all, the lay 'intransigents' and their organization prevented religion from becoming an *instrumentum regni*. Organized Catholicism had come into being to fight against the established Liberal order. The *Opera dei Congressi*'s constant worry was that right-wing politicians might seek to use the movement to create a conservative party with mass support. The danger was a real one. Many Catholic laymen still hoped for a 'reconciliation' between Church and State. 'Reconciliation' seemed especially desirable to conservatives worried about anarchism and social unrest; and it is no coincidence that it was most discussed at periods of political tension – 1878–79 and 1886–87. In 1879 a group of Catholic laymen did, in fact, hold a meeting to discuss the founding of a 'National Conservative Party', able to fight parliamentary elections. Most of them were Roman aristocrats, who had the most immediate interest in settling the Roman question, but Tuscany was also a centre of conservative 'conciliatorism'. The initiative soon faded out, as Leo XIII reaffirmed Papal intransigence on the Roman question, but the whole argument revived again in the summer of 1887. After the tragedy of Dogali (see §5.4), Leo XIII spoke of his wish to end the 'lamentable quarrel' between Church and State. The Abbot of Monte Cassino, Fr Luigi Tosti, published a pamphlet entitled *La Conciliazione*, urging moves towards a settlement; he had apparently discussed it beforehand both with the Minister of the Interior, Crispi, and with Vatican officials. It naturally raised a great storm of criticism from the Catholic 'intransigents' and from the anticlericals and Radicals; both Crispi and the Pope decided that the time for 'reconciliation' had not yet come. The failure of 1887 ushered in a period of much sharper conflict between Church and State.

## 4.6 Conclusion: strategies and counter-strategies

This chapter has outlined some of the forms that popular and clerical disaffection took between 1871 and 1887. Clearly major changes occurred in this period – the rise and decline of anarchism, the decline of intransigent Republicanism, the shift of some mutual-aid societies towards 'resistance', i.e. strikes, and the increasing importance of the Workers' Party in Lombardy. Moreover, in 1882 the vote was given to most literate urban workers (see §3.7), and this led to the election of the first 'Socialist' deputies, including Costa. Here were the beginnings of a modern labour movement, with its own institutions and practices.



Even so, the labour movement was still very weak in 1887. Only the printers had a national trade union. The mutual-aid societies were the most important labour organizations. Traditional forms of popular protest – riot, brigandage – had by no means died out, especially in Southern Italy. Above all, Italy was not yet an industrialized country. Building workers and railwaymen were the largest groups outside agriculture, and most of these had recently been peasants or still had family links with the land. The early labour institutions were being founded by craftsmen and artisans – printers, bakers, tailors, shoemakers – not by industrial workers; and those industrial workers who were found in them were often semi-rural, like the Como silk-workers. The really distinctive feature of the most 'advanced', Northern, labour movement in Italy, the POI, was its success among the landless labourers of the Po valley, especially in Mantua province in 1884–85. This rural base remained a characteristic feature of Italian Socialism in years to come. It is dubious, therefore, whether this period should be seen – as many left-wing Italian historians have argued – as one in which 'spontaneous' popular disaffection gradually became more disciplined and more organized into a 'modern' labour movement. Popular disaffection continued to worry governments, and usually on grounds of public order.

How did the ruling classes deal with protest and opposition? A variety of methods was employed, with considerable success. Military force was certainly one answer. It was used against brigandage, against anarchist bands and often against strikes. Preventive detention, forced exile, house arrest and the like were less drastic variations of 'repression'. Nor was it only the State machinery that used force. The late nineteenth century was also the golden age of the Sicilian Mafia, the period when non-legal violence became a recognized method of defending landowners and new property rights against the peasantry. What was unusual about Sicily was that the *dominant* class was engaged in overt crime. But disaffection did not always have to be repressed; it could also be diverted. The 'great safety valve', emigration, was often opened by members of local political élites – although most governments tried to curb emigration, and the number of

emigrants was far fewer in this early period than after 1887. Similarly, rural poverty could be blamed on foreigners, and used to justify protectionist policies – this was very evident by the mid-1880s. Above all, disaffection was 'absorbed'. Workers' self-help organizations were encouraged by enlightened gentlemen; the 'industrial spurt' of the 1880s, with a rapid expansion of building activity in the main cities and the abolition of the grist-tax in 1883, relieved the worst of the pressure on many urban Italians; and the advent of the Left to power in 1876 helped to pacify many Southern opinion-makers.

Indeed, perhaps the most important factor is that the Left governments after 1876 were not *too* alien from popular feeling on vital issues. Men like Cairoli and Crispi still regarded themselves as democrats, and angrily rejected charges of betraying their early Garibaldian ideals. Garibaldi himself was prepared to come to terms with the political regime after 1876. The 'political classes' and the Radical or Socialist 'disaffected' had much in common, after all – a belief in progress, in science and in evolution. They adhered to vaguely positivist views, and often to Freemasonry. It is noteworthy how 'official', how 'bourgeois', anticlericalism was in the late nineteenth century. In Bologna, for example – the home of Republicanism, of Saffi and Carducci – anticlericalism focused on the local cremation society, which was run by upper-class Liberals and army officers. Cremation, they claimed, was patriotic, scientific, liberal, hygienic, egalitarian, respectful, progressive and cheap.[12] Irredentism, too, may have been officially discouraged – especially as it touched on the royal prerogative in foreign policy – but certainly many Establishment politicians sympathized quietly with expansionist aims.

In short, the 'outsiders and protesters' were not so far outside as all that. They shared many of the values of the insiders. Yet the story of the Radical Party is instructive. The Radicals helped to 'absorb' some popular disaffection, but they failed to carry the Milan working class or Lombard peasantry with them, and by 1887 governments had reason to worry about whether the younger generations of Northern Italy would be as easy to handle as previous ones. Moreover, just when strikes and Socialism became more of a threat, the first attempts at 'reconciliation' with the Church ended in failure. Social Catholicism, with a mass basis, was becoming far more active in the Northern countryside, and this was a real threat to Liberal 'hegemony'. The political classes had been fairly successful in containing disaffection in the 1870s and 1880s; the task was much more difficult in the 1890s.



## Notes

1 P. Turiello, *Governo e Governati in Italia*, i (Bologna, 1882), p. 52.

2 L. Bodio, *Di Alcuni Dati Misuratori del Movimento Economico in Italia* (Rome, 1891), p. 37.

3 Letter of 24 Feb. 1885, quoted by G. Neppi Modona, *Sciopero, Potere Politico e Magistratura 1870–1922* (Bari, 1969), pp. 24–25.

4 Bakunin to Francesco Mora, 5 April 1872, quoted in E. De Laveleye, *Le Socialisme Contemporain* (Paris, 1881), pp. 349–50.

5 G. Manacorda, *Il Socialismo nella Storia d'Italia* (Bari, 1966), p. 163.

6 G. Manacorda, *Il Movimento Operaio Italiano attraverso i suoi Congressi* (Rome, 1953; repr. 1971), p. 366 (the programme is on pp. 362–71).

7 R. Molinelli, *Una Città delle Marche dopo il 1860* (Urbino, 1971), p. 59.

8 *Records of the Tercentenary Festival of the University of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1885), pp. 162–63.

9 D. Binchy, *Church and State in Fascist Italy* (London, 1941), p. 13.

10 Bakunin quoted in Manacorda, *Il Socialismo nella Storia d'Italia* cit., pp. 119–20.

11 M. Bendiscioli, in Autori Vari, *Chiesa e Religiosità in Italia dopo l'Unità*, ii (Milan, 1973), p. 175.

12 Speech of Gen. Costetti at the cremation of Col. Arturo Brin, in Società di Cremazione di Bologna, *Inaugurazione dello Stendardo e Commemorazione del Colonnello Arturo Brin* (Bologna, 1896).

many provincial towns throughout Italy. Furthermore, they discredited the 'agrarian' politicians who dominated the di Rudiní government and the State in general; and they strengthened the position of more 'progressive' Northern leaders. Above all, they exposed the Crown to hatred and contempt. King Humbert's telegram was a great boost to Republicanism, and of course the Crown was already being attacked for its links with colonial policy, militarism and the Triple Alliance. Thus the riots brought Liberal Italy sharply up against unwelcome reality. Popular disaffection seemed to be stronger than ever. Successive governments continued to wrestle with this problem, certainly for the next two years, arguably right until the Fascist regime was firmly installed in 1925–26.

## 5.6 The Catholics

But 'public order' in the 1890s was not just a matter of coping with popular unrest or spontaneous rioting. There were also the *organized* 'subversive' associations – clerical, Socialist, Radical or Republican; they were as troublesome as ever, and even more difficult to suppress. Potentially the most profound challenge to Liberal Italy still came from the Catholics, and successive Italian governments responded in kind. In June 1889 a monument to Giordano Bruno was formally unveiled in the Campo de'Fiori in Rome. The 20 September, the day in 1870 that Rome had fallen to the Italian troops, was declared a public holiday in 1895. An enormous monument to Victor Emmanuel II was built in Rome, on the site of a Franciscan friary and of Paul III's Tower. It soon became generally known as 'The Wedding Cake'. Everyone agreed it was hideous, but 'Italy has to put up something big to show the Vatican'.[6]

Most seriously of all, in 1890 Crispi pushed through a major reform of charities. In the 1880s there were an estimated 22,000 charitable bodies in Italy, spending 96 million lire a year, of which 31 million lire were subsidies from local government. Welfare provision differed markedly between different regions. Most of the charities were run by 'congregations of charity', normally laymen appointed by each municipality and subject to a vague supervision by the provincial authorities. Crispi's new law strengthened this lay control, and specifically excluded all priests from membership of the 'congregations'. The more old-fashioned charities were suppressed altogether; and many others were 'merged' together – nearly 6,000 by 1908. Yet others were 'transformed', i.e. their funds diverted to quite different purposes from the founders' original intentions – this happened to 1,193 charities by 1903, mainly those which had provided retreats,



hospices for pilgrims and dowries for novice nuns. It was all a major challenge to traditional welfare provision, affecting all alms-giving bodies and those caring for the orphans, the old and the sick. It was also a major challenge to the Church's remaining role in 'civil society'. Inevitably the Church fought back. The bishops made a public appeal to the people, deploring the effects of the new measures on the poor, deploring the overruling of founders' wishes and above all deploring the inefficiency and corruption that would inevitably follow. But another law passed three days later expropriated the property of the various lay 'congregations' and 'confraternities' in Rome, and diverted the income to officially approved causes.

There was, of course, much to be said for reforming the charities. Most of them were small, inefficiently managed and often a source of patronage in local government; and the Church had already lost control of many of them in 1862. Moreover, the intellectual fashion of the day was for 'indoor relief', in different kinds of welfare institutions – orphanages, mental hospitals, old people's homes – and these required large sums and some degree of provincial co-ordination. Even so, the Church's reaction was understandable. Crispi's laws on charities had some important repercussions. They made it even more vital for Catholics to gain or share control of local government, and the broader local suffrage made that easier in some areas. Several cities fell to them in 1893, and 'clerico-moderate' alliances between Catholics and conservatives became more common: one took over Milan in 1895. More generally, once the Church and the Catholic laity lost some of their traditional charities they began to engage in more active kinds of social work among the peasants and industrial workers.

This tendency was strengthened in 1891 by Leo XIII's famous encyclical on the social question, *Rerum Novarum*. *Rerum Novarum* not only condemned existing capitalist society, it ordered devout Catholics to transform it, and this seemed particularly apposite at a time of agricultural crisis, industrial depression and high emigration. Employers should pay a 'just wage', enough to permit the worker to save and acquire property. The State might legitimately intervene to safeguard workers' rights and prevent blatant exploitation, but essentially reforms should come by mutual agreement, through a series of 'private' associations. Mutual-aid societies, co-operatives and mixed 'corporations' of workers and employers were the most favoured kinds of association, but workers' trade unions were also permissible provided they did not engage in the class struggle. All this 'Papal Socialism' seemed dangerous nonsense to Liberals, and it

was perhaps partly intended to *épater les bourgeois*. But its real purpose was to stimulate the Catholics to greater efforts – and to combat the ever-present threat of Red Socialism. In 1890 the German SPD had become the largest party in the Reichstag, and in Italy a Socialist Party was being formed (see below). 'Social Catholicism' seemed an urgent necessity, and it was not restricted to Italy.

A further boost came from Giuseppe Toniolo's 'Union for Social Studies', founded in 1889. Toniolo was a sociologist at the University of Pisa; his ambition was to 'Christianize' the 'pagan-positivist-Marxist' social sciences. His writings were very influential, and he also founded a scholarly journal, the *Rivista Internazionale di Scienze Sociali*, to discuss the main issues. The Union's most important document was the 'Milan Programme' of 1894, entitled the 'Programme of Catholics faced with Socialism'. The 'Milan Programme' agreed with the Socialist view that State Socialism was the natural outcome of liberal capitalist society. But it did not welcome the prospect. Socialism would be a disaster, denying God, family life and the right to property; 'under a mask of emancipation it prepares an even more cruel and universal servitude'.[7] The remedy was 'corporations' – i.e. 'guilds' of employers and workers – profit-sharing in industry, small landownership, share-cropping or long leases in the countryside, co-operatives to organize commerce and banking to be run as a public utility. The 'Programme' ended by looking forward to the 'Christian democracy of the twentieth century', in which all classes would work together in social harmony.

Toniolo was essentially a theorist; the practical work had to be done by others – in particular, by the lay organizations affiliated to the *Opera dei Congressi* (see §4.5). The '*Opera*' officially adopted the 'Milan Programme' in 1894, and the 1895 Congress proclaimed that Catholic provincial and municipal councillors should do all in their power to implement it. This was the great period of the '*Opera*'. In 1892–94 the movement was reorganized and its 'permanent committee' was divided into sections to organize the various branches of activity – youth work, education, press, local election campaigns, rural banks, co-operatives, charities, etc. The second section, called 'Christian social economy', was perhaps the most effective, especially in the North Italian countryside. The 'rural banks' (*Casse Rurali*), in particular, soon gave the Northern peasants real protection against usury. By 1897 the '*Opera*' claimed 3,982 parish committees, 708 youth sections, 17 university circles, 688 workers' associations, 588 rural banks, 24 daily newspapers, 105 periodicals and many other organizations and activities. The movement remained far



stronger in Veneto, Lombardy and Piedmont than elsewhere, but even in the South there were some signs of life – in Sicily there were 207 parish committees and 9 periodicals. The '*Opera*' was a major national movement, or movements – prominent as a confederation of workers' societies in one area, as a league of rural banks in another, as an alliance for local elections elsewhere. It crusaded joyfully for the '*reconquista*' of Italian society, while still remaining firmly committed to Papal claims and to 'intransigence' on the Roman question. Perhaps its greatest achievement was in creating a 'Catholic sub-culture', distinct from the established order.

Yet the Catholic social movement had its weaknesses. It was weak in most of the South and some regions of Central Italy. It made little headway among industrial workers, or among landless labourers; and it was riven by factions. The most open split was between the 'old intransigents', who insisted on the Roman question and engaged in 'traditional' activity (charities, education, etc.), and the younger men who were more concerned with the social question, including trade unionism and new kinds of militancy. But there were plenty of other issues in dispute too. If the '*Opera*' admitted the State's right to intervene in the economy in order to prevent abuses and exploitation, then what was the sense in denying the legitimacy of the Italian State, or in abstaining at general elections? Similarly, if free trade produced all the evils denounced in the Papal encyclicals, it seemed odd to refuse votes to candidates pledged to protective tariffs. Hence by 1896 even Don Davide Albertario, the editor of the 'intransigent' *Osservatore Cattolico* in Milan, was urging that Catholics should vote at parliamentary elections, and hoping to become a deputy himself. As the '*Opera*' became more lay and more 'social', it seemed likely to evolve into some kind of a political party. Yet if it did that, would the clergy and hierarchy be able to retain control of it?

However, these splits were not yet too evident, and the rapid spread of the Catholic movement seemed a real political threat to the Liberal Establishment. In 1897 the government of di Rudiní decided to act. On 18 September the Prime Minister instructed Prefects throughout the country to crack down on Catholic associations and to ban meetings whenever there was a danger to public order. On 8 October he again urged the Prefects to act, for clerical associations had often expressed 'views contrary to the free institutions that govern us, and even in favour of the destruction of the Italian State. These guilty and insane statements cannot and must not be tolerated any longer.'[8]

The Prefects responded zealously. Hundreds of Catholic associations were dissolved, journals were banned, meetings prohibited. In December

Zanardelli, perhaps the most anticlerical of the leading Liberal politicians, became Minister of Justice, and carried on the good work. All this was *before* the crisis year of 1898. When, in that year, bread riots spread up the peninsula, and when the fiftieth anniversary of the 1848 revolution in Rome was celebrated by anticlericals throughout Italy, passions were inflamed still further. The Milan riots were the last straw. On 9 May Don Albertario was arrested; on 27 May di Rudiní ordered the Prefects to dissolve all 'subversive' Catholic organizations, including economic and educational ones. All the Catholic dailies were suppressed, as were many weeklies; 2,500 parish committees, 600 youth sections and hundreds of rural banks were dissolved. The whole Catholic network of social, educational and economic bodies, so laboriously built up over the previous decades, was crushed.

Yet the clerical response was surprisingly muted. Paganuzzi, the President of the '*Opera*', protested that Catholics were law-abiding citizens, not rebels or 'subversives'. Pope Leo XIII took the same line. His 'Letter to the Clergy and People of Italy' was far from being a cry of protest; indeed, it could reasonably be interpreted as a conciliatory gesture. The dissolution of Catholic associations, he claimed, was an 'undeserved and unjust measure . . . the community is being deprived of a powerful conservative force, since the organization itself and the spread of its ideas were a bulwark against the subversive theories of Socialism and anarchy'.[9]

In other words, the Vatican (and the 'old' leaders of the '*Opera*') were coming round. They had had a whiff of grapeshot, and they realized that there was something to be said for 'bourgeois liberties' after all. They worried about the Catholics being left isolated, possibly facing an 'anticlerical alliance' of Liberals, Radicals and reformist Socialists. It was far more prudent for the Church to emphasize the social danger, and offer the more right-wing Liberals some useful support in the struggle against Socialism.

Thus the persecution of 1897–98 had very important results for the Catholic movement, and for Italian politics generally. Traditional 'intransigence' was quietly dropped; and in return the new government of General Pelloux allowed most of the Catholic associations to be refounded. Italian governments thereafter could count on tacit Catholic support, and in the next few years the '*non expedit*' was gradually abandoned. So, too, was the *Opera dei Congressi* (see §7.3). Social activity continued, of course, but Catholic politics moved into an era of 'clerico-moderate' alliances at both national and local level; the Catholic threat had apparently been 'absorbed'.



## 5.7 The Italian Socialist Party

There were various working-class movements in Italy before 1890 (see §4.3). They were all jealous of their independence, and they were all committed to different ideologies and aims. Government repression in the late 1880s greatly weakened all of them; but it also increased the tendency for working-class 'economic' organizations – co-operatives, 'leagues of resistance', mutual-aid societies – to press for political liberties and 'legal' reforms, so that their normal peaceful activities could safely continue. It also led some 'bourgeois intellectuals', like the young Milanese lawyer Filippo Turati, to have a greater interest in social problems and a greater sympathy for labour. This intellectual support was to prove a vital factor. Turati and his friends in Milan founded a journal, *Cuore e Critica* – later renamed *Critica Sociale* – which rapidly became required reading for progressive intellectuals. In the 1890s it was fashionable to be a Marxist of the 'evolutionist', positivist kind, to deplore the evils of early industrialization, to press for social reforms and demand the right to engage in 'legal' political activity.

Engaging in legal political activity meant, however, having a legal party to work in; and so Turati and his colleagues set themselves the task of forming an Italian 'Social Democratic Party' – a party that would be legal and reformist, would have mass working-class support and yet would be quite distinct from the older middle-class Radical movements that the Italian Workers' Party (POI) so much detested. For Turati – as for Crispi – the model was Germany, where the SPD won 20 per cent of the vote at the 1890 Reichstag elections. An Italian party might do no less, by proclaiming Socialism with a German face.

And so Turati's group in Milan wooed the Northern workers. In July 1889 he founded the Milanese Socialist League, open to workers and intellectuals but not to anarchists. The League rapidly became influential in Milan, partly because two months earlier some of the Italian Workers' Party leaders had been arrested; the POI had been forced to move its headquarters to Alessandria, in Piedmont. This move left a gap in Milan, and Turati seized his opportunity. He was helped also by the split in the Republican ranks in 1889–90, when the 'collectivists' founded what was virtually a 'Republican-Socialist' movement within the workers' associations. Even so, Turati had an uphill struggle. Many POI members were hostile to interfering intellectuals, and suspicious of anything that smacked of 'political' activity. The POI still existed, after all. It was a loose federation of workers' 'economic' associations, and many Lombard workers wanted to keep it that way.

In August 1891 Turati convened an 'Italian Workers' Congress' in Milan. The delegates were mainly Lombard, but there were some from most regions of Northern and Central Italy, and from every persuasion – Socialist, POI, Radical, Republican, anarchist. The congress approved a motion calling for social reforms, e.g. the eight-hour day. It also set up a committee to organize, within a year, the founding congress of a new 'Party of the Workers'. After many vicissitudes and intrigues, this latter congress finally met in mid-August 1892, in Genoa. The city was chosen because it was celebrating the 400th anniversary of Columbus' discovery of America, and the Italian railways offered cheap fares to anyone wishing to attend. Over 200 delegates, representing 324 associations, came to the Genoa Congress; 80 of them were anarchists. Most were from Lombardy or the Po valley, but some came from the Sicilian *Fasci* and others from Tuscany, Apulia and, of course, Romagna. The 1892 Congress was not the first national 'labour' congress, nor was it even the first to approve a vaguely 'Socialist' programme – the Milan Congress had done that a year earlier – but nonetheless it is usually regarded as the foundation of the Italian Socialist Party, because it was in Genoa that the acrimonious split between 'Socialists' and 'anarchists' took place. By the second day, in fact, two congresses were being held. The 'majority' – 197 societies – approved a 'Socialist' programme drawn up by Turati. It called for an 'economic struggle' by organized workers, to win immediate advantages, and also a 'more general struggle', to win control of the 'public powers' in the State and local government. Meanwhile the anarchists and some of the POI delegates – representing 97 societies – had formed a rival, and short-lived, Party of the Workers. This party was also committed to 'economic' action, but was opposed to fighting elections and did not expect reforms from the bourgeois State. Some delegates were reluctant to join either group; Costa and his Romagna followers joined Turati's party only a year later. Neither party was ideologically homogeneous. Turati's party contained 'collectivist Republicans' and some Lombard POI men, as well as the Milanese positivist Marxists and a few ex-Radicals; the rival party was divided between intransigent POI members and anarchists of different persuasions. These differences persisted over thirty years: although the basic 'Genoa' division between 'Socialists' and 'anarcho-syndicalists' remained valid, each group was itself divided on ideology, strategy and tactics.

Ideology was the key issue. The Genoa Congress discussed programmes, not organization; the initiative remained with the intellectuals. The 'Turatian' 'Party of the Workers' – renamed the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) in 1895 – was based essentially on the Genoa Programme, and it was



the Programme that provided much of the moral fervour and idealism of early Italian Socialism. Indeed, the PSI soon became almost a 'religious' movement. The party's preachers and evangelizers spread the Gospel among the peasants of the Po valley; its intellectuals refined and disputed the articles of the Creed; and it even had a Pope, Filippo Turati, with all the qualities of a great pontiff – personal saintliness, dedication to his followers' welfare and subtle political skills.

What the party lacked, as yet, was an organization. The 'Statute' remained that of the old POI. In other words, the party was a loose association, attempting to co-ordinate a couple of hundred local 'leagues of resistance', co-operatives and so forth. Individual membership was permitted, but the basic structure was that of a federation of disparate groups. These rules made it vulnerable. When Crispi dissolved many of the Socialist and labour organizations in 1894, in the wave of repression that followed the crushing of the Sicilian *Fasci*, the party was threatened with collapse. The Third Congress, held clandestinely at Parma in January 1895, therefore decided to restructure the party on the basis of individual membership. When the repression was relaxed, the new structure remained. Soon the PSI developed all the 'German' features of a modern party – individual membership cards, a network of local sections, internal electoral procedures, regular congresses. By 1897 it had over 27,000 members, and the party ran a daily newspaper, *Avanti!*; even the title was taken from the German model, *Vorwärts*. The national newspaper helped in the vital task of uniting the party, of overcoming local traditions and of giving full publicity to the parliamentary struggles of the late 1890s.

Thus the Socialist Party after 1895 no longer depended necessarily on workers' or peasants' 'economic' organizations, on the co-operatives, mutual-aid societies and 'leagues of resistance'. Local party branches might easily come to be dominated by a leading local 'intellectual' – lawyer, teacher, journalist and the like – and Socialist activists might fight their political struggles more or less independently of the 'economic' bodies. In many areas the party became an electoral machine, run by a relatively small number of activists. It was a fairly successful machine. By 1900 the Socialist Party secured 216,000 votes in a general election and returned 32 deputies, nearly all of them middle-class intellectuals. Meanwhile the 'economic' organizations fought their own battles, without reference to the party as a whole. Few working-class leaders (and even fewer peasants) found their way into Socialist *Party* politics. In any case, the PSI was founded before there was a fully established trade union movement, indeed before Italy's industrial revolution.

However, the distinction between party and economic organizations was never quite so absolute in practice as on paper. The co-operatives and peasant leagues were themselves often run by 'bourgeois intellectuals'. There was also the possibility that the 'economic organizations' might use the party and its deputies to secure concessions from central or local government. This development became part of the 'Giolittian system' of government after 1900 (see §7.1); it clearly implied a 'subordinate' role for the party, which would be 'integrated' into the machinery of the Liberal State. Even in the repressive 1890s, there were some occasions when Socialist co-operatives won public works contracts in Northern Italy or the Po valley. Arguably, too, the strength of the Socialist labourers' leagues and co-operatives in the Po valley blinded the party to conditions elsewhere in Italy, or to the need to win support among other agricultural classes. And there was very little Socialist activity among the small landowners, a class whom the Socialists regarded as doomed to disappear.

The main 'economic' innovations of the 1890s were the Chambers of Labour, another good example of how the 'economic' organizations influenced the party. The 'Chambers' were founded to co-ordinate the various workers' associations and leagues in each city or province, and to act as labour exchanges. Their main concern was to protect employment and to place workers in jobs, although they also collected funds for workers on strike and watched over apprenticeships, arbitration procedures and the like. They were nearly all in Northern or Central Italy, they often received subsidies or free accommodation from the local municipality, and they often acted to prevent overt labour disputes. In short, they were usually conciliatory bodies, seeking better conditions for their members. They were *not* 'resistance' organizations, as the POI's leagues had been. Even so, they sometimes supported strikes, and so most of them were dissolved in di Rudiní's repression of 1897–98. The subsequent rioting in 1898 convinced many Liberals that the Chambers of Labour were useful bodies which helped to maintain labour discipline; it was dangerous to shut them down.

Thus the Socialist Party, founded at Genoa on an ideological basis and led by middle-class intellectuals committed to a programme of evolutionary Marxism, was flanked by 'reformist' economic organizations that might easily become integrated into bourgeois society. And there were forces pushing the party itself the same way. The PSI's early years were much influenced by successive periods of official persecution – Crispi's in 1894–95, di Rudiní's in 1897–98, Pelloux' in 1899–1900. At times of repression, the PSI naturally allied with the Radicals and democrats,



even eventually with the 'left wing' of the Liberals. Despite the occasional rhetoric, the PSI leaders in the 1890s were normally 'collaborationist' – and Engels himself, in his famous letter of 26 January 1894 to Anna Kuliscioff, approved the policy of allying with bourgeois Radicals for bourgeois reforms. The party gradually became more committed to the values of parliamentary democracy. Turati himself joined with the Radicals to found the 'League for the Defence of Liberty' against Crispi in November 1894; and the Socialists and Radicals formed an alliance for the local elections in Milan in February 1895 – a precursor of later national alliances. Although the party fought general elections as a separate party, its programme of basic economic and political reforms was mainly the standard Radical package – universal suffrage, abolition of censorship, legal and political emancipation of women, progressive income tax, the eight-hour day; and indeed Socialists were permitted to vote for a non-Socialist candidate at the second (run-off) ballot provided he supported civil liberties. The Socialist leader Filippo Turati was an ex-democrat, took a 'positivist', 'evolutionary' view of social and political progress, was ignorant of the South and its problems, and was very Milanese in his ideas and aspirations. So, too, was Felice Cavallotti, the leading Radical of the day, and the man who led the various 'moral' campaigns of these years. By 1898 the PSI was an important part of the parliamentary coalition against the government. The party's role was to lead the working and peasant masses into their rightful place in society, and to defend bourgeois liberties.

## 5.8 The Radicals and Republicans

But the chief fighters for freedom were the Radicals. The 1890s was their golden age, and their trump card was 'morality'. The Radicals denounced the bank scandals, and made a great fuss about other people's sexual irregularities – especially the king's open relationships with his mistresses, or Crispi's alleged bigamy. Many of them were pro-French, and therefore hostile to the Triple Alliance; and virtually all of them were 'anti-Africa' and hostile to high military spending. As for economic policy, the Radicals were very close to the free-trade liberal school: protectionism in general, and the 1887 tariff in particular, were regarded as anathema. Tariffs pandered to selfish vested interests, at the expense of the general good. In general, the less the State intervened in economic matters the better; for the Crispian State was oppressive, and the only way to avoid corruption was to reduce its role.

In May 1890 Felice Cavallotti convened a great democratic congress at Rome, at which the famous 'Pact of Rome' was agreed. The 'Pact' rejected ideas of insurrection or of direct action, and argued that parliament should be made to work more effectively. Parliament should be convened whenever fifty deputies demanded it; deputies should be paid; various civil rights, such as free speech, a free press and freedom of assembly, should be guaranteed; the judiciary should be independent; there should be administrative decentralization, and autonomy for local government; primary education should be free, compulsory and lay; military spending should be cut, and the army gradually transformed into a people's militia; social legislation should be passed, with guarantees on female and child labour, pensions, etc.; there should be no tariffs or other taxes on basic foods; above all, article 5 of the *Statuto*, which gave the king the right to declare war and to make treaties of peace, alliance and commerce, should be abolished. These issues remained the Radical programme for many years to come. Most of them concerned the working of the political institutions rather than, say, economic or social arrangements. The Radicals, indeed, demanded changes in the three key institutions of Liberal Italy – the Crown, the army and the bureaucracy.

Much the same programme was also adopted by the Republicans. The Mazzinian 'Pact of Brotherhood' was dissolved in 1893, and a younger generation of Republicans refounded themselves as a party – the Italian Republican Party – in April 1895. The PRI was committed to fighting elections to the king's parliament, and elected twenty-eight deputies in 1900; and it, too, paid much attention to regionalism, local government, bureaucracy, the courts and the tax system. However, the Republicans were more 'intransigent' than the Radicals, and less willing to support governments during the occasional periods of Liberal reform. They also naturally tended to see the Crown as the bulwark of the hated political system, and fiercely attacked its power to determine foreign policy, to declare war and to dissolve parliament. Like the Radicals, the Republicans were a minority group: only in the Romagna did they enjoy significant working-class or artisan support.

Throughout the 1890s the Radicals and Republicans kept up the pressure. Parliament was the main platform for their denunciations; and so the maintenance of parliamentary freedoms – questions to ministers, committees of inquiry, debates on motions of censure – was vital to them. They also relied heavily on journalism, especially on the *Secolo* in Milan, and they were formidable pamphleteers. Thus press freedom, too, mattered more to the Radicals than to any other political grouping. In 1895, with the bank scandals and Crispi's prorogation of parliament, the 'moral question' became the major domestic political issue of the day. Cavallotti published his most famous pamphlet, the 'Letter to the Honest Men of all Parties'. The 'Letter' denounced Crispi for selling honours and receiving bank 'loans'. The Radical campaign certainly contributed to a shift of opinion during 1895–96, although Crispi's fall was caused eventually by the Italian defeat at Adowa.



The Radicals were always a mere 'handful of officers without soldiers'.[10] They never won a real electoral victory. Even in 1900 there were only thirty-four Radical deputies returned, together with twenty-eight Republicans – although the Radicals and their allies had more success in local elections after the broader suffrage was introduced there in 1889. There were just not enough enlightened Northern bourgeois, or artisans, to provide mass backing for the Radicals' ideas. Yet during the 1890s the Establishment was genuinely frightened of them, as Farini's diary shows. The Radicals had a concrete and realistic programme which threatened some of the ordinary assumptions of conventional politics, including the need for a strong army and the Triple Alliance. They represented, if not an alternative government, at least a credible alternative mode of governing, one in which the role of the Crown would be greatly curtailed; and, of all the 'subversives', they were the ones closest to the parliamentary system, and most able to influence some of the Liberal politicians like Zanardelli. In a period when mass parties were just beginning, and when effective political debate was still restricted to relatively small groups of enlightened gentlemen, the Radicals were a real threat. Above all, the Radicals seemed to represent progress – modern, lay, bourgeois ideas, geared to the developing industrial needs of Northern Italy, rather than to the corrupt Court intrigues of Rome and the parasitic colonialism of the South. No wonder Crispi and di Rudiní worried about the loyalty of Milan; and no wonder the influence of the Radicals was greatest precisely when the 'crisis of the State' was most acute.

## 5.9 The debate on the State, 1896–1900

The lengthy political crisis of the 1890s naturally led to much debate among the beleaguered Liberals. Parliamentary government was not working well; but was there any alternative? Many conservatives thought that there was. In 1893 Ruggiero Bonghi called on the king to exert 'a high moral surveillance over the State' and over parliament; Pasquale Villari, too, appealed to the monarchy to unite the Italian people once again in the

hour of danger, and called for an 'honest government above party'.[11] In 1895, as we have seen, Crispi had governed for many months without a factious and inquisitive parliament. In 1897 came the most famous contribution on the conservative side, Sidney Sonnino's article 'Let us return to the *Statuto*'. He repeated the familiar anti-parliamentary arguments – the deputies' corruption, their obsession with local interests, their 'interference' in administration, etc. – and he emphasized also that a parliamentary regime in Italy must necessarily mean unwelcome concessions to Catholics and Socialists. He concluded that the only remedy was a return to the strict letter of the *Statuto* (Constitution), in which the Crown would have a far more active role. 'Your Majesty . . . You alone are responsible for the executive power. You alone are responsible for the nomination or dismissal of Ministers, who must countersign and answer publicly for Your acts of government. The nation looks to You, and has trust in You.'[12]

Sonnino's article caused a great fuss. It looked like, and probably was, yet another attempt to prod King Humbert into action. That was silly, for the king was not particularly sympathetic to the 'conservative' cause, at least until 1898–99. When Farini had mentioned, in November 1893, that Humbert might choose a Prime Minister irrespective of parliament's wishes, the king had soon interrupted him: 'I am deaf in that ear!'[13] Sonnino's arguments simply showed up the weakness of the conservatives. They were unnecessarily frightened of the Republicans and Socialists; they were even frightened of the Vatican, or at least unwilling to come to terms with the clericals; and they were obsessed by High Politics and the need for sound administration. The patriotic appeal was all they had. No wonder they turned to the Crown. They failed to realize that parliament's essential role was (and is) to legitimize government action and make it more acceptable. By attempting to undermine parliament, the conservatives undermined the effective government that they claimed to favour.

The 'constitutionalists' counter-argument to Sonnino was that the 'subversive' parties were not as subversive as all that. They could easily be 'absorbed' into the parliamentary system, given time and a few concessions. But it was vital to keep parliament functioning, so that this process could occur, and so that legitimate interests could be represented and conciliated. 'Interference' in administration was a small price to pay if it avoided disorder and revolution. In any case, if the monarchy tried to rule as well as reign, it would bring about its own collapse and perhaps that of united Italy.

The conflict between the two views was particularly evident in 1899, during the great parliamentary row over the so-called 'political provisions'.



The 'provisions' were a series of bills on public order – prohibiting strikes in the public services, bringing railwaymen and postal workers under military discipline in some circumstances, tightening up the laws on the press, public meetings, etc. They had originally been put to parliament by the di Rudinì government in June 1898, and were inherited by the new government that General Pelloux formed after the Milan riots. Pelloux was a Savoyard Liberal who initially did nothing about them; on the contrary, he lifted martial law and permitted a free press once more. But in the spring of 1899 he reshuffled his government. The new Cabinet was far more conservative, and the 'provisions' appeared once more. The Radicals and Socialists started a filibuster: points of order, endless speeches, constant calls for a count to check the quorum and so forth. Since there was no guillotine procedure or time-limit on debates, the filibuster was successful.

On 22 June the government's patience snapped. Since the 'provisions' could not be pushed through parliament, some of them – e.g. on the press, on public meetings and on associations – were issued as a royal decree, to take effect a month later whether parliament approved or not. This was unconstitutional, and prudent men were horrified. The President of the Senate lamented into his diary 'so now the *Statuto* is being trampled on, just as many conservatives have been demanding and wanting for so many years . . . long live the "Return to the *Statuto*" '.[14] Farini was right to be alarmed. The government was breaking all the rules of the game and exposing the Crown to danger. A week later the parliamentary session ended, after further scenes of uproar during which the voting urns were overthrown.

Clearly the government's days were numbered. Pelloux' parliamentary support began to vanish; Zanardelli and Giolitti went into open opposition. In February 1900 the Court of Cassation declared the decree-law invalid. Pelloux had to start all over again. He brought the 'provisions' back to the Chamber, and filibustering resumed. By this time the Establishment had convinced itself that parliament must have a guillotine procedure if it were ever to work 'properly'; Westminster, after all, had had one since 1881. Sonnino told di Rudinì that 'for me the important question now is that of procedure, the "provisions" are very secondary'.[15] So a guillotine motion was introduced, and there were further unseemly rows. Eventually the new procedure was approved, after the 'Extreme Left' (Socialists, Republicans and Radicals) and Zanardelli's group of 'constitutional Liberals' had walked out. The government then promptly withdrew the original bill on the 'provisions'; they did not seem necessary, once parliament had a guillotine procedure. But the Left stayed away from the

Chamber. Pelloux decided to dissolve parliament and appeal to the country. The ensuing elections were a victory for the Left. The Socialists, Radicals and Republicans won 96 seats between them, 28 more than in 1897. The whole Left, including the 'Constitutional Liberals', won almost as many votes as the government's supporters, and far more in Northern Italy. A fortnight later Pelloux resigned.

Superficially, the results of the parliamentary dramas of 1899–1900 were negligible. The 'provisions' had not been approved; and after the elections parliamentary procedure was soon changed back to the old system. But the political results were extremely important. Sonnino and strong government were discredited. Zanardelli and Giolitti had allied with the Extreme Left, had won a famous victory and soon came back to power pledged to more 'conciliatory' policies. The lesson of the 1899–1900 rows was that governments could not govern without being attentive to parliament. Indeed, it is noticeable how very 'parliamentary' the battles had been. Although the 'subversives' were leading the campaign, there were very few popular demonstrations, no petitions and no disorders. Men had rioted for bread in 1898; they did not riot for liberty in 1899. Perhaps these issues were of interest only to the educated élite – an ominous lesson for the future. Or perhaps the lesson was rather different. The 'real country' could get rid of a repressive government just as easily through parliamentary agitations and elections, as she could by rioting. At any rate, that was the lesson that most of the 'subversives' were anxious to draw.

## 5.10 Conclusion

A month later King Humbert was assassinated at Monza by an anarchist, Gaetano Bresci. It was the culmination of a decade of riot and 'subversion'. Yet the 'subversives' were horrified. Church bells tolled throughout the land, and bishops invited mayors and Prefects to attend requiem masses: 'in those circumstances patriotic and religious sentiments were united in common agreement'.[16] The Socialist paper *Avanti!* appeared with black margins, and called the assassin a 'criminal madman'. Even the Republicans denounced the killing, perhaps forgetting their support for Orsini and Oberdank earlier in the century. The chorus was symbolic. By 1900 the main 'subversive' groups had been 'absorbed' into the system and 'constitutionalized' – not fully, of course, but to a far greater degree than had seemed possible ten years earlier. They had even become the defenders of liberty and the Constitution, against many 'conservative' groups.



## Notes

1 A. Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), p. 76.

2 E. Vitale, *La Riforma degli Istituti di Emissione e gli Scandali Bancari in Italia* (Rome, 1972), iii, p. 51.

3 Pareto's letter to Colajanni 25 Aug. 1893, in S.M. Ganci (ed.), *Democrazia e Socialismo in Italia: Carteggi di Napoleone Colajanni* (Milan, 1959), p. 355.

4 Di Rudiní's words as noted on 19 March 1891 by D. Farini in his *Diario di Fine Secolo*, i (Rome, 1961), p. 13.

5 S. Romano, *Crispi-Progetto per una Dittatura* (Milan, 1973), p. 196.

6 Farini, *Diario* cit., i (22 Dec. 1892), p. 157.

7 The 'Milan Programme' is given in G. De Rosa, *I Partiti Politici in Italia* (Bergamo, 1972), pp. 164–70.

8 G. Spadolini, *L'Opposizione Cattolica da Porta Pia al '98* (Florence, 1954), p. 442; G. De Rosa, *Storia del Movimento Cattolico in Italia*, i (Bari, 1966), pp. 310–11.

9 De Rosa, *Storia del Movimento* cit., p. 326; Spadolini, *L'Opposizione Cattolica* cit., p. 476.

10 R. Michels, *Il Proletariato e la Borghesia nel Movimento Socialista Italiano* (Turin, 1908), p. 239.

11 R. Bonghi, 'L'Ufficio del Principe in uno Stato libero', *Nuova Antologia*, 15 Jan. 1893, 340–55; P. Villari, 'Dove andiamo?', *Nuova Antologia*, 1 Nov. 1893, 5–24.

12 Un Deputato (S. Sonnino), 'Torniamo allo Statuto', *Nuova Antologia*, 1 Jan. 1897.

13 Farini, *Diario* cit., i (27 Nov. 1893), p. 340.

14 Ibid., ii (23 June 1899), p. 1506.

15 Sonnino to di Rudiní, 23 March 1900, quoted in S. Sonnino, *Diario*, i, ed. B. Brown (Bari, 1972), p. 435.

16 L. Vitali (ed.), *L'Episcopato Italiano in morte di S.M. Umberto I* (Milan, 1900), p. vii.

CHAPTER 7

# Politics in the age of Giolitti, 1900–14

## 7.1 The 'Giolittian system'

In the years after 1900 a new political 'regime' emerged in Italy. The constitutional debates of 1898–1900 had largely been resolved by Pelloux' ineptitude and by the general election of June 1900 (see §5.9). The assassination of King Humbert a month later proved, if proof were needed, that authoritarian rule aroused much hostility. Italy entered a period of stable parliamentary government, without excitement or adventures; a period of social reforms and economic prosperity, during which popular discontent could be 'bought off', and the Catholic, Radical or Socialist 'subversives' could be integrated even further into the existing political system. She also acquired a safe, reliable, shrewd parliamentary leader, trusted by the Establishment and yet willing, when necessary, to concede influence to chosen outside groups. Giovanni Giolitti, aged 58 in 1900, Piedmontese, deputy since 1882, former civil servant at the Court of Accounts, former Treasury Minister, even former Prime Minister, familiar with the intricate workings of the bureaucracy, respected by the new young king, Victor Emmanuel III, and admired by the leading parliamentary Socialists, stepped forward to meet his destiny. In February 1901 he became Minister of the Interior; by November 1903 he was Prime Minister. The Giolittian Age had begun.

Giolitti had a bad press at the time, but most historians have judged his rule favourably, perhaps because they know what came later. In the 1920s Croce, for example, saw him as having been devoted to the Crown and to the public good, mindful of popular misery and anxious to reconcile the masses to the parliamentary system. This picture seems valid. Giolitti sought to 'reconcile' the people to the regime, 'real Italy' to 'legal Italy'.



What he did not do was seek to reconcile 'legal Italy' to 'real Italy'. He had no wish to see fundamental political change, and certainly did not intend to allow the Socialists, or the Radicals, or the Catholics, or the Nationalists, any autonomous role in Italian politics. These groups – or rather, their leaders – had to be bought off, perhaps eventually 'absorbed into the system'; but that was all. He was a clear-headed and rather cynical Liberal, not a democrat. And, in the long run, his policies did not work.

Giolitti's policy of concessions took various forms, including attempts to develop the Southern economy (see §6.3). Public works were also important, and by 1907 the government was spending 50 per cent more on them than in 1900. Above all, there was social legislation. This period saw the first effective State welfare measures. In 1902 a new law limited the working day for women to eleven hours, and forbade employment of children under the age of 12. In 1910 a Maternity Fund was set up, compulsory for female industrial workers: the State gave 10 lire at each birth, with another 30 lire coming from the employer's and worker's contributions. There were also laws making a rest-day compulsory each week (1907), prohibiting night work in bakeries (1908) and founding a State-subsidized sickness and old-age fund for the merchant navy (1913). Moreover, in 1898 accident insurance had become compulsory in industry, the employer paying the cost; and in the same year a non-compulsory national insurance fund for health and old age was set up for industrial workers. The Socialist Party welcomed this scheme and recommended its members to take out a policy; but the mutual-aid societies, which already provided pensions for their members, were naturally more cautious. Here was an important limit to Giolitti's policies. The State had already come up against established interests in the social welfare field in 1890, when Crispi had pushed through his law on charities against clerical opposition (see §5.6); in the early twentieth century reforming State-paternalists found they might have to reckon with parts of the 'lay' labour movement as well. It was not surprising that little more was done until after the First World War.

The most important concession to the Socialist-led trade unions of industrial workers and agricultural labourers in Northern and Central Italy was the government's new policy of intervening as little as possible in labour disputes. This policy was cautious and limited. Giolitti remained implacably hostile to strikes in the public sector (e.g. by railwaymen), and to 'political' or 'general' strikes. Even so, it was a major innovation. In 1901 there were many agricultural labourers' strikes in Emilia and lower Lombardy. The government did nothing, except sometimes to urge

landowners to settle. And in 1906 Giolitti exhorted the Prefects and police chiefs:

*in particular, I remind all State officials that in this period of profound social transformation government action must be inspired both by absolute neutrality in the struggles between capital and labour, and by affectionate concern for the legitimate aspirations of the working classes. And it must be the government's special task to persuade everybody that the struggles for progress can only be fruitful when they are peaceful, disciplined and non-violent.*

*Whoever represents the government, whether at the highest or the lowest level, has therefore the duty not only of rigorously applying the law, but also of fulfilling a real apostolate of social peace.*[1]

The social apostolate was helped by 'arbitrators', an unpaid body of conciliators chosen by unions and employers in each province to settle individual (not collective) disputes. By 1905 they had laid down a body of precedents and 'case law' that made a major contribution to social harmony. They insisted, for example, that 'good cause' was necessary before anyone could be sacked; taking part in a strike was not sufficient reason. Thus workers had some safeguard against sudden unemployment. The reformist Socialists were very enthusiastic about these conciliatory 'courts', and Turati even wrote a book about them. They were cheap, quick, knowledgeable, not too formal or bureaucratic, and likely to favour the workers: the ideal labour institution for Giolittian Italy.

Another institutional 'concession' was the Supreme Council of Labour, founded in 1902 as an advisory body to examine labour issues and to give its opinion on proposed legislation. It contained employers, civil servants, parliamentarians, various experts and representatives of various reformist-Socialist bodies like the National League of Co-operatives and the Italian Federation of Mutual-Aid Societies. It even contained a few token workers – just seven out of the forty-four members, and those seven appointed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Industry. The Council was hardly ideal. It excluded the Catholics altogether, and did not even represent the Socialist trade unions as such. But it was effective on some issues. It could take the initiative in proposing legislation, and the laws on weekly rest-days and on the Maternity Fund, among others, were drafted and approved by the Council before going to parliament. The Council's real importance was political. It was the first visible attempt to 'absorb' part of the labour movement into the existing political structure, the first formal recognition that labour had to be allowed its own institutional role in the Italian State.



These 'concessions' often had most impact at local level. Trade unions were small and locally based, and so were strikes. The new government policy meant, in practice, that the central State remained 'neutral' in provincial disputes. That in itself was a nasty shock to local businessmen, but Giolitti went further. By the early twentieth century many municipal councils in Northern and Central Italy were bent on 'improvements' – building cheap houses and new schools, orphanages and old people's homes, or providing a safe water supply and free school meals. In Milan the council ran a tram service to the cemetery, and took hearses and mourners free of charge; in Turin there were even public baths. Giolitti's governments gave benevolent support to such policies, and subsidized some of them (e.g. building co-operatives). There were fewer Prefectoral vetoes, and sometimes Prefects and police chiefs actually tried to see that welfare legislation was properly applied. In 1903 parliament even passed a law permitting local councils to 'municipalize' – i.e. take over and run as a local monopoly – virtually all industrial or commercial activities 'of public interest' in their area. Most major cities started running their own trams, water and electricity boards, etc., amid much controversy; elsewhere, however, lack of finance prevented the law from having much impact. But many of the other aspects of 'municipal Socialism', especially council houses and school-building, were evident even in the smaller centres; and the Socialists ran some of Italy's big cities, including Milan, before 1914.

It would be wrong to exaggerate the extent of Giolitti's 'concessions' to local government. The full range of central controls remained intact, and was used. The transfer of primary education from municipality to central State (see §8.3) greatly reduced local government's powers. The government regularly dissolved local councils, and appointed 'Prefectoral commissioners' to run municipalities for months on end, until new elections could be held. Often the reason was genuine concern for sound administration; but not always. In December 1904, for example, the voters of Bassano elected a Catholic local council. A month later the council was dissolved and a commissioner appointed. The Prefect had urged that this measure was indispensable 'to allow the Liberal party a relatively long period of time to reorganize and regroup its forces' so as to combat 'those parties which are not those of order'.[2] This was a typical example, and it illustrates an important point. If the Giolitti governments tolerated 'municipal Socialism' in Northern Italy, that was a deliberate choice on their part; other local councils were not so fortunate.

Giolitti's Prefects were still expected to win elections for 'ministerial' candidates at general elections, in the time-honoured manner. One

Prefect's *Memoirs* relate how, despite all his careful efforts, 'his' candidate lost in 1900, the first such blow to the Prefect's career;[3] another tells of how, when the wrong candidate was elected at Formia in 1904, he simply quashed the result and counted again.[4] Many historians have written of elections, especially in the South, as if they were entirely corrupt, and of Giolitti's parliamentary support as consisting of Southern placemen. It is true that most Southern deputies were pro-government (103 out of 137 in 1904), but nonetheless Giolitti's majority was Northern: there were always more 'ministerial' candidates elected in Northern and Central Italy than in the South. In fact, we know surprisingly little about Giolitti's electoral methods or his parliamentary support; the period awaits its Namier. Certainly there were plenty of accusations of corruption at elections. The government would ask for detailed reports; the Prefects and police chiefs would deny that any irregularity had occurred. Part of the problem was that the administration of elections was in the hands of local mayors and officials. Governments were not likely to dissolve a friendly town council, just before the elections, merely because of allegations that the mayor was not issuing voting cards to government opponents, or was blocking opposition candidates' meetings. Another factor was that the pro-government candidates expected government officials and pensioners to vote for them, and no doubt it was prudent to do so. But Giolitti himself appears to have acted in reasonably good faith. Certainly he always detested the Southern landowners, and refused to support them in their battles against the peasantry. Often it was the deputies who wanted to be known as 'ministerial', and who wanted the Prefect's support and prestige, rather than the Prefects or government who tried to 'corrupt' them.

The deputies were still much the same as in previous Italian parliaments. In 1900 and 1904 one-third of them had sat in five previous Chambers. In one sense they were local men, born in the province where their constituency lay, yet they usually came from the provincial capital. In short, they were urban men, 'representing' rural areas; an educated élite, trained in the classics, law and rhetoric. Nearly half of them were advocates, and teachers and journalists were also prominent. There were a few industrialists and bankers, but their number did not increase and the number of landowners fell steadily (from 114 in 1900 to 73 in 1913). The Socialist deputies, too, were almost invariably lawyers or teachers. This continuity is perhaps a little surprising. Italian society, the *paese reale*, was changing rapidly; the *paese legale* was not. The deputies' social composition did not change even in the 1913 elections, when almost universal male suffrage was introduced. The deputies' capacity for survival explains much about Giolitti's methods of government. He, like they, was a member of the 'educated ruling class'. His majority was conservative, but his government was 'open' to, and therefore often tacitly favoured by, the new 'organized social forces' in the country.



## 7.2 The Radicals and Socialists

The Radicals were hardly an 'organized social force', but they provide the clearest example of how opposition groups were 'absorbed'. Giolitti was not the only Prime Minister to play this game, and in fact it was Zanardelli in 1901 who began the whole process by inviting two leading Radicals into his Cabinet. They refused, on the grounds that they could not support high levels of military spending, but thereafter the Radicals abstained benevolently in votes of confidence. In 1904 came another major advance. On Giolitti's suggestion, the Radical Marcora became President (Speaker) of the Chamber of Deputies – a key post, and a decisive step in any party's approach to government. In 1906 Ettore Sacchi and Edoardo Pantano joined Sonnino's brief government, attracted by his promise of reforms. In the next few years several Radicals (e.g. Nitti and Credaro) served in Giolitti's Cabinets, and they became a normal part of Giolitti's parliamentary majority.

Why was the Radicals' 'absorption' so easy? The main reason is that most of them had little reason to stand aside. The new king was no reactionary; Giolitti was no threat to parliamentary institutions or civil liberties; industrial progress and welfare legislation were welcome. A few Radicals remained in opposition, mainly 'free-traders' like De Viti De Marco who thought that government policy gave excessive benefits to the protected 'corporations' and trade unions of Northern Italy, and who were sceptical about 'collectivist' welfare schemes. But most Radicals had no such qualms. They were the party 'of political liberty and economic Socialism'; and their base was among the teachers and civil servants – the 'intellectual classes', enjoying the benefits of State employment and anxious for more. Perhaps for this reason, their share of the Southern vote rose from below 5 per cent in 1904 to 17.3 per cent in 1913, and their Southern deputies increased in number from 9 to 35. The Radicals remained Masonic and anticlerical, but Giolitti did not seem overtender towards the Church, at least until 1913; and they were usually mildly pro-French, but that did not matter much until 1914. The Radicals became Giolitti's most faithful allies, and gave him many years of support.

The Socialists proved more resistant to Giolitti's blandishments, despite the various social reforms. Indeed, some conservatives thought that the Socialists were dominating governments, because the constitutional crisis of 1898–1900 had shown that Italy could not be ruled by force. It is more plausible to say that Giolitti 'absorbed' some of the Socialists, especially the union leaders and deputies, but could not buy off the Socialist Party in the country: he swallowed the head, but not the backbone.

Socialist trade unionism enjoyed rapid growth. Many new unions were founded in 1901–02, usually as 'federations' of existing local or craft-based unions. By 1902 nearly 250,000 industrial workers were 'organized' in the Socialist national federations. The best-known example was the Metal-Workers' Union, FIOM, founded in 1901; by 1902 it had 50,000 members, although for some years the different crafts continued to act with virtual independence. The 'federations' were overtly 'resistance' bodies, i.e. formed to resist capitalists. Their whole aim was to fight for higher wages, to conduct disputes with employers and to organize strikes. They were important in periods of labour militancy, channelling and directing what had often started off as 'spontaneous' disputes. The early years of the century were such a period, partly because of the new government policy of non-interference. In 1901 official figures showed over 1,000 strikes, involving 189,000 workers; and strikes became even more common later. The new unionism appealed mainly to skilled men – metal-workers, railwaymen, printers and the like. Where unskilled or female labour predominated, as in road-building or textiles, or in the South, there was little scope for any kind of organization. And, of course, many small traditional unions of local tradesmen or artisans survived. Sometimes the new 'national federation' was simply the old local association renamed, as with the hatters of Monza or the dockers of Genoa.

The unions were not always successful, especially after 1910 when slower economic growth meant that militancy was less likely to pay. FIOM had 30,000 members in 1907, but only 10,000 by 1911. The fact that the large trade unions were 'federations' of different trades made it difficult to find issues on which all their members could unite, except in agitating for general social reforms. When the Socialist unions, together with the Chambers of Labour, formed a 'General Confederation of Labour' (CGL) in 1906, this problem became even more acute. The CGL was an admirable institution for Giolitti, making it easier for him to co-opt union leaders on to all kinds of consultative committees, but it was ineffective as a 'resistance' organization. Moreover, there were often competing rival unions, organized by Catholics or syndicalists. And one of the largest and most militant unions was the Railwaymen's. Even Giolittian governments could not stay neutral in rail disputes, and in 1905 railway strikes were made illegal – though they still occurred on occasions thereafter.



The most important labour organizations in Italy were still the Chambers of Labour (see §5.7). They also expanded rapidly in the early years of the century: in 1900 there were fourteen, in 1902 seventy-six. They were usually run by skilled workers or artisans (tailors, cobblers, barbers); sometimes a local schoolteacher or a 'professional Socialist' lent a hand. They were always more popular than the 'federations', and had many more members. Above all, they were the centres of a Socialist popular culture and a Socialist morality. The workers who spent their evenings at the Chamber of Labour were upright, responsible men, firmly anti-capitalist and anticlerical. They had little knowledge of Marxism, and were mainly concerned with religious and educational issues. The Chambers, or their offshoots, organized housing co-operatives, co-operative shops and educational associations. They often produced their own magazines and ran their own recreational facilities. They preached against drunkenness, wife-beating and infanticide, and in favour of strict sexual fidelity and eventual suicide. In Sesto San Giovanni, for example, all this was going on long before the Socialist Party branch was founded in 1911; the Chamber of Labour had created a series of workers' institutions, active in political education and self-improvement. Rivalry with Catholic associations was intense: 'Socialism' and 'anticlericalism' were virtually synonymous. The Chambers were, in fact, challenging the Church's monopoly of ritual fervour. May Day processions provided a counter-attraction to traditional religious festivals. There were 'Socialist funerals' with bands, banners and processions, giving the humble worker a far more lavish send-off than he could hope to receive from the Church; and there were 'Socialist baptisms', during which the mother dedicated her infant 'to suffering humanity. You will struggle for the redemption of the class to which you belong by birth. You will be a courageous champion of Socialism, the light of the future.'[5] The Chambers of Labour were ideal institutions for diffusing these values in the rapidly industrializing towns of Northern Italy. They illustrate how the allegedly 'modern', Socialist labour movement was deeply impregnated with the older, Mazzinian ideals of local co-operatives and self-help, of laicism and mutual aid.

In some areas the Chambers of Labour took over other functions as well. In Emilia the peasant leagues and Chambers of Labour between them sometimes managed to control the labour market. Farmers could not hire labour except through the Chamber, and the Chamber determined the

rates of pay. Moreover, after 1904 municipal councils could have public works and irrigation schemes carried out by co-operatives (cheaper projects, costing below 100,000 lire, had been allowed since 1889); and after 1906 agricultural co-operatives were allowed to buy up land at public auctions. Chambers of Labour, Socialist co-operatives and Socialist local councils became an intertwined group of public bodies, supported by and supporting the hordes of landless labourers. They dominated both local politics and the local economy.

This was the Italian labour movement's great peculiarity, its source of greatest strength and weakness. Strength, in that Italy was the only industrial country before 1914 where a substantial number of agricultural labourers were Socialists. The *Federterra* ('federation' of agricultural labourers) was one of the first major national unions to be founded, in 1901, and accounted for at least one-third of the CGL's members in this period; in 1913 it had 157,000 out of 327,000. By 1910 there were 1,500 'Socialist' agricultural co-operatives with 218,000 members, and 37,000 hectares were being farmed collectively. Emilia-Romagna was the party's fortress – it won five of the eight seats in Bologna province in the 1904 general election – and it was a fortress built on agriculture, not industry. Yet it was a fragile edifice. It rested on government benevolence, indeed on active government willingness to concede public works and subsidies. It also rested on success in the battle for jobs for landless labourers, and on the labourers' accepting the Socialist aim of land nationalization. And it rested, above all, on employer weakness.

The main targets of Giolitti's 'absorption' policy were the Socialist deputies. They were mainly moderate, humane positivists like Turati, similar in outlook to the Radicals. In 1904, twenty-two of the twenty-eight Socialist deputies had been to university, and nine were university teachers; only two had been manual workers. They needed middle-class votes to be elected, and they usually allied with Radicals or Republicans at election time, at least for the second ballot. Socialist firebrands like Lazzari or Mussolini, although very popular with the party in the country, did not win parliamentary seats. The Socialist vote was a large one, even in these years. The PSI won about 20 per cent of the votes on the first ballot in 1904 and 1909; in Emilia it won almost 40 per cent. Yet the vote was not too high. If more people had voted Socialist, the party could have put up 'revolutionary' candidates who did not need Radical support, and they might have been elected; that was one reason why the Socialist deputies were so lukewarm about universal suffrage. As it was, the Socialist deputies were safe. Usually they did not need to take much notice of the rest of the party. The 'reformist' deputies had, in any case, majority support at party congresses between 1900 and 1904, and again from 1908 to 1912. But they came under fire from the left-wingers, for 'collaborationism' or worse. In 1912 the party congress condemned the 'feeble, skeletal report of the parliamentary deputies, and notes and deplores the lack of political activity by the group, which has helped to demoralize the masses'.[6] It was true that the Socialist deputies had taken few initiatives. They were supplicants relying on government favours, not revolutionaries trying to overthrow government.



But the Socialists could not be fully 'absorbed' into the Giolittian system, for several reasons. One was that in early twentieth-century Italy strikes meant violence. Strikes were legal, as was picketing; but so, too, was the right of non-strikers to work. The police were sent in to protect 'blacklegs' from angry crowds. This was a recipe for disaster, since strikers were used to settling their personal conflicts robustly, and the police were ill-trained, inexperienced and armed. Between 1900 and 1904 over 200 people were killed or wounded in battles between strikers and police. The 'proletarian massacres' continued in the next few years. Every time the police fired, there was a public outcry. Giolitti, in his *Memoirs*, complained that 'the Socialist deputies, ignoring all the work done by the government in favour of freedom and the working people, made continuous protests in parliament and supported the claims of the extremists'.[7] But what else did he expect? All Socialists were genuinely outraged by the deaths, and the deputies did not relish losing control of the party to the 'intransigent' wing.

This pattern was seen most clearly in September 1904. A series of 'massacres' culminated in the shooting of a striking miner at Buggerú, in Sardinia. In many cities, including Milan, the Chambers of Labour called a 'general strike' in protest. It looked very like a national strike, the first ever in Italy, although in reality it was a number of unplanned and uncoordinated local strikes taken on local initiative, evidence of popular hatred of police repression. The strike was far more complete in the Northern cities and the Socialist strongholds of the Po valley than elsewhere; the Socialist deputies, and the party directorate, provided little leadership or co-ordination. Giolitti ordered his Prefects to do as little as possible. In his view, the movement would soon collapse, and when it did the 'myth of the general strike' would be over. He was right about the strike collapsing, but wrong about the myth. Indeed, the whole affair boosted another powerful belief – in government weakness in the face of unlawful militancy. Once the danger was over, the respectable

middle classes railed against the government; and so did the frustrated revolutionaries.

Later 'general strikes' reinforced this impression. Official repression was fierce enough to kill people and infuriate the Left, but not fierce enough to destroy the peasant leagues or reassure the Right. It also meant full 'Socialist funerals' for the victims, with all the panoply of the Socialist counter-culture being paraded in public. In these circumstances it was impossible for the Socialist deputies to compromise overtly with Giolitti. Parliamentary manoeuvres were one thing; public avowals of affection were quite another. In 1903 Giolitti invited Turati to join his government. Although Turati admired most of Giolitti's policies, it was an offer he had to refuse.

The PSI in the country was small – it never had 50,000 members before 1914 – but it was active, it was usually militantly left-wing, and it was always in ferment. More than one-quarter of its local branches were dissolved each year. Party congresses were chaotic and disputatious affairs, seldom taking decisions but always providing drama and excitement. Inasmuch as anyone ran the party, it was the Directorate elected by the congress, but even the Directorate spent most of its time on propaganda – where it was less significant than the party's newspaper, *Avanti!* The party was dominated by middle-class 'professional Socialists', very different from the people they claimed to represent. The PSI won the peasant vote in Central Italy, but it had few peasant leaders. Socialist mayors, town councillors, peasant league organizers and co-operative managers nearly all came from the middle classes. The town council of Turin – a major industrial city – had 15 Socialist councillors in 1902: 3 doctors, 3 advocates, 6 teachers or professors, 1 accountant, 1 railway clerk and just 1 manual worker, and even he owned his own business.[8] Robert Michels called the PSI the 'party of university teachers', but he exaggerated. It was the leaders who were bourgeois intellectuals; most of the members (72 per cent in 1903) were manual workers.

It would be tedious to recount the details of the party's splits and faction disputes. The essence of them was always the same: would the 'reformists' (deputies and union leaders) retain control, or would they be defeated by the left-wing 'intransigents'? Since there was nothing much to control anyway, the outcome hardly mattered. In 1904 the 'intransigents' won a majority at the party congress, but did little with it. In 1908 the 'reformists' won 'power' back. In 1912 passions had been aroused by the Libyan War (see below, §7.5), and the 'intransigents' triumphed once more.



Neither the 'reformists' nor the 'intransigents' agreed among themselves. Turati regarded the State, under Giolitti, as essentially a neutral guarantor of peaceful working-class advance. He prized liberty, and feared that legislative reforms might lead to Bismarckian authoritarianism. His fellow-reformist Bonomi regarded the State in a very different light. It was a set of institutions to be taken over, precisely in order to provide legislative reforms. Thus he, and Bissolati, were far more willing to ally with the Radicals, to join governments if possible, and to push for reforms; and they were also far more interested in foreign policy.

The 'intransigents' were even more divided, for example between the 'revolutionary syndicalists' and the 'revolutionary Socialists'. The syndicalists believed in direct action by the workers themselves, and in seizing power by a revolutionary general strike. The economy would then be run by workers' 'syndicates', or unions. In practice, the 'reformists' retained control of the main unions, and the syndicalists had to make do with some of the Chambers of Labour. Apart from occasional strikes in protest at police repression, they achieved very little. In 1908 they were expelled from the party, and various syndicalist movements flourished thereafter in rivalry to the PSI and to the CGL unions. The 'revolutionary Socialists' were orthodox Marxists, but with no trust in parliament or interest in reforms.

In short, Socialist politics was a complex business. At local level, party branches came and went, largely run by their secretaries; a Socialist subculture was slowly spread by skilled workers and artisans, via Chambers of Labour, co-operatives, etc. At national level, efforts centred on propaganda and journalism, and around the struggle for victory at the next party congress. The deputies went their own way, as much as they dared. And the unions, grouped together in the CGL, pursued their own interests independently of the party and of each other. All this explains why Giolitti's 'absorption' of the labour movement was at best partial and temporary. He could count on the tacit support of the Socialist institutions that mattered, i.e. the deputies, the industrial unions and the labourers' leagues; but that support was bound to remain tacit. The Socialist Party in the country remained aloof. It firmly denounced the capitalist class, and indignantly rejected the corrupt political manoeuvres of the exploiting bourgeoisie.

## 7.3 The Catholics

Much the same is true of the other major ideological group outside 'the system', the Catholics. Giolitti was extremely cautious and reticent about

the Church. His only striking pronouncement was in 1904, when he described Church and State as being 'two parallel lines, which should never meet'.[9] Even in his *Memoirs* he made no mention of the major disputes, nor did he name a single Pope. Giolitti did not want to alienate the anticlerical Radicals and Socialists. Probably he was suspicious of clerical scheming, and possibly he was quite indifferent to religious issues. Yet he needed the support of Catholics, if only as a counterweight to Socialism; and for a time he secured it. He was the first Liberal statesman to win the organized Catholic vote. In return, he was expected to make some 'concessions'. The two parallel lines were beginning to converge.

The long process of cautious rapprochement began as soon as Giolitti became Prime Minister. A divorce bill, which he had inherited from his predecessors, was quietly allowed to founder. In 1904, at the election called after the September general strike, the '*non expedit*' was relaxed for the first time. Catholics were permitted to vote in constituencies where otherwise a Socialist might be elected; and sometimes for other reasons. At Bergamo the Catholics' Liberal allies threatened to stop backing the Catholic-dominated *local* administration unless the Catholics supported the Liberals in the *parliamentary* election. This was a real threat, for Bergamo was one of the centres of social Catholicism: there was a whole network of co-operatives, rural banks and charities, ultimately dependent on a benevolent municipal council. So Pope Pius X himself told the Bergamese to 'do as your conscience dictates'.[10] In 1905 a Papal encyclical *Il Fermo Proposito* explained that the '*non expedit*' still applied in principle, but might be lifted in practice 'to help the maintenance of the social order'. In the 1909 elections the '*non expedit*' was suspended in about 150 constituencies, and voters' turnout rose markedly in the Catholic North (in Veneto, from 48.5 per cent in 1900 to 65.2 per cent in 1909; in Lombardy, from 52.9 per cent to 65.9 per cent). By this time debate concerned not whether Catholics might vote at general elections, but whether they might stand as candidates; forty-one of them did, and seventeen were elected. The Vatican paper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, invented a new formula: '*cattolici deputati*' were permissible, but '*deputati cattolici*' were not. In other words, Catholics might become deputies, but no deputies should claim to represent Catholic opinion, or be elected for their clerical affiliations.

The lay Catholic movements had come to be dominated, after 1898, by the 'clerico-moderates', respectable men of conservative views anxious for reconciliation with the State. There was no more talk of 'intransigence' or 'usurpation'. In 1912 the king narrowly escaped assassination; leading Catholic laymen promptly went to pay homage to him in the Quirinal



Palace itself, the historic site of the Papal conclaves. Giolitti's officials constantly reported back how the clergy and laity had become reconciled to Liberal institutions, and how horrified the Catholics were by Socialism. For example, the bishop of Verona's pastoral letter for Lent 1901, to be read by clergy in church, stressed that:

*Socialism is the most abject slavery, it is flagrant injustice, it is the craziest folly, it is a social crime, it is the destruction of the family and of public welfare, it is the self-proclaimed and inevitable enemy of religion, and it leads to anarchy.*[11]

The Prefects also noted, with some alarm, how influential the various Catholic movements were becoming. By 1911 the 'clerico-moderates' were part of local government majorities in many major cities – Turin, Bologna, Florence, Venice – and hundreds of smaller centres, especially in Lombardy and Veneto. In some areas they controlled most economic and social activity. In Vicenza, Giacomo Rumor owned a printing works, helped found the Banca Cattolica Vicentina, was president of the Vicenza Catholic Workers' Society, sat on both the municipal and provincial councils, and was president of the Chamber of Commerce. Such men were obviously part of the Establishment, whether the fact was publicly avowable or not.

Yet the network of Catholic co-operatives, rural banks and welfare agencies never received official recognition by the State, nor even much support from the Church. The Vatican worried that if lay Catholics were too successful in political or social affairs, they might be less willing to accept Papal directives, and above all might begin to regard the Roman question as irrelevant. In July 1904 Count Grosoli, president of the *Opera dei Congressi*, annoyed the new Pope, Pius X, intensely by claiming that the Catholics were 'anxious that the work of the living should not be impeded by dead issues'.[12] Pius dissolved the *Opera dei Congressi* two weeks after Grosoli's blunder. In 1905 the lay Catholic movements were reorganized as 'Catholic Action', in three separate 'unions': the Unione Popolare to organize pious activities and propaganda, the Unione Economico-Sociale, and the Unione Elettorale to mobilize the vote. The Catholic youth movement, Gioventù Cattolica Italiana, was also reorganized and given the same status as the other 'unions'; and in 1908 the Unione Donne Cattoliche was founded for women. Each was independent of the others, and each was brought under the immediate control of the bishops. This change was important. It reasserted clerical control. It meant that the rising generation of younger Catholics, inspired by Leo XIII's

*Rerum Novarum* and firmly committed to encouraging social change, was left without national lay leadership or central organization. Yet Pius X was probably right in thinking that the *Opera dei Congressi* had had its day. It was too much of a hybrid, with its economic, political, charitable and religious activities all overlapping; and it had risked involving the whole Church in political, even trade union, affairs. If Catholics were going to 'take over' society, they would need various institutions and differing perspectives. In the long run Pius X's decision probably helped the growth of autonomous political Catholicism and of more independent Catholic social movements. It was, perhaps, the first step in reconciling the Church to pluralism.

Catholic lay activities were now under the bishops, so it made a good deal of difference who the bishops were. They were, increasingly, of peasant origin, educated solely in seminary schools, men of little culture and less independence. They did what Rome required them to do, and lived in fear of 'apostolic visitations'. There were, of course, some exceptions: at Bergamo Bishop Radini Tedeschi, supported by his young secretary Fr Angelo Roncalli, backed local strikes from the pulpit. But the general picture was one of hesitation and perplexity. The great advances that Catholic social and economic institutions had made in the 1890s were not continued in the 1900s. The Unione Popolare, for example, had only 78,000 members by the end of 1910 (the equivalent Catholic organization in Germany, the Volksverein, had 652,000). It had become largely a debating club for Catholic intellectuals, and made little attempt to convert the masses or to provide a focus for social life. The Unione Economico-Sociale shows a similar picture. In some regions, notably Lombardy and Veneto, the Catholic organizations continued to flourish. In 1910 there were 105,000 members of Catholic trade unions, working mainly in textiles, agriculture and the railways. The agricultural co-operatives had over 50,000 members, and the rural banks had 94,000 accounts. But in the South the economic movement never recovered from the blows it had received in 1898, and in many other areas the Catholics were isolated and defensive. In the Northern cities a historic opportunity was missed, in this crucial decade of rapid industrialization. The Socialists often stepped in where Catholic organizers feared to tread, and in 1911 only about one-fifth of the 'organized' workers were in Catholic unions.

One reason for this relative decline was that the young Catholic enthusiasts for social, economic and political action were liable to be accused of 'modernism'. 'Modernism' was an ill-defined term, originating outside Italy. It referred to a 'historicist' or, worse, 'immanentist' approach to theological issues, and to rigorous historical and philological study of the



Gospels; and it usually included demands for reform of clerical abuses and of Church organization, and for acceptance of the lay democratic State. In Italy the movement was essentially political, i.e. social-reforming 'Christian Democrat', opposed to conservative 'clerico-moderatism'. Pius X firmly condemned the theological doctrines in 1907, and for a few years there was a virtual witch-hunt against 'modernists'. As with all witch-hunts, the original motives were soon forgotten, and anyone suspected of excessive political or social zeal came under a cloud. Romolo Murri, an energetic priest from the Romagna who had become the leader of the younger 'Christian Democrats', was 'defrocked' and excommunicated in 1909 (he became a Radical deputy, and sat on the Extreme Left benches of the Chamber, still in clerical dress). Many other Catholics lost heart, or bided their time. Thus 'modernism' apparently collapsed, although many 'modernist' doctrines proved very influential later. The whole 'Christian Democrat' movement became tainted with heresy.

It was rescued, eventually, by another political priest, Fr Luigi Sturzo, the acting mayor of Caltagirone in Sicily. Sturzo was also suspect for a time, and in 1907 an apostolic visitor arrived to check up on his orthodoxy. Fortunately, all was well; and in any case Sturzo was willing to keep silent on religious issues. His interest was in local government, which was perfectly acceptable. He argued that the Socialists would hold sway over the people, if the Catholics did not act quickly. He wanted regional autonomy for Sicily and elsewhere, and he hoped for an eventual 'lay' Catholic political party, based on flourishing local organizations and committed to democracy and social reforms. He was horrified in 1904, when Catholics started voting for Liberal candidates. This was the 'politics of eunuchs'; Catholics were 'prostituting their vote' for minimal returns. Sturzo was much concerned about the Southern question, and part of his opposition to 'clerico-moderatism' stemmed from the fact that it was essentially Northern, enmeshed in the 'Giolittian system' of industrial protection. There was little he and his friends could do, outside local government; but at least they prevented political Catholicism being solely identified with 'clerico-moderatism', and built up the first real network of Catholic organizations in Southern Italy. His group was not, of course, alone. The 1904 election convinced many laymen, including Filippo Meda, the influential editor of the *Osservatore Cattolico*, that a 'non-confessional' political party for Catholics was inevitable, once the 'modernist' crisis had died down. When it became clear, after 1914, that a Catholic party would be reasonably successful and tolerable to the new Pope, this view was strengthened. Sturzo was best placed to lead the way; and Giolitti was unlikely to 'absorb' *him*.

In the 1901 census, only 36,000 Italians (0.1 per cent) declared they had 'no religion'; in 1911, 874,000 (2.5 per cent) did so. Was this a real decline in belief, or was it simply that people were more willing to proclaim their lack of faith? Alas, we have no idea. We also have little idea why religious observance fell in some places and not others, or whether industrialization and urbanization had anything to do with it. However, we know that proclaimed religious belief fell most in Central Italy – by no means the most industrial or most urbanized part of the country – and held up remarkably well in industrializing Piedmont and Lombardy. The success or failure of trade unions and peasant leagues, and who organized them, had a great deal to do with the outcome. Even more important was the attitude of the local clergy. Father Burgalassi quotes the diary of a parish priest in Basati, a marble-quarrying area in Lucca province: in 1900 all the villagers in his parish took Easter communion, in 1910 'only a few men' did so. What had happened was that a Socialist union organizer had come along and founded a 'league'. It had secured pay rises and lower hours, but the priest had warned his parishioners not to join, and a Capucin friar had told them that trade unionists were not allowed to take communion. So religious practice fell very sharply, mainly because of the lack of imagination of the local priest – and there were many such priests in Italy.[13]

Catholic education and propaganda were hampered by the fact that priests were not well-educated men. Their libraries rarely contained the Bible or even the Gospels, let alone anything else. Bishops made their usual efforts to improve seminary training, but it was a slow business. Literary Catholics, recognizing the problem, wrote uplifting novels for the people. Even Sturzo wrote several plays, although characteristically on secular themes like *The Southern Prefect* or *Winning the Freedom to Vote*. These works were not much of a challenge to the Socialist or Nationalist rhetoric of a De Amicis or a D'Annunzio, but at least the Catholics tried. Perhaps the clergy's major problem was that they had always acted as 'mediators' between the people and the outside world. This high status was undermined once other people could read and write too, and it was also challenged by lay politicians and trade unionists, including lay Catholics. Naturally the priests sometimes resented it, and their authority was diminished whether they resented it or not.

Even so, one should not exaggerate. Italy in 1911 was not a 'secular' country. Catholic social action may have flagged, but the women's union and the Catholic youth movements both expanded, indeed flourished as never before. The Church may have lost out on funerals and trade unionism, but she found alternative – perhaps more successful – ways of proselytizing, e.g. sports clubs. The 'Catholic sub-culture' could compete on equal terms with the Socialists in most of Northern Italy, and certainly it could outbid the Liberals when it came to winning the popular vote.



Thus Giolitti's compromise with the Catholics was always uneasy, and always unstable. To speak of 'two parallel lines' was simply to fudge the issue. Church and State could hardly avoid influencing each other, if only because the Church's influence on education and welfare was immense. In practice, Giolitti used the Catholics to bolster his majority, but he could not, or would not, give them much in return. He was unwilling to yield a centimetre of Italian soil, and so could not settle the 'Roman question'. He relied heavily on the conservative 'clerico-moderates', and on the fact that the 'Christian Democrats' were out of favour in the Vatican. And he was hostile to anything resembling a 'Catholic party'. He thus missed a possible chance of founding a more stable and more democratic regime which would satisfy the Catholic laity. He tried to 'absorb' the Catholics quietly, without anybody noticing; but he was bound to be found out in the end.

## 7.4 The Nationalists

However difficult Giolitti's relations with the Catholics, it was the Nationalists who posed the biggest threat of all to 'Giolittianism'. Italian nationalism, as an organized movement, barely existed at the beginning of the Giolittian period, or even in 1908; yet by 1914 it was a major force, influencing many sectors of the Establishment, powerful enough to resist being 'absorbed', indeed powerful enough to transform the whole political system in the next few years. How, and why, were the Nationalists so successful? Why was Giolitti unable to cope with them?

Part of the answer is that the Nationalists caught a public mood – a sense of national inferiority, a feeling that Italy was being left behind in the race to industrialize, a concern that Italy, alone among the European Powers, was not acquiring colonies, a sense of shame that so many Italians had to emigrate, that Italy was overshadowed by Austria and Germany in the Triple Alliance, above all that Italy had been defeated – by Abyssinians! – at Adowa in 1896. Writers and intellectuals returned to these themes again and again (see §8.4). Twentieth-century Italian nationalism, like its predecessors, started off as a literary movement, as an attempt at cultural renewal. But it was never just literary. It always claimed to command men's obedience, and to tell people what they must do to be saved. Italy was a 'proletarian nation', entitled to struggle against her

oppressors; she could be redeemed, but only through sacrifice and conflict. The Nationalists' prophet, Corradini, proclaimed the need for a new kind of religious fervour – 'a religious feeling, gentlemen, which when it becomes widespread in Italy will at last make the trains run on time'.[14]

Nationalism, in short, was a revivalist movement, stressing past guilt and future redemption. It competed directly and consciously with Socialism. Virtually all the Nationalists' pamphlets stressed the similarities, and differences, between them and the Socialists, and often used very similar language. But the Nationalists' chief target was Giolitti. Giolitti's cunning parliamentary manoeuvres, his tacit deals with interest-groups, above all his caution in foreign policy, aroused the Nationalists' fury. They were impossible men to 'buy off' or to 'absorb' into the 'Giolittian system', for they were not interested in economic or social 'concessions'. They were visionaries, and they thought history was on their side.

And so it was, at least for a time. Nationalist propaganda also stressed various concrete themes, each highly relevant to sensible, practical men. Their anti-union agitation went down well among many middle-class Italians, who had long thought that Giolitti was making too many concessions to the Socialists. Giolitti did little to reassure them. During one labourers' strike, for example, Count Arrivabene sent an urgent telegram to the Minister of Agriculture: 'I want you to know that to prevent the loss of crops I, Count Arrivabene, am forced to labour in the fields day and night with other members of my family and friends.' Giolitti's reply was hardly diplomatic: 'I am happy, *Signor Conte*, that you have taken work which can only improve your health, and which will help you to understand how hard and bitter is the life of your peasants. Distinguished compliments.'[15] Episodes like that convinced conservatives that Giolitti was handing over the State to their enemies. The recurrent strikes reinforced this view. In 1906, during a general strike at Bologna, a strike-breaking vigilante group of 'volunteers for order' was formed, encouraged by the *Corriere della Sera* and other Liberal papers. Clearly the Nationalists' message was reaching receptive ears.

Admittedly the Nationalists did not produce any original ideas for some time. They simply urged that public sector strikes should be banned, and that police powers should be strengthened. But gradually new themes crept in. By 1911 Corradini was arguing that the State should settle labour disputes, by creating a 'national consensus' on wages. Even more important, he embraced 'productivism'. The State should organize the economy and allocate resources, in order to maximize production. Naturally that could only be done if Italian industry were protected from foreign competition. 'Productivism' and protectionism became important aspects



of Nationalist thinking. They would boost production, maintain profits and help to conciliate labour. They were not temporary expedients but necessary, desirable features of a modern industrial State. All this pleased many industrialists, especially in industries reliant on State orders or tariffs. It also pleased many politicians. 'Productivism' was a widely accepted idea among Radicals as well as Nationalists – Nitti, for example, wrote in 1907 that the whole aim of the Radical Party was 'the greatest elevation of the national soul, together with the greatest development of production'.[16] The two concepts were becoming fatally linked.

The Nationalists' leading thinker on political and economic issues was Alfredo Rocco, himself an ex-Radical. In 1914 Rocco persuaded the Nationalist Congress to adopt a far-reaching policy of constitutional reform, setting up a new kind of State that would replace the discredited Liberal parliamentary system. Rocco provided, at last, an answer to the 'trade union question'. The unions, he proclaimed, should be welcomed, not fought. They were national, centralizing bodies that disciplined labour; all that was needed was that they themselves should be brought under firm central control. There should be a compulsory closed shop for all workers; employers, too, should be organized into recognized legal associations, preferably into the same ('mixed') unions as the workers. Disputes could then easily be settled, if necessary by compulsory arbitration; and the economy could be planned nationally on 'productivist' lines. The congress resolved that 'mixed' unions were 'the most effective way of moving from a system of free competition to one of national producers' solidarity',[17] and of transforming the unions into organs of national co-operation rather than class conflict. All this sounded a bit too good to be true to most conservatives and Liberals, but gradually Rocco's 'extremism' made headway. The Nationalists, unlike Giolitti, did at least have some ideas about how to avoid 'Socialist tyranny'.

But the main reason for the Nationalists' success lay abroad. Italian nationalism was conceived in disgust at the 'cowardice' and past failures of Italian foreign policy. It was essentially a demand for High Politics, indeed for a victorious war. It flourished after 1908, in the dangerous and unstable Europe of the Bosnian, Agadir and Moroccan crises, when colonial rivalry had become intense and when alliances had become more fluid. In 1909 and 1910 many Nationalist journals were founded: *Il Tricolore* at Turin, *La Grande Italia* at Milan, *La Nave* at Naples. In 1910 came the first Nationalist Congress, mainly propaganda for a more active foreign policy. The main Nationalist journal, *L'Idea Nazionale*, began publication the following year, on 1 March – the day the ancient Romans had assembled their armies, and also the date of the battle of Adowa. The

Nationalists agitated for a stronger army and higher defence spending, and in the new international climate they were successful. Spending on the army had been more or less constant, at 250 million lire p.a., between 1900 and 1907; by 1909–10 it had risen to 340 million lire, and right-wing politicians like Salandra argued that even this was hopelessly inadequate.

The Nationalists did not, of course, agree on everything, even in foreign policy. Most of them were primarily interested in colonial expansion, and so remained in favour of the Triple Alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary. Yet the Triple Alliance was showing signs of strain by 1908 if not earlier, and Italy's interests clearly conflicted with Austria's in the Balkans. Furthermore, 'irredentism' (see §4.4) always had a powerful emotional appeal, especially among the radical and democratic young. A 'National Trent and Trieste Association' was founded in 1903, and by 1910 there were several paramilitary student groups, e.g. the 'Hunters of the Tiber' and the '*sursum corda*', receiving military training from army officers. And some of the leading 'irredentists' – particularly Scipio Sighele and Alberto Caroncini – were early members of the Nationalist movement. They preached a Holy War against the traditional enemy Austria, to reclaim the 'Italian' territory of Trent and Trieste; and they saw Italy as essentially a great *European* Power. They made little immediate headway, and in fact were virtually expelled from the Nationalist Association in 1912, in the heady pro-colonial aftermath of the Libyan War. But they were Nationalists too, and their hour was to come two years later.

## 7.5 The Libyan War

In September 1911 the Italian army invaded Libya. This was an uncharacteristic decision, but Giolitti and his Foreign Minister, San Giuliano, had their reasons. In 1902 Italy had signed an agreement with France, whereby Italy supported French expansion in Morocco, and France agreed to back Italian influence in Libya. When the Agadir crisis blew up in July 1911, it was clear that the French were consolidating their rule in Morocco. It was time for the Italians to act. Giolitti had to assert Italy's claims in Tripolitania, before the French stepped in there too. Libya was not much use in itself – Giolitti did not fool himself that the desert could easily be made to bloom – but it had a few ports, and Italy could not allow them to fall into potentially hostile hands.

The Great Power chess game was not the only consideration in Giolitti's mind. The Banco di Roma had founded a branch in Tripoli in 1907, and had built up major banking, shipping and agricultural investments throughout North Africa. Furthermore, it had powerful friends. Its president was Ernesto Pacelli, uncle of the future Pope Pius XII; its vice-president was Romolo Tittoni, brother of Tommaso who had often been Foreign Minister between 1903 and 1909. The bank financed some of the Catholic press, e.g. the *Corriere d'Italia*, which campaigned for war. Indeed, San Giuliano complained that 'every little incident in Tripoli and between Italians and Turks is deliberately magnified by the press for various motives, including money and the intrigues of the Banco di Roma, which has an interest in securing a quick Italian occupation of Tripolitania'.[18]



The Banco di Roma's involvement meant that Catholic opinion – or, at least, 'clerico-moderate' opinion – would support invasion. Public opinion in general was militant, and would not tolerate the government 'standing idly by' while the French took over Tripoli. The Nationalists led the chorus, but many others joined in, including even some Socialists like Bissolati and Bonomi. Some of the press campaign was no doubt orchestrated by the government: pro-Giolittian papers like *La Stampa* and *La Tribuna* were prominent in depicting Libya as a Promised Land. But the government could hardly have resisted for long, even if it had wanted to. It was faced, in fact, with an extraordinary spectacle of nationalist enthusiasm, particularly extraordinary to those who remembered how unpopular Crispi's Abyssinian War had been less than twenty years previously. In Giovanni Pascoli's famous words 'the great proletarian [nation] has stirred'. Ironically, only the proletarian parties, on the extreme Left, stayed aloof. The bulk of the Socialists and syndicalists, most Republicans and some Radicals were hostile to the war; and they were immediately accused of lack of patriotism.

Thus the decision to invade Libya was not just a hasty diplomatic move, forced on the government by the Second Moroccan Crisis. It was also consciously taken for reasons of internal policy, to placate the Nationalists and the 'clerico-moderates'. Public opinion – i.e. the restricted world of politically-minded gentlemen – played its part; so did economic interests; and so did Giolitti's constant, cautious efforts to 'absorb' and conciliate his opponents.

The war itself was a military success, at least by Italy's previous standards. Italy declared war on Turkey on 29 September 1911. Her navy and marines seized most of Tripolitania's ports and coastal towns within three weeks. Then the difficulties began. The Italians had somehow expected the local Arabs to welcome them as liberators from the Turk, but this unaccountably failed to happen. Soon there were 70,000 Italian troops in Libya, fighting not only the Turks but the Arabs as well. After some

months, Giolitti realized that the only real hope of victory lay in putting military and diplomatic pressure on Turkey elsewhere. In May 1912, therefore, Italy occupied thirteen Turkish-held islands in the Aegean, including Rhodes; and in October Italy had a stroke of luck. Montenegro, Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece started the Balkan War, and the Turks were really in trouble. On 8 October they formally surrendered Libya (i.e. Tripolitania and Cyrenaica) to Italy. The Arabs, however, continued their guerrilla resistance for many years, especially in Cyrenaica. The Italians were forced to keep 50,000 troops in the country on garrison duty, and even so their writ only ran in Tripoli and the larger towns. The year of official war had cost nearly 3,500 Italian dead, and 1,300 million lire. Still, Italy had a North African colony at last, and the shame of Adowa had been assuaged.

The war had a major impact on domestic politics. Initially Giolitti's hand was strengthened. He could take the credit for a victorious war and a successful peace. Yet that mood was short-lived. In the longer term the Libyan War broke up the 'Giolittian system'. It was, for example, an immense triumph for the Nationalists. Giolitti had hoped that invading Libya would placate them, but in fact it simply made them more popular and enabled them to forge alliances with the 'clerico-moderates'. The Nationalists had softened up public opinion for the war: Corradini's novel *La Guerra Lontana* and his propaganda book *L'Ora di Tripoli* were both published in 1911, as was Castellini's *Tunis e Tripoli*. The Nationalists claimed (wrongly) the credit for having forced a reluctant government into war. And the Nationalists provided many of the war correspondents in Libya, and made the most of their opportunities for bellicose propaganda. They complained bitterly that the Italian army had not been ready to fight. The soldiers had been betrayed by the politicians; Italy had been stabbed in the back by her own leaders. This was good propaganda, for by late 1912 Italians were counting the cost of the war and wondering why its benefits were so meagre. The Nationalists had the answer: Giolitti was to blame. Soon they became a real right-wing political party, and in 1913 five of them were elected to parliament. They were still a small group, but they had infiltrated the Liberal Establishment, and they were undermining Giolittianism.

Moreover, the Catholics were slipping out of Giolitti's grasp. Most of the Catholic press had welcomed the Libyan venture, and many priests had preached a crusade against the heathen Turk. Pius X tried to discourage this, but in vain. The war provided Catholics with a fine opportunity to demonstrate their patriotism, and many of them seized it eagerly. They, too, were now part of the national unity. Indeed, they were now part of the Nationalists' unity, or at least some of the 'clerico-moderates' were.



Both Catholics and Nationalists campaigned hard against Freemasonry, for Masons were obviously bound to be pro-Turk; both favoured colonial expansion and praised Italy's 'civilizing mission' abroad; both hated the French Revolution and its detestable democratic principles. Catholic support was vital for the Nationalists. Their five deputies owed their election to it, and in 1914 a Catholic–Nationalist conservative alliance won control of Rome's local government.

Yet talk of a Catholic–Nationalist 'wedding' was exaggerated. It was more like a heady but strictly temporary affair. Certainly it never received the blessing of the Church. The Vatican newspaper dismissed the Nationalists as 'supporters of the most tyrannical and odious Caesarism'; and, reporting the Nationalist Congress of 1912, it wondered 'why a small group of people have recently founded a new Italian Nationalist party, warmongering and arrogant, with helmet and sword ready to cut down their neighbours in the name of a parody of Italian imperialism'.[19] Perhaps the Vatican did not want the Nationalists spoiling the game, just when the Catholics were entering the political arena under *Giolitti*'s auspices. Certainly many lay Catholics were anxious to keep their independence, and to show that it was possible to be patriotic without being Nationalist.

The real domestic losers of the Libyan War were the Socialists. In March 1911 Giolitti had offered them a post in his new government, but they had refused him again. Still, the offer showed Giolitti's good intentions, and Bissolati for one rejected it most reluctantly. It looked as if the PSI was on the threshold of power. The war changed all that. It isolated the party's deputies, and strengthened the 'revolutionary' wing. The PSI opposed the war on principle, but its attempts to mount anti-war demonstrations established the party's reputation as a treacherous fifth column undermining national security. Giolitti could no longer look to the Socialist deputies if he needed support, and they in turn felt betrayed by him.

Moreover, the war split the party. Some of its main reformist leaders, including Bissolati, Bonomi and Cabrini, were expelled for supporting the war, or rather for congratulating the king on escaping assassination. They soon formed the 'Italian Reformist Socialist Party', with little support except in the South and Liguria. Although Turati and most other reformists remained inside the old party, the 'reformist' wing never recovered from this blow. The 'revolutionaries' captured the leadership in 1912, and appointed a fiery 29-year-old Socialist from Romagna, Benito Mussolini, to be editor of the party newspaper *Avanti!* Mussolini, like other Socialist editors before and after him, used the job to become virtual party leader. He was a brilliant journalist, and under his leadership *Avanti!*

campaigned fiercely against the corrupt placemen and militarists who murdered ordinary workers both in Libya and at home. So did the syndicalists, 100,000 strong by December 1913, militant and anti-militarist, and always ready to denounce any 'betrayals' by Socialist leaders. Henceforth there would be much less chance of Socialists being 'absorbed' into the bourgeois political system, and many fewer compromises between Giolitti and the moderate Socialist leadership. Giolitti had betrayed his main allies, and his system would have to take the consequences.

## 7.6 The suffrage of 1912

Thus the Libyan War demolished the old familiar bases of Italian politics. The most important change of all was also partly a consequence of the war. For some years there had been a desultory debate about widening the suffrage, and in March 1911 Giolitti had made it part of his new government programme. In 1912, as Italy's conscript soldiers faced death in the Libyan desert, it was impossible to deny them the vote any longer. A new law brought in almost universal male suffrage: all literate men aged 21 and over would have the vote, as previously, but so would those who had completed military service, and all men aged 30 whether literate or not. The electorate, which had been below 3 million in 1909, rose overnight to nearly 8.5 million; the age of mass politics had arrived. Many argued that the change was premature. The existing voters would be swamped by 5 million illiterates; and indeed one estimate is that in 1913 70 per cent of Italy's voters could neither read nor write.[20]

This reform was not the result of any irresistible popular agitation. It was introduced from above, by Giolitti and the 'constitutional' Liberals. They argued that it would be a symbol of national unity during a war, that it would strengthen the conservative rural areas against the 'subversive' towns, and that it would make the working classes more responsible and less given to extremism. In fact, most of the 'subversives' were literate Northerners who had the vote already; and the really troublesome illiterate ones were aged below 30, and still would not get it. Most observers assumed it would make little difference, for governments would still 'manage' elections, and the same people would still be elected. Others, more perceptively, saw that it would weaken the traditional hold of the provincial towns over their surrounding countryside.

The first elections under the new system were held in 1913, and at first sight did indeed show little significant change. Admittedly the Socialist vote rose from 19.0 per cent in 1909 to 22.8 per cent, and the PSI deputies



increased from 41 to 79; yet only in Apulia and Latium were there signs of a dramatic Socialist breakthrough (in Apulia the Socialist vote rose from 3 per cent to 17.3 per cent). The 'constitutional' parties retained 56.7 per cent of the vote. More than two-thirds of the deputies had sat in the Chamber before, a higher proportion than in 1909.

Yet Giolitti's new majority was not quite so comfortable as usual. The Liberal and 'constitutional' seats fell from 382 to 318, out of the total 511. Above all, it rested heavily on organized Catholicism. There were 65 Catholic candidates, and 29 were elected. Furthermore, Count Gentiloni, president of the Catholic Electoral Union, had thought it was pointless to give Catholic votes to Liberal candidates without secure guarantees that they would support Catholic interests if elected. So the Electoral Union had asked parliamentary candidates to sign their agreement to 'seven Points' (on religious education in schools, no divorce law, etc.) in return for the Catholic vote. Many did so, and were duly elected. Gentiloni boasted after the election that 228 deputies owed their seats to Catholic support, although the figure was hotly disputed (especially by the ones who were Masons or known freethinkers). Giolitti always denied he had had anything to do with this 'Gentiloni Pact', and indeed denied it had ever existed. But the informal arrangements were real enough in many constituencies. The 'Pact' showed that the Catholics could reasonably press for more 'concessions'. Their political organization was, in many places, much stronger than that of the Liberals; and they were better equipped for the new age of mass politics, now that the rural areas had the vote. The Catholics, and only the Catholics, could provide the mass anti-Socialist turnout. Henceforth the Liberal regime rested on Catholic support.

## 7.7 The end of the 'Giolittian system'

There were many reasons for the collapse of Giolittianism, besides the Libyan War and the introduction of semi-universal male suffrage. Giolitti was a good political juggler, but even he could not keep all the balls in the air at once. If he made concessions to the Socialists, he annoyed the Catholics. If he allied with the Catholics, he lost the Radicals. If he invaded Libya, he betrayed the Socialists. It was, for example, all very well to set up a Supreme Council of Labour to consult with and help 'absorb' the Socialist labour movement, but what about the Catholic labour institutions, or the syndicalists? Political systems that rest on 'absorption' and 'concessions' are always faced with this 'me-too' problem; it is still a major issue in Italy today. It was particularly acute in the

later Giolittian years, because economic growth had slowed down; there was simply not enough money available to keep everybody happy.

Another problem was that Giolitti was soft on Socialism, but after the Libyan War Socialism was unfashionable. In any case, moderate leaders like Turati had lost control of the PSI, and the revolutionary syndicalists were winning support away from the moderate Socialist unions. Any hope of 'absorbing' the party and the unions into the system had to be abandoned after 1912. All 'Comrade Giolitti' had done, and continued to do, was to alienate other powerful groups, particularly among the industrialists and landowners. In 1911–14 Giolitti continued to make influential enemies. In 1911 he brought in a bill to nationalize life insurance: profits made by the new State monopoly would pay for sickness and old-age pensions for the poor. This proposal smacked of Socialism. It was furiously opposed by financial institutions at home and abroad (60 per cent of existing policies had been issued by foreign companies), and by the Catholics (whose banks and insurance companies had a major interest). The bill was eventually passed in 1912, after being amended so that existing companies might continue operating for ten more years, but it had antagonized many powerful people.

In 1913 Giolitti repeated this error. During a major dispute in the Turin car industry, the Prefect of Turin informed the local employers that, if they locked out their workers, the police would not protect their factories. Moreover, the Giolittian newspaper *La Tribuna* published a sharp attack on Bonnefon Craponne, the president of the Industrial League. The industrialists protested against 'the inexplicable declarations of the political authorities and their illegal attitude',[21] but they had to give in. Three weeks later the dispute ended, with real concessions to the Socialist-led Engineering Union, FIOM. Bonnefon Craponne resigned his post. The industrialists did not forget or forgive their defeat, and they drew the appropriate conclusions. If the government was going to become the arbiter of labour disputes, it was important to have the government on their side. Giolitti was on the other side – and would any democratic government act otherwise? Craponne's successor, Dante Ferraris, was soon financing *L'Idea Nazionale*.

Thus by 1914 a complex bloc of opposition to Giolitti had built up. What brought him down eventually was Gentiloni's public claims about how indispensable the Catholics had been to the new government's majority. This made it impossible for Giolitti to keep his other allies happy. The Radicals withdrew their support, and their deputies hastily left the government. Giolitti immediately resigned. Now it was the Catholics' turn to feel



betrayed: had not Giolitti passed up a marvellous opportunity to work with them and grant 'concessions', free from Radical anticlerical pressure? Thus Giolitti's 'system' ran into the sands, amid much bitterness and recrimination.

Giolitti's downfall highlighted the major defect of his system: the weakness, indeed the virtual absence, of an organized Liberal constitutional party. This was, of course, an old theme of political debate. But it became far more acute in 1911–13. Giolitti was a Liberal, trying to reconcile new political and social organizations with traditional dynastic and bureaucratic authority, and attempting to remain the arbiter in a contending pluralist world. He wooed the Socialists and the unions, or made deals with the Catholics, in order to gain legitimacy for the State and its institutions. He never attempted to form a mass party of the moderate Right, for this would have needed full Catholic support, and might easily have meant Catholic dominance. In any case, it was not necessary. The provinces remained reliable; the Prefects and local 'notables' could still get out the restricted vote. His was an old-fashioned style of politics, restricted to an élite and concerned with the ancient issues of clericalism and consensus, progress and patronage.

But mass suffrage changed everything. It meant mass parties. And there were no possible bases for a mass right-wing party except patriotism or religion. Giolitti's rival Antonio Salandra realized this clearly:

> *we, unlike our Catholic colleagues, cannot offer Paradise in heaven; nor, unlike our Socialist colleagues, can we offer Paradise on earth . . . nevertheless a flame of idealism inspires us too, for the flame, the very essence of Italian Liberalism, is patriotism, is love of one's country.*[22]

After 1913 most governments in Italy were either nationalist, or Catholic, or both; or, to be more exact, they wore nationalist or Catholic labels. The old Giolittian game of parliamentary manoeuvres and 'concessions' to organized groups might well continue, but only under new auspices. The Church's influence was accepted, and there was more overt patriotism, more sabre-rattling, certainly more public profession of interest in the High Politics of international diplomacy. And all this was happening on the eve of August 1914.

## Notes

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4 F. Cordova, 'Alcuni ricordi inediti di un prefetto dell'età liberale', *SC*, v (1974), 334–9.

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8 R. Michels, *Il Proletariato e la Borghesia nel Movimento Socialista Italiano* (Turin, 1908), p. 104.

9 G. De Rosa, *Storia del Movimento Cattolico in Italia*, i (Bari, 1966), p. 433.

10 G. Suardi, 'Quando e come i cattolici poterono partecipare alle elezioni politiche', *Nuova Antologia*, 1 Nov. 1927, 121.

11 Published in Verona 1901; now in *ACS*, Min. Int., Dir. Gen. Aff. Culto, b. 136.

12 Quoted in De Rosa, *Storia del Movimento Cattolico* cit., i, p. 423.

13 S. Burgalassi, *Italiani in Chiesa* (Brescia, 1967), pp. 16–17.

14 E. Corradini, *Il Nazionalismo Italiano* (Milan, 1914), p. 44.

15 N. Valeri, *Giovanni Giolitti* (Turin, 1972), p. 8; C. Sforza, *Contemporary Italy* (New York, 1944), p. 163.

16 F.S. Nitti, *Il Partito Radicale e la Nuova Democrazia Industriale* (Turin, 1907), p. 115.

17 Resolution of the 1914 Congress, quoted in F. Gaeta, *Il Nazionalismo Italiano* (Naples, 1965), p. 120.

18 Memorandum to Giolitti, 28 July 1911, in *Quarant'Anni di Politica* cit., iii, 55.

19 *L'Osservatore Romano*, 25 Sept. 1913 and 23 Dec. 1912; quoted in L. Ganapini, *Il Nazionalismo Cattolico* (Bari, 1970), pp. 196–97.

20 A.S. Hershey, 'The recent Italian elections', *American Political Science Review*, viii (1914), 50–56.

21 Resolution of the Industrial League, 27 May 1913; quoted in M. Abrate, *La Lotta Sindacale nella Industrializzazione in Italia* (Milan, 1967), p. 116.

22 Speech to Chamber of Deputies, 17 Dec. 1913, quoted in B. Vigezzi, 'Il suffragio universale e la "crisi" del liberalismo in Italia', *NRS*, xlviii (1964), 534.

CHAPTER 8

# An Italian people?

The first half of this book has emphasized the varied nature of Italy and of the Italians: their regional diversity, the fragility of their national institutions and so forth. It has also shown how both the political system and the economy were transformed in the early twentieth century. How far, then, had Italian society been transformed too? By 1914, after all, the ruling élite had been trying for over fifty years to 'make Italians' in their own image. Had they succeeded? Or had the Italians somehow 'made themselves' despite, rather than because of, the efforts of their rulers?

## 8.1 Population and migration

In one crude sense they were doing so less than before. The birth rate had begun to decline in the towns, and even in the rural areas of two or three Northern and Central regions. In 1911 live births per 1,000 women of child-bearing age were 147.5 over all Italy, but only 107.0 in Piedmont, 106.4 in Liguria and 132.1 in Tuscany. The South had much higher figures – Basilicata 174.1, Apulia 172.2. Even so, it was too early yet to talk of a North–South divide, or of 'demographic dualism'. Rural Veneto and Lombardy, with their Catholic traditions, retained high birth rates too (over all Veneto it was 173.4), and in the share-cropping areas of Central Italy family size tended to be much higher than elsewhere. The sharpest decline in births took place in the cities – Turin showed only 74 births per 1,000 child-bearing women in 1900–01, and both Bologna and Florence had only 79. The death rate was also declining, and here the North–South distinction was actually diminishing. It was still fairly high at the turn of the century, with deaths per 1,000 inhabitants varying from 19.6 in

Liguria to 27.4 in Basilicata (the national average was 22.4). By 1909–13 the national average had come down to 20.0, with a smaller regional range (Apulia 22.8, Piedmont 17.5).

This improvement had several causes. Much of the money spent on the South went on aqueducts, irrigation and water supply, and the disastrous cholera epidemics of the 1880s were less frequent. Furthermore, the two secular scourges of rural Italy, malaria and pellagra, were both being conquered. Over 1 million people had suffered bouts of malaria in 1898; but in the next decade the disease was greatly curtailed everywhere except Sardinia, and deaths from malaria in 1905–09 were less than a quarter of those twenty years earlier. Sir Ronald Ross had discovered the cause; people began to put wire netting on their windows; and after 1900 quinine was distributed at government expense throughout the affected provinces. A vast propaganda campaign began, to persuade people to take their free quinine, and to assure them that it would work better than wine. This was a real social revolution. It opened up vast dreary regions of low-lying land in Southern and Central Italy to possible cultivation and improvement. People began living in the countryside again for the first time in centuries: in Basilicata the rural population almost doubled between 1871 and 1911. As for pellagra, the breakthrough also came in the early twentieth century, as the rural inhabitants of Northern Italy came to supplement their maize-based diet with richer foods. The disease was disappearing by 1914, and was virtually wiped out soon after the First World War.

The population data indicate clearly that the classic 'demographic breakthrough' to fewer births and fewer deaths was well under way in the towns. The lower birth rate is partly explicable in terms of late marriages. The median overall age of marriage in 1906–10 was 28.6 for men, and 24.5 for women. Many urban dwellers, like soldiers, prisoners or priests, were not encouraged to marry at all, and many others – particularly the 'intellectual classes' whose careers began late – could not marry early. The median age for teachers was 32. In 1911, one-third of the people aged 31–35 in Turin were unmarried. Housing was scarce in the towns, and marriage – or rather, childbirth – meant less income in an age when female labour was in great demand in industry and domestic service. Thus people married late; but the vital question about marriage is not so much when, as who? The answer was that they usually married people like themselves. Industrial workers, in particular, tended to do so, perhaps because they often lived in working-class ghettos near factories. A survey of Milan in 1909 found that 1,519 male industrial workers out of 1,838 had married female industrial workers, or their daughters. Rome, however, was different.



It was the only 'melting pot' in Italy, with little industry. There, only farmers and the intellectual professions were likely to choose spouses from among their own kind.

As an institution, marriage survived the demographic transition without serious challenge. The nuclear family ruled supreme, at least outside the share-cropping areas. Illegitimate children were surprisingly rare, and not likely to survive – in Milan, in 1905, over one-third of them died in their first year, more than twice the mortality of legitimate offspring. Orphans were similarly at risk. Indeed, the foundling hospitals were a national disgrace. In Rome nearly half the babies in them died in their first year. A society in which family ties were so important, in which the family was the economic unit, could not be expected to waste resources or sympathy on defenceless outsiders. The urban family was helped by a network of day nurseries, usually run by nuns, and by the farming-out of city babies to be wet-nursed in the nearby countryside: in Milan, again, one-third of the babies born in 1900 were living outside the city on census day in February 1901. Wet-nursing also gave rural families friends and contacts in the city – very useful later on if the peasants moved to the city and needed a job or a house. And it was the shortage of urban wet-nurses that partly explains the slaughter in the orphanages.

The family was also helped by a flourishing literature of an improving kind, preaching the virtues of family life and explaining the delicacies of woman's role. A host of illustrated magazines and booklets explained that the woman's task was to please her husband, and to make herself and her home so attractive that he would no longer go off to the wine shop. Italian women, proclaimed 'Donna Clara', had never learned to choose the right wallpaper or, more generally, to 'embellish the nest and win their husband for family life' – as in England.[1] Big department stores grew up to cater for these curious new aspirations. Shopping became a respectable, even enjoyable, female activity, instead of a tedious chore for the servants. So, too, did cooking. The first really successful cookery book for the middle-class housewife appeared in 1891, Pellegrino Artusi's *Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well* (note the 'progressive' title). Modern plumbing and the new electric light helped too, by making homes more pleasant.

All this was very important. Rapid economic and social change was helping to emancipate women and give them education and employment. The family might easily have been threatened. Yet the effect was quite different. Lombroso found that in working-class areas of Turin family cohesion was strengthened, if anything, by women finding industrial jobs,

for grandmothers and aunts became essential as child-minders. The family was the worker's best protection against sickness and old age; it was often the only source of comfort and satisfaction in an extremely harsh life. And middle-class women found new outlets and satisfactions within the family framework. The 'Italian Lady' was, indeed, invented as an ideal in the years before 1914; she flourished, graceful, tender and self-sacrificing, for the next fifty years.

Yet even the Italian Lady was known to complain at times. Women were excluded from certain professions, e.g. advocate; even a professor of law at Rome University, Teresa Labriola, was turned down by the Bar in 1913. Another obvious grievance was the lack of a vote. Committees for Female Suffrage existed in all the major cities, even Naples, by 1906. Although most women's organizations concerned themselves with charitable works – organizing hostels for young working girls, founding schools for illiterates, providing school meals – they also debated political and social issues, and founded national organizations to do so. In 1898 various Radical feminists formed an association 'For Woman'; in 1903 came the more respectable National Council of Italian Women, presided over by Countess Gabriella Spalletti Rasponi; the Union of Women, a section of Catholic Action, was founded in 1908; in 1910 there was a (Catholic) women's trade union. In 1911 Radical women shocked the bourgeois by holding a congress in Castel Sant'Angelo. All this ferment even produced Italy's first feminist novel, *A Woman* by Sibilla Aleramo (actually by Rina Faccio, cousin of one of Italy's best-known feminists 70 years later). Radical, Socialist and Catholic feminists agreed about opening up the professions and about the vote, about the need for maternity leave and more factory inspectors, about closing the brothels and introducing legal investigation of paternity; but they were split on most other family and educational issues.

The strength and nature of marriage as an institution was seen clearly in the courts, and in the fate of the various proposals for a divorce law. Wives were not permitted to administer their own property or even have a bank account without their husband's permission. Another good example is adultery, which in law could be committed only by a woman. In 1903 the Supreme Court of Cassation ruled, in a famous judgment, that a woman could commit adultery with a man 'even if he lacked, through amputation, his male organ'.[2] The courts also regularly annulled marriages where the husband had discovered, too late, that his bride was not a virgin. But divorce was a different matter. It was supported by Radicals, Socialists and even by a few Liberals like Zanardelli, but by few others. The civil



code proclaimed firmly that 'marriage is only dissolved by the death of one of the spouses'. Most 'lay' conservatives thought a divorce law would undermine social stability. It would also needlessly antagonize the Church, just when her support was needed against the rising tide of Socialism. When bills were introduced into parliament, clerical bodies in the country organized huge petitions. There were 637,000 signatures against Villa's bill in 1881, 700,000 in 1893 and 3.5 million against Zanardelli in 1902. The Italians may have married late, but they married for ever.

Late marriage does not explain all the decline in births. For working-class couples, there was an average gap of four years nine months between marriage and the birth of the first child; even the 'educated classes' took two and a half years. Clearly there was some voluntary birth control going on, but how? One enterprising demographer sent a questionnaire round to doctors and gynaecologists, but they did not know, or if they did they would not say. Sheath contraceptives were easily available in the cities, their use justified by the need to ward off venereal disease, so this was presumably part of the answer. Some priests and confessors still followed the old canon law in permitting abortion within forty days, while condemning contraception as wicked.[3]

The urban population was growing faster than ever before. In 1881 23.6 per cent of the Italian people had lived in municipalities with over 20,000 inhabitants; by 1911 31.3 per cent did. Urban growth – i.e. the number of people living in such *comuni* – was about 3 per cent p.a. between 1901 and 1911, which remained a record rate of increase until after the Second World War. Both Milan and Rome doubled in population between 1871 and 1911, and each had over 500,000 inhabitants by 1911. Naples, with 678,000 inhabitants in 1911, was still larger than either.

Immigration accounted for most of the increase, probably about three-quarters overall. In 1901, less than half the population of Rome or Milan had been born there. Usually the incomers were relatively local; there was, as yet, negligible movement from the South to the Northern cities. In the Northern 'industrial triangle' of Piedmont, Liguria and Lombardy, only about 12 per cent of the inhabitants in 1911 had been born in a different *province*. A crude conclusion emerges. The Northern cities absorbed much of the surplus population of the surrounding rural areas. The Southern ones did not, and so rural Southerners went to American cities instead. Admittedly some Southern towns expanded rapidly too – Catania and Taranto became successful industrial centres and busy ports in this period – but in most cases the growth was 'artificial', restricted to provincial capitals that 'specialized' in administration.

The great problem in the expanding cities was housing. Middle-class urban dwellers lived in flats with running water, central heating and indoor toilets; some even had lifts and telephones. The residential blocks were built by major development companies, linked to and often founded by the commercial banks. Working-class housing was more primitive. There were one or two 'model villages' built by enlightened industrialists, e.g. Crespi on the Adda, near Milan, but a cheap subsidized housing programme was only just beginning. In 1903 building co-operatives were given tax concessions, and savings banks were similarly encouraged to move into housing finance, but the incentives proved inadequate. As the cities grew, lack of housing became a desperate social problem, bringing many other evils in its train. The building industry, and local government, clearly could not cope. In Milan, where net immigration was running at about 14,000 a year, only 15,436 rooms were officially declared furnished and habitable in 1913; in 1911 over half the city's population lived in a one- or two-room dwelling. Nowhere else was quite so crowded, except Messina where the 1908 earthquake had destroyed the city; but in Naples the figure for those living in a one- or two-room dwelling was 43.2 per cent, and in Turin 42.4 per cent.

Nevertheless, people were anxious to move to the towns. They offered better jobs, better education, even better hygiene and living conditions. Most of the new immigrants settled on the city outskirts, not in the centre. For the most part they were unskilled peasants, and their work was in the most menial and lowest-paid sectors – domestic service for girls, building or food-processing for men. A few employers, like Pirelli, deliberately took on unskilled immigrants, so as to pay low wages and be free of union trouble, but this was unusual. More often it was the 'natives' who had the industrial jobs, the immigrants who took what was left. In Milan only 11 per cent of servants in 1901 had been born there; 53 per cent of the city's printers had. We cannot conclude, therefore, that it was a period of great *social* (as opposed to geographical) mobility, although there was surprising social flexibility in Rome. Chessa found, using 1908 data, that 22 per cent of the sons of manual workers there had white-collar jobs, and 27 per cent of white-collar workers' sons had manual ones.

These were the years of massive Southern emigration to '*La Merica*'. Between 1898 and 1914 there were never less than 150,000 emigrants crossing the Atlantic each year, and in the peak years five times as many. Over 70 per cent of them were Southerners, and 25 per cent came from Sicily. Emigration to Europe also increased, mainly temporary and by North Italians, but it was the sudden Southern exodus to the New World



that attracted the most attention, and that had the most impact. Many of these transatlantic emigrants – roughly 40 per cent between 1897 and 1906, and over 66 per cent later – returned to Italy after making, or failing to make, their fortunes; many of them later went back to America again. Indeed, a kind of seasonal migration developed across the Atlantic: Southern peasants set off in November to work in the Argentine or the USA and returned in the spring for agricultural jobs. In short, migration was a complex business. Different groups of Italians went in different directions, and most of them came back; nine-tenths of those who went to Europe did so. Even so, over 1.5 million Italians must have left their native country for good between 1901 and 1911. And the ones who came back brought new ideas and new values. Few artisans or industrial workers left Italy, for they could easily find jobs at home. Most emigrants were young, male, unskilled and rural. As the peasants and labourers moved out, whole regions took on a peculiar demographic colour. In Calabria, for example, there were only two men for every three women in the 25–45 age group. And Calabria was not extraordinary: Abruzzi, Molise and Basilicata saw an even higher proportion of their people leave, and Veneto was little different.

The causes of emigration were both obvious and complex. Poverty, unemployment, high taxes, above all the disastrous effects of Crispi's 'tariff war' on the Southern rural areas in the 1890s – all these contributed to the process. So, obviously, did the need of American cities for labour, and the need of local shipping company agents for their commission (see §2.4). Once started, the process was self-perpetuating and self-expanding. A few pioneers crossed the Atlantic, then sent word back home, and soon their relatives and neighbours joined them. Emigration may be seen as an 'individualistic' alternative to labour militancy: it was highest in the hill areas of Abruzzi-Molise and Basilicata, but it was low on the neighbouring Apulian plateau, where 'capitalist farming' prevailed, where the labourers' unions managed to win many concessions, and where there was little chance of buying land on your return. The same contrast could be seen in the North, between the hills of Veneto and the plain of Emilia.

Most Italians welcomed this exodus. It was, they thought, an acceptable remedy for grievous problems. It would reduce the pressure of population on resources, raise wages for those labourers who remained, provide thousands of people with capital for investment in agriculture or housing, and give a great incentive to become literate and 'modern' in outlook. Nitti, in a famous phrase, described emigration as 'a powerful safety-valve against class hatreds'[4] – a good argument in the troubled 1890s. Sonnino

thought that to prevent emigration would be to attack the poor. However, the State should certainly prevent exploitation by shipping agents or other countries. In fact, in 1901 a General Commission for Emigration was set up. It provided advice to emigrants, and supervised conditions on the ships. Much was also done by private or clerical charities, particularly the *Opera Assistenza agli Operai Italiani* founded by Bishop Bonomelli of Cremona.

Such views were realistic and compassionate, but also somewhat Olympian and detached. Emigrants were often victims of abject poverty and vicious local greed, virtually driven out by brutal landowners and an indifferent country. De Amicis, in *On Blue Water*, described their sufferings with masterly sentimentality, and aroused much indignation on their behalf. Emigration came to be seen as shameful, and as a refutation of any claim to be 'making Italians'. Catholics deplored its effects on family life, and indeed on religious belief: thousands of the emigrants to America came back as Protestants, often as Pentecostalists. Nationalists worried that Italy was losing too many of her potential soldiers: Southern overpopulation should be remedied by colonies in Africa, not emigration to America. Thus after 1907 the debate on emigration gradually changed. It ceased to be a gentlemanly discussion of economic and social change, and became instead a clamour for imperialism.

## 8.2 The uses of leisure

With greater prosperity, Italians now had more leisure. Some had it in abundance. There were around 200,000 men with private incomes – rentiers, absentee landowners and the like. These were the 'idle rich', or rather, the jobless upper classes. Many of them were, in fact, extremely poor, and clamoured for government posts. Others worked hard at their pleasures. The social élite, and even some others, took to manly sports. Gymnastics, shooting and fencing were all popular – the last two not merely for recreation, since duelling was still fairly common among the upper classes. Mountaineering was also much favoured by the affluent. The Italian Alpine Club's Milan branch had 2,338 members by 1914. The Alpine Club published maps and guidebooks, built huts, diversified into winter sports (skiing was also becoming fashionable) and, above all, organized school trips. Why? Because if Italy were ever to enter a European war, her soldiers would have to fight it out in the Alps. G.C. Abba, one of Garibaldi's 'Thousand', published a school textbook on the subject in 1901. Mountains, being nearer to God, make people virtuous. Climbing them makes boys manly, and 'so, almost without noticing, they are trained as citizens and as soldiers . . . the youth who wears the Alpine Club's badge will, if the country calls on him in future, make an excellent Alpine soldier in war'.[5]



Thus sport could and did have an overt patriotic purpose. However, gymnastics and other martial exercises had little mass appeal. Cycling was the first sport to become generally popular in Italy. The Touring Club Italiano, now Italy's equivalent of the Automobile Association, was founded in 1894 for cyclists. By 1900 it had 20,000 members. One of the *Gazzetta dello Sport*'s first activities was to organize cycle races round Lombardy, and later round Italy. Even cycling had originally been an aristocratic pursuit – it depended on people being affluent enough to buy bicycles and having leisure enough to ride them. And even cycling could be politicized. Soon 'Red cyclists' were setting out every Sunday from the Lombard and Emilian towns, to convert the local peasantry to Socialism.

Another new sport that soon became popular was association football. It, too, was originally a diversion for the gentry, and foreign gentry at that. The first clubs were founded by Englishmen and bore English names: 'Milan' and 'Genoa', not 'Milano' or 'Genova'. Indeed, they were usually founded as much for cricket as for football – 'Genoa' was originally the Genoa Cricket and Athletic Club, founded in 1892, and 'Milan' started life in 1899 as the Milan Cricket and Football Club. Even Palermo had a cricket club in 1897. However, cricket unaccountably failed to catch on in Italy (unlike in Corfu), whereas the sporting upper classes adopted soccer eagerly. In 1898 came the first championship, won by 'Genoa' whose team contained only five foreigners. In 1910 Italy played her first international, beating France 6–2; the match was played in Milan, and attracted 6,000 spectators. Football was still the sport of gentlemen, but it, too, could be politicized or, rather, sanctified: many of the first teams were founded as Catholic sports clubs.

Then there was the greatest new mass entertainment of them all, the cinema. 'Moving pictures' arrived in Italy early in 1897, being shown at circuses and fairs. The first cinemas were built a few years later, and by 1910 most provincial capitals had at least one. An Italian film industry arose, specializing in documentaries. Vitrotti made a famous film about *The Cavalry School at Pinerolo*, and there were several about the Libyan War. Another favourite genre was the grand historical epic, often celebrating the achievements of the Risorgimento: the first film made by the leading Alberini and Santoni company was *The Taking of Rome* (in 1870). 'Moving pictures' provided a marvellous opportunity to combine entertainment with patriotic uplift. The glories of ancient Rome soon became

CHAPTER 9

# Italy and the Great War

## 9.1 The Salandra government and 'Red Week'

The government that Antonio Salandra formed in March 1914 was not expected to last long. Most deputies still thought of Giolitti as the 'natural' Prime Minister; many of them had owed their election to him only four months previously. Salandra was a useful stopgap, perhaps able to 'absorb' the Nationalist challenge, certainly able to hold the ring until Giolitti could win back his Radical friends and his tacit union support. Yet Salandra had other ambitions, or had other ambitions thrust upon him. His was a more conservative government than Italy had seen for many years, and it was pledged to 'national policy'.

Moreover, the new government was soon pushed even further Right. Early in June there was yet another 'proletarian massacre', when three anti-militarist demonstrators were killed at Ancona. The syndicalists, Republicans and anarchists protested furiously; the Directorate of the Socialist Party proclaimed a general strike. Even the CGL agreed to support it. The strike soon escalated into the most widespread movement of popular protest since 1898. There were riots and demonstrations in most major cities, and some small towns in Romagna and the Marches were taken over by insurgents. Railway stations were seized, telephone wires cut, tax-registers burned and trees of liberty planted. Armed peasants near Ravenna even captured a general. 'Red Week', as the movement was later called, was quite spontaneous, although central organizations had called the original general strike, and although national revolutionary figures like Mussolini joined in with encouraging rhetoric. After two days the CGL called the strike off, but it took thousands of troops to restore law and

order. 'Red Week' was a very old-fashioned revolt, but it had important consequences. The 'revolutionaries' were bitter at their defeat, blamed the reformist CGL leadership for betraying them and were more hostile to the bourgeois State than ever. And middle-class property-owners had had a nasty fright. The 'Red Threat' had become a reality. Vigilante groups were formed again at Bologna and elsewhere; there were street battles between 'revolutionaries' and Nationalists. Giolitti's policy of 'absorbing' working-class leaders was thoroughly discredited. It seemed time for a more robust approach to domestic problems – a real factor during the next few weeks, as Europe slid haphazardly into war.

## 9.2 The intervention crisis

On 28 June, only a fortnight after 'Red Week', the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated at Sarajevo. Austria-Hungary determined to punish Serbia. As a member of the Triple Alliance, Italy was pledged to stay neutral if an ally declared war on another country; she was not committed to joining in. There were, in fact, many reasons for caution. War on the Austrian side might mean bigger and rougher Red Weeks throughout Italy; the Austrians were seen by many Italians as the aggressors; the Italian army was still trying to subdue Libya; and Britain was on the other side. It was one of the few firm principles of Italian foreign policy to remain on good terms with Britain, which supplied most of Italy's coal and which had a powerful navy able to threaten Italy's immense coastline.

Moreover, the Foreign Minister San Giuliano had always been perhaps excessively interested in the Balkans: it is striking how high a proportion of the published Italian diplomatic documents, even in July 1914, are about Albania. He was firmly opposed to Austrian expansion there, and he was determined to secure compensation if Austria-Hungary did occupy any more Balkan territory. Indeed, article 7 of the Triple Alliance formally stipulated that such compensation would be given, and it also committed Austria-Hungary not to occupy Balkan lands without previous Italian agreement.[1] Yet Austria declared war on Serbia at the end of July without consulting Italy. This gave San Giuliano a marvellous extra excuse for declaring Italy's neutrality. The Triple Alliance remained formally in force, and Italy continued to negotiate fitfully with Austria about possible compensation, under article 7; but Italy's allies naturally felt betrayed. Some Italians felt dishonoured too, but most were thankful to have stayed out of the war, and industrialists looked forward to supplying the munitions needs of both sides.



Yet neutrality did not solve Italy's problems. If the 'Central Powers' (Austria-Hungary and Germany) won the war, they might seek to avenge Italy's 'betrayal'. If the 'Entente' – Britain, France and Russia – won, it would have no reason to grant Italy any of the Austrian territory she coveted (Trent and Trieste); moreover, Russia would then be a major threat in the Adriatic and Balkans. San Giuliano considered these alternatives coolly. Italy would probably have to join in, if she wanted to join the 'victory banquet'. But whose would be the victory? By 9 September, after the battle of the Marne, it looked as if the Entente would probably win; and most of the land Italy wanted was in Austrian hands. So the Entente looked a better bet; but Austria-Hungary might be persuaded to grant hefty concessions without Italy needing to fight at all. As the war would probably be a short one – over by the late summer of 1915, at the latest – Italy had better act fairly quickly; but she could hardly act before spring, especially as the army was not ready to fight. San Giuliano decided to negotiate with both sides. If Austria-Hungary were willing to grant adequate 'compensation', well and good; if not, perhaps the Entente would make a better offer.

San Giuliano died in October, but the negotiations were continued by his successor, Sonnino. The slogan was '*sacro egoismo*' (sacred egoism), an unfortunate but revealing phrase used by Salandra in a speech to Foreign Ministry officials in October. But it was not just selfishness, and certainly not just cool calculation. Salandra was obviously emotionally committed. On 17 September he told Martini: 'I cannot hesitate: if I thought I had had the opportunity to restore Trent and Trieste to Italy and that I had let it slip, I would not have a moment's peace for the rest of my life.'[2] Moreover, he was convinced that 'the monarchy and our institutions would not survive the conclusion of a European peace from which Italy did not emerge politically and territorially strengthened'.[3] But the Austrians were unwilling to give much territory away, even with German prompting. By January 1915 Sonnino thought the most he could hope for was the Trentino and a boundary revision along the west bank of the Isonzo. The Austrians did eventually concede these regions and agreed also to give Trieste an Italian university, a free port and the title of 'imperial free city', but they did so only at the last minute – 10 May 1915 – and by then it was too late. Early in March 1915 Italy had turned to London. The Entente's bid was much higher – not merely Trentino and the Isonzo, but also Trieste, the South Tyrol, Istria and nearly half of Dalmatia. This was an offer Sonnino could not refuse. On 26 April Italy and the Entente signed the Treaty of London, which pledged these lands to Italy in return for her entry into the war

within a month. On 4 May 1915 Italy denounced the Triple Alliance, and three weeks later was at war with Austria-Hungary. If all went well, Italy could expect to 'complete her unification', and to dominate the Adriatic. It was a triumph for '*sacro egoismo*'.

Italy's entry into the war was essentially the work of two men only, Salandra and Sonnino. The army's general staff was not informed about what was going on: in August 1914 Italy declared her neutrality just as the generals were preparing mobilization, and in April 1915 Italy signed the Treaty of London just when the generals were beginning to think the war might be a long one after all. The king also played a restricted role, at least until the last few weeks. Indeed, the two politicians had to plot to involve him somehow, in order to guarantee no last-minute reversals of policy; and so, after the Treaty of London had been signed, they persuaded him to send official telegrams to the other Entente Heads of State. As for parliament, it was kept completely in the dark about the various negotiations and about the Treaty of London: mere deputies were not fit to discuss High Politics.

Yet the 'intervention crisis' of 1914–15 was not just a matter of diplomatic manoeuvring. Public opinion counted for a great deal. The government's main problem, especially after it had signed the Treaty of London, was how to win enough support for a war. Even some of the Cabinet ministers were neutralists. It is true that by April 1915 some very respectable people were pro-war, including most of the Radicals and prominent Masons, reformist Socialist leaders like Bissolati, and the editor of the *Corriere della Sera*, Luigi Albertini. So, too, were many non-respectable people – the Futurists, for example, and D'Annunzio. The Nationalists and irredentists were naturally in favour; some of them formed armed bands to raid Austria, hoping to provoke reprisals which would lead to war. University students needed little encouragement. They usually rioted in the spring anyway, and the war agitation provided a wonderful excuse. Many Republicans, including the young Pietro Nenni, were fervent in the cause; some syndicalists, like Corridoni and De Ambris, looked to war to trigger revolution.

But the most spectacular convert was the revolutionary Socialist Benito Mussolini, editor of the Socialist daily *Avanti!* After some initial hesitation, he took a public stand against outright neutralism on 18 October 1914. By the end of the month he had resigned from the paper. On 15 November he produced the first issue of a rival daily, the *Popolo d'Italia*, pledged to war and revolution; on 29 November he was expelled from the Socialist Party. The new paper was financed initially through Filippo



Naldi, editor of the Bolognese daily *Il Resto del Carlino*, who used funds provided by big industrial firms and possibly by the government. From early 1915 onwards the French press office in Rome provided much of the cash, although the British and Russians also contributed.[4] Mussolini took very few Socialists with him, and his closest contacts in the next few months were with Republicans and syndicalists, but his conversion proved immensely important. Henceforth the 'interventionists' had a superb journalist, a very effective speaker and a shrewd political brain on their side.

However, most Italians were still opposed to the war. The Socialist Party, despite Mussolini's defection, was the only one in Western Europe not to abandon its internationalist principles. As a result it remained what the Libyan War had made it – the unpatriotic party. Most Catholics were also anxious to keep Italy out, as was Pope Benedict XV; but Luigi Sturzo was an 'interventionist', and many patriotic speeches were made at the executive meeting of Catholic Action in March 1915. In April 1915 the Prefects were asked to report on public opinion in their provinces. They replied that people feared war, and that hardly anybody cared much about Trent or Trieste. In Teramo province people 'perceive war simply as a disaster, like drought, famine or plague'.[5] Businessmen, apart from a few steelmakers and shipbuilders, were as anxious as everyone else. They feared for their raw material supplies and their markets, and worried that war might lead to excessive State regulation of industry. Yet, despite all the apparent neutralism, there was no very strong anti-war feeling. War was coming to be seen as inevitable, always a dangerous sign.

The decision to join the war was part of the domestic political battle. The various politicians manoeuvred among themselves as well as among the belligerent Powers. Salandra wanted a successful war to establish his position as national leader; Giolitti, in opposition, had no intention of letting him have it. On 4 December 1914 Giolitti spoke in parliament in favour of neutrality. A few weeks later he wrote a famous letter, published in *La Tribuna* on 2 February, claiming that Italy could make 'considerable' gains (*parecchio*) without needing to fight. His aim, presumably, was to bring the Austrians to make concessions, so as to avoid war. His advice was counter-productive. The Austrians concluded that Italy was unlikely to enter the war, and so dug their heels in; and Salandra became determined to win more than just *parecchio*, and so more likely to fight. Giolitti had miscalculated. In any case, his hands were tied. He could not use his parliamentary majority to bring the government down, for any new government would obviously be more 'neutralist', and as such less able to wring concessions from Vienna. So he pledged his support to

Salandra, and hoped that Salandra was still negotiating seriously with the Austrians.

Only in early May 1915 did Giolitti realize what was going on. On 9 May he returned to Rome, furious that the government had denounced the Triple Alliance and gone back on its word. He told Malagodi that 'the people who are in government deserve to be shot'.[6] As a sign of support 300-odd deputies – a majority of the Chamber – left their cards at his hotel. He painted a gloomy picture of what war might mean – mutinies in the army, Austrian troops occupying Milan, revolution, the end of the monarchy and of Liberal institutions. Yet, as previously, Giolitti could not form a government himself. All he could do was try to persuade the existing government to accept the latest Austrian offer, that of 10 May; but it was a hopeless task. Salandra was not going back on his signed pledges to the Entente, just so as to 'live for a short time under Giolitti's protectorate'.[7] On 13 May Salandra called Giolitti's bluff by submitting his resignation. The king asked Giolitti to form a new government. By this time Giolitti almost certainly knew about the Treaty of London: it would be fatal for Italy to betray *both* sides. And, of course, the king felt committed by his telegrams, and might abdicate if the Treaty of London were not honoured. So Giolitti refused. After all, he was a good Piedmontese monarchist at heart. He was not going to risk overthrowing his king, merely to avoid a world war. Three other leading politicians refused as well. Meanwhile D'Annunzio and others made inflammatory speeches to excited crowds in Rome, Mussolini gathered a crowd of 30,000 in Milan, and telegrams of support for Salandra flooded in. On 16 May the king recalled Salandra. Giolitti left Rome the next day, and on 20 May parliament voted the government exceptional powers and finance.

Thus Giolitti's parliamentary moves against the war were conspicuously unsuccessful. That was not surprising. Italy joined the European war in the normal diplomatic manner and for the normal diplomatic reason, i.e. booty. Giolitti knew the rules of the game. Kings, Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers, not parliament, made policy; international treaties were, at best, ratified by parliament later. He himself had not bothered about parliamentary approval before invading Libya in 1911; Salandra and Sonnino had acted quite constitutionally in 1915. As Salandra later wrote, Italy was pledged to war, the king had committed himself, 'parliament should merely have drawn the consequences'.[8] Instead, its leading statesman, with a parliamentary majority behind him, had made himself the symbol of neutralism. Henceforth the war could be presented as a crusade against '*Giolittismo*' and against parliament, as well as against Austria-Hungary.



In short, Giolitti had helped to create the myth of 'interventionism': the belief that a tiny handful of far-sighted statesmen, spurred on by a few bellicose intellectuals and some noisy street demonstrations, had swept Italy into war despite all the efforts of parliament and Establishment to stop them. I emphasize again that this *was* a myth. Italy's entry into the war was actually a 'normal' diplomatic decision, taken by conservative-minded men worried about being left out, anxious not to miss an unrepeatable opportunity and concerned about preserving Liberal institutions. It owed little to the 'interventionists', however vocal. In any case, not all the 'interventionists' were ranting nationalist demagogues: many of them, like Gaetano Salvemini or Giovanni Amendola, were noble and far-sighted men. Yet myths are powerful and tenacious, and this one was disastrous. It helped to make many 'interventionists' more willing to suppress parliamentary criticism, more nervous about unpatriotic plots, more determined to win extra territory. Above all, it greatly exaggerated the importance of men like D'Annunzio and Mussolini, and enabled them to claim the 'credit' for the war. Years later, in March 1919, Mussolini summoned the inaugural meeting of the *Fasci di Combattimento* in these terms:

*we are the only people in Italy who have the right to talk of revolution . . . we have already made a revolution. In May 1915. We started off that May, which was exquisitely and divinely revolutionary, because it overturned a shameful situation at home and decided . . . the outcome of the World War.*[9]

That was the real legacy of the intervention crisis.

## 9.3 The Great War: fighting and campaigns

In May 1915 Salandra expected a brief, offensive campaign, leading to quick territorial gains. His hopes were soon disappointed. When the government fell, a year later, nothing of any significance had been won. The 'interventionists' were disappointed too. They had anticipated not merely a glorious victory, but a glorious, manly war. Trench warfare, or rather escarpment warfare in the Alpine foothills, turned out to be very different from the romantic Garibaldine crusade of interventionist rhetoric. It was a squalid, prosaic slogging-match, unheroic and apparently interminable, marked only by the capture of Gorizia in August 1916. The stalemate was finally broken in October 1917, but not by any Italian triumph. The Austrians pushed through the Italian line above Caporetto, and the Italians had to retreat down to the Piave. The second phase of the

war was, therefore, mostly on Italian soil. The Italians fought a defensive campaign until almost the last minute, under a new commander and a new government. As the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed, Italy emerged victorious from her ordeal. But the cost had been enormous – at least 600,000 lives lost, whole provinces devastated and the traditional political system in ruins.

The commander of the Italian army, from July 1914 until the disaster at Caporetto, was General Luigi Cadorna, son of the man who had taken Rome in September 1870. Cadorna was a typical soldier of the old traditional Piedmontese type – authoritarian and unimaginative, contemptuous of civilians and devoted to the House of Savoy. He insisted on a free hand. It was his war, to fight as he chose. The war was run, therefore, from his headquarters at Udine, not from Rome. The politicians were remote from the combat, and in August 1916 Cadorna forbade them from entering the war zone; he even refused to meet the minister charged with maintaining relations between government and army command. In other words, Italy had no civilian war leader like Lloyd George or Clemenceau. She had Cadorna instead. There was no national mobilization, no rousing of the national energies in a great cause. The government's main role, in fact, was to take the blame when things went wrong, and Cadorna naturally encouraged this tendency. In June 1917 he wrote three times to the Prime Minister, complaining that the government's tolerance of 'subversive' (anti-war) propaganda made it impossible to maintain discipline. He blamed the army's low morale on the Minister of the Interior, Orlando, and tried to have him replaced, but the plan failed. Cadorna's letters were not discussed in Cabinet, and Orlando remained in office. After Caporetto he had his revenge, becoming Prime Minister and sacking Cadorna.

Cadorna was an austere man, and he took an austere view of his officers. By October 1917 he had dismissed 217 generals and 255 colonels from their posts. The constant reshuffles did little for the army's efficiency. Most of the junior officers were, of course, not professional soldiers at all. Italy had just over 15,000 serving officers in 1914, but in the next four years 160,000 young men were commissioned in the army: more than 16,000 of them were killed. In the infantry over half the new officers were Southerners: Northerners tended to serve in the more 'technical' or mobile units, further away from the front line. And they were conscripts. 'Interventionist' volunteers and pro-war enthusiasts were regarded with great suspicion, as being unstable, 'subversive' or Republican; they were normally excluded from officer-training centres. Certainly there was no



question of 'Garibaldi brigades', nor of 'volunteer corps', nor of special units of irredentist *Trentini* – all concepts that were anathema to the hard-bitten professionals. In the field, the old Northern military caste was transformed into a 'Southern', conscripted officer corps. At headquarters, however, little changed. Cadorna did not understand his officers, nor they him.

The soldiers, too, were conscripts. Nearly 5 million men were called up into the army; more than half of them were peasants or agricultural workers. Again, Southerners were over-represented in the front-line infantry regiments, for trained Northern workers were needed in the artillery or engineering corps – or else were drafted into armaments factories well away from danger. Ideals of 'nationality' were rare among Southern peasants. 'Trent and Trieste' meant nothing to them, and they were staggered that anyone should think the rocky wastes of the Carso or Bainsizza were worth fighting for. So this was no 'nation in arms', enthusiastic and zealous for glory, or inspired by the ideals of the Risorgimento; on the contrary, it was a sullen, often illiterate, ill-equipped army, torn away from its homes and fields to fight on foreign soil for incomprehensible reasons. Furthermore, the soldiers were well aware that back home there were plenty of 'shirkers' (*imboscati*) – Northern industrial workers, sons of notables or politicians, etc. – all free from danger, all believed to be earning huge wages and all full of contempt for the army and for the war.

So the troops' morale was low, and it became lower still. Pay was exceptionally low – half a lira a day for a fighting infantryman, with similar paltry sums for his family. The troops' rations, too, were none too generous. In the first winter a front-line infantryman received 750 grams of bread daily, 300 grams of pasta or rice, and 375 grams of meat. However, in December 1916 the bread ration was reduced to 600 grams, the meat to 250 grams and the vegetables more than halved; it was only four months later, after much agitation in parliament, that the bread ration was raised again, and then only to 700 grams. During the winter of 1916–17, therefore, the army had a real grievance, and was probably genuinely undernourished. One post-war calculation is that the daily ration, excluding wine, was less than 3,000 calories that winter, compared with 3,846 calories previously and 3,200 later in 1917.[10] Reducing the rations was an astonishing blunder for professional soldiers to make, especially in an Alpine campaign at the onset of winter. The surprise is not that morale was low in 1917, but that it was not far lower.

The troops' welfare was also neglected in other ways. There were no war newspapers, and no entertainment. Soldiers were forbidden to enter

cinemas or bars even when on leave, if they were still in 'war zones'; and there was just one leave per year, of 15 days. Alcohol was made freely available before offensives, and improvised brothels were hastily set up; but otherwise morale was maintained by propaganda lectures about Italy's rightful claims to Trent and Trieste. Even these had to be given by regular officers: when Mussolini offered to give some, the Minister of War forbade it, although he allowed D'Annunzio every facility (not that D'Annunzio was satisfied – he complained to Albertini of having to clean his own shoes). But one vital change did occur. From 1878 to 1911 the army had had no chaplains; even in the Libyan War it had admitted only about 20, to attend the wounded in field hospitals. But in 1915 a 'field bishop', Mgr Bartolomasi, was appointed, and 2,400 priests served as army chaplains during the war, in addition to the 22,000 priests called up as ordinary soldiers. The chaplains, and perhaps especially the soldier-priests, helped illiterate soldiers write home, and generally provided what comfort and assistance they could. One of them, Fr Giovanni Minozzi, founded the 'Soldiers' Homes', usually small barracks-like buildings for about twenty to thirty people, with a few books, a piano, perhaps even a film-projector. By October 1917 there were about 250 of them. They were the most important new initiative taken up to that time to make life slightly more bearable for the troops. They were organized by a priest, and were treated with total neglect, sometimes even suspicion, by the military authorities.

Cadorna relied on more robust methods. He constantly harried his commanders to take a tough line with transgressors. Indeed, there was more than a touch of hysteria about discipline. Between May 1915 and the post-war amnesty of September 1919 nearly 290,000 soldiers – nearly 6 per cent of the total – were tried by courts martial for wartime crimes, usually desertion. The courts themselves were surprisingly lenient: 120,000 men were acquitted, and nearly all the rest were released at the amnesty. Even so, over 4,000 death sentences were passed, and 750 were carried out. The high number of trials and desertions – 55,000 between the spring of 1917 and that of 1918 – are a clear indication of low morale among the troops and of nervousness among the young officers. They also indicate that the army command simply failed to adapt to the new conditions. It insisted on blind obedience, and could not grasp that a mass war needed a different style of leadership altogether.

Summary punishments in the field are another sign of this. Monticone reckons that at least 100 soldiers were shot by their officers before November 1917, and possibly several hundred.[11] Sometimes, after some collective crime like mutiny or disobedience, there was a 'decimation':



individual victims were chosen by lot from among a whole company or regiment, and shot in front of the others. Cadorna issued circulars making it 'an absolute inescapable obligation' for all commanding officers to do this whenever individual responsibility could not be ascertained; the circulars were read out to the troops. They were not well received. If 'decimation' was meant to maintain morale, it not surprisingly had the opposite effect; and Cadorna had to sack some commanding officers for 'cowardice', i.e. refusing to 'decimate'.

Not that Cadorna approved of the practice, but he could see no alternative, given the low morale of the troops. For this he blamed everyone except himself. He claimed that the Socialists were busy undermining morale; the government tolerated this 'defeatism', and allowed hundreds of thousands of 'shirkers' to avoid the war. By the summer of 1917 the Russians were to blame, for giving up and making the war more difficult to win. After August 1917 the Pope was added to the list of villains, for condemning the war as a 'useless slaughter' (see §9.6). Yet Cadorna's real problem, especially in 1917, was that he had not won any significant territory except Gorizia, and did not look likely to. After all, Italy had attacked Austria, and was out to make real gains; and they had to be real, for a considerable amount (*parecchio*) could have been obtained without fighting. As the months went on, and as useless offensive succeeded useless offensive, morale was bound to suffer. So was Cadorna's reputation.

Even so, no one expected disaster. Yet on 24 October 1917 disaster struck, if not exactly out of a clear sky, then out of a sky no greyer than usual. The Austrians, with German support, suddenly broke through the Italian lines above Caporetto in Venezia Giulia. They did so by shelling the Italian artillery, by infiltrating fresh troops at night, by concentrating on two short sectors, by sweeping through the valleys and ignoring the heights, by using gas and by attacking in the fog. These tactics won an initial victory, and enabled them to cut off the Italian rear. But then the Italians turned defeat into rout. Their defences behind the lines were weak, and they failed to bring up reserves quickly; sometimes they even failed to move their troops back from exposed positions. Most of the Second Army was left confused and without orders for two days. The other corps managed to retreat, for the most part, but whenever there was Austrian harassment Italian discipline was likely to crack.

And so hundreds of thousands of Italian soldiers streamed down from the hills, some without weapons, some looting and pillaging, some shouting for joy that the war was over at last, some shooting their friends and comrades in a Dionysian frenzy, most simply exhausted and relieved. It

was an extraordinary spectacle, and it haunted official Italy for a generation. Yet it was far less chaotic and violent than it might have been: officers were unmolested, and both Cadorna and the king were treated respectfully. Eye-witnesses reported hearing shouts of '*Viva la pace! Viva il Papa! Viva Giolitti!*' ('Long live peace! Long live the Pope! Long live Giolitti!') rather than anything more menacing.[12] At least 200,000 soldiers lost contact with their regiments and ended up behind the River Piave. Fortunately the river was in its autumn flood, the Austrians could not cross it and the rout was halted. Most of the Veneto had been lost, together with vast quantities of arms; 300,000 men had been taken prisoner.

Cadorna attributed the Austrian breakthrough to 'the violence of the attack, and the inadequate resistance of certain units, some of which surrendered ignobly while others took to flight in a cowardly manner'.[13] This was itself ignoble, and in any case confused cause and effect. Caporetto was a normal military engagement, which the Austrians won for good tactical reasons; the surrenders and desertions, the acts of cowardice and hysteria, came later. Even so, Cadorna was half-right. Low morale did not cause the military defeat, but it must have contributed to the military collapse afterwards. In any case, after Caporetto Cadorna had to go. The new Orlando government kicked him upstairs to be head of a newly created 'Supreme Inter-Allied Council'; thereafter the army was commanded by General Armando Diaz.

Caporetto changed not only the commander, but the war. Italy was no longer fighting for Trent and Trieste – they seemed impossible dreams early in 1918 – but to defend her sacred soil against the invaders. She had to regroup her army, survive the winter somehow and prepare to hold off renewed Austrian attacks in the spring. Most Italians realized this, and as the Piave line was held both civilian and military morale gradually rose. Moreover, General Diaz paid far more attention to the soldiers than had Cadorna. Trench newspapers began in 1918, and some were soon very popular. Propaganda units (*Uffici 'P'*) were attached to each regiment. Above all, the troops' rations were raised. They were also given ten more days' leave each year and free life insurance – although whether this last concession improved morale must be questionable. The units of special shock-troops, '*Arditi*', set up in spring 1917, were greatly expanded. These 40–50,000 volunteer commandos soon became the legendary heroes of the Italian army, at a time when it badly needed some; and the adventures of fighter-pilots and of naval anti-submarine units received similar publicity. In December 1917 the government founded a servicemen's association, the *Opera Nazionale Combattenti*, to look after the welfare of troops and their families; and there were frequent promises of 'land to the peasants' once the war was won. Strict discipline continued, of course, but there were no more 'decimations'.



In short, the army became more 'national'; and so did the war. By First World War standards, Diaz was a cautious general who refused to risk his men's lives unnecessarily: 143,000 Italian soldiers were killed or wounded in 1918, compared with 520,000 the previous year. Even at the end of September 1918, when it was obvious to the politicians that Austria-Hungary was collapsing, General Diaz was still reluctant to attack. By this time the government desperately needed a token victory, both for appearance's sake and to strengthen Italy's hand at the peace negotiations; and so Italy 'intervened' in the war again. On 24 October, the anniversary of Caporetto, General Giardino began an offensive near Monte Grappa, and two days later the Italians began crossing the Piave. This time it was the Austrians who retreated in disorder, or surrendered without a fight. On 30 October the Italian army could proclaim a victory at last, as it entered Vittorio Veneto 20 kilometres from the Piave. On 3 November it took Trent, and the navy landed troops at Trieste. The next day the war with Austria was over. In ten days the Italians had won what had eluded them for three and a half years.

## 9.4 The war at home: the economic impact

The Great War had dramatic effects on the Italian economy. It was a 'war of exhaustion', which would be won by the side with the most men, arms and resources. Yet Italian steel production in 1913 was less than 1 million tonnes, compared with 2.6 million tonnes in Austria and 17.6 million tonnes in Germany. Cadorna claimed that he had only two machine guns per battalion in May 1915; the Austrians had twelve.[14] Certainly the army was very short of essential artillery, even of bullets, until at least the spring of 1917. Yet somehow the deficit was made up. Italy ended the war with over 7,000 cannons in the field, more than the British had; on Armistice Day she had nearly 20,000 machine guns, compared with 613 in May 1915. She had also created an aircraft industry, producing over 6,500 planes in 1918. Fiat, in Turin, had become the leading producer of trucks and lorries in Europe, making almost 25,000 vehicles in 1918 (compared with 4,500 in 1914). Here was a real 'economic miracle' of high-speed armaments and vehicle production. It was attained despite continuing shortages of raw materials, especially steel and coal. Steel production rose, but only to 1.2 million tonnes in 1918; coal imports fell, from 4.6 million

tonnes in 1913–14 to 1.0 million tonnes in 1917–18, although the shortfall was partly made up by extra hydro-electric power.

How was the miracle achieved? The answer is by 'production at any cost'. The State was the sole consumer for all these industrial goods, and the State did not bother much about prices or costs. A special Under-secretariat (later Ministry) of Arms and Munitions was set up under General Alfredo Dallolio. Dallolio was an energetic and effective organizer, and his priorities were clear: 'the time factor must have precedence over any other consideration'.[15] The ministry made payments in advance, arranged cheap loans and rapid depreciation allowances for favoured firms, and granted generous contracts. Much of the detailed negotiation was done by central and regional 'committees of industrial mobilization', on which the leading industrialists sat; below them there were local cartels, distributing the available raw materials and the contracts. There were plenty of opportunities here for abuse, and in May 1918 Dallolio was forced to resign after a particularly flagrant series of scandals; but it was an ideal system for achieving rapid growth. For a few giddy years Italian industrialists could do no wrong. There were no risks, and both the banks and the State smiled upon them. There was not even much bureaucratic interference: for the most part they ran the 'industrial mobilization' system themselves. To cap it all, they were patriots, nobly sacrificing their energies for the national good.

But the costs were real nonetheless, and had to be paid later. One calculation is that the State spent about 41 billion lire, at pre-war prices, on military supplies, pensions, food subsidies, etc.[16] The State budget went heavily into deficit: from 2.9 billion lire in 1914–15 to 23.3 billion lire in 1918–19. Governments could only pay for the war by borrowing, and so the National Debt rose fivefold, from 15.7 billion lire in June 1914 to 84.9 billion lire in June 1919, including war debts of over 15 billion lire to Britain and 8.5 billion lire to the USA. When governments can borrow no more, they print. There were almost six times as many bank notes in circulation in June 1919 as five years previously. Inflation was the inevitable result, or cause. The wholesale price index rose from 100 in 1913 to 412.9 in 1918, and even this probably understated the real position.

There were other disadvantages to the 'industrial mobilization' system and to the 'war economy'. Only a few regions enjoyed a war boom. Most of the arms firms were in the 'industrial triangle' of Piedmont, Liguria and Lombardy. The war worsened the already grave regional imbalance, especially as Southern savings in government stock were used to finance Northern industrial investment. Only a few sectors of industry were affected: steel, engineering, vehicles, cement, hydro-electric power, chemicals, rubber, woollen textiles. And only a few firms – Ilva, Breda, Ansaldo, Fiat, Montecatini, Pirelli – really benefited from wartime conditions. Only they had their men on the right committees to ensure raw material supplies and profitable contracts; only they were large enough to produce the goods in the right quantities and at the right time. They made huge profits, and ploughed much of them back into new investment: sometimes they swallowed up their pre-war competitors. Fiat's capital grew from 25 million to 125 million lire; it employed 30,000 workers by 1919, compared with 6,000 before the war. Ansaldo bought up the Cogne iron mines, installed hydro-electric plant and acquired two shipping lines. Ilva, essentially a steel trust pre-war, acquired shipyards and engineering plants as well as the Lloyd Transatlantico shipping line. Such firms were widely detested as war profiteers; they may have grown bigger, but they became far more vulnerable politically.



They had also become vulnerable economically, if the war ever stopped. By 1918 the leading firms were fighting desperately to take over the banks, so as to deny credit to their competitors and secure it for themselves. The Perrone brothers, who ran Ansaldo, bought up the Banca di Sconto and tried to take over the Banca Commerciale as well. Max Bondi, who ran Ilva and was linked to the Banca Commerciale, tried to take over the Bastogi finance house; Giovanni Agnelli, who ran Fiat, attempted to buy up the Credito Italiano. Eventually the Treasury Minister imposed a truce, but hostilities resumed after the war.

'Industrial mobilization' naturally implied a big increase in industrial jobs. By November 1918 1,976 firms, with 905,000 workers, were organized by the 'industrial mobilization' system. Over one-third of the workers, i.e. 331,000 people, were men of military age, most exempted from military service but 151,000 of them actually in the army and seconded to the munitions factories. Thus many skilled engineering workers spent the war at home in their usual jobs – a fact of great political significance. For the rest, peasants flocked into the main munitions centres from the surrounding countryside; and women easily found unskilled jobs in transport or engineering – over 20 per cent of the armaments workers were women by 1918. It all meant that the industrial centres grew rapidly. Milan had just under 600,000 inhabitants in 1911, according to the census; by 1921 there were 718,000. Turin increased from 427,000 to 518,000, and became a 'proletarian city': about one-third of its population had industrial jobs, and in 1918 the city contained twice as many industrial workers as in 1913. There was serious overcrowding, especially as house-building stopped during the war.

The 'industrial mobilization' system also rested on strict control of labour. All the workers in arms factories were placed under military discipline. Armed soldiers patrolled the factories. No one could change jobs without the local regional committee's permission, which was rarely given. Indiscipline was tried by military officers and punished by terms in military prisons – or by dispatch to the front. Strikes, of course, were prohibited. Most industrial workers detested this military supervision and discipline. They saw themselves as slaving away in intolerable conditions and working excessive hours – a 75-hour week was normal at Fiat by 1916. Moreover, they also had to cope with transport delays and food shortages. Admittedly by 1917 bread and pasta were rationed and sold at controlled prices, but most other foods were not. Meat and sugar consumption fell sharply in the towns. Industrial workers were less sheltered than peasants from the effects of inflation, and most urban families had to cut down even on basic essentials. Although their pay rose regularly, the cost of living rose even faster: during the war real wages probably fell by 25 per cent, on average, although the position obviously varied from industry to industry.

There was, therefore, much discontent among the Northern workers. Most of them had opposed the war from the outset. They knew their employers were making huge profits, and they knew that many shopkeepers were selling only on the black market. By May 1917 the chief of police recognized that the workers of Turin were 'in a state of compressed effervescence'.[17] Their unrest could probably be contained by firm discipline and regular pay rises, but only if food supplies were readily available. He was very prescient. In August bread shortages in Turin caused major rioting. Barricades were built, and troops had to be rushed in. About fifty people were killed before order was restored. The riots showed how morale in the cities had fallen to dangerously low levels, and they shocked politicians and generals alike. Yet they were an isolated episode, and they soon died down when bread arrived. Economic grievances and class antagonism remained acute in the Northern cities in 1918, but more care was taken over food supplies and propaganda at home as well as in the army, and there was no more rioting.

The workers' grievances were real to them, but to no one else. Most soldiers thought that the urban workers were extremely lucky: they had nice safe jobs well away from danger, they lived at home with their wives and families while their fellow-Italians were being slaughtered in the trenches, and their wages were fabulously high. Indeed, they received an average 6.04 lire per day in 1918 (piece-rate workers at Fiat earned 14.48 lire), while combat troops were still getting only half a lira. Furthermore, the troops' rations were far more meagre than normal consumption at home. Many of the peasants in the army naturally resented the urban workers' privileges, and they resented them even more after the Turin riots. In fact, only about 36 per cent of the armaments workers were men of military age; but the idea that all industrial workers were contemptible *imboscati*, 'shirkers', became deeply rooted among the 'interventionists', and among the soldiers.



The Great War also had sudden and dramatic effects in the countryside. Over 2.5 million peasants and labourers were taken into the army, leaving only the older men, women and adolescents to till the fields. In some areas women had always done farm work while the men went off to foreign building sites, so the position was not much different from usual apart from the lack of emigrants' remittances, but in other regions – e.g. Latium, Apulia, Sardinia – a woman's place was in the home, and families suffered accordingly. The share-croppers of Central Italy probably coped best with the new conditions, for share-cropping had always been an activity for large families. Among the small peasant landowners of Northern Italy, the loss of the bread-winner could be a disaster. On balance, the real incomes of peasant families probably went down, but not much. Italy had long suffered from rural overpopulation; war, like emigration, was one way of relieving it. A vast reserve army of labour – women, the old, the young – went into action. So food production was not seriously affected. During the war it amounted to almost 95 per cent of pre-war production, although admittedly many more animals were slaughtered than usual, and fertilizer thus reduced.

But the value of this produce did change. Indeed, the great inflation transformed the Italian countryside. Inflation reduced debts, and many peasants had been chronically in debt – for seeds, for animals, for the cost of a boat ticket abroad. The village usurers suffered for once; the peasants paid off their debts, and even began to save. Deposits in the rural savings banks almost trebled. Fruit and vegetable growers did best, for these prices were not government-controlled. But anyone who rented land for money was likely to benefit, especially since rents were frozen during the war. Many peasants found themselves making money, in some cases using money, for the first time in their lives. Hundreds of thousands of them began to think that buying their own land might not be an impossible dream. Here was a 'revolution of rising expectations', a shift from hunger to land hunger. The corollary was that existing landowners lost out badly, especially the absentees. They no longer had a stranglehold over their tenants through debt, and the rents they received became trivial. By 1918 many of them were in despair. They had to sell – or fight back.

Governments naturally had to adapt to these changes. They encouraged the impression that after the war there would be ample 'land for the peasants'. This slogan was repeated again and again in the official propaganda of 1917–18. There were several bills in parliament, referring mainly to the Southern *latifundia*, and even one or two decrees in favour of agricultural co-operatives on uncultivated land. These schemes all fed the peasants' land hunger, and worried the landowners. In 1918 some lands in Latium and Emilia were 'occupied' unofficially by peasants. It was easy to predict that when the vast peasant army went back home there would be a tremendous agitation for land throughout Italy (see §10.3).

## 9.5 Wartime politics

In May 1915 Salandra's supporters had expected the war to transform domestic politics. After a rapid victory, a new 'conservative-liberal' regime would emerge, very different from the hated Giolittian system. The 'democratic interventionists' – Radicals like Nitti, respectable Republicans like Barzilai, reformist Socialists like Bissolati – also looked to victory, but they expected it to induce a more 'open' type of government, with mass participation and enthusiasm, and more stress on social progress, education and industry. Giolitti's men, still a majority in the Chamber, licked their wounds and bided their time. They did not expect victory at all; and they feared they would have to pick up the pieces after a disappointing armistice. Wartime politics was essentially the story of the intrigues of these three groups. It was complicated by the fact that there was no pro-war majority in parliament. 'The Chamber never wanted war, and never pretended to want it', remarked Martini bitterly in March 1917;[18] and he was right. Governments were therefore weak and unstable. The politicians behaved with their characteristic blend of calculating shrewdness and short-sighted naivety. They failed to grasp how much the fighting soldiers despised them; and they underestimated, or ignored altogether, changes within Italy's other three main political groups, the Catholics, Socialists and Nationalists.

Giolitti had been the war's first political victim, before it even started. He remained horrified by it, and horrified that Italy should have entered it; and he remained virtually helpless. He could not act against the Crown. He and his followers could bring governments down, but they could not form a new one. Nor could they influence policy. In 1917 the Giolittians favoured negotiations and a compromise peace: '*parecchio*' all over again. But Sonnino was obdurate, and after Caporetto the victorious



Austrians were not anxious to negotiate. At home, the Giolittians had to take much of the blame for low morale. Camillo Corradini, Undersecretary at the Ministry of the Interior, was sacrificed after the Turin riots; and had not the retreating Italian soldiers of Caporetto shouted '*Viva Giolitti*'? So Giolitti remained isolated, the personification of 'neutralism' and corruption. He feebly urged more parliamentary control over the conduct of the war. Over 100 Giolittian deputies formed a 'Parliamentary Union' to this end, but this move only aroused further suspicions of defeatism.

Giolitti's great enemy Salandra was also an early political casualty of war. His government proved unable to control Cadorna, unable to achieve the promised victories, unable to rally the country and unable to win friends in parliament. In June 1916, after an Austrian counter-attack in the Trentino, Giolitti had his revenge. Salandra's government fell – the first government to fall in a belligerent country – and he never held high office again. His successor was Paolo Boselli, 78 years old and not noted for energy even when in his prime. He formed a 'National Coalition', including several 'democratic interventionists' – a Republican, two Radicals, two reformist Socialists – and even a Catholic, Meda. With Salandra gone, Sonnino was the leading 'conservative-liberal' in the Cabinet; as Foreign Minister, he embodied Italy's determination to achieve her war aims. But Boselli's government was just as unsuccessful as Salandra's; and on 25 October 1917, the day after the Austrian breakthrough above Caporetto, it fell.

The Sicilian lawyer Orlando then formed Italy's third and last wartime government. He retained Sonnino as Foreign Minister, but the Radical economist Nitti became Treasury Minister, and soon dominated most of his colleagues. In general, the 'democratic interventionists' were more influential than before, and far more so than the Salandrian conservatives who had begun the war. In December 1917 all the various pro-war groups, from democrats like Bissolati to Nationalists like Federzoni, formed a 'Parliamentary Group (*Fascio*) of National Defence'; by April it had 156 members. The *Fascio* was a response to Caporetto and to 'defeatism', and it was a very significant development. It showed that the 'democratic interventionists' could ally politically with the right-wing Liberals and Nationalists in the patriotic cause – and against Giolitti. Indeed, it was formed specifically to oppose Giolitti's 'Parliamentary Union'. Moreover, the *Fascio* was intolerant. He who was not with it, was against it. It called for a tougher line against 'subversives', and for tighter press censorship. Thus the 'democratic interventionists' certainly became more

influential, but at a cost. They acquired some strange bedfellows, and their 'interventionist' credentials were often more evident than their democratic ones. This was even more true outside parliament. Local '*Fasci* of National Defence' and 'Resistance Committees' sprang up; Republicans, Radicals, Masons and Nationalists worked together in the common cause – combating the neutralists. These local bodies, patriotic and paranoid, became centres in which landowners, eminent citizens, labour agitators and youthful careerists met to exchange ideas and to deplore government inertia. Many lasting friendships began there, and some of them were the nuclei of later Fascist organizations.

The 'democratic interventionists' had another major problem. At the end of 1917 the Bolsheviks in Russia published the Treaty of London, showing that Italy was fighting not only for Trent and Trieste but also for, *inter alia*, Northern Dalmatia and the South Tyrol. These areas were not inhabited by 'Italians'. Bissolati and his colleagues were horrified to learn, after nearly three years of war, that Italy was fighting for the wrong things. So were many Liberals, including Albertini of the *Corriere della Sera*. The Giolittians and the Socialists stepped up their attacks on the war. In January 1918 President Wilson of the USA issued his 'Fourteen Points', proclaiming that Allied war aims included the right of 'autonomous development' for oppressed nationalities. Point Nine laid down that 'a readjustment of the frontiers of Italy should be effected along clearly recognizable lines of nationality'. Here was the democratic interventionists' opportunity. They climbed hastily on to Wilson's platform. In April they organized a 'Congress of Oppressed Nationalities' (oppressed by Austria-Hungary, that is) in Rome. Delegates came from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Roumania; the congress proclaimed their rights to national independence. Sonnino refused to attend. He thought all this talk of 'nationalities' was dangerous nonsense, and he certainly did not want a strong Yugoslavia on Italy's doorstep. He wanted the Treaty of London, and continued to defend it. Orlando, as Prime Minister, equivocated. He allowed a 'Czech legion' to be formed from Czech prisoners-of-war, to fight against Austria, and he encouraged talk of 'nationalities' as a good propaganda weapon against the enemy troops. In 1918 it often seemed as if Italy were fighting a war of national liberation. But Orlando kept Sonnino on as Foreign Minister, despite the press clamour. On Armistice Day in November 1918 Italy's war aims were still undefined. The 'democratic interventionists' had not imposed their views, and still needed to rely on President Wilson.



## 9.6 The outsiders' politics

Ambiguity also prevailed within the 'outsider' political movements – the Catholics, Socialists and Nationalists. Catholic attitudes to the war ranged from nationalism to pacifism, with pro-war feeling more common in the South. Most bishops thought the war was a divine punishment, to be borne as patiently as possible, i.e. they thought the same as most soldiers. The faithful were urged to do their duty, but there was not much enthusiasm. Some priests, including Fr Semeria, chaplain at Cadorna's headquarters, had real crises of conscience as the appalling slaughter went on. But usually the line of 'moderate patriotism', of rendering unto Caesar, prevailed. The Prefect of Verona boasted that the local clergy always adopted the propaganda lines he suggested to them.[19] Organized religion became an indispensable prop to a weak State fighting an unpopular war. In the field, open-air mass became a regular feature of army life; between 80 and 95 per cent of the soldiers in many regiments took Easter communion in 1916. Mussolini wrote in his diary that the chaplain's cry of 'Italy before all and above all' was the first real patriotic speech he had heard in sixteen months in the army.[20] At home, parish priests organized aid for soldiers' families; and Nitti thought they might persuade the peasants to produce more food.

This helpful attitude brought the various Catholic movements many benefits. Baron Monti, an old school friend of the Pope, was made director of the Fondo per il Culto, in charge of government subsidies to the Church. The cousin of the Vatican Secretary of State was made a Senator. And in 1916 Filippo Meda became Finance Minister in Boselli's government. He was not the first Catholic to be a government minister in united Italy, but he was the first to become a minister because of his Catholicism. In May 1918 another Catholic deputy, Cesare Nava, became Under-secretary of Arms and Munitions on Dallolio's resignation. The State needed these men in government, just as it needed the bishops' help on the home front and chaplains and soldier-priests in the field. Thus the war boosted the long process of 'reconciling' united Italy and organized Catholicism.

And yet the Vatican itself did not join in, apart from organizing a great deal of relief work – exchanges of sick or wounded prisoners, repatriation of displaced civilians, etc. Benedict XV refused to declare that the war was 'just', and in May 1915 he called it an 'appalling butchery'. In August 1917 he issued a famous Note, urging disarmament, arbitration and an international conference to settle the outstanding issues. The initiative

failed. The main impact of the Note came from one phrase in it, where the Pope declared that the war was a 'useless slaughter'. This caused a great fuss, and probably did have a devastating effect on Italian morale. The top brass at Cadorna's headquarters said the Pope should be hanged. He certainly took some of the blame for the rioting at Turin three weeks later, and for the defeat at Caporetto in October. In any case Sonnino, as Foreign Minister, resented secret Papal diplomacy, and was determined to keep the Vatican out of any peace negotiations. All the 'democratic interventionists' thought the Pope was far too sympathetic to Catholic Austria. The Italian Establishment's Masonic traditions died hard: the Catholics were still too suspect, too 'defeatist', to be welcomed fully into the political fold.

So 'reconciliation' had its limits. Indeed, the war also boosted a contrary process – of building up independent Catholic institutions. For example, the war gave the peasants new wealth; much of it flowed into the Catholic rural banks. Charity was needed in wartime as never before; it was Catholic organizations that relieved distress. In March 1915 the Pope had reorganized Catholic Action yet again, putting its various component bodies under a single national executive run by Count Giuseppe Dalla Torre as president and by Fr Luigi Sturzo as secretary. The executive stimulated a host of local and diocesan initiatives – helping peasant landowners, founding rural banks and Catholic newspapers, promoting co-operatives, agitating for land for the peasants and votes for women. In March 1918 it even managed to found a national trade union confederation, to rival the Socialists' CGL. By 1918 the provincial Prefects of Northern Italy had become quite alarmed.[21] Catholic Action was clearly taking on a more direct political role.

Thus the Catholics took part in the war effort, but they kept their distance. They took a longer view. When the war was unpopular, they appeared as 'neutralists', seeking to mitigate disaster; when men rallied to the flag, the Catholics rallied too. Catholic ambiguity, like Giolitti's, was inevitable: the Socialists could not be left as the sole defenders of the neutralist cause. But, like Giolitti's, it caused much resentment.

There was, on the face of it, less ambiguity about the Socialists' attitude to the war. They were opposed to it. Militarism was widely detested; and skilled industrial workers, natural Socialist supporters, had no contact with the troops or their experiences. The PSI was the only political party openly committed to peace; it acted as spokesman for popular discontent. Yet the Socialist Party could not be too unpatriotic. It clearly could not support the Austrians, nor could it sabotage the war effort. The party secretary, Lazzari, therefore coined a formula to define the party's attitude: 'neither adherence nor sabotage'.



So here was more ambiguity. And, as the war went on, many Socialists inevitably became involved. Socialist local councils organized rationing and welfare payments; Socialist co-operatives helped to keep down the cost of living and to prevent profiteering; Socialist trade unionists sat on regional 'committees of industrial mobilization', and helped to settle labour disputes. These committees granted wage rises, safeguarded working conditions and helped workers gain exemption from military service. No wonder Socialist trade unionists and ordinary workers welcomed them. Yet they were undoubtedly part of the war effort: their job, essentially, was to make more weapons. Socialist deputies, too, sat on commissions and influenced social and economic legislation; that, too, helped the workers, but it also helped the war. In any case, some Socialist deputies were sympathetic to the war. After Caporetto they became quite open about it, and Turati himself proclaimed that the country was in peril and all should rally to the cause.

Thus many Socialist leaders and institutions did little to oppose the war, and much to support it. However, there were exceptions. The party's formal leadership, the Directorate, remained in the hands of the party's 'revolutionary', 'intransigent', 'maximalist' wing; and the Directorate appointed the editor of the party's newspaper, *Avanti!* So Socialist propaganda, under *Avanti!*'s new editor Serrati, remained firmly anti-war. The paper was much censored, but in October 1915 it managed to publish the resolutions of the international anti-war conference at Zimmerwald. When the Turin rioting broke out in August 1917, the Socialists took the blame, or credit. Serrati was arrested as an instigator, along with the party's secretary, vice-secretary and various other leading left-wingers. Naturally, the Socialists were also blamed for Caporetto. In fact, Socialist anti-war propaganda was fairly ineffective. Only the Bolsheviks' success in Russia gave the Socialists much of an argument, and even then President Wilson soon provided other attractive ideals to counter Lenin's. By 1918 the maximalists were very frustrated. Their leaders were in gaol, they were detested by all true patriots, and they had become spokesmen for the 'shirkers' rather than for the workers.

Above all, they distrusted the Socialist deputies and trade union leaders for being soft on militarism, and for being too close to the renegade Bissolati and other expelled ex-Socialists. In September 1918 the party held a brief congress in Rome, and condemned the deputies' conduct. There were many other rows later. The Socialist movement was irremediably split, essentially on the war issue. On the one hand, the 'maximalist' Directorate, the constituency parties and *Avanti!* regarded opposition to the war as the test of revolutionary virtue; on the other, 'reformist' trade

unionists, local government leaders and most deputies 'collaborated' as a patriotic necessity.

The Nationalists, of course, had no doubts about the virtues of war, although they too were divided about war aims. They took part in the 'Congress of Oppressed Nationalities' in 1918, but few of them were willing to give up any claim to Dalmatia. Indeed, they agitated strongly for *more* territory, especially in Asia Minor and Africa. They were also prominent in the national and local '*Fasci* of National Defence'. The Nationalists fought the defeatists and the neutralists, sometimes literally. Their favourite target, apart from the Socialists and Giolitti, was Orlando, for being too feeble as Minister of the Interior in 1916–17. Orlando told Malagodi in September 1917 that the Nationalists wanted to 'become masters of the Interior Ministry, so as to govern Italy with partisan aims and methods, organizing demonstrations with the help of the police and striking terror into their opponents'.[22] That was true. A powerful weapon was being forged. The war gave the Nationalists deeper local roots and greater local support, and it made them even more paranoid.

Indeed, it confirmed many of the Nationalists' deepest suspicions about parliamentary government. Federzoni argued that the Italian State was failing to run the war properly, and might fail to win the benefits of victory. The old parasites of parliament and bureaucracy must be swept away. 'Industrial mobilization' must continue in peacetime. The slogans of 'productivism' (see §7.4) reappeared. Italy should be run by the 'producers', especially the technical experts; and she should be run on military lines. The State, in peace as in war, should control prices and incomes, should regulate foreign trade, should distribute raw materials, should ration consumption and should discipline labour. The Nationalists promised radical, progressive change: an efficient economy, full employment, social welfare and social harmony. It was not too unrealistic a programme, for much of it had apparently happened already, in the war; and it was very attractive to arms' manufacturers and to many young officers and patriots. Above all, it provided a marvellous excuse for excluding large unwelcome groups – Socialists, Catholics or Giolittians – from political influence. Such an argument was badly needed in 1918, for it was clear that the Socialists and Catholics would dominate post-war parliamentary politics. 'Productivism' offered a way out of this nightmare. It provided allies, even among the 'democratic interventionists'; and it provided good grounds for setting up a new kind of State, welcome to all who had supported the war. The Nationalists had won their major battles before the war; would they win again after it?



## 9.7 Conclusion

The Nationalists had expected the Great War to 'make Italians', to cement the disparate people together into a united community. In some ways it did so. Shared hardships, bread-rationing, urbanization, the army's use of the Italian language rather than dialect, all helped to unify the country. Yet the contrary was far more true. The Italians were also deeply divided by the war. The opposition to it included not only the Giolittian majority in parliament, but the two major organized forces in the country, the Catholics and Socialists. The disputes of 1914–15 refused to die down, even long after the war was over. To the victorious 'interventionists' 'Italy' henceforth meant wartime Italy: noble, self-sacrificing and disciplined, the 'Italy of Vittorio Veneto'. 'Italy' also meant wartime Italy to the defeated neutralists and to many ordinary peasants and workers, but it was seen by them as repressive and reactionary. To both, patriotism meant war. The Italians had been divided before, but by November 1918 they were more divided than ever – 'combatants' against 'shirkers', peasants against workers, patriots against defeatists. No conceivable form of government could suit them all.

The war left other major legacies. They included a thirst for justice ('land for the peasants') and a transformed industrial economy. The very bases of the Liberal State were being questioned. The government was dominated by Nitti, who welcomed State intervention in economic and social affairs and encouraged demands for a 'broader democracy'. The war also produced tens of thousands of new officers, drunk with patriotism and greedy to command. They had won the war, and did not intend to let anyone forget it. The Great War, like the Resistance of 1943–45, provided a whole generation with patriotic credentials and a claim to reward. But perhaps the greatest legacy of the war was psychological, or medical. It left men utterly exhausted. The overwhelming impression given by the letters and diaries of this period is of strain, of not being able to cope any more. Perhaps that was why almost as many Italians died from influenza in 1918–19 as were killed in the whole war. This was the people that had to deal with Italy's post-war crisis.

## Notes

1 For the text of article 7 of the Triple Alliance, see Z.A.B. Zeman, *A Diplomatic History of the First World War* (London, 1971), p. 3; A.F. Pribram, *The*

CHAPTER 10

# The strange death of Liberal Italy, 1919–25

In November 1918 the war ended at last. Italy had won. She had gained Trent and Trieste; her historic rival, Austria-Hungary, was destroyed; her monarchy and Liberal institutions were respected and intact. Yet less than four years later the Fascist leader Mussolini was Prime Minister; a few years again, and the old Liberal institutions were no more. Liberal Italy collapsed suddenly and unexpectedly in her hour of triumph. Why?

## 10.1 High Politics: patriotism insulted and patriotism avenged

One major reason is that her statesmen lost at diplomacy, just when the game mattered most. Italy had won the war but bungled the peace, and bungled it spectacularly and publicly. Orlando and Sonnino went to the Versailles peace conference in 1919, demanding the full terms of the 1915 Treaty of London, i.e. Trent, Trieste, the South Tyrol to the Brenner, Istria and Northern Dalmatia. Most of these demands were granted, even when they ran counter to the 'principle of nationality' dear to the American President, Woodrow Wilson. But Wilson drew the line at Dalmatia, and the atmosphere was not improved when the Italians also asked for Fiume (Rijeka), the former Hungarian port on the Croatian coast. Fiume had not been mentioned in 1915, and rarely mentioned later; and it was not much use – Italy now had a much bigger Adriatic port at Trieste. But its citizens were mainly Italians (if the suburbs were not counted), and they wanted to be included in the Kingdom.

The Fiume question revealed again the differences among Italian politicians about Italian war aims. Did Italy want the Treaty – a good old-fashioned document of secret *Realpolitik* giving her control of the Adriatic – or did she want to embrace the new 'democratic' ideals and claim Fiume on national grounds? The answer, it seemed, was that she could not make up her mind. In fact, Sonnino did not really want Fiume. He only asked for it to strengthen his hand when it came to arguing about Dalmatia: in his view Dalmatia, with its splendid naval bases, was the key to the Adriatic. The Navy Minister agreed with him. The high-minded 'democratic interventionists' like Bissolati, however, held fast to the 'principle of nationality'. Fiume was 'Italian'; Dalmatia was not, and so should be given up. The army commander, General Diaz, agreed with *them* – he feared that Italy might acquire an 'Ireland', with the army having to fight constant guerrilla campaigns against recalcitrant Dalmatian Italophobes.[1] So the government wavered. At Versailles, it publicly demanded both Fiume and the Treaty; on the Adriatic, it intrigued with Croat and Montenegrin separatists, and tried to subvert the new state of Yugoslavia.

The result was a disastrous rebuff. President Wilson refused to 'concede' either Fiume or Dalmatia to Italy, and published his arguments in a leading Paris newspaper. Sonnino and Orlando, affronted, went back home and were greeted as popular heroes. Conversely, Wilson became the arch-villain – a great change from the virtual adulation he had received in Italy a few months previously. The collapse of 'Wilsonism' had very important consequences for Italian politics: it destroyed the credibility of the 'democratic interventionists', as well as of the Allies.[2] Two months later the Orlando government fell, with the Adriatic question still unresolved. Italy had acquired Trent and Trieste, and the Italian army occupied Istria and Northern Dalmatia *de facto*, but her Allies had failed her over Fiume – and also over the ex-German colonial territories in Africa, which the British and French carefully kept out of Italian hands. It seemed, in D'Annunzio's phrase, a 'mutilated victory'. 'Interventionists', Nationalists and even many ordinary Italians greatly resented the sanctimoniousness of the Americans, the selfishness of the British and French, and the feebleness of their own government – especially when, in June 1919, Francesco Saverio Nitti became Prime Minister.

Nitti was an economist. Like most devotees of the Dismal Science, he overrated both its importance and its dismalness. Italy lacked coal and money; only the Allies could provide them; therefore the Allies must not be affronted. He and his Foreign Minister Tittoni played down Italy's claims; and the clamour of the 'interventionists' grew. D'Annunzio called Nitti '*Cagoia*' (abject coward). The nickname stuck. Nitti issued an amnesty to the wartime deserters, which affronted all right-minded patriots. He also

cut down military spending, and this infuriated all the Right, especially the many new army officers. Soon the loyalty of some army units was dubious. Throughout the country a host of 'interventionist' groups railed against the 'renouncing' government.

In September D'Annunzio agreed to lead a military coup organized by prominent Nationalists, top army officers and one or two industrialists. He marched into Fiume with 2,000 'legionaries', mainly deserters or mutineers from the army. The '*Comandante*' remained there for fifteen months, hurling defiance at '*Cagoia*' and at Nitti's successor Giolitti. Fiume became a symbol of patriotic fervour and youthful vitality. Futurists, ex-servicemen, Nationalists, syndicalists, anarchists and adventurers flocked there from all over Italy. They swaggered round in cloaks and daggers (literally), bullied the local citizens and enjoyed themselves immensely. The regime was a permanent *festa*, full of processions and ceremonies, of dancing and slogans. D'Annunzio's idea of democratic decision-making was rather like Mussolini's later: long rhetorical speeches from balconies to the eager crowds below, punctuated by massive acclamations. D'Annunzio also invented many of the other trappings of the later Fascist regime, including the militia, the 'Roman salute', the compulsory castor-oil 'purgation' for dissidents, and even the meaningless warcry 'Eia, eia, alalà'. However, D'Annunzio's Fiume was not just comic opera, nor merely a 'May 1968' of the Right. The '*Comandante*' issued proclamations *urbi et orbi*. He founded a 'Fiume League', a kind of Anti-League of Nations for oppressed peoples; and, within Fiume itself, he promulgated a revolutionary Constitution, largely written by his syndicalist friend Alceste De Ambris. It proclaimed that Fiume was a 'Producers' State'. Everybody was to be a member of one of ten 'guilds', or 'corporations', which would run the economy; the upper house of parliament would be elected by these corporations.

Initially there was not much that Italian governments could do. Nitti could not expel D'Annunzio by force, for the 'invasion' was very popular in Italy. The army in Venezia Giulia had clearly helped D'Annunzio to prepare it; certainly it would refuse to move against him. So Nitti ignored D'Annunzio as best he could, although D'Annunzio was not an easy man to ignore. Giolitti, who succeeded Nitti as Prime Minister in mid-1920, was more effective. He began negotiating directly with the Yugoslavs, and in November 1920 the two countries reached agreement. The Treaty of Rapallo declared that Fiume was to be independent. Italy kept Trieste and Istria. In Dalmatia, Zara and four islands were to go to Italy, but the rest was to be Yugoslav. This treaty was generally welcomed in Italy, perhaps



because by late 1920 most people had got bored by D'Annunzio. Even in Fiume itself many of D'Annunzio's followers thought it acceptable, for it kept Fiume out of Yugoslav hands. On Christmas Day 1920 Giolitti took the final step, and sent the navy in. D'Annunzio surrendered almost immediately. The regime of the '*Comandante*' was no more.

Yet Fiume was an important episode, or rather an important symbol. D'Annunzio had held the city, in defiance of Italian governments and international opinion, for over a year. He had proved that the Italian State was weak, and that the Armed Forces might prove disloyal. He had also pioneered a new style of 'mass politics', adopted by later demagogues in Italy and elsewhere. And although the manner of his fall – the 'Christmas of Blood' when Italian warships shelled the city – damaged his prestige as hero and war leader, it also tainted Giolitti yet again as anti-patriotic and fratricidal. D'Annunzio had helped to convince many Italians that they had been robbed; and he had shown that daring and activism might win back what had been lost. The plight of Fiume and Dalmatia provided slogans for all kinds of super-militant patriotic groups; it kept the spirit of 'interventionism' alive throughout the post-war years.

## 10.2 Economic problems

Another major reason why the Liberal regime collapsed was its failure to cope with the transition to a peacetime economy. The problems were, indeed, intractable. The Nationalists, and some wartime 'technocrats', argued that there should be no transition at all. Some industrialists, especially those in heavy industry, electricity and shipbuilding, agreed; it was their only chance of survival in the post-war world. They could never sell all their guns, aeroplanes and ships on the open market; nor could they easily sell them to peaceful governments anxious to cut public spending. So the Perrone brothers of Ansaldo financed all sorts of right-wing nationalist movements and newspapers, and Oscar Sinigaglia helped to organize the Fiume expedition. Such industrialists advocated what was, in effect, an alternative model of economic development: ships, steel and hydroelectricity were to be vital in peacetime international competition, as well as in war.

But their arguments failed. Neither the Nitti nor the Giolitti government was willing to listen. The wartime controls were removed, and Italy went back to a semi-market economy and free-ish international trade. The results were dramatic. In 1920 the Perrone brothers tried desperately to buy up the Banca Commerciale, hoping thus to secure credit; Max Bondi

of Ilva tried to diversify, by taking over the Edison electricity company. The various manoeuvres failed too. At the end of 1921 Ansaldo went bankrupt, and brought down the Banca di Sconto with it. Ilva, its great munitions rival, had failed a few months earlier, as had Lloyd Mediterraneo. True patriots naturally blamed the government for these bankruptcies: national idealism and dynamic initiative had once again been trampled underfoot by short-sighted, time-serving politicians.

In the meantime Italy suffered all the ills of hasty adjustment. As millions of men left the army, unemployment reached a peak of 2 million in November 1919; as industrialists 'reconverted' their plant to peacetime production, share prices halved. Above all, there was inflation. The wholesale price index (1913 = 100) rose from 412.9 in 1918 to 590.7 in 1920. The lira fell from 30 to the pound sterling in March 1919 to 50 in December of that year, and to 100 in December 1920. This post-war inflation was almost as bad as in the war itself. It wiped out the middle-class's savings, crippled the huge rentier class and drastically reduced the wages and pensions of State employees. And civil servants had suffered enough already – senior administrative salaries in 1918 were less than half what they had been in 1914, in real terms.[3] A few firms, like Fiat, kept working normally during 1919–20, mainly because of the continuing need for army vehicles and ambulances; but by early 1921 the recession was international, and it badly hurt Fiat just when it was able to produce more vehicles from the new Lingotto factory.

These dark economic prospects were worsened by intense labour militancy. For three and a half years severe factory discipline had been enforced on recalcitrant workers. Suddenly a new era dawned. Socialist and anarchist leaders came out of prison or exile. Socialist trade unionists began organizing again: although – or perhaps because – most of them were 'reformists', they needed to prove their virility. Some valuable reforms were won, including the eight-hour day, State-financed labour exchanges and old age, health and unemployment insurance. Much of the militancy was defensive, for inflation hit workers' income as much as anyone else's. But much was not defensive at all. Many workers were convinced that revolution was imminent, 'as in Russia', and at least some of the agitations were designed to 'prepare' or help carry out the revolutionary task. Strikes, lockouts, riots, factory occupations and gang warfare became commonplace. Over 1 million people went on strike in 1919, and more again in 1920. Membership of the Socialist unions in the General Confederation of Labour rose from 250,000 in 1918 to 2 million by late 1920; the recently founded Catholic confederation claimed 1.2 million,



mainly in textiles and agriculture; and the anarcho-syndicalists of the Italian Syndical Union claimed 300,000 members in September 1919, with much support in the steelworks and shipyards of Liguria. Industrialists nervously bought off trouble whenever they could, and governments seemed helpless.

More traditional modes of social protest were not forgotten either. Food riots broke out spontaneously in Central and Northern Italy in June 1919, provoked mainly by a sudden sharp increase in prices. The rioting was 'revolutionary' in the old-fashioned style: granaries were plundered, shops were looted, trees of liberty were planted, little local republics were set up. But the authorities reacted very differently from usual. Nitti had just become Prime Minister, and he was not going to start off by shooting women and peasants. So mayors and Prefects were ordered to set up food committees, often with the aid of the local (Socialist) Chambers of Labour; these committees requisitioned stores and issued price decrees, halving the price of many foods at a stroke. The rioting died away. But the shopkeepers were furious. How could they trade, if they were forced to sell at half-price, and if looters went unpunished?

And so a fateful pattern was set. When riots or strikes broke out, governments sought to compromise, to settle, to 'absorb' or buy off popular discontent. The policy worked, in the short run; but it fatally antagonized the middle classes. They complained it was not just the workers they had to contend with, but also the government; and the issues at stake were exacerbated by the 'patriotic question' – the new 'strikers' were the old 'shirkers'. Not all strikes were successful, of course. In July 1919 there was a 24-hour 'international' strike of solidarity with the Russian Revolution, which aroused little enthusiasm; and in April 1920 a ten-day 'general strike' in Piedmont also failed to achieve its aims, this time of defending the new workers' councils in the factories. But unsuccessful strikes annoyed respectable opinion too, and public sector stoppages were particularly resented. The railwaymen came out in January 1920, as did postal and telegraph workers; they came out again in April and September; and in July even the troops went 'on strike', in protest against possible posting to Albania.

The most famous example of labour militancy was the occupation of the factories in September 1920. It started as part of a normal wage dispute in the engineering industry. The unions feared an employers' lockout, and occupying the factories seemed the logical way to prevent one. In addition, the anarchists and syndicalists had long advocated 'direct action' of this kind as a prelude to revolution. So over 400,000 workers took over their

factories or shipyards, expelled the managers, ran up the Red (or Black) Flag, and carried on working – sometimes at making barbed wire or guns for self-defence. They stayed there for nearly four weeks, living off 'Communist kitchens' in the factories, or off 'wages' taken from factory safes. It looked remarkably like a revolution, and it was a terrible shock to the *benpensanti*. Yet the Giolitti government affected to ignore it, at least initially. In Giolitti's view, the workers would do less harm inside the factories than outside, and in any case the army could not expel them without a bloodbath. The movement would collapse when raw materials ran out and when orders were cancelled, and he wanted the extremist ringleaders to take all the blame for failure. Even so, after ten days or so the government began to be alarmed, especially when news of weapons manufacture leaked out. So it started putting pressure on the employers to settle, using both stick and carrot – the stick being a threat of credit restrictions, the carrot a more protective tariff. By this time wages were no longer the issue. Something more 'revolutionary' was needed, if honour were to be satisfied and the workers persuaded to withdraw. The solution was 'trade union control of industries', a resounding phrase that sounded important and could be applied to all industries. Giolitti set up a commission to draft a bill making it compulsory; and the occupation ended, amid much recrimination.

But, once again, the price was too high, or seemed so. Many industrialists were furious at the government's 'interference' in the dispute, and had no intention of allowing the unions any say in management. They need not have worried. The commission failed to agree on a draft, and although Giolitti put a bill to parliament in February 1921, nothing came of it. Even so, the occupation had disastrous consequences. In itself, it was a dramatic threat to the bourgeois order; and the government response to it seemed no better. Arguably Giolitti had little choice – he had to persuade the workers out of the factories somehow, and 'control' was as good a way as any. But that was not how it looked to industrialists. Moreover, employers had to worry about other aspects of government policy. Giolitti had appointed a former syndicalist, Arturo Labriola, as Minister of Labour; there was a government bill to introduce a public register of shareholdings, which would make tax evasion much more difficult (this bill greatly alarmed the Vatican); the Minister of Finance was introducing a wealth tax, and talking about taxing war profits at 100 per cent. There were plans to give the trade unions even greater control over the labour-exchanges, so that employers could no longer hire whom they pleased. Where would it all end? Was the government in league with the unions?



In late 1920 an economic recession hit Italy, and deepened the industrialists' gloom. Some of them became more willing to finance strikebreakers and right-wing extremists, although many others (e.g. Agnelli of Fiat) still relied on the Socialist unions as the best guarantors of industrial discipline. Things also looked bad for the militants. The 'occupation of the factories' had failed to bring about revolution, and had destroyed the syndicalists' great myth, the idea that seizing factories would bring down the bourgeois regime. There were far fewer strikes in 1921. But they had left a legacy of bitterness and fear, and there were many accounts to be settled.

## 10.3 Agriculture

Much the same was true in the countryside, only more so. The soldiers left the army in 1919, and went home expecting 'land to the peasants'. Often they acquired it easily enough, buying from frightened or impoverished landowners; sometimes they took it by force, although in practice very little force was needed. Peasants would march symbolically on to barren or uncultivated land, would raise their flags and set to work. These 'land occupations' were nothing new: they had occurred sporadically throughout the nineteenth century. And they were not 'revolutionary'. They were usually reassertions of traditional claims, in the new post-war climate where promises were more likely to be kept. Sometimes they were spontaneous, but many were organized by local priests or by the ex-servicemen's associations, which could also help with such matters as seed purchases, insurance and marketing. Most of the occupations were in Latium and the South, where most of the uncultivated land was. Taking sales and occupations together, nearly 1 million hectares came into peasant ownership. By 1921 there were probably about 3.5 million peasant-owners, twice the number of 1911; in the South, between 30 and 40 per cent of rural heads of families owned some land by then. Many Southern *latifundia* disappeared altogether. The turmoil of 1919–20, so alarming and revolutionary in appearance, in reality established a new, deeply conservative social structure in much of rural Italy.

Land occupations and purchases also occurred in Central and Northern Italy, but the general pattern there was rather different. Where small tenant farming predominated, as in some of the Northern hill areas, the agitations were over rents, food prices or co-operative enterprises; priests and Catholic union organizers were prominent. In much of the Veneto the landlords had fled during the Austrian occupation of 1917–18, whereas the clergy had stayed behind to share the people's sufferings. No

wonder that, in the words of the Prefect of Vicenza, 'the rural population, under the influence of the Catholic party, are greatly agitated and regard their bosses with real hostility; the landowners are regularly described – even from the pulpit – as covetous speculators'.[4] In Tuscany and Umbria, where the share-cropping system was widespread, the peasants already 'occupied' the land physically; what they wanted was full ownership, or at least guaranteed tenure, a greater say in deciding land use and a larger proportion of the produce. In areas like Emilia where there were large tenant-farmers hiring wage-labourers as required, the Socialist Labourers' Union Federterra demanded higher wages, a closed shop, above all the '*imponibile di mano d'opera*' – i.e. enforced overmanning, one worker per 6 hectares in Ferrara province throughout the winter. The ultimate Socialist aim was 'collectivization', which would follow 'after the Revolution'. The unions failed to achieve nationalization, but they often secured their other demands by well-organized strikes, particularly effective at harvest-time. In the 'red' provinces of Ferrara and Bologna no labourer could get a job except through the Socialist unions' labour exchange; no employer could hire non-union labour. The Socialist Chambers of Labour could 'dictate conditions of work, wage-rates, even, if they so desired, the choice of crop'.[5] Any attempt to beat the system was countered by rick-burnings, physical violence, boycottings and even expulsion from the province.

Altogether, these were years of social upheaval in rural Italy. If there was a common factor in the different regions, it was that the larger landlords and tenants were threatened. And if there was a factor common to agriculture and industry, it was that governments sometimes seemed to be acting directly against the employers' interests. In September 1919 a government decree instructed Prefects to 'recognize' occupations of uncultivated land: peasant co-operatives (usually of ex-servicemen) could keep it for four years. The new law naturally encouraged further occupations, or at least landowners naturally supposed that it did. In October the unions' 'labour exchanges' were officially recognized, and granted State subsidies. In the summer of 1920 a prominent member of the Catholic Popular Party (see below, §10.4), a party which relied heavily on the peasant vote, became Minister of Agriculture. Micheli behaved true to form. In October 1920 he issued a decree giving permanent, as opposed to four years', guaranteed tenure to illegal land occupiers. In January 1921 he introduced a bill guaranteeing all agricultural jobs until the end of 1922. Landowners everywhere bitterly resented these new decrees; and those in the North feared that land occupations might spread to their areas.



Landowners had other reasons for worry in late 1920. At the local elections of October–November nearly a quarter of the municipal councils, including most of the rural *comuni* in Central Italy, were won by the Socialists; the Catholic *Popolari* did almost as well. That meant that only union leaders and their friends would get local government jobs and subsidies, public works would be entrusted only to peasant leagues and to Socialist or Catholic co-operatives, and party propaganda would be subsidized from the rates – which would rise sharply. Furthermore, militant peasant unionism, both Socialist and Catholic, showed no signs of diminishing, and after the poor wheat harvests of 1919 and 1920 (4.6 million tonnes and 3.8 million tonnes respectively, less even than the wartime average of 4.56 million tonnes), many landowners were genuinely short of funds. The Giolitti government, with its *Popolari* ministers, seemed bent on destroying the position of landowners throughout the country. Who would act to save them?

## 10.4 Political breakdown

All these problems were serious, but not insuperable. Liberal Italy might have weathered the storm, given time and a stable political framework. But post-war Italy did not have a stable political framework. It had been precarious enough in 1913, but by 1919 it was weaker still. The old ruling class had been bitterly divided by the war: 'interventionists' against neutralists, Salandrians against Giolittians. The 'democratic interventionists' – Republicans, reformist Socialists, pro-war syndicalists – were also divided among themselves, and in any case were discredited by President Wilson at Versailles. The Nationalists, proud of their victorious war, trumpeted that a stronger State and a warlike economy were necessary. Indeed, in early 1919 there was much agitation, especially by the 'democratic interventionists', for a 'Constituent Assembly', to draft a new Constitution and push through thorough-going political and social reforms.

The two major groups of 'outsiders' were also more troublesome than ever. The Catholics, building on their wartime efforts, founded their own political party. The Popular Party (Partito Popolare Italiano, PPI) was an uneasy fusion of right-centre and left-wing Catholics, supported mainly by the small peasant proprietors and tenants of Northern and North-Central Italy, and anxious to win over the Southern peasantry too. It naturally backed the peasants' land and rent agitations, and indeed often organized them. The PPI was formally 'non-confessional', and its policy programme carefully omitted any mention of the Roman question or of

ecclesiastical legislation. Thus it did not aim to represent the Church's interests. It was a lay political party founded for lay purposes; yet it was led by a priest, Luigi Sturzo, and virtually all its supporters were practising Catholics, hostile to Liberalism, laicism and landlordism. The Catholics had now returned *en masse* to Italian politics. Unsympathetic Liberals suspected the PPI of being too 'clerical'; but the Vatican suspected it of not being clerical enough.

The founding of the PPI meant that the Liberals could no longer win Catholic support tacitly and cheaply, e.g. by promising not to bring in divorce, as in 1913. The days of 'Gentiloni Pacts' were over. The Catholics had emerged from the war as *combattenti*, with radical claims that had to be met. However, there was no guarantee that the PPI would keep any bargain it made; it was too disparate, and it was not under the Church's control. It refused, for example, to join an anti-Socialist coalition at the 1920 local elections in Milan, with the result that Milan came under Socialist control, much to the annoyance of its archbishop. No government in this period managed to win lasting backing from the PPI. Yet the Liberal regime had come to depend upon such backing.

The Socialists were, apparently, even more threatening. The PSI ended the war committed to immediate revolution and to the dictatorship of the proletariat. For two years the party Directorate and its newspaper, *Avanti!*, continued to preach revolution. The 'reformists' – trade union leaders, old parliamentary hands, co-operative organizers, local councillors – counted for little; and the unions had to give regular proof of militancy, if only to ward off the strong syndicalist challenge. However, the Socialists' revolutionary slogans were purely verbal. They had no idea how to lead a revolution, and by the late summer of 1919 they were totally absorbed in election campaigning. Only in Turin, where the young Sardinian journalist Antonio Gramsci led a campaign for 'factory councils' in industry, was there any appreciation of the real issues involved. Even so, slogans are important in politics. The PSI's revolutionary posturing meant that it was not 'available' to friendly politicians like Giolitti; it could not be tacitly 'absorbed' into the system by public works schemes or union concessions, as in pre-war days. The PSI joined the Third International, and sent a high-ranking delegation to Moscow in July 1920 for its second congress. Serrati, editor of *Avanti!*, was elected on to the Comintern's executive committee. The PSI's public Bolshevism, its support for strikes and factory occupations, frightened the respectable middle classes away from a Liberal regime that seemed incapable of dealing with overt subversion.



The Liberal regime admittedly made things unnecessarily difficult for itself. Orlando's government introduced universal male suffrage in December 1918, to reward the soldiers. The following August Nitti brought in proportional representation as well, partly to please the Catholics, partly to strengthen the reformist Socialists, partly to stifle calls for a Constituent Assembly, partly because many moderate Italians hoped, as usual, that it would provide a safeguard against an extremist takeover. Henceforth there would be fifty-four huge constituencies, and the 508 deputies would be elected on a party-list system. The new electoral law was a real constitutional upheaval, although few realized it at the time. Nitti himself was confident in September 1919 that not more than sixty Socialists would be elected, half of them moderate men 'willing to take part in government'; in mid-November, more realistically, he thought that 'at the Chamber we will have to overcome an initial period of confusion', 'which will last perhaps a month or two'.[6] Giovanni Amendola was more perceptive: 'the list system means the abdication of the Liberal Party . . . into the hands of a Red–Clerical alliance'.[7] He was right about the end of the Liberal regime, but not about its successors.

In November 1919 the first elections were held under the new rules. The results were a disaster for the government, and indeed for the political system. The Radicals won 67 seats, and the reformist Socialists 21, much as expected; but the Giolittians won only 91, and the right-wing Liberals only 23. The new Chamber was dominated by the two organized mass parties, the Socialists with 32.4 per cent of the vote and 156 seats, and the *Popolari* with 20.5 per cent and 100 seats. 'Government' parties (including the Radicals) won over half the votes only in the South; everywhere north of Rome, and even in Latium itself, the 'subversives' triumphed. The North–South split was unmistakable. One hundred and forty-six of the 156 Socialist deputies came from Northern or Central Italy; so did 76 of the 100 *Popolari*. But 162 of the 239 'government' deputies were elected in the South. Could the backward South really rule the industrial North? In any case, Liberal governments could only survive if they secured support either from Northern Catholics or from Northern Socialists. Such support would be difficult to win in the time-honoured manner. Most deputies were now dependent on party machines, and could not be bought or 'transformed' as easily as before.

The Nitti government fell in June 1920. The new Prime Minister was Giolitti himself, a sure sign of how the Establishment was trying to forget its old quarrels. Giolitti approached his tasks in the old complacent spirit. He assured Malagodi that there was 'no need to take the threats of Serrati,

Bombacci and Co. too seriously. They are people who calm down immediately when they become deputies . . . in general the Socialists are not to be feared. Their very organization gives them a sense of responsibility and makes them used to discipline.'[8] Giolitti also wooed the PPI, brought it into government and gave it some key posts, including the Treasury and Agriculture. But Giolitti and Sturzo were uneasy bedfellows. Giolitti, as a Piedmontese Liberal, could not abide meddling priests; Sturzo, as a Southern democrat, disliked corrupt fixers of elections. Moreover, Giolitti's concessions to Socialist trade unions (see above, §10.2) greatly annoyed Catholic unionists, as well as alienating the Liberals' essential middle-class supporters – and the Church. So Giolitti's liaison with the PPI was always fragile, and both sides constantly looked around for other partners. The local elections of autumn 1920, with their sweeping Socialist and *Popolari* gains, simply confirmed that the old regime was no more.

In May 1921 Giolitti played his last card. Hoping that the Socialists were by this time discredited, he called new elections. And hoping as ever to 'absorb' troublemakers, he offered Mussolini's Fascists a place on the government parties' lists. The gamble failed. Certainly the government parties' vote went up, from 36.9 per cent in 1919 to 47.8 per cent; but the Socialists lost fewer votes than expected, and the PPI vote remained stable. There were now 123 Socialist deputies, 15 Communists and 107 *Popolari* – still virtually half the Chamber. What was worse, the 'government' parties had become far too disparate. They included not only 64 Radicals and 24 reformist Socialists, but also 35 Fascists. No stable government could be formed from such a Chamber, and Giolitti resigned forthwith. He was succeeded by a series of short-lived coalitions under weak premiers, living from hand to mouth as public order collapsed. Salandra, Orlando, Nitti, Giolitti – all had been tried, and all found wanting. There was no other Saviour in sight, or rather none among the Liberals.

## 10.5 The rise of Fascism

This complex crisis clearly offered immense scope for paranoid patriots. Continuing the hysterical traditions of 1917–18, they founded various movements – the '*Fasci* of Resistance', the 'Italian *Fasci* of National Defence', the 'Association of Italian Volunteers' and so forth; the term '*fascio*' (which literally meant 'bundle', and came to mean 'group') was deliberately reminiscent of the '*Fasci* of National Defence' (see §9.5), as well as of the revolutionary Sicilian *Fasci* (§5.5). The most prominent 'interventionist' group was that of D'Annunzio's legionaries, whose sights were set



on Rome as well as on Fiume. After Fiume had fallen, D'Annunzio's supporters founded a 'National Federation of Fiume Legionaries', both patriotic and syndicalist. Former members of the '*Arditi*' (shock-troops) also founded a semi-political movement after the war; it soon had 10,000 members – men who had been chosen in war specially for their murderous qualities, and who enjoyed a good fight. The Futurists were also still active, and indeed Marinetti was the acknowledged leader of the *Arditi*. He, too, founded '*fasci*' throughout Italy, the '*Fasci Futuristi*', loosely co-ordinated by a 'Futurist Political Party' with a programme based on 'total and intransigent anticlericalism'.

These 'interventionist' movements had much in common. They attacked the same targets: parliament, government, Nitti, Giolitti, Socialists, Catholics, bureaucrats and war-profiteers. They were urban, and strongest in Northern and North-Central Italy; they were paramilitary in organization and style; and they relied heavily on patriotic myths and bellicose sentiments. They appealed to students, both those who had fought in the war and those who had, unhappily, been too young. And they all recruited ex-officers. At least 130,000 officers were discharged from the army in 1919; over 20,000 of them took crash courses at university, either before or after formal demobilization. So the distinction between officers and students was never a clear one. All the 'interventionists' were active, all were glorious, all needed honour and excitement. They were available for political adventurers like D'Annunzio or Marinetti.

The most formidable right-wing demagogue in Italy was Benito Mussolini, 35 years old in early 1919 and with very varied experiences behind him. Born in anarchist Romagna, the son of a blacksmith and a schoolmistress, he soon became that classic figure of Italian society, the embittered and penniless intellectual. He read voraciously, especially in literature and philosophy; he kept himself by a series of short-lived jobs – schoolteaching, building worker; and he joined a revolutionary political movement, the PSI. He served his time in Switzerland, as all good revolutionaries should; he wrote an anticlerical novel. Mussolini was intelligent, yet impatient of complexities; he was energetic, yet anxious for instant panaceas; he was inconsistent, yet always convinced of his own righteousness.

In short, he was a born journalist. Journalism was how he – and many others – made his way to the top; and he remained a journalist at heart all his life. From the local Socialist paper at Forlì, *Lotta di Classe*, he became editor of the official Socialist daily *Avanti!* in 1912, at the age of 29. This was a post of great political influence, and he was hugely popular and successful in the job. Two years later, however, he broke with the PSI over

the intervention issue. He had made sure he had funds enough to found another paper, the *Popolo d'Italia* (see §9.2), but even so his action was not that of a calculating careerist. On the contrary, Mussolini was a violent and impulsive man, and he enjoyed living dangerously. War seemed desirable and exciting to a man of his temperament – and it made good copy. Naturally he went off to fight, and was honourably wounded; and naturally he came back in 1917 to battle against 'the internal enemy' in the columns of his newspaper. He never forgot those glorious war years. He had campaigned for the war, wrecked his Socialist career for the war and fought in the war: the war was the great ennobling experience of his life, indeed the great ennobling revolution of the twentieth century.

When peace came Mussolini, too, founded a political movement, the *Fasci di Combattimento*, whose inaugural meeting was held in a building on piazza San Sepolcro, Milan, on 23 March 1919. The *Fasci* were often indistinguishable from the *Arditi*. Captain Ferruccio Vecchi of the *Arditi* was chairman of the Fascists' inaugural meeting. The *Fasci di Combattimento* had the usual radical programme – a Constituent Assembly, abolition of the Senate, land for the peasants, seizure of Church property and major tax changes. But there was not much of a market for all this, and what there was had been cornered by the Socialists. The movement remained strident but ineffective in 1919–20, restricted to a few major centres of ultra-patriotism: Milan, Bologna, Trieste. It had only 870 members in December 1919. In November Fascists, Futurists and *Arditi* stood together in the parliamentary elections in Milan: they won a derisory 4,657 votes, out of 270,000.

It was the *Popolo d'Italia*, not the *Fasci*, that kept Mussolini in the limelight; it was in the newspaper, not in 'interventionist' politics, where his word was law and no rivals like D'Annunzio could challenge him. Mussolini remained an editor, first and foremost, long after he had become the '*Duce*' (leader) of Fascism. He successfully turned the paper into the spokesman for all the discontented extreme 'interventionists'. But the newspaper continually needed money, money which could only be provided by industrialists – sugar barons, steel magnates or shipbuilders. For nearly two years Mussolini struggled to keep his newspaper alive, and to find a political opening.

It came, eventually, from setting up armed 'squads', real paramilitary organizations run by Fascist ex-officers. Trieste, where national passions ran deep, was soon dominated by these groups, well-armed and enjoying army help. In late 1920 the Fascist paramilitary movement – '*squadrismo*' – really took off, rather to Mussolini's surprise. Many factors helped it.



The Treaty of Rapallo was good propaganda for nationalists; and so was the fall of Fiume. Above all, the Giolitti government seemed soft on militancy. The 'occupation of the factories' frightened many people; the local election results in October–November frightened them even more. It was time to stand and fight.

The really important breakthrough came not in the North, nor in the cities, nor even in centres of nationalist excitement like Trieste. It owed little to Mussolini or to his newspaper. It came in the 'red' provinces of Central Italy, in Emilia and Tuscany, where landlords and leaseholders reacted against the victorious Socialist labour leagues, against the new local councils and against government agricultural policy. Fascist squads were the ideal instrument for breaking up Socialist or *Popolare* dominance in the countryside. A lorry-load of ex-officers or students would descend on some village at night, beat up the local unionists, 'purge' them of their iniquities by making them drink castor-oil, burn down the local party offices, and depart. The police would stand by, when not actively joining in; the Prefect would wring his hands, but stay well clear. Landowners naturally encouraged these exploits: destroying the labour leagues was well worth the cost of the odd lorry.

Yet *squadrismo* was not just class conflict, nor was it just thuggery. Many ordinary peasants were sick of the petty Socialist dictatorships too, and joined the squads willingly enough. Once the labour leagues' 'closed shops' had been broken, these men could expect jobs, leases or even smallholdings. Above all, the squads were convinced of their own righteousness. They were restoring law and order, they were rescuing their country from tyranny, and they were avenging their fallen wartime comrades. That was why so many respectable Liberals wished them well, initially. Luigi Albertini wrote that the Socialists deserved all they got; Giovanni Amendola agreed, and expressed his 'complete support both with my head and my heart'.[9] Mario Missiroli described Fascism as 'the emergence of a besieged army'.[10] And it was victorious. The 'red' provinces of the Po valley and of Tuscany were transformed, sometimes in only a few weeks, from being the home of the most powerful peasant unions in Europe to being the main strongholds of the Fascist squads.

All this transformed the Fascist movement too. The initial stereotype of Fascism, the 'revolutionary' 'interventionist' 'Fascism of the first hour' in Milan and the big cities, the Fascism of Mussolini, syndicalists, ex-officers and students, was replaced by another stereotype: *squadrismo*, reactionary and rural. But stereotypes are deceptive, and perhaps there was not that much difference between the earlier and later Fascist movements, except

that the later one had found its vocation. Both were, in fact, urban – the squads started out from provincial towns, usually provincial capitals – and both initially contained much the same people, i.e. ex-officers and students. At Bologna, for example, the squads could only begin serious operations when the university term began in the autumn of 1920. Even so, *squadrismo* made Fascism a mass movement, and gave it a much wider base, or series of bases, in Central Italy. Small leaseholders and owners, farm managers and artisans, share-croppers in Emilia, those who had bought or hoped to buy land, joined the squads and joined the *Fasci*. The squad leaders – the '*ras*', as they were soon called – like Farinacci in Cremona, Balbo in Ferrara, Arpinati in Bologna, soon became the great *condottieri* of Northern and Central Italy.

Mussolini, in Milan, could not control these men, and the local *ras* remained one of his biggest headaches for years to come. But his position outside *squadrismo*, above the mêlée, also gave him a marvellous opportunity for manoeuvre. On the one hand, he was the *Duce* of Fascism. He and his paper acted on the squads' behalf, as national organizer, financier and propagandist. He was the man who could unleash the squads, and he threatened to do so unless given concessions. But he also played a very different role, that of moderate statesman, far-sighted and patriotic. He was the man who could tame the squads, if only he were given the authority to do so. Whenever the squads were particularly violent, Mussolini murmured soothing words about national reconciliation and restoring law and order. Mussolini needed squad violence. It had given him an effective political movement to lead. He needed to support it; but he also needed to deplore it.

For most of 1921 Mussolini played the squad-tamer, reassuring his city followers that Fascism had not sold out to the rural bourgeoisie, and reassuring the Establishment that he was respectable at heart. He proclaimed that land should be leased out to the peasants. Mussolini also reaffirmed his republicanism, to console his more radical supporters. Even so, the Fascist movement was clearly becoming more conservative. By July 1921 Mussolini had become the peace-maker. He proposed a 'pact of pacification' between the Fascists and the Socialist unions, and one was actually signed on 2 August. It was a great risk to take, and he soon paid the price. The *Fasci* of Emilia rejected the pact angrily, and some prominent leaders – including Roberto Farinacci of Cremona – resigned from the Fascist central committee. Dino Grandi of Bologna and Italo Balbo, boss of Ferrara, even went to Gardone and asked D'Annunzio to take over the Fascist leadership. The Fascist movement very nearly split, and for a few



months Mussolini's authority was precarious. Yet the squad leaders distrusted each other at least as much as they distrusted Mussolini; and there was no alternative leader except D'Annunzio, who refused to act.

So Mussolini kept his hold on the movement, after many harsh words and a brief tactical resignation. He had to give up the 'pact of pacification': *squadrismo* continued to flourish, spreading out from Central Italy into fresh provinces in the North. But he managed, in October 1921, to put Fascism on a proper footing as a formal political party, the Fascist National Party (Partito Nazionale Fascista, PNF). The new party founded local branches, welcomed 'respectable' recruits, collected regular dues; it was obviously designed to be a centralized body under Mussolini's control, a counterweight to the local squads and their insolent commanders. With over 200,000 members by the end of 1921, and over 300,000 by May 1922, the party gave Mussolini a real political base other than his newspaper. It greatly improved his hand in negotiations with other politicians. The PNF rapidly became the party of the middle classes, filling the vacuum left by the collapse of Liberalism.

Organized mass unions proved useful too. Here the militant syndicalist legacy of early Fascism was vital. The *squadristi* and the syndicalists joined forces, like the stick and the carrot. *Squadristi* destroyed the Socialist peasant leagues; syndicalists followed on their heels and herded the former members into Fascist bodies. Sometimes the 'closed shop' system was simply taken over, the Socialist league being replaced by a Fascist 'syndicate' and by a Fascist labour exchange. More generally, Fascist volunteers not only broke strikes among railway and postal workers, they also founded alternative unions. Syndicalism was organization, strength, political power; it was also 'the conscience of the revolution'. The union, or syndicate, linked the old radical aspirations to the new reactionary reality; or rather, it showed that Fascism was not merely reaction. And it worked, or seemed to. It was literally true, in 1920–21, that the Fascists made the trains run on time, indeed run at all: a remarkably high proportion of the early provincial leaders, including Farinacci himself, were stationmasters or other railway officials. In January 1922 the various local unions formed a National Confederation of Syndical Corporations, with Edmondo Rossoni as secretary. By June it claimed nearly 500,000 members, mainly peasants. In many regions landowners negotiated only with the syndicates, and were threatened if they tried to do otherwise. The Catholic and Socialist peasant unions melted away. The Fascists were 'bringing the workers into the system', while making sure they did not dominate it. And who else could do that?

By late 1921 'Fascism' already meant several quite distinct phenomena. To many, it meant strike-breaking – seen either as a vicious attack on workers' rights or as a heroic, patriotic duty. To others, it meant the 'national' unions, a new way of disciplining and mobilizing labour. To a few, it was still a revolutionary, republican movement, 'Fascism of the first hour'. But this last kind of Fascism was obsolescent, and indeed was rapidly turning 'anti-Fascist': the *Arditi* Association went over to D'Annunzio in June 1921, and publicly declared its opposition to Fascism. To most people, and to most Fascists, 'Fascism' now meant *squadrismo* – a number of different paramilitary groups, fiercely independent, sometimes in league with large landowners, sometimes more 'syndicalist', but always recruiting from the urban middle class or from leaseholders and small owners, always run by local bosses, always intransigent and, increasingly, a menace to public order as well as to Socialists. To the more sophisticated, 'Fascism' also meant local groups, but more complex and varied ones than the term '*squadrismo*' implied: republican in the Romagna, irredentist in Trentino, syndicalist in Emilia. Alternatively, 'Fascism' meant 'Mussolinism': a cult of personality, full of bellicose rhetoric and nationalist sentiment; necessary to hold the disparate groups together, but essentially theatrical.

These different kinds of Fascism explain why historians disagree even about such basic questions as who the Fascists were. Were they 'bourgeois' or 'petty bourgeois', 'rising' or 'falling', members of 'new' or 'old' élites, or of none? Traditional views have stressed the 'humanist petty bourgeoisie' – teachers, civil servants, lawyers, rentiers – hit by inflation, desperate for jobs and resentful of working-class prosperity. Many of these men were ex-officers and some were landowners, needing to control labour and avoid taxes. The problem with this argument is that it simply describes the traditional middle classes of pre-Fascist times – particularly in the South, where Fascism was weakest. Renzo De Felice argued, with little evidence, that many Fascists were members of the 'rising middle class', who had recently acquired land or small businesses.[11] They were, in short, 'petty bourgeois', but aggressive and successful rather than defensive. Our only real evidence comes from a survey of about half the Fascist Party members in the autumn of 1921, which revealed an unusual number of landowners, shopkeepers, clerical workers and, above all, students – Petersen calculated that 12–13 per cent of Italian students must have been PNF members at this time.[12] Fascism was a typical militant student movement, except that these students knew how to fight, and their parents approved of their activities.



The only indisputable conclusion is that Fascism was a number of complex local movements, linked by patriotic sentiment, by hatred of Socialism and by the myth of the *Duce*. However, Liberal politicians had no doubt what Fascism meant. It meant, by late 1921, the thirty-five Fascist deputies and the PNF leaders, who represented substantial middle-class interests, and who were willing to collaborate with other respectable parties in parliament. Such people might also be willing to give up Fascism's paramilitary aspects, as the attempted 'pact of pacification' had shown. Was it not wise, therefore, to strengthen the Fascist Party and the deputies, perhaps even by bringing them into the government, so that they could assert their authority more effectively over their own followers?

In these circumstances Mussolini had only two real worries. Firstly, some tough-minded Liberal politician might yet 'restore law and order' against the Fascists rather than with them. This was unlikely, if only because there was no parliamentary majority for such a policy. In fact, after Giolitti's resignation in June 1921 there were three more Liberal governments, one led by the reformist Socialist Ivanoe Bonomi (June 1921 to February 1922), and two by Facta, a Giolittian (February to July, and July to October 1922). Both Bonomi and Facta were weak men, anxious only to compromise, and neither of them could ensure police or army loyalty in fighting Fascists.

In any case, there were no tough-minded Liberals around, except Salandra, Giolitti and (possibly) Orlando. Salandra showed little sign of activity or ambition, had little support in parliament and was not noticeably anti-Fascist anyway. Giolitti was the man who had brought the Fascists into parliament; and he had alienated the *Popolari* – in February 1922 Sturzo 'vetoed' his return to power. Orlando, the 'President of Victory', was still reasonably prestigious despite Versailles, but he had not been a tough Minister of the Interior in 1916–17 and there was no reason to suppose he would be any tougher in peacetime. The same argument applies to tough-minded police action. The squads might have been suppressed by the police and *carabinieri*, if strong orders had been issued to the Prefects, and if these orders had been believed. Giolitti and Bonomi issued the orders, but the Prefects did not believe them – after all, in national politics both men were trying to conciliate the Fascists, not repress them, and the Fascist candidates were on government lists at the 1921 elections. Only exceptional Prefects like Mori at Bologna were willing to risk acting on their own; and he was soon transferred. So, too, were other 'neutral' (i.e. not actively pro-Fascist) Prefects, especially in Tuscany. It was the Prefect's job to keep in with the local élites; and the local élites

sympathized with Fascism. Most policemen and judges, too, were well-disposed towards Fascist aims; the police had had to face all the demonstrations and riots of the Socialist years, and they welcomed their new allies.

The second possible threat to Mussolini was more serious. His followers might slip out of his control; even worse, they might desert him and go over to D'Annunzio. The crisis over the 'pact of pacification' had shown that this was a real possibility. D'Annunzio helped Mussolini out by being hostile to *squadrismo* – he called it 'agrarian slavery'[13] – and by posing as national peace-maker. There was not much point in the squad leaders going over to him; better the devil they knew. In any case, Mussolini had learned his lesson. After September 1921 he backed the squads, very loudly. Together they won some famous victories. They took over town after town in Northern Italy in the summer of 1922. The *Duce* was leading his troops again.

The opponents of Fascism helped Mussolini too. In January 1921 the Socialist party split, and thereafter Italy had a real Communist Party, sectarian and financed by 'Russian gold'. It was too small to be a threat, but its existence was excellent propaganda for the Fascists. Most of the Left-wing Socialists stayed in the PSI, and so the reformists were still outnumbered there and still unable to ally with 'bourgeois democrats' in defence of the Liberal regime. But the greatest boost of all to Mussolini came from outside the formal political parties. In the summer of 1921 anti-Fascist defence squads were formed, the *Arditi del Popolo*, mainly consisting of anarchists, syndicalists, Republicans and Socialists. This movement soon collapsed for want of money and arms, but it had frightened the bourgeoisie a little. And it left a legacy. An armed anti-Fascist struggle had been attempted, and had collapsed within a few weeks.

In July–August 1922 Mussolini's opponents helped him again. Some of the main trade union bodies – the anarcho-syndicalists of the Italian Syndical Union, the reformist Socialists in the CGL, the Railwaymen's Union, the Dockworkers – had formed an 'Alliance of Labour' in February, mainly to fight wage cuts and unemployment. The 'Alliance' had the benevolent backing of several political parties – the PSI, the Republicans, even the Communists and anarchists – but it was dominated by the reformist Socialists. On 31 July it called a 24-hour general strike, hoping to ensure that the new government then being formed would be anti-Fascist and contain reformist Socialist deputies. This was a disastrous error. The strike was not widely supported: only 800 of Fiat's 10,000 car workers came out, and Fascist volunteers kept public services running. It



discredited the CGL, and ensured that the reformist Socialists would *not* be in the next government; and it frightened respectable opinion yet again. The Fascists could pose, once more, as saviours of their country, their own thuggery forgiven if not forgotten.

After the 'Alliance of Labour' strike, the question was no longer whether the Fascists would come into government, but on what terms. The parliamentary manoeuvres of autumn 1922 were over this issue, as was the Fascists' violent pressure – their continuing murders, their seizure of provincial towns, the mass rally of 40,000 Fascists at Naples on 24 October, even the so-called 'March on Rome' on 27–28 October. Mussolini succeeded brilliantly, both in keeping up the morale of his supporters by militant action, and in confusing the politicians by offers of compromise. In early October, he was negotiating with Giolitti, among others, demanding four Cabinet posts in a new government. By mid-October Mussolini could insist on becoming Prime Minister himself, unless the politicians used force against the massed Fascists. The Facta government, still formally in office, was obviously reluctant to do so. But early on 28 October, after much hesitation, it finally asked the king to sign a decree establishing martial law (*'stato d'assedio'*).

The king, after initially agreeing, refused. Why? No one can be sure, but his military advisers seem to have told him that the army might not be willing to fire on Fascists. Marshal Diaz is reported to have said, in a splendid phrase, 'Your Majesty, the army will do its duty; however, it would be well not to put it to the test.'[14] The king may also have worried about his cousin, the Duke of Aosta, who was near the Fascist headquarters in Perugia and might have been hoping for the Crown. More probably he thought resistance was not worth it. Why risk a bloodthirsty civil war, when the only question was how many Fascist ministers were to be included in the next coalition government? And the Fascists had already taken over most of the country – the 'March on Rome' of 28 October was actually a successful 'March on the provincial capitals'. So the king refused to authorize martial law, and instead made one last effort to persuade Salandra to form a government. Salandra, realistically, refused. Two days later Mussolini arrived on the overnight sleeper from Milan, summoned by the king to form the new government.

Thus Mussolini did not really seize power. He did not, by 28 October, need to use force. He won by threatening to use it, and by having the squads ready to obey. Formally, he became Prime Minister constitutionally, appointed by the king; the 'March on Rome' happened afterwards, when hordes of Blackshirts were allowed to roam around the

capital exulting and rampaging in the rain. Mussolini won by being 'brought into the system' by a king and a governing élite that could see no other way of containing organized violence and recovering the Centre-North. Although it is right to stress the longer-term causes of his victory – the 'mutilated victory' of Versailles, agrarian class conflicts, ex-officers seeking social promotion, proportional representation and so forth – there was nothing inevitable about it. If there had been a 'respectable' conservative able to exploit anti-union sentiment in 1920–21, if Giolitti had not made Fascism respectable in May 1921, if the *Popolari* had not been so opposed to a new Giolitti government in February 1922, if the reformist Socialists had not called a general strike in August 1922, if Facta had resigned earlier in October, if Giolitti had been in Rome instead of Piedmont later in the month, or if the king had not been worried about his cousin, all might have been different. And the idea of 'absorbing' the Fascists into the Establishment, of allowing them a few posts in someone else's government, may have been ignoble but was not foolish. It might have worked – Mussolini himself recognized on 17 October that 'they would like to imprison me; joining a government would be the liquidation of Fascism'.[15] 'Absorbing' troublemakers is normally sound Italian politics; on this occasion it misfired, but the politicians cannot be blamed too harshly for trying it.

## 10.6 Mussolini as Prime Minister (October 1922 to April 1924)

On 28 October 1922 a new era of Italian history began – literally so, for the Fascist regime dated its documents thereafter from the March on Rome. But few people realized it at the time. Mussolini formed a coalition Cabinet – a 'National Government', as he called it – including himself and three Fascists in the key posts, but also including two *Popolari*, four Liberals of various types, a Nationalist (Federzoni) and three prestigious names – Marshal Diaz at the War Ministry, Admiral Thaon di Revel at the Admiralty and the philosopher Giovanni Gentile at Education. The talk was all of 'normalization' and restoring law and order. Mussolini even invited the CGL leader Baldesi to join his government, although opposition from the Fascist syndicates and from the Nationalists ensured that the offer was not taken up. Most observers welcomed this work of reconciliation. Gaetano Salvemini, who was to spend twenty years in exile fighting the Fascist regime, wrote in April 1923 that 'a return to Giolitti would be a moral disaster for the whole country. Mussolini was able to carry out his coup last October because everybody was disgusted by the Chamber.'[16] Similarly, a month after the March on Rome Anna Kuliscioff, a lifelong Socialist, wrote that she was looking forward to pacification and to the 'absorption' of the Fascists: 'the victory of a subversive bloc now would foment Fascist violence and would encourage them to maintain their armed squads'.[17] And few people supposed the new government would last long.



The main losers from the March on Rome were, in fact, the Fascist *squadristi*, numbering perhaps 100,000 by this time. Mussolini's government was far too parliamentary for their tastes. Its economic policy was depressingly orthodox, it was allied to the hated PPI (until April 1923), and Mussolini continued to intrigue with the even more hated CGL. In Rome, the career bureaucracy was still entrenched. Even at local level Prefects tried to keep some semblance of control. Had the revolution been betrayed? Where were the jobs for the boys?

Mussolini the squad-tamer had to answer these complaints somehow. His answer was brilliant. In January 1923 the Fascist Militia (MVSN) was formed, 'to defend the Fascist revolution'. The Militia was recruited from party members, usually ex-*squadristi*; it was paid out of public funds; and it was answerable directly to the *Duce*. Here was a marvellous way of ending undisciplined *squadrismo*. The Militia was designed to keep the rank and file squad members under control, and to make the *ras* impotent; it gave Mussolini a private army too. Of course, this was not achieved overnight. The Militia remained for several years a loose federation of local squads, run by local bosses, but at least it showed that the government was trying to control the hard men. Apart from that, the Militia had few functions. It guarded public buildings, and it allowed Fascists to parade around in uniforms; but its main purpose was to exist. It provided the *squadristi* with rewards, both in cash and in glamour. It was an outward and visible sign that the Fascist Revolution had succeeded – and that it was over.

Most important of all, the Fascist movement risked being taken over by the Establishment. The PNF had 300,000 members in October 1922; it had 783,000 by the end of 1923. A vast crowd of careerists and place-seekers threatened to swamp the old believers. And in February 1923 the Nationalist Association joined the PNF *en bloc*. This 'fusion' of two movements, which at local level often detested each other, transformed Fascism yet again. Luigi Salvatorelli called it, perhaps prematurely, 'the undeniable victory of the Nationalist spirit over the Fascist one'.[18] The Nationalists were monarchist, anti-Masonic and conservative. They had far more in

common with the old landowning élites and with the Roman bureaucracy than the Fascists did, and they soon dominated the Southern branches of the party. They provided able leaders; and they provided novel yet respectable ideas. 'Fusion' gave the Fascist Militia another 80,000 members, who had formerly been in the Nationalist paramilitary organization, the *'Sempre Pronti!'* That, too, helped to weaken Fascist *squadrismo*. Moreover, some of the old Fascists were expelled from the party, including even the boss of Naples, Padovani. De Vecchi of Turin was sent to Somalia. Mussolini seemed to be favouring 'revisionist' Fascists like Giuseppe Bottai, who argued that *squadrismo* had become anachronistic. To sugar the pill, the *Duce* set up a new Fascist body, the 'Grand Council'. Like the Militia, it did little – most political decisions were still taken by the government coalition – but it created a formal Fascist 'Cabinet', parallel to the constitutional one, and it gave the top Fascist bosses the opportunity to look important while the party beneath them was slowly transformed. The PNF was becoming respectable. It could be used already as a weapon against the *ras*; it might become the mass party of the bourgeoisie.

Mussolini's major political achievement in 1923 was also geared to this aim. In April the PPI Congress was very divided on the party remaining in the Fascist-led government, and ten days later Mussolini brusquely dismissed the *Popolari* ministers. Clearly the government's parliamentary majority was now at risk, so Mussolini immediately proposed a new electoral system. This was a shrewd move. Proportional representation was generally regarded as disastrous, except by Socialists and *Popolari*. Most Liberals wanted to return to single-member constituencies. The Fascists proposed a 'corrected' proportional system, in which the party grouping with the largest number of votes, provided it amounted to at least 25 per cent of the valid votes cast, would receive two-thirds of the parliamentary seats. This would ensure, in theory, a stable government majority. In practice it would mean that Mussolini could form a 'national bloc' of pro-government groups, and that the Liberals would be forced to climb on to his bandwagon. On the other hand, they would be elected; and so most of them supported the measure, however half-heartedly. The losers would be the Radicals and the more 'left-wing' Liberals (Nitti, Amendola, etc.), who had lost most of their influence already; and – above all – the PPI. Mussolini would no longer need its support. The PPI was confused and hopelessly split by this time, and the Vatican, clearly impressed by Mussolini's concessions on education, Freemasonry and the like (see §12.4), applied some delicate pressure. Most PPI deputies abstained in the vote on the electoral bill, and Sturzo resigned from the post of party secretary, 'by the Holy See's wish'.[19] The bill passed its second reading by 235 to 139; Giolitti, Salandra and Orlando all voted in favour. Mussolini's position seemed secure.



Soon came the elections, to consolidate it still further. In April 1924 the *'listone'* of approved candidates – Fascists, former Nationalists, right-wing Liberals including Salandra, Orlando and De Nicola, Agrarians, even a few *Popolari* – won 66.3 per cent of the valid votes, and was thus entitled to two-thirds of the seats anyway. Of the bloc's 374 victorious candidates, only about 220 – 60 per cent – were 'Fascists', and of course some of these had been Nationalists until the previous year. The government's success was particularly marked in the mainland South (81.5 per cent of the vote) and in Central Italy; in the North the bloc received less than the opposition. Yet the 'opposition' covered a huge range: the Giolittians (strictly speaking, not an 'opposition' at all, but 'parallel' to the government bloc), Amendola's 'constitutional list', Bonomi's Democrats, the *Popolari* (9.1 per cent of the vote), the Republicans, Matteotti's reformist Socialists (5.9 per cent), the PSI (down to 4.9 per cent) and the Communists (3.8 per cent). These parties had little in common, and they squabbled ceaselessly. Mussolini had, it seemed, succeeded in his aims. He had brought Fascism under control, and had made it respectable and parliamentary. He had destroyed and discredited the main opposition parties, especially the Socialists and Catholics. He had won over the Nationalists and right-wing Liberals to his cause, and allowed them influence and office. He was the hero of a grateful Establishment, and could look forward to a long dull reign.

## 10.7 The Matteotti crisis

But it was not to be. On 30 May Giacomo Matteotti, who had replaced Filippo Turati as leader of the reformist Socialists, spoke in parliament. He denounced the recent elections as a fraud and a sham. What he said was true: the 1924 elections had indeed been much worse than usual, and many opposition candidates had been beaten up or tortured. His speech was a conscious act of defiance, designed to discredit Mussolini's claims to respectability and 'normalization'. He may also have been trying to prevent the CGL leaders from coming to terms with the *Duce*. At any rate, he infuriated Mussolini, who was alleged to have told his personal gang of thugs (the so-called *'Cheka'*, set up in January) 'if you were not cowards, nobody would have the courage to make a speech like that'.[20] On 10 June Matteotti disappeared. Everyone assumed, rightly, that he had been murdered by Fascists. The main opposition parties walked out

of parliament in protest, and the Liberal press denounced both government and Fascist movement as assassins. The 'Matteotti crisis' had begun: Mussolini's 'Watergate'.

The immediate issue, as in Watergate, was one of complicity. Was Mussolini, or the Fascist government, or the Fascist movement, 'responsible' for Matteotti's death? Matteotti had been seized by Mussolini's hit-squad, led by Amerigo Dumini; Dumini was also assistant to Cesare Rossi at Mussolini's press office. Clearly the operation had been planned by men close to the centre of power – i.e. not by Fascist 'extremists', but by 'normalizers'. Was Mussolini's remark tantamount to an order to kill Matteotti, or beat him up? Did Mussolini have any later part in the plot, or in a cover-up? The long-term issue was political. If the Fascist thugs were rampant, if the Fascist government could not guarantee law and order after all, or if it was itself a criminal band of murderers, then it would obviously have to go. But how? It had just won a solid parliamentary majority, and its supporters were entrenched in office throughout the land.

As in the Watergate crisis, the government's chief enemy was the press. Amendola's *Il Mondo* and Albertini's *Corriere della Sera* thundered against the government, and their circulation rose alarmingly. Mussolini also had to worry about his Cabinet – four ministers offered their resignations, and some of the others were doubtful – and about the Liberal elder statesmen like Giolitti, Orlando and Salandra. These men remained in parliament. They might well influence the king, and the king might, constitutionally, dismiss the government. Even so, things could have been a lot worse for the *Duce*. There were a few popular protests and strikes after 10 June, but nothing serious: even for Matteotti's funeral there was only a ten-minute stoppage, in which the Fascist syndicates themselves joined. The general public seemed reluctant to blame the government. D'Annunzio remained silent, perhaps because he was about to sell his manuscripts to Mussolini for over 5 million lire. In the Chamber, the opposition parties had conveniently walked out – 'gone to the Aventine hill', to use the old Roman expression – so there was no chance of the government being overthrown by a parliamentary vote. This was a vital advantage, as Giolitti complained: 'Mussolini has all the luck: the opposition was always very troublesome to me, but with him it just walks out and leaves the field free.'[21] And the Senate voted on 26 June in favour of justice and pacification, by 225 to 21. Above all, the king stayed inactive. He failed to see how he could dismiss the government as long as it enjoyed a parliamentary majority, and the Senate's vote was a clear indication of Establishment views.



So Mussolini hung on to power. He refused to admit any complicity in the murder, he sacrificed some of his more unpopular henchmen, and he carried on 'normalizing'. A career Prefect, Crispo Moncada, became chief of police, and ex-Nationalists were given the key security jobs. Federzoni became Minister of the Interior, and Rocco Minister of Justice. Several other right-wing Liberals and monarchists were brought into the government; one of the king's former adjutants, General Clerici, became Under-secretary of War. Above all, the Fascist Militia was reorganized. In August it was 'brought into the Armed Forces', i.e. Militia members would henceforth be subject to military discipline, the officers would be ex-army regulars, and everybody would take an oath of loyalty to the king.

As time went on, the opposition's impotence became clearer. The Vatican implicitly supported the government, and ordered Sturzo into exile. The opposition parties continued to squabble. The 'Centre-Left' parties had a secret committee to co-ordinate the anti-Fascist struggle, but it had no arms, and it was also supposed to fight against the Communists if need be, as the Communists well knew. The Communists, in turn, saw the situation as 'going to the Right. This is very favourable to us. It helps even now to sow lack of confidence in the opposition parties among the proletariat and peasants and even some strata of the bourgeoisie.'[22] There was clearly no chance of any concerted opposition action against Mussolini.

Yet, once again, Mussolini's attempts at 'normalization' failed. They were all a bit too obvious. The *squadristi* were furious at the various conciliatory moves, and they greatly resented the press campaign against them. Why were such newspapers still allowed in Fascist Italy? In their view, it was the opposition parties that had acted illegally, even treasonably, by walking out of parliament. In September the Fascist deputy Casalini was murdered in Rome, and the *squadristi* became more furious still. Why should they suffer the opposition's moralizing over Matteotti, while their own men were being slaughtered with impunity? Thus the Matteotti crisis entered its second phase, that of squad reaction. The leading *ras* had learned to distrust Mussolini. They feared that they, too, might be called to account for their past crimes, as Matteotti's murderers had been. They also worried about the Militia. De Bono had resigned as commander in June, because of his involvement in the Matteotti murder; his successor Balbo had to resign in November, implicated in various other crimes. This time the new commander was an army general, Gandolfo, who promptly sacked all the regional commanders and replaced them with ex-army officers.

When parliament reopened on 12 November it soon became clear that, despite the opposition parties' absence, the government was in danger. The respectable conservatives, elected on the '*listone*' six months previously, were unhappy. Giolitti was anti-government, and his supporters voted against the Foreign Ministry budget. Orlando abstained on the Interior Ministry budget, and Salandra made a critical speech. Various industrialists and generals spoke up in the Senate, and on 5 December the Senate vote on the Interior budget showed fifty-four anti-government votes and thirty-five abstentions. This was a real blow to Mussolini, especially as the Minister of the Royal Household abstained. Orlando, in the Chamber, urged the king to take the situation in hand. On 20 December forty-four Fascist deputies, mainly from the South, met in the house of the ex-Nationalist paramilitary leader Paolucci and agreed to support 'normalization'. Mussolini tried to oblige. On 20 December he delighted the Liberals by producing a bill for returning to single-member constituencies, a gesture which also implied new elections fairly soon to resolve the crisis.

But 'normalization' still eluded him, if indeed he was still pursuing it. The day after Christmas Salandra resigned as president of the budget committee. The next day Cesare Rossi's 'memorandum' on the Matteotti affair (and other Fascist crimes) was published in the opposition press, and fully implicated Mussolini. On 30 December the Cabinet met, and the two Liberal ministers, Casati and Sarrocchi, urged it to resign. Meanwhile, back in the provinces the *ras* had decided to act. Now that Balbo had gone, how long would any of them keep their jobs in the Militia? They wanted their Militia to stay Fascist, and no more talk of pacification. Thirty-three of them visited Mussolini on 31 December, and demanded a 'real' Fascist regime at last; in Florence, the Fascists rioted. So Mussolini had little choice. He could not remain as 'constitutional' Prime Minister; 'normalization' had apparently failed. But he could still play the *squadrista* card. He was still, just about, the man who could tame the squads; or rather, by this time, the man who could unleash them. It was his last card, but it was a trump – provided he played it quickly before the squads got out of control.

And so Mussolini decided to stay on, as the unashamed *Duce* of Fascism. On 3 January 1925 he spoke to the Chamber of Deputies. The Fascist government, he claimed, had always sought peace and 'normality'. It was absurd to imagine that he had ordered Matteotti's murder. He had always acted legally – even in the previous six months the budgets had been regularly approved, the Militia had taken an oath to the king, and an electoral reform had been proposed. Alas, none of this statesmanship had made the slightest impression on the opposition. It had 'seceded' from parliament – itself an anti-constitutional and revolutionary act – and had continued its scurrilous and libellous press campaign. Mussolini was therefore reluctantly forced to take sterner measures. 'I now accept, I alone, full political and moral and historical responsibility for what has happened . . . if Fascism has been a criminal association, then I am the chief of this criminal association.'[23] Henceforth Italy would have a strong government, one that would not tolerate slanders or sedition; and with such a strong government, there would be no need to unleash the squads.



It was a masterpiece of ambiguity. Many people at the time, and many historians since, have taken his speech to mean that he accepted responsibility for Matteotti's murder; but that is not what he said. Indeed, he specifically denied any involvement in the murder. What he claimed responsibility for was Fascism. That greatly reassured the *ras*, who imagined that the government would now be more responsive to their wishes. But most of the old ruling class was also reassured. The squads were not, after all, to be unleashed, and it was the normal State machinery – Prefects, police, etc. – that would restore law and order. Mussolini had accused the opposition of unconstitutional behaviour, a reminder that the king and the Chamber were still backing him; respectable conservatives had every excuse for doing the same. Above all, Mussolini had seized the political initiative. He could now make serious moves against the opposition parties and their newspapers. He had survived his Watergate.

His victory, once again, owed much to the militant squads and to their power in the provinces; and, once again, it owed much to the king's unwillingness to use the army against the Fascists. Yet, once again, it was not inevitable. If the opposition parties had been present in the Chamber, especially in November–December, or if the Rossi memorandum had not been published when it was (on 27 December, a foolish time because nothing could be done about it over the holiday period), or if General Gandolfo had not dismissed the Militia commanders, or if the Militia 'consuls' had not conveniently put pressure on in late December, or if the elder statesmen – especially Salandra – had shown more initiative, then Mussolini might have fallen. On 30 December Casati and Sarrocchi had expected the Ministers of War and Navy to support their call for Cabinet resignation; but they did not. The king had decided, and Mussolini was safe. Italian politicians learned another lesson, which they have never forgotten: in a crisis, it makes a great deal of difference who is Head of State.

CHAPTER 11

# The Fascist State: the new authoritarianism

Mussolini's speech of 3 January 1925 was not merely the end of the Matteotti crisis. It was also a foretaste of things to come. He had made three main promises, or threats. He had promised that press freedom would be curbed and that the opposition parties would be disciplined; he had promised a 'strong State'; and he had promised that the Fascist squads would not be unleashed. So the outlines of a new 'regime' were already discernible. It would be illiberal and authoritarian, but it would not be fully 'Fascist' – although naturally some face-saving concessions would be given to the Fascist enthusiasts. It would strengthen the institutions of High Politics; and it would do its best to abolish the trivial concerns of Low Politics.

## 11.1 The defeat of the opposition

Mussolini's first aim, to curb the opposition, was achieved with remarkably little fuss or protest. The two Liberal ministers, Casati and Sarrocchi, resigned after the 3 January speech, as did Salandra from his post as head of the Italian delegation to the League of Nations. But the two Service ministers, General Di Giorgio and Admiral Thaon di Revel, continued in office, symbols of royal favour, and that reassured the conservatives. The Minister of the Interior, Federzoni, ordered wholesale police raids on party offices, and over 100 people were arrested; but the main target was not the 'official' opposition parties, but the Radical-Republican '*Italia Libera*', a small, recently founded, specifically anti-Fascist network of local clandestine groups. That was reassuring too. '*Italia Libera*' was dispensable, especially as dissolving it could be portrayed as necessary to restrain the Fascists. So the main opposition parties continued to exist, and to hope for



royal intervention or for new elections. They did nothing very much in 1925, except to issue a futile appeal to the king and to squabble among themselves.

Soon they lost their main weapon, the press. Mussolini, ever the professional journalist, had decided to run the newspapers himself. The government tightened up press censorship immediately after 3 January, and unflattering papers were regularly seized. In 1925 the leading Liberal journals were brought under government control. There was no need for a set battle, for newspaper proprietors, like other industrialists, knew they could not afford to quarrel with the government. They simply replaced offending editors: Luigi Albertini was dismissed as editor of the *Corriere della Sera*, and Senator Frassati lost his post at *La Stampa*. Some newspapers changed hands completely – in Naples, *Il Mattino* was bought up, in order to be rid of its owner-editors, the Scarfoglio brothers; but this was unusual. Normally the whole process was smooth and legal. If all else failed, there was always the closed shop. The Press Law of December 1925 laid down that only registered journalists could write for the papers; and the Fascists ran the register. Editors and journalists knew that they held their jobs on sufferance, and that Mussolini read the papers every day. Only the strictly party newspapers – the Communists' *L'Unità*, the Socialists' *Avanti!* and so forth – provided alternative viewpoints (until November 1926), and even they were rigorously censored and available only in the big cities.

Without king or the main newspapers, and cut off from the Chamber, the opposition parties were helpless. They were not so much attacked as allowed to fade away. Soon their deputies began trying to re-enter the Chamber, only to be repulsed – except, curiously enough, for the Communists, who had made a symbolic reappearance in parliament as early as November 1924. The Socialists had split into several squabbling groups, and their trade unions were still trying to come to terms with Mussolini; the *Popolari* struggled on, but by 1925 the Vatican had obviously abandoned them. The Nationalists had joined forces with Fascism, as did many right-wing Liberals in 1925–26. A few courageous Radical or Republican groups, such as Giovanni Amendola's Unione Democratica Nazionale, survived but had little influence. Inasmuch as a focus of opposition remained, it was the Senate. Senators were appointed by the king, and could not be purged without a direct challenge to the Crown. So the Senate held up Mussolini's press law and other illiberal measures in 1925, and for many years individual Senators like Benedetto Croce could speak their minds and influence the young. But that was all. There was no other

political outlet. Even the traditional ways of influencing governments, through local administration and/or Masonic lodges, were closed. Elected mayors were replaced by appointed '*podestà*'; local councils by consultative bodies; and the Masons, many of whom had been prominent anti-Fascists during the Matteotti crisis, were banned, like all other secret societies, in 1925.

When normal political activity is denied, men turn to abnormal means. Despair of the opposition ever doing anything led a respected reformist Socialist deputy and war hero, Zaniboni, to try to kill Mussolini in November 1925 – a serious plot which might well have succeeded. There were three other attempts in 1926, and all brought the government more sympathy. After the last, allegedly by a 16-year-old Bolognese anarchist named Zamboni, the government seized its chance. Amid a clamour for law and order, it withdrew all passports, banned all opposition parties and their journals, declared that the mandate of opposition deputies had expired (so they lost their parliamentary immunity) and set up a 'special tribunal' to repress anti-Fascist activity. Few people minded much. The Prefects reported that the ban on opposition was 'greeted with relief' as being 'severe but just',[1] and in any case the parties had been dormant for at least a year already, as had the press and the Chamber. Thus the classic Liberal institutions of informed public opinion were brought down. 'Public opinion' henceforth would be what the government said it was: the newspapers, like the radio, would be under the 'Great Editor'.

## 11.2 The strong State

Mussolini's second promise on 3 January had been to strengthen the traditional machinery of High Politics. This presented even fewer problems. The repression of 1925–26 was repression by the police and the courts, both subject to conservative ex-Nationalist Ministers: Federzoni at the Interior and Rocco at the Ministry of Justice. From November 1926 the police were allowed, once again, to banish suspected persons to remote provinces or Southern islands; this '*confino*' was used quite extensively against minor anti-Fascists and rumour-mongers as well as against ordinary criminals. It had unexpected consequences. Northern intellectuals found themselves in the South for the first time, and were shocked by what they saw; the Fascist '*confino*' contributed much to public awareness of the Southern problem after 1945. Otherwise the police continued in their customary manner, scrutinizing the usual 'subversives', organizing networks of informers and investigating the sexual or financial peccadillos



of the Fascists themselves. Sometimes other iniquities were found, like a Masonic past or a shocking plagiarism – Farinacci, for example, was discovered to have cribbed the thesis for his law degree at the University of Modena word for word from someone in Turin.[2]

Admittedly police activity was on a much larger scale than previously. Renzo De Felice found that in a typical week the political police alone would carry out 20,000 'visits', searches, arrests, seizures of literature, etc.[3] The secret funds were greatly increased, and 500 plain-clothes men (the 'applause squad') were assigned to surround Mussolini on public occasions. But policing remained in traditional hands. Mussolini's chief of police from 1926 to 1940, Arturo Bocchini, was a career Prefect, as was his successor Carmine Senise. Both men were intensely suspicious of the provincial Fascists, and both prevented the Fascist Militia's attempts to found an effective rival political police force. This was an important achievement, which greatly affected the whole nature of the Fascist regime. There was no SS in Italy, and very few political appointments to top police jobs. But, as so often in politics, reality was disguised by rhetoric. In December 1930 Mussolini suddenly announced that the 'OVRA' had made important arrests. Nobody knew what the initials stood for. Most Italians assumed there was a new secret police. In fact, the OVRA was mainly the traditional secret branch of the Ministry of the Interior, but using more informers than previously, and structured on a wider base (eleven zones) than the provinces. In the absence of a free press, the secret policemen were the only people in Italy who knew what was going on – and Bocchini was the only man in Italy who dared tell Mussolini.

As for the courts, the only real innovation was the 'Special Tribunal for the Defence of the State', set up in November 1926 to try terrorists and other political criminals. The tribunal was run by Militia consuls presided over by military judges, and it applied military law. It could, but rarely did, inflict the death penalty – there were twenty-six executions up to the fall of the Fascist regime in 1943, including nine in the fourteen peacetime years. Usually it imposed prison sentences or '*confino*'. Its most famous victim was the Communist leader Antonio Gramsci, who was sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment. Once again, the result of Fascist policy was paradoxical. The ordinary courts had nothing to do with political offences. So, although they may not have protected the citizen or defended civil liberties, they did not become servile instruments of the Fascist regime. The legal system remained unchanged and 'unFascist' – although admittedly no more independent of the executive than before 1922. Judges simply joined the party, and kept their jobs. And Rocco's new penal code in 1931 was

far from 'Fascist' in tone: most of its provisions emerged from pre-Fascist discussions, and remained in force for many years after 1945.

Another vital institution to be placated was the army, which in early 1925 was restive: not about the nascent Fascist regime, needless to say, but over the government's anti-Masonic campaign and in particular over the Minister of War's plans to cut down its size. In April 1925 Mussolini bowed to the inevitable, and gave in. The Minister of War was dismissed, Mussolini took on the post himself, and new army regulations were pushed through the following year – basically the old structure, the 'garrison army', restored. Mussolini also became Navy Minister in May 1925, and Air Minister in August. This sounded impressive, but even the *Duce* could not do all the work himself. In practice the three Armed Forces were run henceforth by the under-secretaries, who were nearly always generals or admirals. There was not much 'Fascistization' – as late as December 1940 the Ministry of War was still trying to get army officers to join the party[4] – but equally there was not much planning or efficiency. Each branch continued to go its own way, despite Marshal Badoglio's fitful efforts, as chief of the general staff, to co-ordinate them. Badoglio was also Governor of Libya until 1934, which hardly improved matters. The army, navy and air force each prepared for a different war, or rather for no war at all. Generals and admirals proliferated; arms – especially tanks – were neglected. Mussolini's attitude to the services was shown best in 1933. He sacked Italo Balbo from the Air Ministry, and wrote to him saying that there were only 911 serviceable planes instead of the 3,125 that Balbo had claimed: 'I add immediately that I consider this number satisfactory.'[5] Mussolini did not care about efficiency, but he did care about Balbo becoming too popular or troublesome, and the fact that the air force was at less than one-third strength was a useful political weapon against him. In the long run the Fascist settlement proved disastrous; but it maintained the jobs of career officers, and it ensured their support for the regime. In one respect only did the Fascists undermine the army's role: troops were no longer needed to maintain order against strikers or rioters. This innovation, too, helped the officers enjoy a quiet life.

The 1925 law on 'secret associations' affected the civil service too, for Freemasons were supposed to be dismissed. Civil servants could also be dismissed if they were 'in conditions of incompatibility with the general political directives of the government'. Mussolini's much vaunted 'purge of the bureaucracy' went little further. He had come to power pledged to reduce the swollen wartime civil service, but most of the cuts were in 1922–24, when the number of ministries was reduced from fifteen to



eleven and when 50,000 railwaymen were sacked. After 1925 civil servants kept their old jobs, and apart from Masonry kept their old practices. In January 1926 the government tried to prevent them issuing statutory instruments with the force of law, but inasmuch as the new rules made any difference at all, they probably strengthened the real powers of senior civil servants. So, too, did Mussolini's habit of accumulating ministries. He ran eight ministries himself by 1929, quite apart from the fact that as Head of Government he had assumed, in December 1925, many of the powers previously exercised by the whole Cabinet. Fascist government was centralized government, and one man was supposed to be responsible for virtually everything. Other ministers came and went at frequent intervals, and counted for little; there was minimal scrutiny by parliament or press. In such circumstances the bureaucracy flourished. In the 1930s it began expanding again, and by 1939 there were fifteen ministries once more. Most of the top administrative posts were held by career civil servants, not party men. Even in characteristically 'Fascist' ministries like the Ministry of Corporations all the senior staff in 1938 had been civil servants since 1916.[6] Naturally they joined the party, but they remained civil servants first and foremost. Many Fascists disliked this outcome. There was much party pressure for 'a new Fascist State', or at least for more jobs for the faithful, but only in 1939 did the Fascists begin appointing civil servants 'for political reasons'. Other institutions existed, after all, to keep the Fascists happy – the Militia, for example, or the *party* bureaucracy, or the syndicates and corporations.

In the early years there was pressure of a different kind, for a streamlined civil service, more able to administer efficiently the new industrial State. These suggestions were also ignored. When De'Stefani presented proposals on these lines in March 1929, Mussolini pointed out that 'we have to adopt a policy of the maximum number of jobs in the State bureaucracy, if we don't want an insurrection on our hands – an insurrection caused by the hunger, I repeat hunger, of intellectuals'.[7] In the 1930s, pressure for jobs became greater, and the State became far more involved in detailed economic intervention and welfare. The existing civil service avoided any major changes in its own structure by off-loading the new tasks on to public and semi-public agencies or 'quangos'. These new bodies provided not only the necessary regulations, but also jobs for needy Fascists. This was a happy outcome, for it kept the ministries themselves safe; and the State needed a permanent, non-political executive.

Even most of the Prefects, always the most 'political' branch of the civil service, were career civil servants. Only 29 of the 86 new Prefects

appointed between 1922 and 1929 came from outside the Prefectoral Corps. This proportion was maintained in later years: 37 of the 117 Prefects in office in 1943 were political appointments. Their powers remained as wide as ever. In 1927 Mussolini stressed this point in a well-publicized circular:

*I reaffirm solemnly that the Prefect is the highest State authority in each province. He is the direct representative of the central government. All citizens, and especially those who have the great privilege and honour to be Fascist party members, owe respect and obedience to* the highest political representative of the Fascist regime *[my emphasis].*[8]

Mussolini needed the Prefects in the early years to suppress *squadrismo* and to control the provincial Fascist leaders, so he insisted that there could be no dual authority in the provinces. He also increased the number of Prefects (from 78 in 1923 to 100 in December 1926) and the number of provinces (from 69 to 91); two more provinces, Littoria and Asti, were created in 1934–35. The Prefect's job was to organize the police, to repress the 'subversives', to defend the regime and to watch over the 'social and intellectual order' of the province. Most Prefects performed their task admirably. The Prefect, not the party secretary, was in charge of the province, at least in principle. Later on, once the *ras* had been tamed, party secretaries were given more latitude, especially in labour relations and in dispensing patronage. Even so, the Prefects were usually dominant, and indeed they had an easier time in the Fascist period than ever before. There were no elections to worry about, nor was there significant labour militancy to curb. The Prefects enjoyed government confidence and support; they controlled and spied on the local Fascist party branches.

They also had far more control over local government, as part of the general programme of increased central authority. All local councils were dissolved in 1926, and mayors were dismissed. Thereafter the municipalities (*comuni*) were run by one man, the *podestà*, sometimes helped by a purely consultative appointed council. The *podestà* was appointed by the Prefect; he could be dismissed at any time by the Prefect; and he could be transferred to another *comune* by the Prefect. The Prefect's main task – a difficult one – was to find a reliable *podestà*. In the South, they usually chose elderly conservative gentlemen, especially landowners or ex-army officers; Fascist enthusiasts were not suitable, and local lawyers even less. In Tuscany, however, the *podestà* was often a local aristocrat: the Fascist 'reform' simply meant that the Tuscan nobility regained control



of local government. In the North, too, local landowners predominated, but 'strangers' were often brought in when the favouritism and corruption became too blatant; again, retired colonels were ideal, having plenty of free time and needing no pay. Rome was given a Governor, usually an aristocrat – a Borghese, a Colonna, a Boncompagni Ludovisi – responsible directly to the Ministry of the Interior. Altogether, the *podestà* were typical of the new 'strong State'. Although party members, they were rarely 'Fascists'; their job, indeed, was to prevent control of local government by the real Fascists. They were the old ruling class, watched jealously, as of old, by the Prefect. But they were in office only because elections had been abolished. That was the real meaning of the 'Fascist State'.

## 11.3 The defeat of the Fascists?

Mussolini's third promise on 3 January 1925 had been not to unleash the squads. He would tame Fascist violence, while governing through the normal machinery of State. Many of the measures just described were in fact aimed largely at the Fascists themselves. It was, after all, the *Fascist* deputies who dominated the Chamber and who, therefore, suffered most as parliament was emasculated; and the local Fascists would have run local government, had it not been for the *podestà* and the Prefects. Mussolini had 'assumed full responsibility' for the Fascist movement; this was a threat to the Fascists as well as to others.

The Fascist National Party (PNF) in early 1925 was still a loose organization, in which various factions contended. The local bosses enjoyed considerable autonomy and power, as they had proved in December 1924. How could they be tamed, without provoking another rebellion? Mussolini's solution was imaginative. In February 1925 he appointed the most intransigent *ras* he could find, the '*Fascistissimo*' Roberto Farinacci of Cremona, to be party secretary. Farinacci was an ideal front man. Many provincial bosses regarded him as their spokesman. He had a reputation for ruthlessness and extremism, which he enhanced in 1925–26 by acting as flamboyant defence counsel in the trial of Matteotti's murderers, and by loudly proclaiming that he had a secret list of 8,000 Freemasons in government jobs. He frightened many conservatives, so that Mussolini by contrast appeared the soul of moderation. And he was a political innocent. He thought his job was to create an effective and disciplined Fascist party, which would impose its will on the old conservative ruling class; but his real functions were firstly to reassure the *ras*, and secondly to discredit them by his behaviour.

For much of 1925 Farinacci was allowed a fairly free hand. He imposed tough discipline, cracking down hard on dissenters, purging many members – including six deputies – and even expelling two of the leading Militia 'consuls', Galbiati and Tarabella. Yet he tolerated, even encouraged, squad violence in the provinces, especially when directed against Catholics and *Popolari*, and there were bitter rows between him and the Minister of the Interior, Federzoni. In October, when Fascist squads killed eight Liberals and Masons in Florence 'in front of the tourists', Mussolini at last intervened. Yet again he ordered the squads to be dissolved; any squad members would henceforth be expelled from the party. The Florence *fascio* was ruthlessly purged. Six months later, once the Matteotti trial was safely over, and once the 'constitutional' laws were safely through parliament, Farinacci was dismissed and banished to Cremona without a job. He languished there for almost a decade, watched carefully by the police and writing occasional letters of frustrated recrimination to Mussolini. The news of his dismissal was greeted by considerable disturbances: the Fascist intransigents realized that the days when they could lord it over the old ruling class were over.

The new party secretary was Augusto Turati, dull but reliable. Under him the PNF was transformed into a tool of Mussolini's personal policies. In January 1926 the Grand Council had decided to allow in new members, and membership figures rose in a year from just under 600,000 to 938,000. Most of the recruits were prudent men who could see where the best hopes of advancement lay. This in itself changed the party's nature. The process continued in later years. No new members were admitted between 1927 and 1932 except from the youth organizations, but in 1933 another influx brought the party up to over 1,400,000 members – a 40 per cent increase in one year. It almost doubled again in the next few years, reaching 2,633,000 by 1939, not counting the women or youth organizations. As new men came in, so older and more intransigent Fascists left or were thrown out; 7,400 were expelled between April and September 1926, and the purge gathered momentum later. Probably 50,000–60,000 members had been expelled by March 1929, and a further 100,000–110,000 had left voluntarily. In 1927 7,000 people were expelled from the Rome *fascio* alone. A further major purge took place under Turati's successor, Giuriati, in 1931–32; possibly 120,000 members were then expelled. No doubt many ex-*squadristi* remained, disgruntled but still loyal to their *Duce*. Nevertheless, by 1928 the PNF was no longer a Fascist vanguard, merely a new and much-extended 'Freemasonry' based on patronage: the initials PNF were jokingly read as '*per necessità famigliari*', 'for family reasons'.



A high proportion of the members, even in October 1927, were clerks and white-collar workers in local government or minor public employment.[9] For these groups membership was semi-compulsory, and became fully compulsory in 1933. Party secretaries, even at provincial level, also came from the lower middle class, but real influence often remained in the hands of the same local notables who had flourished in the pre-Fascist era. At Verona, for example, the Fascist federation was not merely purged, but actually dissolved for some time, and when it was refounded there were no public jobs for anyone unless he joined the party; but the real bosses remained the *comune* councillors, 'coming from the old cliques, more clerical than the Pope, pupils of General Pelloux. They run things from outside, via the Prefect.'[10] In the South, where many *fasci* were founded for the first time in 1926, this tendency was even more marked. Job-seekers and local employees formed the mass membership; landowners, Freemasonic and formerly Liberal, provided the leadership. The jibe that the PNF consisted of 'the old ruling class in black shirts' was fully justified in many areas.

The changes in the PNF were not of membership alone. The Fascist provincial press was virtually suppressed; and in October 1926 the party itself was given a new Statute, or Constitution. The elective principle was abandoned. Henceforth all posts were filled by appointment from above. The Grand Council was termed the 'supreme organ of Fascism' and was empowered to appoint the national Directorate; federal secretaries, at province level, were to be appointed by the general secretary; secretaries of individual *fasci* would be appointed by the federal secretaries. Local and provincial congresses were abolished. So the ordinary party members, whether old or new, had no way of influencing policy-making. The party became a mere supporting organization. Its members paid dues, secured their meal tickets and (sometimes) furthered their careers, but their political role was restricted to showing 'moral leadership' and mouthing the correct slogans on request.

Perhaps the process even went too far. The PNF was not just tamed, it was emasculated. The last party congress ever held was in 1925. From 1931 to 1939 the party secretary was Achille Starace, a notoriously stupid man who was the butt of many jokes. With him in charge, the problem was to find something for the party to do. The party failed to influence policy, failed to form a new élite, failed to inspire the young or reassure the old. At local level, true, its leaders sometimes enjoyed considerable patronage and influence – which they fully abused. They were not punished for their misdemeanours, for that would have meant admitting that Fascism

had not restored hard work, patriotism and morality after all. So corruption soon became endemic. The Fascist party secretaries, linked to the national headquarters in Rome and dispensing favours in return for political support, were often tiresome local bullies, but at least they were little more.

What was true for the party was also true for the Militia. The Militia had been brought under greater army control in August 1924, much to the annoyance of the consuls (see §10.7). In September 1925 General Gonzaga, a career soldier, was made commander of the Militia. By late 1926 the fight against the consuls and against the ex-*squadristi* had been largely won. The Militia remained in being, disciplining restless Fascist youths and providing an employment outlet for retired army officers; but its members had less and less to do. They provided some pre-military training for young people, they tried to muscle in on the work of the police, and they organized parades on Sundays. That was all. With the rapid decline in organized opposition, the squads were indeed anachronistic. Mussolini's reliance on the *State* machinery of repression ensured that the voluntary Militia was left as the army's appendix – quite useless but occasionally troublesome.

In December 1928 the party's 'supreme organ', the Grand Council, was 'constitutionalized'. Henceforth it would consist almost exclusively of ministers or holders of top State jobs – Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, etc. Above all, it would advise on constitutional issues, including the succession to the throne, the composition and functions of parliament, relations with the Vatican and so forth. It was also supposed to draw up a list of names of possible heads of government, to be submitted to the king in case of vacancy. In principle, this law struck at the heart of the old Constitution. It limited many of the Crown's prerogatives, including that of nominating future Prime Ministers, and it even threatened to prevent the normal succession to the throne (the heir-apparent, Prince Humbert, was widely believed to have anti-Fascist sympathies). In practice, its effect was limited. Mussolini was far too astute to draw up a list of his own successors. In any case, the Grand Council could not 'advise' unless it met, and Mussolini convened it irregularly at best and, in later years, rarely. The new law was probably passed to ensure that the king did not obstruct Mussolini's 'reconciliation' with the Holy See (see §12.4), a settlement which involved him giving up a small piece of territory in Rome. It was certainly a public humiliation for the Crown, but what it really symbolized was the 'fusion' of party and State.



## 11.4 Summary

Between 3 January 1925 and December 1928 the Italian State had been transformed. It had not been 'Fascistized'. The intransigent provincial Fascists were a spent force by November 1926, with their leader Farinacci isolated at Cremona. Nevertheless, an authoritarian regime had been set up, with an authoritarian slogan – 'Everything within the State, Nothing outside the State, Nothing against the State'. It was based essentially on the old bureaucratic-military ruling class, and designed to protect that class from the new political and economic forces that had arisen during the Giolittian period and/or the First World War – organized industrial labour, militant agricultural labour, political Catholicism, and indeed Fascism itself. New organizations, like the Fascist Militia or the syndicates, were set up to absorb or control the 'new forces'; or, in the later years of the regime, to protect established economic interests. But the important institutions of the new State were the old traditional ones writ large – the army, the Prefects, the police and the courts. Most of the old institutions survived, despite all the talk of revolution. The Chamber of Deputies, although transformed in membership, was still needed to pass laws; the Senate remained untouched, as always a forum for respectable opinion. In 1932 there were 148 Senators who were not members of the PNF; even in 1942 there were still 34 left, and many others were 'Fascist' only in name. Above all, Italy was still a monarchy. When Mussolini died, it would be the king who would decide the future government, and everyone knew it. Admittedly some features of the old Liberal State, e.g. political parties and elected town councils, were abolished, but even this affected fewer members of the old ruling classes than might be imagined. The interests of the 'Great Electors' continued to be protected; local government remained largely in the same hands as before 1920.

Yet the new political system was not simply the old regime in more authoritarian form. The loss of certain traditional (or not so traditional) liberties – a free press, free speech, free association, etc. – was not trivial, and certainly hurt many members of Italy's former élite: the respectable Liberal anti-Fascists of the Aventine, and the Freemasons, were the great losers of 1925–26. The price may have been worth paying if it secured law and order, political stability and maintenance of privilege; but it was still a high price. Moreover, Mussolini was always setting up new institutions and adopting new policies – the battles for wheat and for births, the corporations and the labour tribunals, the youth movements and the *Dopolavoro*, the welfare schemes and the 'reform of customs' (see Chs 12

and 13). Many existing State institutions were left largely unchanged, but that is not necessarily proof of continuity of policy. The Fascist government was always innovating, always invading new areas of society and indeed new areas of the world.

Another major weakness of the new system, from the point of view of its beneficiaries, was the excessive personal power of the *Duce* himself. What if he betrayed, or misjudged, their interests? In fact, Mussolini proved to be a rotten manager. He had a lively journalistic intelligence, but he was impulsive. He over-simplified and dramatized everything, and had no patience for prosaic long-term planning. He was also distressingly vulgar and vulnerable to flattery. Corruption and incompetence were tolerated, even encouraged. Intensely suspicious of rivals, he dismissed most of his more competent subordinates – Rossoni in 1928, Turati in 1930, Grandi, Rocco and Bottai in 1932, Arpinati in 1933; even Balbo was banished to be Governor of Libya in 1934. These men were replaced by mediocrities or intriguers – in the 1930s Starace was head of the PNF, Buffarini Guidi was running the Ministry of the Interior, Ciano was Foreign Minister. Worst of all, he deliberately isolated himself. Mussolini had no confidants after his brother Arnaldo died in 1931; he had no friends, and no social life except with his mistresses. He could not even enjoy a decent meal, for after his ulcer in 1925 the doctors had forbidden virtually all food: the *Duce* lived off sugared milk and fruit. He worked long hours, but to little purpose. Much of his time was spent reading newspapers, or deciding trivial questions like when the Rome policemen should wear their summer uniforms. His initial, M, was needed on every document, and it was rarely refused. Senior civil servants and ministers pursued their own policies, often quite contradictory to those of their rivals, and each of them would produce an initialled paper from the *Duce* in order to overcome his colleagues' opposition. The Council of Ministers met only once a month, and even then did not co-ordinate policy. Perhaps Mussolini had grown bored; perhaps he was simply too contemptuous of arguments and of men to take any of them seriously; or perhaps it was a deliberate device to keep everyone dependent on him. At any rate, it was no way to run a country.

There was one consolation. Mussolini's was a 'Roman Dictatorship'; it would not survive him. The chief of police thought the regime would collapse immediately on Mussolini's death. Federzoni, Farinacci and most anti-Fascists agreed on this, if on nothing else. The king and the army also realized that the regime would not last: the king had appointed Mussolini to be Prime Minister in 1922, and what he had given he could take away. The Vatican prepared quietly for a future post-Fascist regime. Fascist or anti-Fascist, conservative or progressive, they all bided their time, and waited for the end.



## Notes

1 R. De Felice, 'La situazione dei partiti antifascisti alla vigilia della loro soppressione secondo la polizia fascista', *Rivista Storica del Socialismo*, 25–26, a. viii (1965), 79–96.

2 *ACS*, Seg. Part. del Duce, Cart. Ris., b. 37, sottof. 2.

3 R. De Felice, *Mussolini il Duce*, i (Turin, 1974), p. 83.

4 Circular of Minister of War, 3 Dec. 1940, in *ACS*, Fondo Primo Aiutante S.M. il Re, sez. spec., f. 67.

5 Letter of 12 Nov. 1933, quoted by G. Rochat in G. Quazza (ed.), *Fascismo e Società Italiana* (Turin, 1973), p. 108.

6 Taylor Cole, 'Italy's Fascist Bureaucracy', *American Political Science Review*, xxxii (1938), 1143–57.

7 A. De'Stefani, *Una Riforma al Rogo* (Rome, 1963), p. 12.

8 Circular of 5 Jan. 1927, in A. Aquarone, *L'Organizzazione dello Stato Totalitario* (Turin, 1965), pp. 485–88.

9 S. Tranquilli, 'Elementi per uno studio del PNF', *Lo Stato Operaio*, i (1927), no. 8, 875–90.

10 Ibid., p. 882. Cf. A. Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power* (London, 1973), pp. 303–05.

CHAPTER 12

# The Fascist regime: the quest for consensus

In the previous chapter I outlined the main features of the new 'Fascist State', stressing – perhaps overstressing – the undeniable continuity of many institutions. But, equally undeniably, the Fascists did not merely form a government. They claimed to have set up a 'regime'; and the regime was, or purported to be, 'totalitarian', affecting every aspect of ordinary people's lives. The Fascists also preached an ideology of national solidarity and individual self-sacrifice, and tried to train a new generation of true believers in patriotism and war. This chapter will examine how far their policies were successful.

## 12.1 Ideology and indoctrination

There were many strands in Fascist thought. The syndicalists, revolutionary and anti-capitalist, were anxious to build a new kind of 'producers' State' (see below, §12.2). The provincial radicals, populist and impatient, yearned to sweep away Church, king and parliament. There were spiritual revivalists, preaching national pride and a 'new Rome'; and there were ex-Nationalists, royalist and anti-democratic, drawing up blueprints for a strong State and a planned economy. The various groups disagreed with each other violently over such matters as corporatism, or the Church, or the powers of old élites; but uniting most of them was an urge to be in the avant-garde in all spheres, and an urge to rescue Italy from foreign domination. Fascists knew whom they were against: Bolsheviks, Freemasons, international bankers – anybody, in short, engaged in a secret conspiracy against the nation. These ideas were mainly a legacy from pre-war days, especially from the Nationalists and Futurists (see §8.5), and indeed from the war itself. The Fascists may not have had a coherent doctrine, but they



had a powerful one. They had won the war, and vanquished the Bolsheviks after it; they had built a new State and a new economy, the envy of the world; they were the new élite, vigorous in mind and body. They would spread civilization and order throughout the Mediterranean and North Africa, as their Roman forefathers had done. Admittedly there were also conservative, clerical or 'rural' elements in Fascist doctrine, but even these were perfectly compatible with nationalism, Empire and 'Roman-ness' (*romanità*). Indeed, this cult of ancient Rome was perhaps the most striking feature of the regime. The word '*Duce*' itself came from *Dux*; the *Fasci* were, of course, the Roman symbols of office; the Militia and the youth organizations all had a pseudo-Roman hierarchy and titles – legions, cohorts, centurions and so forth.

Furthermore, this ideology was not just for Fascists. To achieve their noble purpose, the Fascists had to 'mobilize' every Italian to the cause. 'The thoughts and wishes of the *Duce* must become the thoughts and wishes of the masses', wrote Gentile.[1] Theirs was a mass regime, founded on war: 'real' Italy had vanquished 'legal' Italy, in 1922 as in 1915. The Fascists never forgot their orgins. Mussolini 'considered the whole nation in a permanent state of war';[2] and so the morale and fighting spirit of the masses had to be constantly maintained.

They had numerous instruments to hand. The press, for example, was not merely censored, but primed. Government subsidies were increased, in return for fulsome praise of the regime. Despite his militarism, Mussolini always believed the pen was mightier than the sword. His press office sent out detailed instructions on what to print and how to print it – 'the *Duce*'s speech may be commented upon. We will send on the comment ourselves.' Hence the relentless Fascist rhetoric: the 'unsleeping' *Duce*, his 'masculine profile forged in bronze', marched 'audaciously' at the head of his invincible legions. Foreign words were Italianized – 'cocktail' became '*coda di gallo*' – and even the word *Mezzogiorno* was banned, as too redolent of the 'Southern question'. Reports of crime, or suicide, or traffic accidents, disappeared from the newspapers. Nothing was allowed to disturb the national harmony.

Yet the result was emasculation rather than indoctrination. Educated Italians continued to read their old familiar newspapers rather than Fascist ones – in 1933 the *Corriere della Sera* had a circulation of over 600,000, compared with the *Popolo d'Italia*'s 100,000. The government concentrated on other means of persuasion – youth movements, recreation schemes, syndicates (see below, §12.2) – rather than on mass propaganda. It also 'took over' one or two worthy bodies like the Dante Alighieri

Society; and it founded both a National Fascist Institute of Culture and a Royal Italian Academy, on the French model, to mobilize or flatter the intellectuals. Few people took much notice. In 1935, however, things became more serious. The press office became an under-secretariat for press and propaganda, and in 1937 this in turn became a full-scale Ministry of Popular Culture, vulgarly known as Minculpop. It had many tasks. Press supervision continued, but by this time other mass media had become more important. The first radio stations were set up in 1924–25: there were over 300,000 registered sets by 1932, and over 1 million by 1938. Each set was listened to by numerous people – at least a family, often a café, and occasionally a whole piazza. And broadcasting was state-controlled. Hence news broadcasts and newsy chats, in particular Roberto Forges Davanzati's 'Chronicles of the Regime', provided a marvellous opportunity for official propaganda.

So, too, did the cinema, which became the most popular entertainment in Italy in the 1930s, and which brought spoken Italian to the ears of many citizens for the first time. The regime built an 'Experimental Centre of Cinematography', training 100 students a year, including Michelangelo Antonioni; and it took over *Cinecittà* – Italy's Hollywood – in 1938. After 1934 many Italian films were subsidized, although the industry remained essentially in private hands. Most films were escapist entertainment, depicting 'white telephones' and other such symbols of opulence. But there were also several films glorifying Fascism and the regime's achievements: Blasetti's *Vecchia Guardia* was a major success, as was *Luciano Serra, pilota*, which the *Duce*'s son Vittorio helped to make – the title was suggested by the *Duce* himself. Augusto Genina's *Siege of the Alcazar* has been praised both by Antonioni and by Mario Isnenghi.[3] Admittedly the most popular films were American, but the regime did its best to censor them and restrict imports. In any case, official newsreels had to be shown, by law, at every performance, so the customer could not escape propaganda. Altogether, 'it may well be argued', as Philip Cannistraro wrote, 'that Fascist Italy was the first State in Western Europe to recognize the potential value of the mass media for purposes of political control'[4] – although Nazi Germany soon outpaced Fascist Italy in this dismal enterprise.

The other mass entertainment in Fascist Italy, and one constantly featured in the cinema newsreels, was sport. These were the years of spectacular racing cars, of Nuvolari and the *Mille Miglia* race around the country. Balbo flew across the Atlantic, and a surprisingly large number of other Fascists were airmen – Ciano, Pavolini, Muti, the *Duce*'s sons Bruno and Vittorio; even Mussolini himself acquired a pilot's licence in 1939.



Skiing became genuinely popular, and the regime encouraged it – future European wars would probably be fought in the Alps. Cycling, too, was a mass sport with patriotic overtones – the *Giro d'Italia* was a way of unifying the country, and the party secretary started the cyclists off. 'Mussolini's boys' won twelve gold medals at the Los Angeles Olympics, and Primo Carnera was world heavyweight champion from 1933 to 1935. Football became the second obsession of Italian men. Arpinati, for some years Under-secretary of the Interior, was a genuine fan. In 1926 he became president of the Football Federation, and built a huge stadium in his home town of Bologna. In 1934 came a real propaganda triumph. Italy not only staged the World Cup, but won it. The *Duce* himself attended the final, and handed out the medals to his victorious team. The Italians also won the Olympic Football Championship in 1936, and the World Cup again in 1938. These sporting achievements contributed much to the government's general popularity, and the Fascists knew it. The Football League championship continued to be played even during the Second World War. The regime helped sport; and sport helped the regime.

The most successful 'ideological' body of them all was undoubtedly the *Dopolavoro* (literally, 'after work'). The Fascist squads in the early 1920s had closed down the old Socialist recreational and welfare centres; the Fascist syndicalists sometimes took them over. In 1925 the various local clubs were federated into a national network, the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro* (OND), and in 1927 the Fascist Party took over control. The movement soon expanded enormously, from 280,000 members in 1926 to 1.75 million in 1931, and to nearly 4 million by 1939. Most clubs were local, organized on a *comune* basis, but the OND also persuaded some 3,000 industrial firms to set up recreation schemes, and public employees naturally had their own facilities. So the OND was easily the largest Fascist organization for adults, and easily the most popular. The *Dopolavoro* clubs had bars, billiard halls, libraries, radios and sports grounds; they put on concerts and plays; they provided virtually free summer holidays for children; they organized charabanc trips, ballroom-dancing, mountain walks and days at the seaside. They also handed out welfare relief in poor areas: both circuses and bread. No wonder they were popular. It was the first time in Italian history that mass leisure activities had existed, let alone been encouraged and subsidized by politicians. And it was not too solemn. The *Dopolavoro* was fun, not propaganda; it was recreation, not self-improvement. Some Fascists worried about this, and high-minded Italian bourgeois looked down on it all as irredeemably vulgar, but Mussolini knew better. He, like thousands of others, went to Riccione for his holidays.

This stress on sport and recreation typified the Fascist obsession with physical fitness and vigour, and more generally with the cult of youth. Fascist posters and films always depicted *young* heroes. '*Giovinezza*' – 'Youth' – was the party song. Young people are, of course, the prime target for every 'totalitarian' regime; the Fascists were no exception. In 1926 they founded the Opera Nazionale Balilla (called Gioventù Italiana del Littorio, GIL, after 1937), a youth organization with many branches. There were the 'Sons of the She-Wolf' for 6- to 8-year-olds; the '*Balilla*' itself for boys aged 8–11; the '*Balilla* Musketeers', for boys aged 11–13; the 'Little Italians' for girls aged 8–14; the '*Avanguardisti*' for 13- to 15-year-olds; and so forth up to the age of 21. These various organizations were youth clubs with sports facilities, but they were also pre-military training bodies with indoctrination sessions, and their leaders were present and active in the schools as well as at Saturday afternoon rallies. It was difficult to avoid joining them, at least in Northern Italy and while at school. And they had little competition. The (Catholic) Boy Scouts were closed down in 1928, and although Catholic youth organizations did exist they were not allowed to engage in serious matters like sport. So, superficially, the Fascists were successful. They brought up a new Fascist generation, imbued from childhood with patriotic zeal and military fervour.

The education system itself was diverted to similar ends. In the primary schools, teachers were fairly young and easily replaceable. Fascist textbooks and readers could easily be imposed upon them. Forges Davanzati himself wrote a highly successful text, *Il Balilla Vittorio*, for fifth-grade pupils. In general, 'political education' seems to have worked at this level. By the time they left primary school most 11-year-olds had learned something of the war, of the shameful post-war treatment of returned heroes, and of the Fascists' great campaign to rescue Italy from Bolshevism. In the secondary schools it was more difficult. The teachers were not anxious to lower academic standards, and the subjects studied – including philosophy, in the *licei* – discouraged total conformity. The headmaster was usually a Fascist, and the *Balilla* officials taught PT, but there was little opportunity for full-scale indoctrination. Pupils were not hostile to Fascist ideas, indeed they accepted them as normal; but they were not committed enthusiasts either. In the universities the same arguments applied even more strongly. The regime founded Faculties of Political Science, but these were naturally despised. It also forced university teachers to take an oath of loyalty –

*I swear to be faithful to the king, to his royal successors, and to the Fascist regime, and to observe loyally the* Statuto *and the other laws of the State, to exercise the office of teacher and to fulfil all my academic duties with the aim of training hardworking, upright citizens, devoted to the country and to the Fascist regime. I swear that I do not belong nor will belong to associations or parties whose activity is irreconcilable with the duties of my office.*



Only 12 out of 1,200 professors refused to take the oath, and were dismissed.[5] That in itself was a good propaganda victory for Fascism, although it demonstrated nothing but the truism that nearly all university teachers are venal. Afterwards, the universities were left alone by the regime, and carried on much as before, until the anti-Semitic laws of 1938.

So, for the most part, did the world of High Culture. Croce continued to publish *La Critica*, although he had organized an anti-Fascist 'manifesto' in 1925. The major publishing houses like Laterza and Giulio Einaudi presented exciting new works: Ungaretti, Montale, Moravia, Pavese and Vittorini all wrote their best, or first, works in the Fascist period. Above all, the *Enciclopedia Italiana* included articles on anti-Fascist themes: Rodolfo Morandi, for example, wrote about Communism, Socialism and Historical Materialism. One of the twelve 'non-juror' university teachers even remained on its managing committee. In general, intellectuals were tolerated and flattered, indeed bought off, rather than persecuted. Many prominent writers and artists received government prizes: even the young Amintore Fanfani was given 2,000 lire for his work on economic history.[6] Others – e.g. Guttuso, Ungaretti, Quasimodo – were given university chairs. The *Duce* himself loved to show off his wide reading to impressionable foreign journalists. The regime was endorsed by Pirandello and Marconi at home, by Freud and George Bernard Shaw abroad. Mussolini asked no more. He ruled with a light rein, and subsidized the intellectuals.

Altogether, the Fascists probably succeeded in indoctrinating most children in primary school, but they did not create a really 'Fascist' élite via secondary or higher education, let alone create a 'Fascist' intelligentsia. That was very significant, for training a new Fascist élite was a vital task for the regime. The Fascists did their best, but it was not good enough. Their key institution was the Gioventù Universitaria Fascista (GUF), the Fascist student organization which had been quite active in the days of *squadrismo*. After 1926 most students joined it, if only for career purposes, and its social activities (film clubs, etc.) were reasonably popular. The main activity of GUF was to run the *Littoriali* – cultural and debating competitions in which teams from all over Italy competed. They were

well attended, if only because they provided a rare opportunity to speak fairly freely on important issues; but they did not have the desired effect. If anything, they showed young people how stifling most normal political discussion was. They also provided a marvellous opportunity for anti-Fascist infiltrators.

Did all this Fascist effort at 'social control' actually work? The judicious historian gives a prosaic answer: yes and no. Yes, in the sense that until 1936 most people swallowed most of the propaganda most of the time, at a fairly superficial level. Italy was stable, the *Duce* was popular, open dissenters were rare. It made sense to go along with the regime, and patriotism is a natural feeling even in Italy. But there was little enthusiasm for Fascism – as opposed to patriotism or to Mussolinism – and the regime's claims to 'totalitarianism' were laughable. Religion, family sentiment, individual ambition and cunning, the parish pump, the art of *arrangiarsi* – all these traditional institutions and values survived and flourished. The Fascists totally failed to arouse warlike zeal among the general population, a failure which became very evident by the late 1930s. In short, there was acceptance but not devotion, consensus but not commitment, let alone 'hegemony'. Still, even the Fascist consensus was a great deal more than most Italian regimes had achieved. On balance the ideological efforts paid off. It took years for most people to see through Fascism.

## 12.2 Fascist syndicates and corporations

Arguably the Fascists' key achievement was to 'discipline' labour. The Fascist movement had taken off in 1920–21 as a reaction to trade union militancy. The Fascists had destroyed the existing unions and co-operatives. But that was not enough. To avoid renewed trouble in future the Fascists needed to 'represent the workers' interests' within their own organizations. So the Fascist unions – 'syndicates' is the Italian term – had to be reasonably successful in negotiations, if they were to attract some working-class support. For a time they were. The Fascist syndicalists built up their empires rapidly after 1921 (see §10.5). The Matteotti crisis in 1924 further strengthened them. Mussolini needed all the working-class support he could get, if only to put pressure on wavering businessmen; so he backed the syndicates. In 1925 there were several major strikes led by the Fascist unions, sometimes supported tacitly by the government. These strikes culminated in a major engineering dispute in Lombardy, involving over 100,000 workers. The strike was a success for the Fascist syndicalists, but it alarmed many conservatives. Mussolini had to redress



the balance by a purge of the more militant syndicalists. Even so, in October 1925 the industrialists were forced to recognize the new facts of industrial and political power. The industrialists' confederation and the Fascist syndicates' confederation recognized each other's right to represent exclusively their respective side's interest, and pledged themselves not to negotiate with any other body. It was a triumph for the Fascist syndicalists: they had cornered the labour market. Henceforth their rivals could only fade away, impotent and unheeded.

And yet the Fascist syndicalists' battle was only half won. They had been fighting on several fronts. They had triumphed over the Socialist and Catholic unions, and had over 2 million working-class members by 1927; they even succeeded, for a time, against the industrialists; but they failed to impose their ideas about labour relations upon the government. Many syndicalists had been arguing for years that the syndicates should become the basic institutions of the State. They had been impressed, too, by De Ambris's and D'Annunzio's schemes at Fiume (see §10.1), where 'corporations' of both employers and employed had been supposed to run the economy in a spirit of national harmony. In short, the Fascist syndicalists were not just trade unionists, competing with rivals and fighting for higher wages in a capitalist system. They were prophets of a new economic order, in which the class struggle would be abolished, private enterprise would be strictly regulated and the national interest would prevail. And in this new order they themselves would play an essential part.

The more conservative Fascist sympathizers naturally dreaded this prospect. Trade unions might be necessary in any industrial State, but they certainly should not be allowed to run the economy. Mussolini could not afford to alienate these men, who included the leading industrialists, nor could he afford to alienate the syndicalists. The result was a prolonged balancing act, ending in a compromise. In April 1926 a major new law was passed, which owed much to the Minister of Justice, Alfredo Rocco. Rocco was no syndicalist. His whole aim was to *discipline* labour: as he told the Chamber, 'the State cannot allow, the Fascist State least of all, any other States within the State. The regulation of trade unions must be a means of disciplining them, not a means of creating powerful, uncontrollable bodies that can dominate the State.'[7] The law confirmed the syndicates' monopoly of negotiations, as agreed six months previously, and provided for compulsory arbitration of collective disputes by special labour tribunals. This pleased Rossoni and the syndicalists. But strikes, go-slows and lockouts were strictly forbidden, and strike leaders were promised prison sentences. Moreover, the syndicates were to represent workers only. They were not to

be 'mixed' guilds of employers and employed, embracing whole industrial sectors; and hence they would not be able to decide economic policy. In particular, they would not decide government policy. Syndicates were specifically prohibited in the key ministries (article 11). Specially severe prison sentences were provided for strikes or go-slows that 'aimed at coercing the will or influencing the decisions of a department or organ of State, province or municipality, or a government official' (article 21). As for the major firms, they would need to negotiate with the Fascist syndicates, but they would not be dragged into any corporatist planning network, and the absence of strikes was naturally pleasing to employers.

The 1926 law did not work out quite as planned. In practice, the labour tribunals had little work to do: they dealt with only forty-one cases in the next ten years, and settled only sixteen of them by judicial decree. Most disputes continued to be settled by negotiations between syndicate and employer; the more serious ones were settled by officials of the Ministry of Corporations. 'Individual' disputes were also settled in this way, or by the ordinary local courts. National collective agreements were also less important than might appear. Minimum wages were set, until 1934, by the provincial 'unions' rather than at national level. Moreover, the syndicates had no representatives in the factories. The pre-Fascist internal commissions (elected shop stewards' committees) were abolished in 1925, and although Fascist '*fiduciari*' often existed in the major factories, they were legally recognized only in 1939. Hence it was difficult to ensure that any collective agreements that the syndicates made were actually enforced. Strikes and demonstrations continued to occur, often over precisely this issue, although only on a local scale and without any press publicity. Yet, on balance, the legislation did its job. There was remarkably little labour unrest in the Fascist period. The syndicates and the local courts seem to have been reasonably successful in dealing with individual grievances, and in the 1930s low wages could always be blamed on the Depression. Perhaps the technology of the time – the introduction of conveyor belts, the 'Bedaux system', time and motion studies – made authoritarianism in the factories virtually inevitable. Skilled men would have lost their jobs, and craft unions would have been undermined, in any case. In that perspective the Fascist unions do not appear so unsuccessful, and they clearly attracted some working-class support, especially after 1930.

The 1926 law did not settle the union question for ever. 'Corporatist' ideas of national economic harmony were still very much alive, and Mussolini still needed a threat against independent-minded employers and against independent-minded syndicalists. His balancing act, therefore,



continued. Later in the same year he set up a new ministry – the Ministry of Corporations. 'Corporations' implied 'mixed' unions of workers and employers, and national economic planning; and the new Under-secretary, Giuseppe Bottai, was exactly the kind of empire-building intellectual that industrialists most feared. He soon helped to push through a 'Charter of Labour', proclaiming grandiose guarantees on social issues and labour relations. Yet, in practice, the Ministry's main achievements were to mediate in labour disputes, and to reduce the syndicalists' influence. In 1928 Rossoni was dismissed, and the Confederation of Fascist Syndicates was split up into six component parts: thenceforth there were six workers' confederations of syndicates (one each for industry, agriculture, commerce, etc.) with six corresponding employers' confederations and one genuine 'mixed corporation' – of artists and professional men. This was a major blow to syndicalism: 'corporatist' ideology had been used to undermine 'syndicalist' reality.

This process continued in the next few years. In 1930 a National Council of Corporations was founded, to act as a joint consultative body on the economy. It met and deliberated regularly, to little effect. Only in 1934 were real 'mixed' corporations actually set up. There were twenty-two of them, containing representatives of employers and workers and also of the PNF. They were empowered to fix wage rates, settle disputes, distribute labour, regulate apprenticeships, advise on economic issues and generally 'encourage improvements in production'. But it was just propaganda. The workers' syndicates and the employers' associations continued to exist 'below' the level of the corporations; the corporations themselves did little, except to provide jobs for bureaucrats. Pius XI himself complained that 'new syndical and corporative organizations tend to have an excessively bureaucratic and political character',[8] and his views were echoed by many leading Fascists, including Turati, Arpinati and Farinacci. When the Fascists did begin regulating the economy on a major scale after 1933, they used quite different machinery, and the corporations were not even consulted.

But although the corporations were only propaganda, they were very good propaganda. They were propaganda, indeed, that many Fascists – including Mussolini himself – fervently believed in. They were original, at least to people who knew nothing of Fiume, and they tackled the right issues. They promised both 'workers' self-management' and 'managerial authority', both dynamic innovation and protection of established interests, both free enterprise and State monopoly. They seemed to offer 'a third way', between capitalism and Bolshevism, which looked attractive in the

Depression. They justified Mussolini's whole regime. The class conflict had apparently been overcome; the national interest prevailed, the trains ran on time. Gaetano Salvemini remarked in 1935 that 'Italy has become the Mecca of political scientists, economists and sociologists, who flock there to see with their own eyes the organization and working of the Fascist Corporative State', and who 'flood the world with articles, essays, pamphlets, and books, which already form a good-sized library'.[9] Until imperialism replaced it, 'corporatism' was one of the major elements in Fascist ideology.

But while the corporations may have been just propaganda, the syndicates were real. The impact of trade union activity is always debatable, and the figures for the Fascist period are particularly controversial, but it seems probable that real wages in industry declined a little between 1924 and 1926, i.e. while the Socialist and Catholic unions were being destroyed; then rose and fell again over the next four years; and thereafter were maintained until 1934. Thus the Fascist syndicates, together with government policy, cushioned the worst effects of the Depression. Private consumption per head went down by only 2.5 per cent in the real Depression years of the early 1930s. However, in November 1934 the 40-hour week was introduced in response to syndicalist demands for work-sharing to combat unemployment. This policy reduced the monthly wages of those already in jobs by about 10 per cent. That was a major blow to the established working class, and it was directly attributable to government and union policy; but the decline was partly recovered by 1939, and of course reduced hours were also a real benefit. In any case, the policy did mitigate unemployment: the official figures went down from 1.2 million in December 1933 to 960,000 a year later and to 700,000 in 1936, although the true rate was probably at least 75 per cent higher at all times.

These figures are, as always, inconclusive: effective wage rates depend on many other factors besides trade union strength or government policy. But they do at least show that the absence of strikes and of free trade unions did not lead to vicious exploitation of industrial workers. I have deliberately quoted figures for *real* wages. Perhaps the real impact of Fascist syndicalism was to make it easier for cuts of about 25 per cent in money wages to be imposed between 1928 and 1934, as the cost of living fell. More militant unions might have successfully resisted these cuts, and thus increased unemployment.

The syndicates had, of course, other ways of courting popularity. Indeed, as Vannutelli argued, 'the very lack of power to work directly for salary increases encouraged the labour movement to pursue other



compensatory goals'.[10] Grievances were often freely discussed at local syndicate meetings. The unions also helped to find jobs, and often controlled the local labour exchanges. During the Depression at Turin, they arranged for 1 per cent of workers' pay to go to subsidizing the unemployed, and 'persuaded' the employers to contribute as well. The syndicates claimed the credit for, and sometimes distributed, some of the regime's best-known welfare measures. Family allowances were started on a large scale in 1934, to compensate workers with families for the 40-hour week; they were paid in all sectors by 1937. Christmas bonuses and holiday pay also began in the late 1930s; accident and sickness insurance was included in most pay settlements. Above all, there were subsidized leisure activities, the *Dopolavoro* (see above, §12.1); and there was job protection. All this was not exactly a Welfare State, rather a medley of different provisions and different 'semi-State' welfare bodies; but it was novel, and it helped defuse working-class unrest. Union membership rose rapidly. In Milan, the industrial unions had 176,000 members in 1933, but 560,000 by 1940. In that sense the syndicates 'mobilized' the workers. The Communist underground organizer Curiel thought syndicates comprised 'the only organization in which the working class has managed, intermittently, to express its wishes'.[11]

## 12.3 Anti-Fascism

For all these reasons anti-Fascism was weak. It remained weak until 1938, indeed until 1943. The mass political parties of 1919–20 retained, at best, a few clandestine bridgeheads in areas of traditional strength. The Socialist Party was very feeble, since both Communists and reformists had split off to form separate parties in 1921–22. Relations between these three parties were usually uneasy, although the reformists and 'maximalists' (Socialists) managed to fuse their two parties together again in 1930. This move only increased hostility between Socialists and Communists; the Communists spent much of the period between 1929 and 1934 denouncing the 'Social-Fascism' of their rivals. None of these parties could operate freely in Italy, although some ex-*popolari* were still active in Catholic Action (see below, §12.4). Anti-Fascist politics meant, for the most part, writing articles in the anti-Fascist press or agitating among Italian emigrants in Paris or Switzerland, with occasional efforts at smuggling pamphlets into Italy. Only the Communists had any idea of underground organization. They managed to print a surprisingly wide range of journals in Italy, but even the Communists were few in numbers – between 2,500 and 7,000 – and

sectarian in strategy, until the late 1930s. The other parties showed little sign of life, and had no organization within the country. The Republican Party was influential among the exiles, for it could claim that it had been right all along: the anti-Fascists had relied on the king in 1924, and he had let them down. He would have to go. So republicanism became an article of faith among most anti-Fascists – but the party stayed tiny.

However, anti-Fascism was not just the parties. Equally important, indeed far more important before 1936, were various small dissident groups of intellectuals, journalists and students, usually Radical or Republican in sympathy, who would found an association or journal, produce a few clandestine issues, and then be forced into years of exile. A rather different 'group' was *Giustizia e Libertà* (GL) founded in 1929 by Carlo and Nello Rosselli, Ernesto Rossi and others. *Giustizia e Libertà* aimed to unite Republicans, Socialists and democrats in an activist 'super-party', and it went in for spectacular gestures like dropping anti-Fascist pamphlets from aeroplanes. It had considerable appeal for young intellectuals, and soon it had an underground organization in Italy – by 1933 it may have had as many adherents as the Communist Party. There were also a few respected intellectual figures like Croce in Italy, Sforza and Salvemini in exile, keeping alive the spirit of independence and inquiry. But that was all. Without institutions or organizations, the Italian anti-Fascists were like the Russian dissidents forty years later – sometimes infiltrated, usually persecuted and always harmless.

There were two major exceptions. Italy's newly acquired lands in the north-east, 'Venezia Tridentina' and 'Venezia Giulia', both contained substantial ethnic minorities – 228,000 'Germans' in the South Tyrol, 327,000 Slovenes and 98,000 Croats in Venezia Giulia – who were determined to preserve their languages and customs. The Fascists were far too nationalistic to permit any such thing. They insisted upon the use of Italian in the primary schools, although hardly any of the local children could understand it, and although this meant sacking the local teachers. They also suppressed private teaching. Italian also had to be spoken in public offices, courts, etc., so local officials lost their jobs too; and German and Slav surnames were Italianized. Even the inscriptions on the tombstones were changed. This was a real *Kulturkampf*, and it was not restricted to cultural symbols. Jobs were at stake, in teaching and in administration, and Italians from other regions were encouraged to settle in north-east Italy. After 1934 a new industrial zone was set up in Bolzano, partly to speed on this 'Italianization'. By 1939 there were about 80,000 'Italians' in the South Tyrol, far more than in 1921.



But the policy did not work. The local priests led the cultural resistance, continuing to preach and catechize in German or Slovene, and organizing clandestine private schools. Church–State relations were much worse in these regions than elsewhere in Italy, and in 1936 Bishop Fogar of Trieste was even forced out of office. In the South Tyrol, the 'Germans' were isolated rather than assimilated. Deprived of schools and urban jobs, they remained defensive and despondent in their rural ghettos. In Venezia Giulia sterner forms of resistance appeared. Italian teachers were driven out of schools, bombs went off regularly in public buildings, and local terrorists assassinated police and militiamen. There were five Slavs out of the nine people condemned to death by the Fascist Special Tribunal before 1940. In these regions anti-Fascism became deeply ingrained, and became synonymous with anti-Italianism.

The feebleness of organized anti-Fascism in 'mainland Italy' is, at first sight, surprising. It certainly surprises and dismays many Italians today. Communist membership was a few thousand at most; *Giustizia e Libertà* never had more, and the Socialists had far fewer. Money was always short – if the Communists and GL were the most influential groups, it was mainly because of the Comintern's subsidies and the Rossellis' private fortune. No foreign States except France and Russia had an interest in harbouring anti-Fascist exiles, and the French and Russian interests were strictly limited. Obtaining arms was virtually impossible. Moreover, people remembered that the anti-Fascist parties had lost badly, not only in 1922 but also in 1924–25. They were split, and they offered no credible political alternative. The various assassination attempts on Mussolini in 1926 had associated them with terrorism, and this naturally reduced public sympathy. Part of the explanation for the anti-Fascists' weakness lies in effective policing: Bocchini's informers were everywhere, and *confino* or worse awaited dissidents. But perhaps the real reason for anti-Fascism's failure was that the Fascist regime seemed tolerable and was even popular, at least until 1937–38. It was careful not to alienate vested interests: even the workers had some safeguards, and journalists were flattered and bribed. Active resistance seemed pointless.

Yet 'latent', submerged forms of anti-Fascism, or at least of non-Fascism, were extremely widespread. Catholicism provided an alternative ideology and focus for loyalty; so did Liberalism. Far more people went to Catholic Action meetings, or read Croce's work, than were ever reached by *Giustizia e Libertà* or by the clandestine Communist press. The self-proclaimed anti-Fascists were much less important for many years than they – and some historians – have believed; but the quiet, dissembling

trimmers, in schools and offices throughout Italy, kept their jobs and prevented the Fascists from creating a new ruling class. That was a real achievement, though it was not done by the official anti-Fascists.

## 12.4 The Church

The Catholic Church was the greatest obstacle to any 'totalitarian' regime in Italy. All the others – parliament, press, opposition parties, unions – could be smashed or emasculated; but not the Church. Nor could she simply be ignored, for she had immense influence in education and welfare, and she proclaimed values quite incompatible with those of Fascism. Mussolini, therefore, needed all his political skills. He had to reassure the hierarchy of the Church by material concessions, he had to obscure the ideological differences, and he had to win tacit or explicit endorsement for his regime. But he also had to limit the Church's hold on society whenever possible, especially once the endorsement had been won. Of these various aims, winning endorsement was the most important, because success there would be a propaganda triumph. The Church's major interest, on the other hand, lay in protecting, or if possible increasing, her influence in society. If that could be done, it was certainly worth an endorsement. The Church of Pius XI was still a defensive body, inward-looking and suspicious. She felt she had been rejected by progressive Europe for over a century, and that she was beset by powerful enemies. She needed to carry out her tasks, without hindrance or persecution. So it made sense to render unto Caesar that which was Caesar's anyway, and to take from him whatever she could obtain.

Thus the atheist and anticlerical Mussolini, pre-war author of *Claudia Particella, the Cardinal's Mistress*, gradually became the prodigal son. In its first few years in office Mussolini's government increased clerical salaries, granted 3 million lire for damaged churches, restored the Crucifix in schoolrooms, law courts and Colosseum, rescued the (Catholic) Banco di Roma and closed down fifty-three brothels. It also set up national examinations, thus enabling Church schools to enter pupils for them on an equal footing with State schools, and recognized degrees given by the new Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan. It banned Freemasonry, and closed down anticlerical journals; it dropped the Liberal proposals to tax ecclesiastical property and to introduce a public register of shareholdings; and it destroyed the Socialist menace. Moreover, Mussolini flattered the Church. In his maiden speech to parliament he praised her as representing 'the Latin and imperial tradition of Rome'. He had his first



three children baptized, at quite advanced ages; and in 1925 he even married Donna Rachele in church, ten years after the civil ceremony. True, Fascist squads wrecked Catholic co-operatives and unions throughout Italy, and the Popular Party was dissolved along with the others, but that was different. Those were lay bodies, with secular tasks; they were dispensable. Mussolini did not attack the Church as such. On the contrary, he wooed her.

By 1926 the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Gasparri, was confident that Mussolini was going to stay in power. A major long-term deal could be done. On 11 February 1929 Mussolini and Gasparri signed the 'Lateran Pacts' – a treaty, a financial convention and a Concordat. The treaty set up a separate sovereign State of 'Vatican City', with 44 hectares of land and full diplomatic rights. The financial convention gave the Pope 750 million lire, plus a further 1,000 million in Italian State bonds, as compensation for the loss of his pre-1870 territories. And the Concordat granted various privileges to the Church. Religious education was brought into secondary as well as primary schools, seminarists were exempted from military service, and church marriages were deemed legally valid – they no longer had to be followed by a civil ceremony. The Concordat also guaranteed the future position of Catholic Action organizations 'in so far as they carry out their activities independently of all political parties, and immediately subordinate to the Church hierarchy, for the diffusion and realization of Catholic principles'. This was perhaps the most important provision of all, at least to the Pope. It ensured that the Church could continue to run her own organization for the laity.

The pacts were a triumph for the *Duce*. The cost was negligible, the benefits huge. Mussolini had 'solved the Roman question', which had baffled even Cavour and Crispi; he could count on world-wide prestige and a chorus of admiration. He was 'the man sent by providence', as Pius XI called him.[12] His regime was sanctified and blessed by Mother Church. At home, nobody could touch him now; abroad, he could assume the agreeable mantle of Defender of the Faith. The Church, too, could rejoice. She had achieved sovereign territory at last, financial security, above all recognition and immunity for her work. In short, she had the right to peaceful co-existence – no mean achievement in an avowedly totalitarian state.

But like later forms of peaceful co-existence, this one went through various phases. There was real détente for a few months in 1928–29, and again in 1935–36; but there was virtual 'cold war' in the summer of 1931 and in 1938–39. The early rows were over the Catholic youth movement.

There had been disputes in 1927–28 over the Catholic Boy Scouts, which had been dissolved before the Lateran Pacts. In 1931 a major storm blew up. Catholic Action was accused of organizing sport, of being led by ex-*popolari*, and of trying to form 'occupational groups' – trade unions by another name. There were police raids and squad violence, and the State formally closed down Catholic Action's youth organizations. Pius XI retaliated with an encyclical '*Non abbiamo bisogno*', in which he recommended anybody who had to take an oath of loyalty to the Fascist regime to do so with 'mental reservations'. After some months the quarrel was patched up, but the Fascists insisted on confining Catholic Action to strictly religious activities. Former members of the PPI were henceforth ineligible as leaders. Catholic youth associations were not allowed to organize athletics or sport, which was to be a Fascist monopoly; but they were permitted to engage in 'recreational and educational activities having religious purposes'. This seems to have been sufficient. They flourished during the 1930s, and membership rose from just under 250,000 in 1930 to 388,000 in 1939. The Catholic youth movements were always a rival to the *Balilla* and to the GIL, and by their very existence they mocked any claim that the *Duce* was rearing a new Fascist generation.

The Catholic student movement, FUCI, deserves a special mention. It had been founded in 1896 and had always been an important branch of Catholic Action. In the Fascist regime it was especially significant, for it was the only authorized non-Fascist organization for students. In 1932 it even managed to set up a 'graduate movement' for ex-students. It was led by a devoted enthusiast, Igino Righetti, and from 1925 until 1933 its chaplain was none other than Mgr Giovanni Battista Montini, the future Pope Paul VI. FUCI had long-term aims: to prevent any Fascist monopoly of student life, and to train a Catholic lay élite. This élite would defend the Church's interests in the uncertain future, and most thinking Catholics, indeed most thinking Italians, knew Fascism would not last. After Mussolini would come the deluge, in the form of a revived Liberalism or, even worse, Communism. The Catholics had to build, not in order to take over the country – few dared hope for that; but to hang on to what they had won. They wrought better than they knew. Many of Italy's Christian Democrat leaders after 1945 came up through FUCI. Both Aldo Moro and Giulio Andreotti were presidents of it, and its members included Emilio Colombo, Mario Scelba, Benigno Zaccagnini and Francesco Cossiga, as well as many future administrators, judges and businessmen. A new Catholic ruling class was being formed, under Fascist eyes. No wonder the Fascist police had informers in all Catholic Action branches, or that the chief of police urged that Catholic Action members should be excluded from jobs in government service.[13]



Thus although the Church undoubtedly contributed to the Fascist consensus between 1926 and 1938, she was also a rival, and a rival who was building up her strength. Northern and Central Italy seem to have had a mild religious revival in the 1930s. Church marriages became even more common; the median age at baptism declined from fourteen to ten days, in conformity with Church teaching. The various branches of Catholic Action had over 1 million members. A new Freemasonry had arisen to replace the old, and it had some claim to be the real 'internal opposition'. Church-run secondary schools had 31,000 pupils in 1927; by 1940 they had 104,000. However, Catholic Action was still feeble in the South – in Gallipoli 'usually it's one poor boy who is trying to organize Catholic Action, and his parish priest who is trying to stop him'.[14] And the Church herself had rivals. Worried Catholic attempts to curb the Pentecostalists and prevent the distribution of Protestant Bibles were at least as prominent in the religious history of these years as any revival of Catholic piety; on the only occasion Mussolini met Pius XI, that was the issue the two men discussed. Still, the number of clergy undeniably increased during the Fascist period, from 68,264 in 1921 to 70,652 ten years later; admittedly most of the new men were monks or friars, but some regions (for example Piedmont) saw an increase in secular priests too, and the monks were less cloistered than previously. And the nunneries were transformed. Not only were there far more nuns (129,000 in 1936, compared with 71,000 in 1921 and 45,000 in 1911) but many more were working in schools or hospitals, and over half were in the North. The increase was no doubt a consequence of the First World War, for many girls could no longer hope for marriage; but it helped the Church's '*reconquista*' of Italian society.

## 12.5 The breakdown of Fascist consensus

The Fascist regime remained fairly popular until about 1936, but the late 1930s saw a marked change. 'Youth' was a difficult cult to keep up. By the mid-1930s the youthful heroes of 1915–18, and even the youthful *squadristi* of 1921–22, were youthful no longer. They were sweating middle-aged Fascist *gerarchi*, performing their physical jerks in public and ranting on about *Giovinezza*. They were simply ridiculous, to none more so than to the genuinely young. Their parade-ground antics symbolized the paradox of Fascist ideology. The Fascists claimed to be 'revolutionary', to be sweeping away the traditional strait-jacket of the Liberal past; yet in

practice they had compromised with the older institutions, and even in propaganda they regularly appealed to traditional values like 'the family' or 'rural life'. In De Felice's phrase, they had founded a 'movement', but had set up a 'regime'.[15] Fascist ideas had emerged from the years of turmoil, from the First World War and revolutionary unrest; yet they were preached during the ossified years of Depression and stagnation. Many Fascists were radical demagogues at heart, and the Fascist ethos was deeply anti-Establishment; yet for years they had been part of the Establishment, and it showed. Many of them had somehow acquired aristocratic titles – *Count* Dino Grandi, *Count* Ciano *di Cortellazzo*, *Count* De Vecchi *di Val Cismon*. It was a classic case of rhetoric being out of joint with reality. The young intellectuals grew ever more cynical, especially in the 1930s when they could not find jobs; and, in the factories, disaffection became more noticeable.

In the end the rhetoric won, as it often does. Just as apocalyptic sects proclaim their beliefs with redoubled fervour the day after the world has failed to end, so the Fascist government stepped up its ideological campaign in 1938. It introduced the so-called 'reform of customs'. Italians were suddenly forbidden to shake hands – they had to use the 'Roman salute' instead. They were given detailed instructions on how to give it: it was all right to keep your hat on, but not to do it sitting down. They were also forbidden to call each other '*Lei*', the normal polite form of address; they had to use '*Voi*' instead. Civil servants were told to wear uniform. The army and Militia were forced to adopt the '*passo romano*', or goose-step – another risible sight to most Italians and deeply offensive to the king, who at the age of 69 could not manage it. These ludicrous measures antagonized virtually everybody, but it was difficult to ignore them.

The most odious aspect of this renewed ideological zeal in 1938–39 was the government's anti-Jewish campaign. It began, quite suddenly, in 1937. Until then individual Fascists like Farinacci and Preziosi may have been anti-Semitic, but the movement as a whole had not been racialist, except of course towards Libyans and Ethiopians. Mussolini had had a Jewish mistress for years, and in 1932 he appointed a Jewish Minister of Finance. In any case, there were only about 45,000 Italian Jews in the country, plus about 10,000 who had been born abroad, mainly refugees from the Nazis; the Jews were about 0.1 per cent of the population, not enough to be a plausible threat or to generate much popular resentment. Yet by 1938 Minculpop was distributing a 'Manifesto of Racial Scholars', and a press campaign was well under way. In November came legislation.



Foreign Jews were to be deported. Italian Jews were forbidden to marry 'Aryans', to hold public office (including teaching and civil service jobs), to join the PNF, to own more than 50 hectares of land, to run any business with over 100 employees or to have 'Aryan' servants. Some exceptions were allowed for war service or devotion to Fascism in the past, but even so the laws had an enormous impact: 6,000 Italian Jews left the country in the next three years. Many business firms closed down; Jewish children were expelled from State schools; one in twelve university teachers, including the Principal of Rome University, lost their jobs; the brilliant physicist Enrico Fermi left Italy in protest. Thus the academic and business élites were outraged; and so was the Church. The laws were denounced from many pulpits as immoral, and the Pope spoke out frequently against racialism. The Vatican also regarded the laws as a clear breach of the 1929 Concordat, since they prohibited 'mixed' marriages between Catholics and Jews, even baptized Jews.

The Fascist laws coincided with the first major pogroms in Germany – *Kristallnacht* was on 9 November 1938 – and so they were naturally regarded as simple subservience to Germany. In fact, there is no evidence of any Nazi pressure for the laws. Why, then, were they passed? Fascist propaganda against the Jews concentrated on their alleged lack of martial spirit. On 5 November 1938, for example, the main anti-Semitic journal, *La Difesa della Razza*, contained four articles on this theme: 'Un Popolo senza Eroi' by G. Cogni; 'Gli Ebrei e la Guerra' by E. Canevari; 'Giudeo e soldato: un' antitesi' by G. Lucidi; and 'Gli Eterni Imboscati' by E. Gasteiner. Most of its other issues were surprisingly full of militarist rhetoric, all jackboots and expansionism. Perhaps this is the key. The only semi-rational explanation for the government's measures is that the Fascists, like Pharaoh in Egypt (Exodus 1:9 ff.), feared that the Jews might not be loyal in time of war, especially if Italy were allied to Germany. Better to exclude them from the army and government service first.

If this was Mussolini's calculation, it misfired badly. The laws were much resented in the country, and were a source of shame to many Fascists. They discredited the 'activist', 'revolutionary' aspects of Fascist ideology, by showing where they led; and they alienated the conservative élites of Church, business and Court, on whom Fascist consensus had mainly relied. Moreover, the laws made it clear that Mussolini's foreign policy was dangerous. The Germans were feared and distrusted even by many Fascists. Fascist rhetoric was tolerable at Militia parades; but suddenly the game had become serious. The ultra-nationalism, the zeal for

domination and Empire, the general belligerence of Fascism were dragging Italy into unnecessary wars, fought in order to prove the Fascists' virility rather than for any real national interest. Thus it was not just the young and idealistic who began to reject Fascism in the late 1930s; the old and cautious did so too.

In short, the anti-Semitic campaign and the 'reform of customs' were disastrous political errors, although not inexplicable ones. All parties, in all countries, profess lunatic and antiquated ideas, and on occasion act accordingly. The Fascists simply provide an outstanding example of how destructive an ideology can be. They always had to be doing something new and dangerous. Their rhetoric prevented them from retaining the stable, authoritarian, 'Francoist' policy so ardently desired by the Establishment, and so laboriously constructed in 1922–29. The 'movement' had subverted the 'regime'.

The anti-Fascist parties naturally benefited from the changed climate. The Socialists and Communists had signed a 'pact of unity of action' in 1934, and this alliance lasted until the Nazi–Soviet pact five years later. Moreover, Italian intervention in the Spanish Civil War (see §14.1) had a major impact on anti-Fascism. The mass left-wing parties joined with others to raise a 'Garibaldi battalion' from among the emigrés, to fight in Spain for the Republic. These units included Nenni and Longo, and were commanded by the Republican Pacciardi. In March 1937 they helped to defeat Italian troops fighting on Franco's side at the battle of Guadalajara. News of the victory soon percolated back to Italy. So the anti-Fascist parties still existed, and could defeat the Fascist Militia; Fascism was vulnerable after all. Rosselli's famous slogan 'today in Spain, tomorrow in Italy', began to appear on walls. Guadalajara was a huge boost to left-wing and anti-Fascist morale. The anti-Fascists used the wireless from Madrid or Barcelona to spread their message, far more successfully than hitherto. Indeed, the Communist Party's influence in Italian politics dates from Togliatti and Longo's time in Spain. But the Socialists, Republicans and GL benefited too. The comradeship forged in battle was sometimes stronger than the inevitable rivalry, and had a major impact on post-war Italy: Togliatti, Longo and Nenni dominated the Communist and Socialist parties until the mid-1960s, and Pacciardi was Minister of Defence in the Italian Republic. The left-wing parties were learning to work together. And they were no longer the inevitable losers: prudent men might soon have to consider changing sides. Rosselli's slogan turned out to be true: the Spanish Civil War *was* a rehearsal of things to come in Italy.



## 12.6 Summary

Italian Fascism has provoked intense arguments among historians and sociologists. There are three main schools of thought. The 'Radicals' see Fascism simply as a tougher version of Liberal Italy. Some of them regard it as the inevitable consequence of the Risorgimento's limited achievements, as a 'revelation, not revolution'. This perspective seems to me valid for the 'High Political' institutions of the regime (see §11.2). There was much continuity between Liberal and Fascist Italy here, although 'continuity' does not mean continuing on from the troubled years of 1918–22, nor does it preclude strengthening. But in other fields, and even in other political institutions, 'continuity' was less evident. The Fascist National Party, as a mass organization of the middle classes, was new; so was the Militia. Giuseppe Prezzolini may have exaggerated when he said that Fascism was 'the only really original political idea ever invented by the Italians' since the medieval communes and *Signorie*,[16] but his view is more realistic than that of Nicola Tranfaglia or other contemporary Radicals.

A second, and larger, group of historians recognizes that Fascist Italy was different from Liberal or Republican Italy, indeed regards Fascism as essentially revolutionary, but sees it as a European or even world-wide phenomenon which just happened to occur in Italy first. Such writers normally stress the similarities between Fascist Italy and other Fascist regimes, especially Nazi Germany. They stress also the long-term structural changes in European societies, selecting suitable themes according to academic interests or political preference: the fall – or rise – of an independent peasantry; the fall – or rise – of the lower middle classes; the rise – or betrayal – of the 'masses', and of 'mass parties'; the limited nature of 'bourgeois' revolutions in previous centuries; the concentration of industrial or financial capital; the absence or sudden loss of Empires; the 'moral crisis of the West'. These historians are right to stress the lower middle-class composition of early Fascism, and to emphasize that nationalist and activist ideas were extremely influential in many countries. It also seems to me correct to argue that the Fascists aimed at and partially created a 'mass society'. But Italy was very much *sui generis*. There is no Grand Structural Explanation that accounts for the Fascist regime. As for the Nazis, most Fascists had little in common with each other, let alone with them.

Finally, there are the dullards, who rigorously reject any schematic interpretations, and often any attempt at thought. If the king had not changed his mind on the morning of 28 October 1922, they claim, there might never have been a Fascist regime at all. This group is, alas, right. All

crises can have multiple outcomes. Fascism was not inevitable, nor was it bound to succeed – indeed, in the early years it went through repeated crises that threatened its very existence. It emerged from the First World War, from Versailles and Fiume, and from the peculiar clashes of the new post-war politics; in 1924–26 it became a 'regime', through a further complex series of manoeuvres and misunderstandings. The only way to understand why Italy became Fascist is to study its detailed history.

Furthermore, Fascism meant different things at different times. De Felice stressed the distinction between 'Fascism-movement' (revolutionary, intransigent and syndicalist) and 'Fascism-regime' (conservative, compromising and corrupt). But this distinction is itself too simple. 'Fascism-movement' included syndicalists like Rossoni, provincial squad-leaders like Farinacci and would-be cultural revolutionaries like Malaparte. And 'Fascism-regime' – the conservative regime of 1926–34, of consensus and conciliation, of Mussolini in top hat and frock coat, the regime of Alfredo Rocco and the constitutional changes of 1925–26 – was also the regime of intense corporatist propaganda and disputes over Catholic Action; it was not as conservative as all that. Moreover, by 1938 this conservative regime had somehow turned stridently nationalist. It had become the regime of Empire and racialism, with Mussolini as the victorious *Duce* never out of military uniform.

So here is another continuity problem. Was the real Fascist revolution in 1936–38? Or was 1936–38 the beginning of the regime's breakdown, the extremism being due to panic and hysteria as the failure of Fascism became daily more apparent? Perhaps both views are true – it was a 'real' Fascist revolution at long last, arousing intense antagonism as the implications of it all eventually struck home. But, once again, there was nothing inevitable about it. The regime might, just might, have evolved in other directions, as Franco's Spain did after 1939; it was not Fascist militarism alone that prevented this happy outcome. And even in this late Fascist period Mussolini was less warlike than he pretended. He kept Italy out of war in 1939, and only joined in when the outcome looked certain.

Nevertheless, my own view is that Fascism, like Communism, was essentially the child of war. Its origins lay in pre-1915 humiliations and agitations. Its appeal was to the officers of the war generation, to the 'real Italy' of the trenches and of Vittorio Veneto, to men who had won the first major victories of Italian arms. Together these men had overcome not only the Austrians, but also the hated neutralist Establishment, the cowardly Giolittian parliament, the treacherous Socialists and the peace-mongering Church; and in the post-war ferment, braving insults and



violence, they had conquered them all again. They never forgot. The regime's slogans and symbols were always military – 'believe, obey, fight'. Mussolini's working office after 1929 was in Palazzo Venezia, which had until 1915 been the Austrian Embassy. Wartime memories accounted for many Fascist policies. 'Intervention' in the economy was geared mainly to national glory. So was 'industrial mobilization'. Factories had recreation centres, like the soldiers had had in the war; the *Balilla* had chaplains, as regiments had had in the war; newspapers were censored, as they had been in the war.

'War alone', proclaimed Mussolini's official 'Doctrine of Fascism' in 1932, 'brings up to their highest tension all human energies, and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to meet it.'[17] When there was no war to fight, the Fascists found surrogates; when there was, they joined in. Mussolini was always the *Duce*, the military leader, the man on horseback. His regime was neither conservative, nor revolutionary; it was bellicose.

## Notes

1 G. Gentile, *Origini e Dottrina del Fascismo* (Rome, 1929), p. 48.

2 Speech to Chamber of Deputies, 11 Dec. 1925, quoted in R. De Felice, *Mussolini il Fascista*, ii (Turin, 1968), p. 269.

3 M. Antonioni, 'La Sorpresa Veneziana', *Cinema*, 25 Sept. 1940 (quoted in F. Savio, *Ma L'Amore No* (Milan, 1975), p. 30); M. Isnenghi, '30–40: l'ipotesi della continuità', *QS*, no. 34 (1977), 103–07.

4 P.V. Cannistraro, 'Mussolini's cultural revolution – Fascist or Nationalist?', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vii (1972), 137.

5 The oath is given in A. Aquarone, *L'Organizzazione dello Stato Totalitario* (Turin, 1965), p. 179.

6 F. Tempesti, *Arte dell'Italia Fascista* (Milan, 1976), pp. 211–12.

7 Speech of 10 Dec. 1925, in A. Aquarone, *L'Organizzazione* cit., p. 130.

8 '*Quadragesimo Anno*' (1931); quotation from Part Two, section 5, on p. 43 of English edn (London, n.d.).

9 G. Salvemini, *Under the Axe of Fascism* (London, 1936), p. 10. This claim was not exaggerated. A. Gradilone's *Bibliografia Sindacale Corporativa*, published in 1942, contained over 1,000 pages.

10 C. Vannutelli, 'The living standard of Italian workers, 1929–39', in R. Sarti (ed.), *The Ax Within* (New York and London, 1974), p. 147.

canteens provided extra food off-rations and family allowances were much increased. But the working week also went up, from 40 to at least 48 hours, and industrial workers were peculiarly exposed to air raids.

Indeed, Northern Italy was one of the few places where mass aerial bombing proved effective in the Second World War. It disrupted production, it shattered morale, and it forced thousands of people to flee from the cities. In Turin, 25,000 dwellings had been wrecked by the end of 1942; and 500,000 people had left Milan. The bombing also helped provoke the first real labour trouble for eighteen years. In Turin, over 100,000 industrial workers downed tools, usually for short periods, during the week after 5 March 1943; these 'internal strikes' soon spread throughout Piedmont and into Lombardy, Veneto and Emilia. The protests were triggered by the government's decision that only heads of families, who could prove they had in fact moved house, were to receive an 'evacuation allowance' of an extra month's wages. But the stoppages were also clearly political – anti-government, anti-war, anti-Fascist. In some factories, especially in Turin, Communist organizers helped stiffen the protest, and the Fascist syndicate bosses were helpless. Eventually the government and employers promised to pay up, and work was resumed. The strikes were the first mass protest demonstration in Axis Europe; they revealed how weak the Fascist regime had become by March 1943.

It was not, of course, the bombing raids alone which lowered morale. People had to cope with all the inevitable wartime shortages. There was very little heating fuel in the Northern cities in 1942–43, and shoes were virtually unobtainable. Soap became a luxury, as did coffee. Petrol had soon disappeared, and in 1942 private cars were requisitioned. Italian cities became quiet, or at least less polluted, and for a few brief years the tram and the bicycle recovered their old pre-eminence. Real wages may have been maintained, but that is an economist's calculation based on *official* prices, which had supposedly been more or less frozen in 1940. Most basic foods, including bread after October 1941, were rationed. The system seems to have held up until 1943; but the rations were extremely low. An adult civilian was allowed about 1,000 calories a day, even in winter: in 1942–43 the ration was 150 grams of bread a day, 400 grams of meat a month, 500 grams of sugar a month and so forth. This was quite inadequate, especially as the bread was 30 per cent maize. The whole 'corporate' structure of control and intervention provided only a quite inadequate diet. So the black market flourished. By June 1943 bread was being sold in Rome at eight times the official price, eggs at fifteen times; and the city's cats had long since disappeared.



The food shortages were not all that surprising. As in the First World War, half the soldiers had come from the fields; and animal feeds or artificial fertilizers were unobtainable by 1942. So food production fell (the wheat harvest was 6.51 million tonnes in 1943, compared with 8.18 million tonnes in 1938), but that only partly explains the long queues and poor diets of urban workers. Farmers could easily avoid selling their produce at fixed prices to the official agencies. Instead, they could eat it themselves, give or sell it to their relatives, or sell it on the black market. Mussolini himself told his ministers that only a quarter of Sicilian grain went to the State warehouses, most of the rest being smuggled into the towns in carts and sold under the counter.[10] As in 1915–18, many peasant families became relatively prosperous. They began buying land, and inflation soon reduced their mortgages. Sensing their chances, they simply ignored the regime: it was in the countryside, not the towns, that the Fascist system first collapsed.

## 14.4 Propaganda and the party

Yet it was the towns that mattered most politically; and morale in the towns was never high. Police informers in Milan had reported as early as July 1940 that many people were listening to Radio London, and after the fiasco in Greece a few months later 'lack of confidence is very widespread and discontent is growing'.[11] The chief of military intelligence spoke privately, in December 1940, of 'a state of mind similar to that which overcame the French on the eve of their catastrophe. It is the same moral bankruptcy; most people, as in France, want the war to end, at whatever cost.'[12] People spoke out freely, without shame or fear, blaming Ciano, the Germans or even the *Duce* himself; 'defeatism' was far more widespread than in 1915–18. As food became scarce, as prices rose steeply and as bombing became more frequent, civilian morale naturally grew worse, and by Christmas 1942 it had visibly collapsed – visibly, for slogans began to appear on walls: '*Il Fascismo è Fame*', '*Morte al Duce*', '*Viene Baffone*' ('Fascism is Hunger', 'Death to the *Duce*', 'Moustachio [i.e. Stalin] is Coming').

Moreover, it was not just the man in the street who complained. Fascist party officials stressed that the upper classes, young people and intellectuals were the most hostile to the war. Few private organizations sprang up to help soldiers' families or the war-wounded. The number of university students suddenly doubled, presumably because they were exempt from military service. And Mussolini went out of his way to annoy influential

people. In October 1941 he ordered all Sicilian-born government employees working in Sicily to leave the island, an evident sign of his suspicion about their loyalty. There were plenty of Sicilians in government service throughout the country, and it was idiotic to alienate them in this way; the Minister of Public Works called it, in his diary, 'an act of sabotage'.[13] In 1942 Mussolini stepped up his campaign. He brought in a compulsory register of share-ownership, one of the main issues that had frightened the wealthy and the Vatican away from Liberalism in 1920–21 (see §10.2). He even proposed to abolish officers' messes in the army. Mussolini's old contempt for the complacent bourgeoisie had clearly surfaced again, although the rhetoric was partly a response to events – he told newspaper editors in April 1942 that 'we always said we despised the comfortable life, and now the uncomfortable life has arrived'.[14]

That was not, perhaps, a very effective way of cheering people up; but what else could he say? Despite the State radio, the controlled press and the *Duce*'s undoubted gifts as pro-war journalist, government propaganda was feeble and ineffective after 1940. It compared unfavourably even with that of 1917–18. In the First World War Italy had been fighting for Trent and Trieste: incomprehensible ideals, no doubt, to the peasant-infantry, but ones which fired the enthusiasm of many officers and volunteers. In 1940–43 Italy was fighting for – what? For Corsica, Nice, Tunisia, Greece? Or for Hitler? Mussolini recognized the problem. It was put to him that he should use the clergy more for propaganda, but he dismissed the idea: 'How would the clergy explain to the people that we are fighting for Timor and Java?'[15] In these circumstances propaganda just could not succeed. If it bore any resemblance to reality it was liable to be 'defeatist'. The most popular radio commentator, Mario Appelius, was sacked in February 1943 for some incautious revelations. In practice, Fascist radio propaganda was simply abuse of the 'Anglo-Saxons'. That was fair enough in its way, but not too convincing to the millions of Italians who had relatives in the USA.

In any case, the Fascist propaganda machine had rivals. Colonel Stevens of Radio London became a national figure. The BBC's version of events, although no doubt doctored too, was a good deal more credible than that of the Italian State radio, RAI. The Vatican also had a broadcasting service; a British Foreign Office official minuted in July 1941 that it 'has been of the greatest service to our propaganda'.[16] Furthermore, it had a newspaper, the *Osservatore Romano*, whose circulation shot up to 200,000, and which on occasion even dared to publish Churchill's speeches, as well as many other items of unwelcome news. The regime



could not even produce any popular new songs: such efforts as the 'Ode to the *Duce*' or the 'Song of the Submarines' somehow failed to catch on.

Propaganda at home was primarily a matter for the Fascist Party. But the party had not been effective for years. After 1940 all servicemen were allowed to join it, so there were formally 4.75 million members by 1942, but the party lacked organization and credible leadership at every level, particularly at the top. There were constant personal squabbles. In December 1941 the party secretary challenged a government minister to a duel, and had to be replaced. The new secretary was Aldo Vidussoni. It was a symbolic appointment. Vidussoni was 28 years old, and thus represented Youth; he had been wounded in the Spanish Civil War, and so incarnated Valour. But unfortunately he was naive, indeed *fesso*: he had no judgement of men, no skills as an organizer, no gifts as an orator. He inspired derision, not devotion, from the public; and the Fascist old guard detested him as an upstart. The faction-fighting continued more bitterly than ever. Other 'outside' factions, for example the Petacci 'clan' (the family and friends of Mussolini's favourite mistress Claretta Petacci), joined in the mêlée. In short, the party not only failed to boost morale, but positively lowered it. Its one success was to divert public criticism away from Mussolini himself, but by late 1942 even that was beyond it.

Thus the party disintegrated from within. 'The party is absent and impotent', lamented Farinacci after the strikes of March 1943,[17] and he was right. The Grand Council had not met since December 1939; the *Duce* had not spoken from his balcony in Palazzo Venezia since June 1940. Admittedly in the spring of 1943 Vidussoni was replaced by a tough-minded ex-*squadrista*, Carlo Scorza, and a new chief of police took over, but by then the whole Fascist regime was crumbling. Reality had caught up with it. The façades of bellicose activism, of controlling the economy, of Youth and Patriotism, all were collapsing in the harsh glare of war.

## 14.5 On the fringe

Like earlier Roman Empires, the Fascist one crumbled first at the periphery. The Sicilians nursed their grievances, and founded secret 'autonomous associations' to struggle against the 'Continentals'. In the South Tyrol, most of the inhabitants were '*Optanten*' who had voted to leave (see above, §14.1), and who were regarded from 1940 onwards as German citizens subject to German law. So the Nazis set up a Delegation for Repatriation, with its own administration, its own courts and its own schools. The whole economy came under German control, and in many

rural areas Italian schools were shut down. The 'option' itself was not seriously enforced. By June 1942 only 72,000 South Tyrolese had actually 'gone back' to the *Reich* – most of them only as far as the North Tyrol. Often they did not like what they found – 500 of them were in Dachau concentration camp by April 1940 – and many returned clandestinely to their old homeland. In any case, there were still over 110,000 '*Optanten*' in the South Tyrol, living as German citizens without having to give up their farms. This was the ideal solution from their point of view, and one which they were not anxious to change. There were also 60,000 German-speakers who had chosen to stay, or not bothered to vote: these '*Dableiber*' were victimized as anti-Nazis. The South Tyrol had, in effect, slipped out of Italian hands.

Venezia Giulia was similarly threatened. The Germans, moving down the Balkans to help their Italian allies in Greece, took over Yugoslavia in April 1941. The country was carved up. Croatia became a petty kingdom, and the Italian Duke of Spoleto was made king, much to his horror (he wisely never went there). The Italians occupied, and administered directly, much of Slovenia and parts of the Croatian and Dalmatian coast. These new areas, bordering on Venezia Giulia and with much the same ethnic composition and history, posed huge problems. The Fascists could not hold them by force; nor could they reconcile the local Slavs to Italian rule, except perhaps by making far more concessions (on schools, use of Slav languages, administrative autonomy, etc.) than they had ever tolerated in Venezia Giulia itself after 1919. By late 1941 the Italians had a Slav revolt on their hands – the first armed Resistance movement in Axis Europe. Terrorist attacks became frequent. Guerrilla bands of the Liberation Front, a nationalist movement mainly led by Communists, controlled much of the countryside. The Fascists tried everything they knew. They took and executed hostages, burned villages, tortured captives; to no avail. By the summer of 1943 the Slovene and Croat Resistance movements were, in effect, alternative governments, and their organizations had spread far into Venezia Giulia itself. The various Slav regions under Italian rule looked like sharing the same fate: the Fascists were losing them all.

## 14.6 Underground stirrings

Fascism was crumbling; what of the anti-Fascists? They were debating and squabbling as usual, either in exile or on the remote Southern islands where the Fascist tribunals had confined them. In 1940 the USA had replaced France as the main centre of intellectual exile, although some



individuals like Silvio Trentin remained active in Toulouse, and indeed a 'Committee of Action for the Union of the Italian People' was set up there in 1941 by Communists, Socialists and 'GLists'. But there was no action, no union and no impact on the Italian people. In America, the formidable Carlo Sforza – aristocratic, anticlerical, ex-Foreign Minister, in exile since 1927, contemptuous of Fascism and of much else, including the king – pressed a rather different case on the State Department: a 'democratic' case, with few unpleasant Socialist overtones and certainly nothing dangerous like full Communist participation in a Popular Front. In August 1942 Sforza helped to organize a Pan-American Anti-Fascist Congress in Montevideo. The congress demanded a 'social and democratic Republic', a new Constitution and European federalism; worthy aims, if anyone in Italy wanted them. These exiles were out of touch: 1942–43 was a bad time to be a *republican* anti-Fascist, for the king was by far the most likely person to rid the country of Mussolini. There was no point, either, in disdaining the Church and the Communist Party, since they were the only non-Fascist bodies with an organization in Italy.

Yet the exiles were not the whole of anti-Fascism. Indeed, 1942–43 saw the revival of 'indigenous' anti-Fascist politics, after some seventeen years of quiescence. Seventeen years, after all, are not as long as all that: many people could remember pre-Fascist politics, and there were plenty of 'survivors' around, still young enough to be competent. The old intellectual radicalism of Amendola's Unione Nazionale and of the Rossellis' *Giustizia e Libertà* resurfaced in 1942. After much debate, the movement was broadened to include Republicans, Radicals and Left Liberals, and renamed the 'Party of Action' in January 1943. It was, as always, run by professors – De Ruggiero, Salvatorelli, Fenoaltea, Calamandrei – but now the professors had something to do: publishing clandestine journals like *Italia Libera*, proposing reforms that might actually be implemented, drafting Constitutions that might actually be adopted. The Communists also found it easier to spread their propaganda and organize their cells. *L'Unità* began to appear again in mid-1942 as a clandestine monthly, and Umberto Massola's network in Piedmont and Lombardy, although tiny, helped to foment the stoppages of March 1943. Socialists were fewer, but they too still existed and new groups like Lelio Basso's *Movimento di Unità Proletaria* were being formed within Italy. Most surprising of all, a Catholic – but formally 'non-confessional' and secular – party existed again by mid-1942. The new Christian Democrat (DC) party was headed by the old Popular Party leaders, men like De Gasperi, Gronchi, Spataro and Scelba. It was indebted for recruits to the million-strong branches of

Catholic Action and to numerous local 'discussion groups'. The Catholics, too, had their clandestine papers, especially *Il Popolo*; they, too, had their plans for the future, including political and trade union liberties and regional devolution; they, too, realized that the hour was rapidly drawing nigh. What was more, they had the Vatican and the Church behind them. That implied international links and information, a ready-made organizational network and unrivalled opportunities for propaganda.

So four major anti-Fascist groupings – Actionists, Communists, Socialists and Catholics – were showing signs of life. There were also many Liberals or Liberal sympathizers, issuing the occasional manifesto or dropping a word in an important ear. Then there was Ivanoe Bonomi, last Prime Minister but one, still busy twenty years later and claiming to be the heir of Giolitti and of the 'Historic Left'. Bonomi was respected at Court, and had friends among Roman bureaucrats and Southern landowners. He was a key link man in any political intrigue, particularly as he thoughtfully founded his own 'political party', the largely spurious Democratic Party of Labour, in order to guarantee his place at the negotiating table.

Did all this matter? No, in the sense that it was all very limited. None of the opposition parties, not even the Communists, had an effective organization: at the main Fiat works in Turin, there were 80 Communist Party members in March 1943, out of 21,000 workers. The police usually knew what the anti-Fascists were up to, and there were over 1,400 political arrests between March and June 1943. May Day 1943 was greeted by posters and circulars, but by nothing more militant, despite the successful strikes of a few weeks earlier. But yes, anti-Fascist activity did matter in the sense that these politicians were actually present in Italy and might influence events: Bonomi talked to everyone, the Communists provoked strikes. These people, whatever their faults, were more sensible than most of the exiles. Some of them, like Bonomi and Casati, had served in previous governments; others, like De Gasperi and Romita, had been prominent in party politics. They had learned to live with each other. In April 1943 Bonomi persuaded all the main anti-Fascist groups, except the anti-monarchist Republicans and Actionists, to join a 'United Freedom Front'. They would all work together against Fascism, and set up a democratic political system thereafter.

Here was something new, and important, in Italian politics: Catholics, Communists and Socialists agreeing to collaborate. And it was not just words. The agreement stuck, through all the vicissitudes of war and reconstruction, through four hard years of tragedy and triumph; for decades it was the foundation of the Italian Republic. So these wartime intrigues



did matter. They set up a claim to the Fascist succession, indeed helped to determine that succession. But they did not bring Fascism down. Only the king and the army could do that, and even they needed help.

Finally, a word on the Church in these years. Vatican City was, of course, neutral territory. Yet the Vatican was deeply involved in the war – organizing exchanges of disabled prisoners, providing relief for refugees and orphans, trying desperately to prevent the bombing of Rome, negotiating constantly with all sides. As John Lukacs has remarked, the Vatican's influence during the Second World War 'was very great, far greater than during the First World War; indeed, greater than at any time in the modern history of Europe'.[18] Above all, there was the Church's persuasive role within Italy. Vatican Radio and the *Osservatore Romano* provided alternative sources of information; they, and parishes throughout the country, also diffused alternative values to those of Fascist militarism. In 1917 Benedict XV had called the First World War a 'useless slaughter'. The words were just as applicable to Italy's war twenty-five years later, and although Pius XII was far too fastidious a diplomat to use such a phrase, his Christmas address in 1942 came fairly close, condemning both 'State-worship' and racialism. The Church's attitude was clear. The war had to be endured, but it could not be welcomed. It was, in all probability, a punishment sent by God. This resigned view, much denounced by Fascists and policemen – pastoral letters were often sequestered for 'defeatism' – accorded perfectly with the sentiments of most Italians. It was not defeatism exactly, just scepticism: *pazienza*, soon the war would be over, and then things could return to normal. The Church was speaking for the 'real country' at last. If her voice was muted, that too was a welcome change from the strident tones of militant Fascism.

## 14.7 The July plot

In the winter of 1942–43, as the war was being lost and the Fascist regime was collapsing, the political and diplomatic manoeuvres naturally became more intense. In the background were heard the distant rumble of guns in Libya and bombs on Milan, of strikes in Turin and food riots in Matera, of runs on banks and anti-Fascist congresses; in the foreground, in Rome itself, shadowy figures – some resolute, many fearful – held worried conversations, and sent out oblique signals to friend and foe alike. Another Caesar was about to fall in the Capitol; but how? And should no man else be touched, but only Caesar? How would the Germans, and the Allies, and the Fascists, and the Italian people react? Who would replace the *Duce*?

Above all, how would Italy get out of the war? Nothing, in those months, was clear; nothing was inevitable. Italian politics suddenly reverted to its familiar stereotype. It became a vast Renaissance drama, with plots and counterplots around the Court, with passionate loyalties and filial betrayals. The leading actors wore impressive costumes and bore resplendent titles – King, Pope, Marshal, *Duce*, Grand Council – but they all improvised their parts, and they all covered their tracks.

The leading role, as always in a crisis, was that of king. Victor Emmanuel III had been on the throne for nearly forty-three years, and had learned to be sceptical of politicians. He was an intelligent man, but unimaginative, timorous and remote. He was not likely to take any initiative if he could avoid it, let alone one that would risk his Crown. He wrung his hands, and hesitated: perhaps something would turn up. His chief adviser, the Minister of the Royal Household, Duke Acquarone, was far more busy. Acquarone talked to everybody who mattered, put people in contact with each other and transmitted messages to the king.

If the king were to act, he would need the army. Fortunately the army was still available. It had not been Fascistized, and it remained loyal to its king. It might have lost the war, but it knew its duty – to maintain order at home. Back in May 1940 General Soddu, as Under-secretary for War, had told the king's aide-de-camp that the king should not assume supreme command of the war 'so that the Crown can save the Country if the regime becomes decrepit or even threatens to collapse'.[19] In October 1941 General Hazon, commander of the *carabinieri*, told him that 'everyone is looking to the Crown to be a sheet-anchor if the war ends in defeat', and reassured him that the *carabinieri* and public security forces were 'anti-Fascist in tendency'.[20] General Hazon was obviously 'reliable'; so was the chief of police, Senise (unfortunately he was sacked in April 1943); so was the new Under-secretary of the Interior, Albini; and so was General Ambrosio, who took over from Cavallero as Chief of the General Staff in February 1943. All these men sent messages of devotion to the king, and the implied message was obvious. They would all accept whatever the king decided. They assumed that the king would call on one of his marshals to head a military government; their job would be to preserve public order thereafter.

The king, too, thought that the post-Fascist transition could best be tackled by a military government, although he toyed with various other possibilities (e.g. Bonomi or Orlando). But he could not carry out a coup on his own, or even with the army. That would have exposed the Crown. What if the new government failed? What if there were an unexpected Fascist backlash in the country? What if the Germans moved in? From the king's viewpoint, it was wise to wait until the military situation became absolutely desperate, i.e. until everyone could see that there was no alternative. And it would be even better if some other group took the initiative and overthrew Mussolini first.



There were, in fact, several possible ways in which that might happen, none of them pleasant. The Germans might engineer an 'ultra-Fascist' coup, replacing Mussolini by some real hardliner like Farinacci. That would get rid of Mussolini, but would solve no other problems, and it would force Italy to continue her hopeless war. Alternatively, there might be a popular revolt, led by Communists or Republican anti-Fascists – not a likely prospect, admittedly, but a very unwelcome one to conservative monarchists. Far more probable was Allied intervention: after further defeats, Italy would have to offer 'unconditional surrender', and the Allies would impose some political solution of their own. That might not be too bad if the Allies installed Bonomi, but unfortunately the Americans seemed keen on a Sforza government and on a republic. Finally, a group of 'moderate Fascists' – men like Dino Grandi, Giuseppe Bottai and Luigi Federzoni – might overthrow the *Duce* and negotiate an armistice with the Allies. But these men were not trusted by Allies, Germans or king, and in the unlikely event of them succeeding they might well expect a reward – themselves in government, and a moderate Fascist regime continuing. No wonder the king hesitated. The least bad outcome would be a 'limited' moderate Fascist move against the *Duce*, enabling the king to install a reliable marshal in government before anyone had time to react. But how was this to be managed? And how were the Allies to be squared?

Fortune intervened. On 5 February 1943 Mussolini made the king's task easier by sacking half his Cabinet. Grandi ceased to be Minister of Justice, Ciano to be Foreign Minister, Bottai to be Minister of Education. They now had all the more reason for disaffection, and all the more time to conspire. In March came the Northern industrial strikes. They brought about a strong Fascist reaction and a tough new party secretary, so the dissidents had to act quickly before worse befell them. The strikes also led Farinacci to propose that the Grand Council should be convened, to restore morale. And the war, too, came closer. On 13 May the Axis troops in North Africa finally surrendered. On 9 July British, Commonwealth and American troops landed in Sicily, and met little resistance. Within a week the western half of the island was in Allied hands, and the Chief of the General Staff was recommending surrender. Finally, Mussolini's rather feeble efforts to persuade Hitler to switch men and arms from Russia to the Mediterranean failed. When he came back empty-handed from his final

meeting with the *Führer* at Feltre in mid-July, it was obvious that mainland Italy was completely exposed. In these circumstances Mussolini could not refuse the call for a Grand Council meeting, supported as it was both by the 'moderate' Fascists and by hardliners like Farinacci. So here was a chance for the dissidents to unseat Mussolini by 'constitutional' means.

As for the Allies, the king's task was to persuade them that he, not they, should install the next government; and that they should offer an acceptable peace, preferably in secret. These two points were connected. The Allies would not offer peace as long as Mussolini remained in power; and any new government had to be acceptable to them, or they might not offer peace at all. There was, therefore, much secret Italian diplomacy in 1942–43, sounding out Allied intentions and seeking to discredit *émigré* politicians – especially Sforza – whom the king disliked. Ciano approached the British Foreign Office in November 1942; the heir apparent's wife, the Princess of Piedmont, passed messages from Lisbon; the new Duke of Aosta promised to overthrow Fascism. Nothing much came of these efforts: Churchill was sympathetic but Eden was not. The Vatican, with its international links, was far more useful. In December 1942 the Apostolic Delegate in Washington was instructed to make it quite clear to the US government that Count Sforza

*is not thought, by informed people, to be a suitable person for the circumstances mentioned above, if only by reason of his age. He is thought by some to be motivated by anticlerical ideas and sentiments, which cannot fail to arouse anxiety among Catholics . . . in general the Italian émigrés, either because of their political outlook which would lead them to repeat the errors and weaknesses of the past, or because of the spirit of revenge and vendetta which it would be difficult for them to avoid, or – especially – because of their inadequate knowledge of the present circumstances and needs of Italy, which have greatly changed in recent years, do not seem capable of the tact necessary to meet the difficulties which would face any successor government.*[21]

Thus did the Vatican 'interfere' in Italian politics; and successfully. By February 1943 the Americans were asking Vatican advice on the next government and on the monarchy question. On 22 May the Vatican replied that 'the Italian people is in general attached to the monarchy'; the king should be allowed to choose his Prime Minister – 'governments imposed by other people would certainly not be welcome to the Italian people'.[22] On 29 May Roosevelt's negotiator in Washington told the Apostolic Delegate that the USA accepted the idea of a military government,



and promised to negotiate a separate peace – or rather, to accept a separate surrender; the king should be told. At last the way was clear.

Not only clear, but compulsory. If Fascism were not overthrown, the Americans would bomb Rome, thousands of people would be killed, and Italy would suffer the fate of the defeated. These were no vain threats. On 19 July Allied planes did bomb Rome for two hours, killing 1,500 people – including General Hazon, commander of the *carabinieri* – and wrecking the Basilica of San Lorenzo. It was, possibly, a political air raid: if so, it achieved its aim. In the next few days the Minister of the Royal Household made careful arrangements with the army and the various police forces: all was made ready for the royal coup.

On the evening of 24 July the Grand Council met at last. Grandi had drawn up a masterly resolution, vague and superficially unexceptionable. It urged that the various State institutions – government, parliament and corporations – should resume their proper functions. The Fascist regime might continue, but the one-man dictatorship must end. The resolution also called upon the *Duce* to ask the king to resume effective command of the Armed Forces, and with it 'that supreme initiative of decision-making which our institutions attribute to him'. This was the real point. It was a virtual invitation to the king to overthrow Mussolini. The debate was acrimonious and confused, and went on until the early hours of the morning. Many of the Fascist leaders present clearly did not grasp the implications of what they were discussing. In the end Grandi's resolution was carried by 19 votes to 7 (or 19–8 including Farinacci, who voted for a separate motion of his own). Even the *Duce*'s son-in-law, Galeazzo Ciano, voted in favour. The Fascist *gerarchi* had thrown in the towel. Why? The extreme circumstances of July 1943, with Sicily invaded and Rome bombed, were mainly responsible; but it needed also Dino Grandi's brave initiative among the weary *gerarchi*, and the king's known attitude, to pull it off.

The next afternoon Mussolini visited the king, and was not only dismissed, but arrested. Meanwhile the *carabinieri* took over the radio stations, the post offices and the telephone exchanges; the Ministry of the Interior was occupied, and so was the Fascist Party headquarters. A few leading *gerarchi* were also arrested. A tank division moved into central Rome. It all passed off very quickly and successfully – but then a *coup d'état* is not all that difficult if king, army, police, populace and even most governing politicians are all on the side of the rebels. Later that evening the king appointed Marshal Badoglio to be the new Prime Minister. His government was to be 'technical', i.e. to consist of civil

servants and generals, not politicians. The State radio broadcast the news at 10.45 p.m.: Fascism had fallen, but the war continued.

It was a fitting end. The Fascist regime had fallen, as it had arisen, because of war. It had glorified High Politics; and it was overthrown by the monarch, and replaced by a marshal. The new government dissolved party, Grand Council, Special Tribunal and Chamber; the Militia, being armed, was merged into the army. Hardly a Fascist stirred. In Rome, it was as if Fascism had never been. The years of rhetoric and posturing, the Battles for Wheat and Births, the Empire and the Pact of Steel, had left, it seemed, no legacy at all. They had been a bad dream, best forgotten: a mere 'parenthesis', in Croce's phrase. Yet Fascism was not dead yet. It took two more years of war and civil war before the regime finally disappeared. And Fascism did leave a legacy. Post-Fascist Italy was set up as the regime's inverted image: a peace-loving, democratic, decentralized republic, guaranteeing civil liberties and run by men with impeccable anti-Fascist credentials.

## Notes

1 *Ciano's Diary 1937–38* (London, 1952), p. 32 (entry for 13 Nov. 1937).

2 *Ciano's Diary 1939–43* (London, 1947), p. 125 (entry for 13 Aug. 1939).

3 *Ciano's Diary 1937–38* (London, 1952), p. 33 (entry for 14 Nov. 1937).

4 For this letter, see C.J. Lowe and F. Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy 1870–1940* (London, 1975), pp. 350–52 and E. Faldella, *L'Italia nella Seconda Guerra Mondiale* (Bologna, 1959), pp. 16–17.

5 The speech is given in full in R. De Felice, *Mussolini il Duce*, ii (Turin, 1981), pp. 841–42.

6 Report dated 27 Jan. 1941, in L. Ceva, *La Condotta Italiana della Guerra* (Milan, 1975), pp. 191–92. On the poor training of Italian troops, see also Faldella, *L'Italia nella Seconda Guerra*, pp. 51–52.

7 F. Minniti, 'Il Problema degli armamenti nella preparazione militare italiana dal 1935 al 1943', *SC*, ix (1978), 24; cf. C. Favagrossa, *Perché Perdemmo la Guerra* (Milan, 1946), p. 14.

8 Memorandum of Cavallero 19 Jan. 1942, quoted in Ceva, *La Condotta Italiana* cit., p. 199. Cf. P. Puntoni, *Parla Vittorio Emanuele III* (Milan, 1958), p. 94 and p. 98; F.W. Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship* (Harmondsworth, 1966), p. 237 and p. 293.

9 A.S. Milward, *War, Economy and Society, 1939–45* (London, 1977), p. 97.



10 G. Gorla, *L'Italia nella Seconda Guerra Mondiale* (Milan, 1958), p. 242.

11 Report dated 9 Dec. 1940, in P. Melograni (ed.), *Rapporti Segreti della Polizia Fascista 1938–40* (Bari, 1979), pp. 128–29.

12 Puntoni, *Parla* cit., p. 34.

13 Gorla, *L'Italia nella Seconda Guerra Mondiale* cit., p. 250.

14 G.B. Guerri, *Rapporto al Duce* (Milan, 1978), pp. 330–31.

15 Gorla, *L'Italia nella Seconda Guerra Mondiale* cit., p. 288.

16 A. Rhodes, *The Vatican in the Age of the Dictators* (London, 1973), p. 246.

17 Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship* cit., p. 254.

18 J. Lukacs, *The Last European War* (London, 1976), p. 367. This judgment is confirmed by the published Vatican documents: *Actes et Documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale* (11 vols) (Rome, 1965–81).

19 Puntoni, *Parla* cit., p. 12.

20 Ibid., p. 77.

21 Mgr Tardini to Mgr Cicognani, 7 Dec. 1942, in *Actes et Documents du Saint Siège* cit., vii, p. 131.

22 Card. Maglione to Mgr Cicognani, 22 May 1943, ibid., p. 362.

CHAPTER 15

# Resistance and renewal: Italy from 1943 to 1948

In July 1943 a 'regime of popular unity founded on war' collapsed; it was soon replaced by another regime of popular unity, founded this time on anti-Fascism. This was surprising, considering how tender a plant anti-Fascism was in 1943. Yet there were good reasons for its sudden success. The fall of Fascism left a political vacuum, and Italians abhorred that; the king had less influence on events after 8 September 1943, and could not block the anti-Fascists; the Communist leaders were moderate, and anxious for alliances; clerical politicians joined the other anti-Fascists, rather than setting up as rivals; the Americans were sympathetic and supportive. By June 1944 the anti-Fascist parties controlled the government in Rome, despite the king. By June 1946 they had established a Republic, and were drafting a new Constitution. So a new 'regime' emerged. It looked remarkably like the old pre-Fascist one, especially that of the Giolittian era – but without the king, without the Nationalists, without the militarism and without the High Politics.

## 15.1 The forty-five days

'The war continues.' That was Marshal Badoglio's message to the Italian people as he took over power on 25 July 1943; but few believed him. Most Italians rejoiced that Fascism had fallen, and thought peace was imminent. Nor did Badoglio himself mean what he said. The war had to continue for a time, it was true, so as to deceive the Germans while an armistice was negotiated with the Allies; but it would only be for a few days, or at most weeks.

Yet the new government failed in its main task. It did not make peace quickly enough, or secretly enough, to get Italy out of the war. It was

not altogether Badoglio's fault. The Allies proved reluctant to 'negotiate'; they wanted 'unconditional surrender', although they were not sure themselves what that meant. By mid-August the slogan had become 'honourable capitulation', not much clearer. The Badoglio government sent envoys to Lisbon, Tangiers and Madrid. They explained that Italy wanted to surrender, indeed wanted to change sides, but could not do so yet. The Germans were pouring divisions over the Brenner and clearly intended to take over the fight within Italy. If the Italians surrendered immediately, the Germans would seize Rome. So Badoglio could do nothing, not even surrender, unless and until the Allies sent parachutists to the Rome area; in that case the Italians would hold the airfields and start fighting the Germans.

Here was a promising basis for negotiations, but there were unforeseen delays. General Castellano, Badoglio's envoy in Lisbon, talked there with British and American generals, but forgot to take a radio with him. So the Italian government knew nothing of the talks' progress until a week later, when Castellano arrived back in Rome (by this time another general had been sent to Lisbon to find out what was happening). Meanwhile Churchill was out of Britain from 6 August to 19 September, conferring at Quebec and visiting Washington. Eventually an agreement was patched up. General Eisenhower consented, not very enthusiastically, to send airborne troops to the Rome area. On 3 September General Castellano signed a secret 'short armistice' (i.e. military only, without political or economic clauses) at Cassibile, near Syracuse in Sicily. The landings near Rome, and the major Allied thrust at Salerno, were to be six days later, and the armistice would be announced then.

The plan misfired. The Germans suspected what was going on, and by 7 September they controlled the airfields. So Eisenhower did not send his parachutists. But he carried on with his Salerno plans, and – despite all Badoglio's pleas – he announced the armistice, at 6.00 p.m. on 8 September. The consequences were as foreseen. In the next three days the Germans took over Rome. Badoglio gave the Italian army no clear orders to prevent this takeover, or indeed to do anything at all. There was some confused resistance by infantry units, and some street-fighting in the city itself, but on the whole Rome was simply left to its fate. Moreover, on news of the armistice Italian troops throughout the country dispersed in confusion, or were taken prisoner by the Germans. The next day Allied troops landed near Salerno and faced a long and bitter battle against the Germans, with negligible Italian support. In north-east Italy, in Venezia Giulia and the South Tyrol, and in Fiume, the Germans took over



formal control of their 'new provinces'. On 12 September a daring German commando raid 'rescued' Mussolini from his enforced retreat in the Abruzzi mountains, at Gran Sasso, and took him off to Germany. So the haggling over the armistice provisions – over the release of British prisoners-of-war, the handover of airfields, the passing-on of information about German supplies – had come to naught; with one important exception. The Italian navy sailed to Malta, more or less intact, and thereby freed many Allied ships for the Atlantic or Far East. The whole balance of naval power was changed – a fact appreciated by Churchill, if by few others at the time.

But that was the only ray of light. Rome had been lost, the army had disintegrated, the country had become a battlefield for Allies and Germans. 'The war continued', with a vengeance. It not only continued, but devastated the Italian mainland for the next twenty months. Italy was no longer allied to Germany; she was occupied by her instead. Badoglio had failed not only diplomatically, but strategically. He had failed to mine the Alpine passes and tunnels, and thus prevent German troops entering Italy; he had failed to hold the airfields near Rome; he had failed even to organize the city's defences. The Allies found themselves not with one opponent less but with one campaign more: a long, hard slog up the peninsula, fought by tired troops for doubtful military objectives. Perhaps the botched armistice had even more serious consequences. If the Allies had landed successfully north of Rome, Central and Northern Italy might have been taken quite quickly. By 1944 Anglo-American troops might have swung round into the Balkans, and reached Eastern Europe before the Red Army. This argument, although speculative, gives some measure of Badoglio's (and the Allied) failure.

In the restricted perspective of Italian politics, the most important event of 8–9 September was the king's action. In the early morning of 9 September he, the royal family, Badoglio, the government and the general staff fled Rome to avoid capture. By the next day they were safely installed in Brindisi, on the south-east coast. The king had abandoned not only his army, but his capital. It was an ignominious royal betrayal, and it was never to be forgiven or forgotten. On 9 September Victor Emmanuel III threw away what goodwill he had won on 25 July. His flight was to mean the end of his dynasty three years later, and even before then it greatly reduced royal influence on affairs, amid all the crises and horrors of war. And yet . . . the king's flight was not merely a debacle. Despite everything, he still symbolized the State. He was alive and well, and living in the South. It was not only the war which was to continue.

## 15.2 The Allies and the 'Kingdom of the South'

Yet the king's Italy had evidently shrunk. Rome and the ministries were in German hands; Sicily already, and most of Southern Italy soon, came under direct Allied rule by the Allied Military Government (AMG); Central and Northern Italy were run by the Germans, or by Mussolini's puppet-regime that the Germans had installed on Lake Garda (see below, §15.3). The Badoglio government 'controlled' only Sardinia and four provinces on the south-east Italian mainland, and even these were only allowed it 'in order to preserve such remnants of dignity for the new regime as had survived the ignominious (though necessary) flight from Rome'.[1] Moreover, an 'Allied Control Commission' was soon set up to 'supervise' the government and the provincial Prefects; the Badoglio administration had minimal independence even in its 'own' areas. Badoglio sought desperately for status. He and the king pleaded to be allowed to join the war as an Ally. Churchill refused – allies have claims to equal status. Even so, on 13 October Badoglio declared war on Germany. Italy became not an ally but a 'co-belligerent' – an ambiguous status, but better than being a defeated ex-enemy. Badoglio's strongest card was that his government had signed the 'military' armistice. In late September he went on to sign the political and financial 'long' armistice. These armistices gave the Allies control over Italian economic and military resources, and great influence over Italy's whole political future. Thereafter it was in their interests to preserve the government that had signed such terms. But in every other respect the Badoglio government was weak. It was supposed to be a military government, but there was virtually no army left – twenty-one poorly equipped divisions at most, out of the sixty-two that had existed on 8 September. No army, no marshal; perhaps no army, no king.

The Allies – especially the Americans – soon realized the need for a 'broader-based' government, more able to rally Italians to the cause. Even Churchill recognized this, though he insisted that Badoglio must remain in office, and that the armistice terms must be observed. But the king had no particular wish to see the government broadened, and hardly anybody else was willing to broaden it. Anti-Fascist leaders detested the king and the marshal, saw no reason to support the royal military government, and suspected it had signed dishonourable armistice terms. Most anti-Fascists naturally wanted to take over power themselves. In Rome, Bonomi's United Freedom Front changed its name to the Committee of National Liberation (CLN), deplored the king's 'dereliction' and went underground. In Naples, which Allied troops took on 1 October, both Benedetto Croce and the returned exile Carlo Sforza refused posts in a reshuffled Badoglio government; they insisted on the king abdicating and on a new, anti-Fascist government being formed. In January 1944 the anti-Fascist parties held a congress at Bari. They resolved that a 'Constituent Assembly' should be elected after the war to settle the 'institutional question' – i.e. whether Italy was to continue to be a monarchy – and to draw up a new Constitution. The congress also proclaimed the need for the king to abdicate immediately: this was necessary, in Sforza's view, so that a new regime might more credibly 'defend the sacred borders of the fatherland and our old and honoured colonies'.[2] Here was a powerful argument. The king was portrayed as the major obstacle not only to an 'anti-Fascist' government but to the very preservation of the country. Although Victor Emmanuel refused to abdicate, he eventually agreed to allow his son Humbert to become 'Lieutenant-General of the Realm', once Rome was taken. This did not satisfy the anti-Fascists, who still refused to join Badoglio's government. Indeed, at Bari they had elected a *Giunta*, or executive, to act as an alternative and more legitimate government.



By this time the anti-Fascists' 'traditional' supports were gradually coming back to them. As the Allied armies advanced, so more territory was handed over to the Badoglio government – in February 1944 it was 'given' Sicily and most of the South, and the government moved camp to Salerno. These zones now enjoyed a more or less free press, often run by anti-Fascist intellectuals. Local government, too, was coming into different hands. The Allies replaced most Prefects and police chiefs with colourless junior officials. They also appointed 'sound' or 'anti-Fascist' local notables as mayors, a policy which was particularly disastrous in Western Sicily as it handed back local power to the Mafia bosses. The new mayors were often assisted by committees – the doctor, the priest, the schoolteacher, a token peasant; in them the parties could find a platform. Local 'Committees of National Liberation' sprang up in the major cities; and there was ample opportunity everywhere for acquiring weapons and ammunition. In short, the anti-Fascists' position was stronger than it seemed. Time was on their side. The Allies would not rule Italy for ever; and the king's flight had discredited the major obstacle to their ambitions.

The political impasse between the Italians reflected divisions between the Allies. Britain had been fighting Italy for three years in the Western Desert, and wanted her armistice reward. Eden detested the Italians so much that even his own officials were said to call him 'almost psychopathic'.[3] Churchill had no love for the anti-Fascists in general or for Sforza in particular: his *Memoirs* describe Italian politics in 1943–44 as 'an

endless series of intrigues among the six or seven Leftish parties . . . to get rid of the King and Badoglio and take the power themselves',[4] and he called Sforza 'a useless, gaga, conceited politician', who was probably aiming to become king himself.[5] From his perspective Badoglio was the best bet. Roosevelt, on the other hand, had 600,000 Italo-American voters to worry about, and a Presidential election coming up. The US army had not been fighting the Italians for long, and the State Department had little interest (then) in the future balance of power in the Mediterranean. The anti-Fascists could count on sympathy in Washington, and could play the Allies off against each other.

Eventually Stalin resolved the issue. In March 1944 the USSR officially recognized the Badoglio government. Two weeks later the Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti arrived in Naples from Moscow and announced that the Communists were willing to join the royal government. Most Communists were dismayed to hear it, but the new policy – known ever afterwards as the '*svolta* of Salerno' – worked. If the Communists joined the government, the other parties had to join as well, or risk a huge increase in Communist influence. So Togliatti, Croce and Sforza all became 'Ministers without Portfolio', as did Socialist and Liberal representatives. 'Broadening' was at last achieved, mainly by the Russians, via Togliatti.

The new government was, in fact, broader than it was long. Seven weeks later, on 4 June, the Allies entered Rome, and Crown Prince Humbert took over officially as Lieutenant-General. More significantly, the anti-Fascist leaders in Rome – Bonomi, Nenni, Ruini, De Gasperi, Cianca – emerged blinking from the catacombs. They demanded a new government, led by a civilian; indeed, they demanded to be the new government. The Americans supported this claim; Togliatti and the Communists could hardly oppose it, any more than could Humbert. So Badoglio had to resign. A new government was hastily cobbled together in the Grand Hotel. It was led by Bonomi, and it consisted mainly of leaders of the six parties in the Committee of National Liberation. The Rome CLN had taken over, in a bloodless coup against a phantom monarch and against the British. Churchill, who had been away watching the Normandy embarkation, was furious: 'I am not aware, at this present time, that we have conceded to the Italians, who have cost us so dear in life and materials, the power to form any Government they choose without reference to the victorious Powers and without the slightest pretence of a popular mandate.'[6] But there was nothing he could do. It was true that the central CLN represented nobody in particular; but it did represent an idea, the idea of 'national unity founded on anti-Fascism'. That was a powerful formula. It offered a real prospect



of 'making Italians' on a new basis, even of overcoming the old divide between 'legal Italy' and the 'real country'.

After June 1944 a 'normal' routine of politics was gradually established in Rome. Everyone agreed that the 'institutional question' could wait. Meanwhile Bonomi, like Badoglio, sought to make his government more credible. He was fortunate in that the Allies were concentrating their resources on Normandy, and so needed more Italian support. The Italians managed to put three divisions in the field by November, although in Sicily 80 per cent of potential conscripts dodged the draft. Moreover, the American elections were approaching, and Roosevelt needed to be seen to be treating Italy well. Accordingly the Allied Control Commission dropped the word 'control' from its title, although not from its activities. In September the Allies announced a huge economic and medical relief programme. In October the USA resumed full diplomatic relations with Italy. The British, too, eventually came round. Bonomi had accepted the armistice terms. Besides, the Communists were looking quite powerful, especially in the North. It might be better to back a reliable old warhorse like Bonomi than risk facing a Communist takeover. On one point the British remained adamant: Sforza was not to be Foreign Minister. Bonomi did not mind. His government pursued reassuringly conservative policies at home, and although it passed tough legislation to punish Fascists and 'purge' the administration, it showed little sign of fanaticism in implementing it.

In November 1944 came another political crisis. The Party of Action and the Socialists were unhappy about the slowness of the 'purge' – only about 500 officials had been dismissed by this time. They were also worried, as always, about appointments. The government insisted on its right to appoint Prefects and other officials in newly liberated areas, e.g. Florence in September 1944: Rome's writ, not that of the local CLN, should run even in the radical North. The Socialists and Actionists found this doctrine strange. Where did the government's legitimacy come from, if not the CLN? The obvious answer was 'the Crown', but that was not acceptable to them. So they left the government. Bonomi carried on much as before, with Liberal, Christian Democrat and Communist support. The Christian Democrat leader De Gasperi became Foreign Minister, a vital post at that time. The episode showed that the CLN's claim to be the fount of post-Fascist legitimacy could and would be resisted. It also showed that parliamentary politics could be conducted even without a parliament; that temporary majorities could be constructed even without deputies; that Socialists and Communists could split apart even while formally allied. Things were clearly getting back to normal.

## 15.3 The Republic of Salò

But not in the North. There, in September 1943, the Germans had restored Mussolini as head of a new Fascist regime, the 'Italian Social Republic'. Mussolini agreed rather reluctantly to this turn of events. He did not want to be an Italian Quisling, and told Hitler so – an unfortunate gaffe, for the *Führer* apparently admired the Norwegian puppet. But the *Duce* soon changed his mind. A Fascist restoration gave him the chance to strut once more upon the stage; and it might prevent direct German rule in Northern and Central Italy. The new government was based, not in Rome which the Allies might take within weeks, but in various Northern cities – the Ministry of Finance was at Brescia, that of Public Works was at Venice, etc. Mussolini himself was at the Villa Feltrinelli in Gargnano, but the regime soon became known as the 'Republic of Salò', for it was in that small town on Lake Garda that the Ministry of Popular Culture was set up; and propaganda was the Republic's chief function.

Fascism, proclaimed the *Duce*, had been betrayed by the king and the Establishment, indeed by some of its own leaders. All those who had voted for Grandi's motion on 25 July were condemned to death. Most had fled, but Marshal De Bono, Galeazzo Ciano and three others were shot in January 1944. Ciano was the *Duce*'s son-in-law, but Mussolini rejected pleas from his favourite daughter to spare her husband's life: treason could not be tolerated, and Fascism could not be sentimental. However, the king was the main target of Mussolini's scorn. It was he who was really to blame for Italy's failures and defeats. Henceforth, said the *Duce*, Fascism would be republican and radical, as well as loyal to its wartime ally.

These were brave words, and Mussolini made some effort to live up to them. The reconstituted party – the Fascist Republican Party – attracted 487,000 members by March 1944, a surprisingly high figure given the circumstances. In November 1943 it held a congress at Verona and approved an eighteen-point programme, including the promise to convene a Constituent Assembly. In 1944 the government went further. It declared that all large firms were to be 'socialized' – run by a management board on which half the members would be elected by the workers. Basic industries would be run by the State. The new system would replace the defunct corporatism of the 1930s.

The 'socialization' law annoyed Northern industrialists; it disturbed the Swiss, who owned much of Italian industry, and the Germans, who hoped to; and it failed to impress the workers. Indeed, the Communists organized a successful general strike in March 1944, with up to 500,000



taking part, just after the measures were announced. In practice, hardly any firms were 'socialized' – just the newspapers and publishing houses, and they only nominally. Few people believed in the new radical Fascism. Nor were the leaders of Salò new radical Fascists. They were either the same old conformists and careerists as before – Buffarini Guidi at the Interior, Marshal Graziani at Defence, Tarchi at the Ministry of Industry – or else fanatics like party secretary Alessandro Pavolini and 'Racial Inspector' Giovanni Preziosi. The civil servants and judges were also the same officials as before: most of them avoided taking the oath of loyalty to the new Republic, but they kept their jobs.

The government's real problem was that it had responsibility without power. All the old colonies had gone, as had Slovenia, Dalmatia and the Southern third of Italy. Venezia Giulia and the South Tyrol were separate regions, run by *Gauleiters* with no allegiance to Salò. Even in the Republic, the Germans ran practically everything. They controlled the government's telephones, and censored the government's letters. Hitler's ambassador, Rudolf von Rahn, and Himmler's man, SS General Karl Wolff, had far more power than any Fascist. The Germans kept 600,000 former Italian soldiers in internment camps in Germany, and used them as cheap industrial labour. They tried to transfer machinery, indeed whole firms, to Germany – many units of Innocenti were in fact moved from Milan in 1944. They insisted on calling up youths for military or 'industrial service', i.e. forced deportation to Germany. And they deported at least 7,500 Italian Jews to German concentration camps; 6,885 of them died there, mostly in the gas chambers.

The Germans also gave orders to the Republic's army and police. Not that the Republic had much of either. Marshal Graziani, as army commander, had 45,000 reliable men at most, plus a varying number of ill-armed conscripts – perhaps 80,000 early in 1944 – liable to desert at any moment. There were also 40,000–50,000 men in coastal battalions or anti-aircraft units, and various semi-private armies, e.g. Prince Valerio Borghese's '*Decima Mas*' (Tenth Torpedo-boat Squadron). These forces were quite inadequate for war, but like the party membership figures they show that Mussolini's Republic had some support; desertion was easy, after all. As for the Republic's policing, it was a tragic farce. The *carabinieri* were dissolved as being too monarchist – it was they who had arrested Mussolini on 25 July – and a 'Republican National Guard' (GNR) was set up to replace them as the main police force in the countryside. The GNR, with a nominal 100,000–150,000 men, was basically a mixture of the old royal *carabinieri* and the old Fascist Militia; but it was ill-trained and

inexperienced, except for the *carabinieri* within it. The ex-*carabinieri* squabbled with the ex-Militiamen, and were reluctant to hunt down anti-Fascists; they frequently deserted. The GNR soon had to withdraw from most rural areas, literally leaving the field free for anti-Fascist partisans.

But the GNR was not the only police force. The Ministry of the Interior had its own Republican Police – the old 'public security' forces – in the cities. These were professional policemen, suspected by the Germans of being too soft on anti-Fascists and Jews. The party ran its own 'Black Brigades' – *squadristi*, in short, for fighting anti-Fascists. Giovanni Preziosi had his own special force for hunting Jews; the Germans had the SS. Furthermore, most prominent Fascists retained their own private police forces, which robbed and murdered the citizenry at will, quarrelled fiercely among themselves, denounced rivals to the Germans and carried out 'dirty tricks' for other police units. Almost anybody could run a 'special police force'. All you needed was a handful of criminal thugs and a political protector. Buffarini Guidi, the Minister of the Interior, backed the 'Koch band', run by a sadistic cocaine addict named Pietro Koch. Roberto Farinacci supported the 'Muti', a mercenary company of 2,300 men, much used against partisans in the hills. These and other 'police groups' spent much of their time on private enterprise – bank-robbing, industrial espionage, kidnapping and political blackmail.

Mussolini looked on helplessly. Occasionally he sent a vain protest to Hitler; once, in December 1944, he went to Milan – in an open car! – and roused the Fascist faithful with a stirring speech. But he knew he had lost, and lost ignominiously. The Republic of Salò was a grisly parody of the old Fascist regime. It failed to protect Northern Italy from German savagery, and it finally destroyed the myth of Mussolini as all-powerful *Duce*. He was revealed as an impotent poseur, mouthing futile slogans. It is difficult not to feel some sympathy for him. He was an old man, defeated in life, wasted by sickness, abandoned by his daughter, surrounded by a squabbling family, bullied by the Germans, without friends and without hope. Still, he deserved his fate. He was an arrogant bully, and he had miscalculated. As the war crept nearer, he attempted to negotiate with the Allies. But so did General Wolff; and the eventual German surrender made no provision for the Fascist leaders. On 25 April 1945 Mussolini fled with his mistress Claretta Petacci for a romantic last stand in some Alpine redoubt. Even this was denied him. Communist partisans caught up with him at Dongo, on Lake Como. On 28 April he was shot in the back, and his body was brought back the next day to Milan to be hung up, face downwards, for public execration in piazzale Loreto. The other leading *gerarchi* –



Farinacci, Arpinati, Starace, Buffarini Guidi – were shot too; Preziosi killed himself. Many lesser figures escaped, sheltered by friends or business contacts, but no matter: the anti-Fascists had killed the *Duce*, and had dramatically demonstrated their vast new power.

## 15.4 The Resistance

The Salò Republic's most spectacular failure was in maintaining public order. This was not just because of inadequate policing. Right from the start, in September 1943, there were huge numbers of ex-soldiers, without orders but often still armed. There were also escaped British, Greek and Slav prisoners-of-war (50,000, according to some estimates); and there were urban evacuees of all kinds wandering through the countryside, many of them very anxious to avoid German and Italian officialdom. Half the population of Tuscany is said to have moved during the year after September 1943, usually from town to country.[7] Such men formed the first 'armed bands', living in the hills and woods of Central and Northern Italy. Sometimes they were outsiders terrorizing the local peasants, more often they were local men – e.g. returned soldiers – helped and fed by them. In either case they were real outlaws. In some rural areas they became a virtual mass insurrection, especially in the spring of 1944 when Mussolini's government called up three more age groups, and when the Germans stepped up their deportations of workers to Germany. The young men took to the hills to avoid this fate. By June 1944 the army High Command estimated there were 82,000 'rebels', and Marshal Graziani told the *Duce*

> *call-up to the army is practically void. The mass of young people prefer to take to the* maquis . . . *rather than go to Germany . . . In practice the government of the Italian Social Republic controls, and that only up to a point, the stretch of plain astride both banks of the Po. All the rest is virtually in the hands of the so-called rebels, who are supported by large sections of the population.*[8]

It was not surprising that most peasants supported them. They had sons of call-up age too. Moreover, the 'rebels', or rather the 'partisans', gave 'help' in wage negotiations with landowners, and helped the peasants to fiddle their grain quota allocations. The partisans seized part of the grain that the peasant was supposed to deliver to the authorities, and gave him a 'receipt' for double the amount they took. The Fascists accepted this receipt at face value. The peasant could then sell the other half of the grain on the black market, at ten times the price the State would have paid him.

He made a lot of money, and the partisans obtained peasant goodwill as well as free food. The system depended, of course, on collusion, or fear, on the part of the local Fascists, but there was usually no problem about that.

The partisans specialized in surprise attacks, in sabotage and blowing up bridges, in seizure of booty and political assassination. This was a real guerrilla war – rural, small-scale, improvised, mobile, a war of fierce hatreds and cruel local vendettas, with plenty of scope for individual heroism and cunning. And it was savage, on both sides. Pavone estimated that almost 45,000 partisans and around 10,000 'civilians' were killed in Central and Northern Italy from the autumn of 1943 to the end of the war.[9] Some whole villages were massacred. Here was a new kind of anti-Fascism. It was not the squabbling, self-important exile politics of pre-war years, nor the jockeying for position of Bari and Rome, nor even the disciplined, tenacious underground organizing and pamphleteering of Communist tradition. It was a series of spontaneous popular risings, local rather than national, military rather than political, often anti-city and anti-State rather than specifically anti-Fascist. It was very unexpected, caused by the sudden collapse of the old order and by the sudden German occupation; yet it was very 'traditional' too – a primitive war of rebels and bandits, fighting against the hated 'authorities', often to avoid conscription.

Here was a marvellous opportunity for the anti-Fascist parties in the North. Their leaders had some money, some organization and some experience of fighting; and their colleagues in the South had contacts with the Allies, who could supply guns, ammunition and food. Thus the party leaders had a lot to offer; in return, they acquired more or less reliable militias – a wonderful asset in an uncertain world. Some bands were founded by parties directly, especially by the Communists and the Party of Action. By 1944 most of the other bands had become party-affiliated. Communist partisans ran the 'Garibaldi brigades'; the Socialists controlled the 'Matteotti bands'; the Actionists manned 'GL'. They all had 'political commissars', charged with propaganda and with ensuring loyalty. This development permitted some tenuous regional and national co-ordination, although it also encouraged rivalries – occasionally Communist and Actionist bands took to fighting each other, and the Christian Democrat 'Green Flame' bands were regarded with much suspicion by the others. But the parties did not really control the partisans. One 'Garibaldi brigade' in Val d'Ossola had a priest as political commissar. Many people simply joined the nearest band, irrespective of ideological colour; others followed a local hard man or ex-army officer into the hills, and he chose his party later, according to circumstances, or chose no party at all.



The parties were not alone in seeking to channel the partisan movement. Some bands consisted mainly of workers from particular firms; many were financed and armed by industrialists, anxious to grant favours that would become repayable later. The owners of Fiat probably gave over 100 million lire in cash to the partisan bands, quite apart from vehicles, petrol, etc. Nor was 'resistance' confined to the countryside. The Communists had their urban guerrillas too, the GAP – *Gruppi di Azione Patriottica* – which were extremely effective, both in killing prominent Fascists and in provoking fierce German reprisals, thus alienating ordinary Italians even further from the regime. There were also factory committees of agitation, sabotaging war production and smuggling out arms and supplies. Many industrial firms helped the slow-down of output, by hiding machinery in Alpine valleys or by obstructing German plans for a transfer to the *Reich*. Above all, there were strikes, repeated, public and defiant – in Turin in November 1943, throughout Northern Italy in March 1944, by Fiat in June, in Milan in September, in Turin in November, in Turin and Milan in March and April 1945. Admittedly they were for higher wages rather than for liberty, but they were effective: production at Fiat was about 10 per cent of normal by late 1944.

Inasmuch as the Resistance was organized at all, the Communists were the major organizers and beneficiaries. In September 1943 the Italian Communist Party (PCI) was still very small, with perhaps 5,000 members, few of them industrial workers. But the party had capable '*cadres*' – dour, tough-minded organizers, experienced in underground work; men, in short, like the party's Resistance leader, Luigi Longo ('Gallo'). Three thousand of them, including Longo, Secchia and Scoccimarro, had just been released from prison by Badoglio, in August 1943. The party also had money, and it had friends over the border in Yugoslavia. So the 'Garibaldi brigades' were soon the most widespread of the partisan bands: they included perhaps 50,000 men, around 60 per cent of all active participants. Moreover, the low living standards of 1944–45 were a marvellous opportunity for propaganda: average daily wages, at constant 1938 prices, fell from 13.91 lire in 1943 to 5.16 in 1944, 40 per cent of their 1913 level. In the chaos and disruption of 1943–45, a well-led party could achieve miracles. The PCI encouraged strikes, campaigned for higher wages and threatened employers. By January 1945 it had 12,000 members in Turin, and over 70,000 in German-occupied Italy; most of them were factory workers.

In short, the Resistance was a Communist success story. Many Communists wanted to go further. They thought that the armed Resistance was

a marvellous opportunity for revolution. Togliatti, in government, was more cautious. He knew the Western Allies were the real power in Italy, and he could not afford to alienate them: American economic aid would be essential for years to come. He also knew that British troops were busy crushing Communist partisans in Greece; he wanted nothing similar in Italy. He realized that the 'insurrection' was restricted to a few Northern regions, and that there were still more Italians fighting on the Fascist side – until April 1945 there were more police, Black Brigades, etc. than there were partisans. Togliatti was not going to risk all the real Communist gains on one hazardous throw. The PCI in 1943–45 became a major force in the emerging anti-Fascist Establishment. That was enough, at least for the time being.

The Party of Action formed the second largest number of partisan units. There were about 28,000 members of the 'GL' bands by March 1945, about a quarter of the total number of partisans. But most of them were not members of the party, which remained the classic 'professors' party', the party of students and journalists, of men who were zealous, righteous and not much afflicted by doubt. Yet it was extremely influential. It was the Actionist leader, Ferruccio Parri, who first urged that the partisans must be a people's army rather than just a number of small intelligence-gathering groups. It was the Party of Action which insisted on 'purging' the administration, on setting up a republic and on radical political change. The Actionists envisaged a second Risorgimento, a national uprising that would cleanse away the stain of Fascism and establish a new Jerusalem, lay, radical and democratic. They helped to win the war; but they always had unrealistic hopes of the peace. When the war ended, the 'GL' bands were dissolved. The party, as such, had put down few roots.

The Christian Democrats had less need to build up an organization, for parishes existed already, and so did Catholic Action. Indeed, in Northern Italy the party organization was only formed in March 1944. Many Churchmen were still not convinced that it was a good idea to have a single Catholic party. The Christian Democrat partisans, the 'Green Flames', emerged therefore from Catholic Action (especially the youth movements) rather than from the party. Most priests in Northern Italy were sympathetic to the cause, many taking an active part in the fighting. In Udine, for example, the provincial clergy formally decided that the Germans were 'unjust invaders' whom it was lawful to oppose. The bishops were normally more cautious, but the Cardinal Archbishop of Turin visited partisan units in the hills, heard confessions and celebrated Mass with the guerrillas. Convents and hospitals provided food and refuge, and



sometimes stored arms. How many divisions had the Pope? None, but in 1944 he had around 20,000 partisans.

This policy made sense for the Church. She wanted a quick end to the war and a peaceful transfer of power; but she could hardly stand out against popular passions, and it was not prudent to let the Communists, Socialists and Actionists monopolize the Resistance. Fascism was obviously doomed; the Catholics, too, had to establish their credentials for the post-war world. The armed struggle provided these. It also furnished a veto on excessive political or social change, and on any suggestion of anti-clericalism. The Resistance was supposed to be a popular insurrection; it must not become a Communist revolution.

The other two major Resistance parties were the Socialists and the Liberals. The Socialists were allied to the Communists, but were much weaker in organization, and in strategy were often closer to the Actionists: they stressed *political* change (especially the abolition of the monarchy), were horrified by Togliatti's *svolta* in March 1944, were suspicious of the Church and pressed for a thorough-going 'purge' of officials. The Liberals were fewer, and some of them were suspect as royalist or '*Badogliani*', but they enjoyed much financial support from industrialists and others.

There were, therefore, five main anti-Fascist parties in the North, as in Rome and the South (not counting Bonomi's Democratic Labour Party, which was almost entirely a Southern creation). As in the South, these parties set up local and regional Committees of National Liberation (CLNs), although the parties included were different in each province, and although other people – Republicans, Trotskyists, anarchists, and free-lancers – sat on them as well. CLNs were also set up in factories, offices, transport services, etc., for the task was not just to co-ordinate military operations: 'every liberation committee that arises is another blow struck against Fascism, and is another stone laid to help build the new democratic State'.[10] The CLNs had real power, especially in liberated zones; they ran the fifteen 'partisan republics' which sprang up temporarily in 1944. The Actionists, in particular, hoped that they would continue after the war as the tutors of democracy, purging and uprooting 'the profound roots of Fascism, not just the Fascists'.[11] In Piedmont, the regional CLN founded its own purge commission, which investigated private firms as well as State officials: it condemned the managing director of Fiat to death, although the Allies rescued him just in time.

In January 1944 a supreme politico-military authority, the Committee of National Liberation for Upper Italy (CLNAI), was formed to co-ordinate the activities of both CLNs and partisans. This body soon asserted

its claims to power, not only against Germans and Fascists in the North but also against the official government and against the Allies. In August the Allies sent General Raffaele Cadorna, the son of the First World War commander, to the North to 'control' the partisan units. Eventually the Allies agreed to recognize the CLNAI as the legitimate political representative of the Resistance forces, and to entrust it with maintaining public order in liberated zones until an Allied Military Government could be set up; but it was to ensure that all arms were handed over immediately at the end of the war, and meantime the supreme military commander was to be Cadorna. Longo and Parri were made 'vice-commanders'; in practice both of them took more decisions than did Cadorna.

So did the CLNAI, which under its president, Alfredo Pizzoni – a respectable Anglophile banker, trusted by the Allies and with no party links – burgeoned in the last months of the war into a virtual provisional government. Individual parties sometimes acted on their own initiative, but on the whole the party leaders learned to collaborate with each other. In particular, they agreed to proclaim a general insurrection throughout Northern Italy in mid-April 1945, to liberate the Northern cities before the Allied troops arrived; they even agreed on sharing out the official jobs afterwards. The Communists would have acted alone if necessary, but the other parties could not allow that. They, too, realized it was vital to salve Italian honour and secure some political strongholds; so they joined in, however reluctantly in some cases. So did thousands of 'last-minute partisans'. There had been 80,000 partisans in March 1945; there were 130,000 by mid-April, and 250,000 by the end of the month. In the second half of April 1945 the North Italian cities fell to the anti-Fascists. It was the CLNAI that temporarily ran the liberated areas; it was the CLNAI, or the local CLNs, that purged the old officials and appointed new mayors, police chiefs and Prefects; it was the CLNAI that co-ordinated relief work and emergency supplies. And it was the CLNAI that handed over Milan to the Allies, with most public services working.

What was the significance of the partisans' efforts? Militarily, they undoubtedly contributed much to the Allied cause. They deprived Germany of manpower, and helped to tie down German soldiers and policemen in Italy. Their guerrilla activities were far from negligible. Marshal Kesselring estimated that in just three months, June–August 1944, they killed some 5,000 Germans and put a further 25,000–30,000 out of action.[12] They also helped thousands of escaped Allied prisoners, acquired and passed on information, and disrupted war production, transport of war material and Fascist morale. However, one should not exaggerate all this. The



80,000-odd partisans did not liberate whole regions by themselves, nor form a people's army, nor hold a front line. It was the Allies, not the partisans, who defeated the Germans and who liberated most of Northern Italy. Italy was not Yugoslavia.

The real effects were political. The Resistance not only aborted Fascist attempts to restore 'national unity' after September 1943; its leaders went on to proclaim that they had achieved a new 'national unity', on anti-Fascist terms. The peasants were 'involved' in the national struggle; the major cities of Northern Italy *were* liberated by Italians, not Allies. The new political system would not be merely an Allied imposition. The Communist Party benefited most, appropriately since it made the main contribution to the fighting. The Resistance 'legitimized' the PCI, and made it one of the indispensable pillars of a new 'national unity'. The Communists gained both democratic credentials ('we joined with everyone else in the struggle against Fascism') and revolutionary ones: an ideal combination. But the other parties benefited too. Actionists, Socialists, Christian Democrats and Liberals could all point with pride to dead heroes and to living legends (e.g. Parri or Pertini) as proof of their anti-Fascist credentials. Moreover, for the Northern party leaders the Resistance meant the CLNs – inter-party bargaining arenas, where men had learned to compromise for the common good. This experience had a profound impact on Italy's post-war Constitution-makers, and on the tacit conventions of the post-Fascist political game. Thus an unexpected, rather 'primitive' popular rebellion, with no united social or political programme, with no outstanding military or political leader – there was no Mao, no Tito, in Italy – achieved some surprising results. Post-Fascist Italy was to be a 'party-system', some would say 'partyocracy', legitimized by the overriding ideology of anti-Fascism and national unity.

Just as the First World War had provided political myths and political leaders for a whole generation, so too did the closing stages of the Second World War. The 'values of the Resistance' became sacrosanct. Even thirty years later a major law on public order laid down stiff penalties for any group who dared to criticize them.[13] This ideology was certainly glamorous and in many ways admirable, but it had, and has, unfortunate implications. The Resistance was usually portrayed in subsequent rhetoric as a patriotic 'people's war', far more 'revolutionary' and certainly far more united than it had been in reality. Post-war Italians looked back with pride to what had in fact been a chaotic period of national defeat, civil war and popular vendetta. The 'values of the Resistance' were vague: they might include romanticizing violence and taking a generously extensive

view about who was a Fascist. They might also 'legitimize' not only anti-Fascism, but guerrilla warfare, political assassination and urban terrorism. If the post-war political regime proclaimed these values too loudly and too carelessly, it was going to lay up trouble for itself later on.

That was one snag. There was another. The Resistance had been restricted to Northern and Central Italy. There had been no popular insurrections in the South, apart from the 'four days' of Naples in September 1943 before the Allies arrived. The old Southern political and economic system remained intact, and the Left parties were very weak. Even in Rome itself there had been no insurrection against the Germans. It was the Vatican, not the anti-Fascist parties, that in 1943–44 had provided an alternative focus of loyalty, had protected the city from bombing and had sheltered thousands of Jews; and it was the Vatican that in 1944–45, after the city's liberation, continued to provide food and shelter for the city's starving poor and for thousands of refugees, and to maintain close contacts with the government ministries. The Vatican's prestige in Rome had never been higher: even the Chief Rabbi became a Catholic convert in February 1945. Thus the anti-Fascist Liberation of Northern Italy in April 1945 posed the same question as had the Fascist March on Rome in October 1922. Would a new Northern-based élite, with a title to rule based on Northern fighting experience and with Northern ideas and institutions, conquer Rome and the South? Would it take over the State, or would it be absorbed by the system?

## 15.5 The wind from the North

In May 1945 a CLNAI delegation went to Rome. It demanded a new government, more representative of the Northern Resistance. The CLNs in the North should continue running local government, public services and industrial firms. The civil service should be immediately 'purged' and decentralized. There should be jobs for the partisans. The Romans had to agree, at least verbally. Bonomi resigned, and the Resistance leaders were brought into the government. The new Prime Minister was Ferruccio Parri himself, the Action Party leader who symbolized 'the values of the Resistance'. His government was another 'CLN' six-party coalition, but fourteen of its twenty members were Northerners. In Northern Italy, the local CLNs remained in being, and the Prefects and police chiefs they had appointed remained in office. CLN commissars managed the major industrial firms. CLN 'purge commissions' and local partisan groups took their revenge on Fascist officials, managers and landowners: at least



12,000–15,000 people were murdered in April–June 1945, 3,000 of them in Milan alone. It was a passionate wave of collective hysteria and private vengeance, horrible in its impact but understandable in its context, and mercifully brief – although in Piedmont and in the 'triangle of death' in Emilia the killings went on for several years.

Yet the Resistance leaders' victory was only apparent. The CLNAI had agreed that all partisans would lay down their arms at the end of the war. Most of them seem to have done so eventually, although rumours of a 50,000-strong Communist military organization circulated for years to come. So Parri had no anti-Fascist militia at his disposal. He could not use a body of armed partisans as a political bargaining counter in Rome, as Mussolini had done twenty years earlier. Worse, not all the partisans became peaceable citizens. Bandits and armed bands flourished in 1945–46, and although many of them were in the South and had nothing to do with the partisans, they all served to alienate public opinion and to discredit anti-Fascism. Thus Parri not only failed to maintain an armed militia, the first task of any revolutionary government; he also failed to maintain order, the first task of any government.

The government also had to cope with the disastrous economic legacy of war. Hundreds of thousands of ex-soldiers and former prisoners-of-war clamoured for jobs. Inflation reached record levels. Prices in 1945 were 24 times the 1938 level, even after a freeze on gas, electricity and rents. The government had no revenue, for the tax system had virtually collapsed. Over 3 million houses had been destroyed or badly damaged, as had most of the country's railway stock, lorries, bridges and ports. Industrial output in 1945 was about a quarter of the 1941 figure, and indeed was about the same as in 1884; the gross national product was about that of 1911, and income per head was lower than in 1861. One survey found that the average Italian took in only 1,650 calories a day in July 1946, compared with 2,650 pre-war.[14] These matters could not be put right quickly, and the government took the blame for disappointed hopes. Again, the comparison with Mussolini is instructive. The Fascists had been able to exploit post-war economic distress. They had come to power only in 1922, four years after the war, when things were getting back to normal and when, indeed, the economy was starting an impressive upswing. Parri had no such luck.

Above all, the government aroused hostility by its efforts at a 'purge'. It was not just public officials who worried about dismissal. Tough decrees had been passed, laying down criminal sanctions against those who had 'collaborated' with the Nazis or with the Salò regime. They could be

applied to virtually anyone in Northern Italy who had not actually been a partisan – i.e. to 30 million people. So millions of ordinary Italians began complaining about the injustice of retrospective legislation, and fearing denunciation by personal enemies. The courts often refused to convict, for judges and juries had held Fascist party cards themselves. The Liberals, swamped by protests, withdrew their support from the government. By the end of November 1945 Parri was forced to resign, protesting furiously that his efforts to create a new moral Italy had been sabotaged. Mussolini had conciliated the Establishment; Parri had alienated it. And so the 'wind from the North' blew itself out, after a mere six months.

Parri's government of 1945 was the most 'radical' that Italy had ever had, yet it achieved very little. It did not restore public order, nor 'purge' the administration; nor did it introduce long-term economic or social changes. There were no post-war nationalizations, no health service, no welfare state, no seizing the 'commanding heights' of the economy. Why not? The answer is simply that hardly anybody in power, even among the Communists or Socialists, thought in such terms. The left-wing parties were, in fact, very suspicious of the public economic agencies (the IRI, etc.) and regarded them as a Fascist legacy. They preferred 'hiving-off' to extensive State control; and they preached 'reconstruction' and 'national unity' like the others. The Communist leader proclaimed, in the party newspaper, that even if the Communists were in government by themselves they would still rely on private initiative to rebuild the economy.[15] The Communists insisted that there should be no dismissals, but neither they nor the Christian Democrats had any alternative economic strategy. There was no ready-made blueprint for change à la Beveridge. Politicians wanted merely to end the old 'autarchic' restrictions, to dismantle the corporate State and to get back to pre-war production levels. In any case, in a six-party government the Liberals and Christian Democrats had to agree to every measure, which in itself precluded radical change; and the Allied Military Government was still formally in charge of most of Northern Italy until December 1945. What the Parri government did achieve, however, was to discredit the Northern Resistance leaders, and the Party of Action in particular. Future governments would still be anti-Fascist party coalitions, but their base would be in Rome, not the Northern hills; and their leaders would be cautious professional politicians, most of whom had been in Rome or the South in 1943–45 and had taken little if any part in the fighting.

The new government formed in December 1945 was led by Alcide De Gasperi, the first Catholic politician to become Prime Minister of united Italy. He was to remain leader of successive governments until August 1953. He led a no-nonsense, 'law-and-order' government, anxious to show that anti-Fascism could be responsible. It abolished the 'Purge Commission', and tacitly abandoned the 'purge'. It sacked the CLN 'commissars' running the big firms, which were returned to their owners. Above all, it replaced virtually all the CLN-appointed Prefects and police chiefs in the North. By January 1946 the State machinery was back in the hands of career officials, who served De Gasperi as they had once served Mussolini. Five months later Togliatti, as Minister of Justice, issued a general amnesty, and most 'purge' cases were immediately dropped. The 'State' had, apparently, triumphed over the 'Resistance'; and it was still recognizably the same State, with the same officials and the same institutions.



## 15.6 The 'institutional questions'

Yet that was soon to change. The anti-Fascist parties had agreed back in 1944 that after the war a 'Constituent Assembly' would be elected, and that 'the institutional question' – i.e. whether Italy was to remain a monarchy or become a republic – would be settled either by that Assembly or by referendum. Eventually it was decided to hold a referendum, on the same day as the elections to the Constituent Assembly: 2 June 1946. A month earlier Victor Emmanuel III had finally abdicated, and so the referendum decided the fate of his son, King Humbert II, who had been acting as 'Lieutenant-General' since June 1944. The anti-Fascist parties were fairly solidly Republican, except for the majority of the Liberals and about a quarter of the Christian Democrats. The referendum produced a Republican majority, but only by 12.7 million votes (54.3 per cent) to 10.7 million; there were 1.5 million blank or disqualified ballot-papers. All Northern and Central regions, except Latium, voted for the Republic; Rome and all the South voted monarchist, with a peak of 79 per cent in Naples. Italy was still divided into two halves, as it had been in 1943–45; 'the values of the Resistance' flourished only where the Resistance had flourished. This has remained true ever since. The 1946 referendum, highlighting the split between a conservative, monarchist South and a radical, Republican North, proved an excellent guide to subsequent voting patterns: much the same split was still evident in the next popular referendum twenty-eight years later, on divorce. After a few days Humbert II left Italian soil, not without protesting at alleged electoral irregularities. The 'institutional question' was settled. Henceforth the monarchy lived on only in the glossy weekly magazines.

It was the anti-Fascist parties' greatest victory. But what if the departure of the House of Savoy meant that Italy would revert to the Papacy? That was what the Constituent Assembly elections seemed to indicate. The Christian Democrats won 35.2 per cent of the vote and 207 seats out of 556. They were the largest single party, and might reasonably expect to dominate the new Republic. The Communists won 104 seats, their Socialist allies 115; they too were mass parties, and would remain so. Between them, these three parties won 75 per cent of the vote. The other three CLN parties stood revealed as electorally negligible. The Party of Action won only 7 seats, and dissolved itself the following year. Bonomi's Democratic Labour Party had 9 deputies; even the Liberals were reduced to 41. And 30 seats were won by a new 'Party of the Average Man', representing the resentful white-collar workers of Rome and the South, who had little sympathy for anti-Fascism and were still worried about being purged. So the elections of 2 June 1946 abolished CLN government, as well as the monarchy. De Gasperi formed a new government of the three main parties plus the Republicans, who had won 23 seats. He established a pattern for the future. Henceforth the Italian Republic would have three major parties. It would be governed by the Christian Democrats, but always in alliance with other groups. The CLNs were dead; long live the anti-Fascist alliances.

The Constituent Assembly's main task, of course, was not to reveal party strengths but to draft a new Constitution. The task was not too difficult. Neither Catholics nor Marxists had any blueprint for a new State. The Constitution, therefore, enshrined the values of the constitutional lawyers, most of whom were Liberals, although there were occasional concessions to the other parties' particular hobby-horses. The Republic was to be anti-Fascist by definition; anything that smacked of a strong State, of High Politics, was suspect. The Constitution carefully listed, and guaranteed, civil and political liberties. There was to be no one-man government, as in 'Presidential' systems. The President would be a largely symbolic figure, elected mainly by parliament, and influential mainly when a government had fallen: he would then nominate a Prime Minister-designate, whose new government had to seek parliamentary confidence within ten days. Governments were to be Cabinets responsible to parliament, as in Britain. However, it had already been decided to elect parliaments by proportional representation, so no one party was likely to have a parliamentary majority. The Senate was henceforth to be elected, apart from a few life Senators (ex-Presidents of the Republic, etc.). Various 'social rights' – e.g. the right to own property, or to join trade unions – were inserted.



Citizens could insist that parliament should debate particular issues, and could challenge most legislation by popular referendum. A Constitutional Court would be set up, with powers to strike out legislation that infringed the Constitution. Judges were to be freed from government control, and regulated by a Supreme Council of the Judiciary consisting of judges and lawyers. The bureaucracy was to be decentralized, and regional governments were to be established throughout the country.

Here was a charter for weak government, unable to dominate parliament or people; a charter for liberty. Yet many of the provisions were too abstract to give much effective protection. A whole series of rights was proclaimed – to freedom from house searches, to free movement within Italy or abroad, to meet in public places, to form associations – but in each case the 'right' might be restricted by particular laws. Article 15, for example, laid down that: 'the freedom and secrecy of correspondence and all other forms of communication are inviolable. They may be limited only by a warrant issued by a magistrate according to the procedures laid down by law.' So telephone-tapping could continue as usual, quite legally. Similarly, the right to strike was to be exercised 'within the framework of the laws that regulate it' (article 40); no such laws were passed, so the Constitutional clause remained meaningless. Furthermore, the existing laws were mainly those in Rocco's penal code and the public security law of 1931, and the Constitution-makers omitted to repeal these texts. They therefore remained in force, even though they prohibited precisely the kind of political or trade union activity that the Constitution was supposed to protect. Moreover, some essential institutions established by the Constitution, e.g. the Supreme Council of the Judiciary and even the Constitutional Court itself, were not set up until the late 1950s. In short, the Constitution was unenforceable, or at least unenforced. Italians soon began joking that the only clause which was actually applied was article 12, laying down the colours of the national flag. The joke was unfair. The powers of Head of State, of government and of parliament in the new Republic were very different from those in the old regime; and new legislation was bound to be passed eventually. Meantime, Italy had a Liberal Constitution, a Catholic government and Fascist laws.

On one point the new Constitution was specific, or seemed to be. Article 7 stated firmly that

*the State and the Catholic Church are, each in its own sphere, independent and sovereign. Their relations are regulated by the Lateran Pacts. Modifications of the Pacts, accepted by the two parties, do not require the procedure for Constitutional amendments.*

Many lay Italians were horrified by this article, and it was only approved with the help of Communist votes – Togliatti being anxious as ever to conciliate the Church. The Church's position was, therefore, guaranteed in the very Constitution of the new Republic. Yet even that was to prove ambiguous. Many Catholics supposed that the *content* of the Lateran Pacts of 1929 had been 'written into' the Constitution; but lay lawyers always argued that article 7 merely stated what was the basis of Church–State relations, and how that basis might be changed in future. Even so, article 7 was a real victory for the Church. And many of the Constitution's other clauses reflected traditional 'social-Catholic' ideals of a weak State, political liberties and small-scale property.

That was particularly true of the Constitution's one extraordinary innovation, regionalism. Christian Democrats from Sturzo onwards had been regionalists; their leader in 1946, De Gasperi, himself came from the Trentino and before 1918 had been a deputy in the Vienna parliament. Moreover, both the Party of Action and the Republicans stood for decentralized government as an essential feature of the new participatory Republic. These arguments seemed persuasive to most Northerners, particularly as the centralized machinery of State in Rome had not been 'purged'. The Communists could hardly oppose regionalism without rousing suspicions about their dictatorial aims; and besides, they might come to power in the Central regions. Furthermore, the professor of constitutional law at Rome University, Gaspare Ambrosini, was a Sicilian who had been a convinced regionalist for years. Constitutional lawyers have always been taken too seriously in Italy, particularly during a Constituent Assembly when they were drafting the texts.

Above all, regionalism was introduced because it had to be. The strong State had collapsed in 1943. Thereafter there were real threats of revolt or secession in the outlying regions, especially where there were ethnic or linguistic differences from mainland Italy. This was true in Sicily and Sardinia, in French-speaking Valle d'Aosta, in German-speaking South Tyrol and in the Slav-speaking parts of Venezia Giulia. Foreign powers – France, Austria and Yugoslavia – encouraged the secessionists in all three Northern regions. In Sicily, 'traditional' forms of banditry flourished in 1943–47, provoked mainly by foolish government attempts to reintroduce conscription; many outlaws were enrolled in an independent army led by conservative landowners. The Sicilian élite had little desire to be ruled from Rome at all, and even less to be governed by Northern Resistance partisans.

Italian politicians, faced with powerful groups demanding concessions, acted true to type. They bought them off. 'Separatism' could not be countenanced; but 'regional autonomy' was all right. Sicily, Sardinia, the Valle d'Aosta and 'Trentino-Alto Adige' (see below) became 'regions of special statute'. They were allowed to elect their own assemblies, and were given certain legislative and administrative powers. The local élites could thus preserve their own languages and cultures, their own economies and welfare systems, and their own jobs. Regional agitations died down, so much so that in January 1948 the grateful President of the Südtiroler Volkspartei told De Gasperi 'no one better than you, born in the Trentino, can understand that the desire for autonomous government, rooted in our people for centuries, is not a threat to national unity but the finest way of capturing the hearts of our people'.[16] Even so, De Gasperi took no chances. The German-speaking South Tyrol did not become a region on its own, but was lumped together with the Italian-speaking Trentino: the 'Germans', although allowed back home and guaranteed their language, would always be a minority in the regional assembly of 'Trentino-Alto Adige'. And regional government was laid down not just for the outlying 'ethnic' areas, but for the whole country. It had to look like a constitutional principle, not a desperate political device. Admittedly only the four 'special' regions were actually set up, for the time being, but the Constitution made it clear that the new Republic would not be over-centralized. That was an astonishing departure from the traditions and institutions of united Italy.

The new Constitution, approved in 1946–47, came into force on 1 January 1948. In the meantime the Constituent Assembly had had to accept several unwelcome reminders of the real world outside Rome. The peace treaty, drafted by the victorious Allies and signed in Paris in February 1947, gave France various Alpine territories, including the Mont Cenis plateau and the Tenda and Brig valleys, where the Italians had built reservoirs and hydro-electric stations. Italy managed to retain the German-speaking South Tyrol, but Dalmatia, Istria and Fiume were handed over to Yugoslavia, and the Dodecanese islands to Greece. Italy also had to pay reparations, especially to Greece, Yugoslavia and the USSR. Worst of all, the treaty refused to recognize Italy's contribution to her own liberation. Many prominent Italians were furious. Orlando accused the government of 'lust for servility', and Nitti called the treaty 'a humiliating and odious *diktat*'.[17] Sforza, by now Foreign Minister at last, appealed for 'revision' on the day it was signed. But the Constituent Assembly had to ratify it, under protest. In 1918 the Italians had won a 'mutilated victory'; now they suffered a 'mutilated defeat'. Soon they lost all their colonies as well, except for Somalia, which Italy retained on a ten-year trusteeship. Eritrea

was handed back to Ethiopia; Libya, occupied by the British, became independent in 1952. It all showed that being anti-Fascist was not enough. High Politics was unlikely to go away, and Italy had been left far weaker.

The peace treaty did not settle the future of the Trieste area. Most of Venezia Giulia had been occupied by Yugoslav partisans at the end of the war, as had Trieste itself. In June 1945 Tito agreed to withdraw east of the 'Morgan line', so that an Allied Military Government could be set up in Trieste and in the western rump of Venezia Giulia. The Yugoslavs took over the rest. Negotiations dragged on, inconclusively. The USSR supported Tito; Britain and the USA wanted to show Italian voters the benefits of Western support. Each major Power drew its own line on its own map (see Map 3, p. xxv). Eventually the French line was agreed on for the northern part. It ran well to the west of the Morgan line, and gave Yugoslavia most of the Isonzo valley and – an important symbol – Caporetto. Italy retained Gorizia, Gradisca and Monfalcone in Venezia Giulia, and Tarvisio in Friuli; but she lost the rest of her First World War gains. No agreement was reached for the areas south of the Duino River. The French line there would have given Trieste and Capodistria to the Italians, but Capodistria was on the other side of the Morgan line and was occupied by Yugoslav troops. So the peace treaty simply termed the whole disputed area in the south 'the Free Territory of Trieste', and it remained divided *de facto* into two zones: Zone A (Trieste), occupied by Anglo-American troops, and Zone B (Capodistria), occupied by the Yugoslavs. Over the next few years Capodistria became incorporated into Yugoslavia. In 1954 the Western Allies handed over Trieste to Italy, after complicated negotiations in London. Relations with Yugoslavia rapidly improved, to the great benefit of both sides.

## 15.7 The exclusion crisis

In the meantime Italian politics had been transformed yet again. The 'wind from the North' had died down; the problems now came from East and West. An Iron Curtain divided Europe; its shadow fell across Italy. The anti-Fascist alliance of Christian Democrats and Communists was becoming anachronistic. The Communist leader Togliatti began denouncing the government and threatening revolution – extraordinary behaviour for a coalition partner, and explicable only in terms of having to please the Russians, or keep control of his followers. The Church, too, had long been worried about the alliance. Pius XII told Truman's special envoy in June 1946 that his 'main aim has been and is to fight Communism'.[18] In November a Vatican dignitary, possibly the Under-secretary of State Mgr Montini, visited De Gasperi and told him that

*any kind of collaboration with the anticlerical parties, not only in the municipality of Rome but in the government, is no longer admissible. If the Christian Democrats were to continue with such collaboration, they would be considered a party favouring the enemy. The Christian Democrats would no longer have our support or our sympathy.*[19]

De Gasperi persuaded his adviser that it was best to wait until the Constitution had been drawn up and the peace treaty signed, but clearly the Church had spoken: no Christian party could ignore her views.

Moreover, the USA was still providing much-needed aid and investment, and was beginning to wonder – rather tardily – whether the money was being well spent. Bankers, at home and abroad, argued that the currency would collapse unless deflationary monetarist measures were taken; but these would increase unemployment, and the Communists could hardly agree to that. Above all, De Gasperi had to worry about the South. It had voted monarchist in 1946, and the 'Party of the Average Man' was strong there. The Southerners wanted the PCI out of government, they wanted American aid to continue, and they wanted jobs. They had to be conciliated. The new Republic was fragile, and the Christian Democrats could not risk the South becoming a focus for right-wing disaffection.

In May 1947, therefore, De Gasperi excluded the Communists and their Socialist allies from his coalition. But that did not solve all his problems. The Communists might well cause more trouble in the unions and on the shopfloor, now that they were out of office. They might even start an insurrection – the American National Security Council reported in February 1948 that they were 'believed to have the military capability of gaining initial control of Northern Italy'.[20] Or they might win an election, especially if their alliance with the Socialists survived. The obvious tactic, therefore, was to woo the Socialists; but the Socialist leader Nenni chose Togliatti rather than De Gasperi. If the Socialists could not be won over, they could at least be split. In January 1947 Giuseppe Saragat had founded the Socialist Party of Italian Workers (PSLI; later called Social Democrats), an anti-Communist rival to Nenni's party; 52 of the 115 Socialist deputies joined him.

The anti-Fascist parties divided, therefore: Left v. Right, East v. West, Communists v. Christian Democrats. True, there were several other pro-Western parties, e.g. the Republicans, the Liberals and the new PSLI, but the Christian Democrats were the only mass party on the 'Western' side.

As the elections to Italy's first post-war parliament grew nearer, the USA increased its anti-Communist investment: shiploads of food, promises of Marshall Aid, pledges on Trieste, guns and ammunition for the police, even posters and leaflets. Thus the Christian Democrats had both America and the Church behind them. Priests and bishops threatened excommunication for anyone who voted Communist; parish halls became electoral headquarters. The Pope himself, in his Christmas message of 1947, warned that 'he who gives his support, his services and his talents to those parties and forces that deny God is a deserter and a traitor'.[21] The Christian Democrats also had a huge organizational advantage over the other parties: Catholic Action. Early in 1948 Luigi Gedda, its president, founded 'civic committees' in each parish, to arouse the hesitant and mobilize the vote. Catholic Action's 1.8 million members became an unpaid army of election workers.

Thus the parliamentary election of 18 April 1948 was held in a fervent, passionate atmosphere of crusading zeal and 'Red Threat', heightened by the Communist seizure of power in Czechoslovakia only two months previously. The Christian Democrats' manifesto was entitled 'Save Liberty'; the party symbol on the ballot papers was a shield inscribed with the single word *Libertas*. Virtually overnight the party became the Defender of Western Civilization. In the South, the middle classes abandoned the 'Party of the Average Man' and rallied to the Church; even in the North, 15–20 per cent of the Left's 1946 votes switched to the Christian Democrats, and the party defeated the combined Communist-Socialist list in all Northern regions (although not in the left-wing strongholds of Central Italy). Overall, the 'Popular Democratic Front' of Communists and Socialists won 31.0 per cent of the vote, compared with 39.8 per cent for the two parties in 1946; the Christian Democrats secured 48.4 per cent, compared with 35.2 per cent in 1946, and won over half the seats in the Chamber of Deputies. The Church had, unexpectedly, provided mass backing for democracy.

## 15.8 Conclusion

The election of 1948 established a new 'regime' – perhaps not the rule of the Saints, but the rule of the Clericals. It was a far cry from the days of the CLNs, of inter-party agreements and anti-Fascist unity; a far cry too from the liberal pluralism proclaimed by the new Constitution. Only the Church could protect Italy from Communism, and the Church was not liberal. Moreover the Christian Democrats necessarily relied on the old unpurged Roman institutions – police, judiciary, Prefects, civil service; and these



were not liberal either. All this was much resented by left-wing Northerners. Their revolution had been betrayed, their claims to rule had been ignored, the State they had created had been snatched from them. They had defeated Fascism after years of hard fighting; they had founded the Republic. Yet within two years another 'one-party regime' had been established, led yet again by a single dominant leader, and excluding them yet again from influence or reward. No wonder they felt bitter. Ever since 1947–48 radical Northerners have seen the Rome Establishment as illegitimate, indeed as 'Fascist'; their resentment has proved a constant source of weakness to the Republic.

And yet the 'anti-Fascist' theme survived, precariously. The Resistance partisans and the Constituent Assembly deputies had not fought and laboured in vain. The Christian Democrat Party may have been clerical, but it was anti-Fascist too; it may have been backed by conservative Southerners, but it was usually led by reforming Northerners. De Gasperi was cautious in victory. His governments, even after April 1948, were coalitions: they included Liberals, Republicans and Saragat's Social Democrats. He governed with the Centre, not the Right, and he was unwilling to be too dominated by Pius XII's Vatican. Moreover, there was room for dissent and opposition in the new Republic. The Communists may have been excluded from government, but they were never outlawed from the system. They ran the most powerful trade unions, and local government in most of Central Italy; they held seats in parliament and sat on important committees. They were secretly much relieved to have lost the 1948 elections, since they could not have hoped to govern Italy peacefully thereafter. As for the undeniable social and economic conservatism of the new Republic, that too was 'anti-Fascist' in a way – the Fascists had run a 'planned economy' and a 'welfare state', and had all but discredited both. Italy by 1948 had turned her back on Fascism, on nationalism and on High Politics. Indeed, she had been extraordinarily fortunate. In five years she had moved from a Fascist dictatorship and a lost war to a fairly stable parliamentary democracy, and had done so without a full-scale civil war. It was a political miracle. Imperial Italy had reverted, thankfully, to *Italietta*.

## Notes

1 C.R.S. Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy 1943–5* (London, 1957), p. 74.

2 E.L. Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War* (London, 1971), ii, pp. 518–19.

3 US Ambassador Kirk to State Dept, 15 July 1945, reporting views of senior Foreign Office officials; quoted in D. Ellwood, *L'Alleato Nemico* (Milan, 1977), p. 159.

4 W.S. Churchill, *The Second World War*: v, *Closing the Ring* (London, 1952), p. 167.

5 Woodward, *British Foreign Policy* cit., ii, p. 512.

6 Ibid., p. 543 (Churchill to Roosevelt, 10 June 1944).

7 G. Bertolo *et al.*, *Operai e Contadini nella Crisi Italiana 1943–4* (Milan, 1974), p. 326.

8 F.W. Deakin, *The Last Days of Mussolini* (Harmondsworth, 1966), p. 202.

9 C. Pavone, *Una Guerra Civile* (Turin, 1991), pp. 413, 511–12.

10 *L'Italia Libera*, iii, no. 1 (Jan. 1945).

11 'Stato e Governo', *L'Italia Libera*, ii, no. 5 (Oct. 1944).

12 P. Spriano, *Storia del Partito Comunista Italiano*, v (Turin, 1975), p. 365.

13 Law of 22 May 1975 no. 152 ('legge Reale'), art. 7.

14 A. Giovagnoli, 'La Pontificia Commissione Assistenza e gli aiuti americani (1945–48)', *SC*, ix (1978), 1090.

15 *L'Unità*, 28 Aug. 1945; quoted in G. Bocca, *Palmiro Togliatti* (Bari, 1973), p. 463.

16 Ammon to De Gasperi, 31 Jan. 1948, quoted in M. Toscano, *Alto Adige, South Tyrol* (Baltimore, 1975), p. 134.

17 N. Kogan, *Italy and the Allies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), p. 170.

18 Myron Taylor to Pres. Truman and Byrnes, 3 June 1946, quoted in E. Di Nolfo, *Vaticano e Stati Uniti 1939–52* (Milan, 1978), p. 491.

19 G. Andreotti, *Intervista su De Gasperi* (Bari, 1977), pp. 72–73.

20 National Security Council, 10 Feb. 1948, in US State Department, *Foreign Relations of the USA, 1948*, iii (Washington DC, 1974), p. 767.

21 R. Faenza and M. Fini, *Gli Americani in Italia* (Milan, 1976), p. 273.

CHAPTER 16

# The triumph of 'Low Politics'

This chapter is about the political system of Republican Italy after 1948. I have already discussed the Constitution adopted in that year, and how it provided for weak government (§15.6); and I have also described how the 'Red Threat' came to dominate domestic and international politics in 1947–48 (§15.7). Thereafter the Communists were excluded from government, despite their anti-Fascist record; the Christian Democrats, permanently in power from December 1945, set up a new conservative regime, respectable and quietist. It was a regime of 'Low Politics', like that of parliament and local government in the nineteenth century: it practised the politics of compromise and patronage, of temporary deals and temporary governments, of granting favours and buying support, and of political 'interference' in administration. Many Italians, therefore, regarded it as inherently corrupt, just as their nineteenth-century predecessors had done.

## 16.1 Parliament and the parties

The Chamber of Deputies was elected in large multi-member constituencies, using a list system of proportional representation which ensured that the parties held roughly the same proportion of seats as they won votes. Hence small parties could and did win seats: there were rarely less than nine or ten parties represented in the Chamber. The system also ensured, normally, that no one party won an overall majority. The Christian Democrats did so once, in the exceptional Cold War election of 1948, but after 1953 their vote hovered around 40 per cent. They were 'the party of relative majority', but they could not govern alone. The other parties also retained a remarkably stable vote between 1953 and 1972. The left-wing

vote (Communists and Socialists) remained between 35 per cent and 40 per cent; and the right-wing (Liberals, Monarchists and neo-Fascists) regularly secured between 12 per cent and 15 per cent (see Table 16.1).

So Italian government was coalition government, and there was only a limited number of possible coalitions. There were three main types: 'Centrist' or 'Centre-Right' governments, consisting of Christian Democrats, Republicans, Social Democrats and (sometimes) the Liberals; 'Centre-Left' governments, excluding the Liberals but including the Socialists; and 'governments of national unity', backed by all the main anti-Fascist parties, including the Communists. These three types are in loose chronological order for the thirty years after 1948. 'Centrist' coalitions normally governed the country from 1948 to 1962; 'Centre-Left' ones did so from 1963 to 1972; and thereafter there were serious, if unsuccessful, attempts to bring the Communists fully back into the political fold.

One way of interpreting this story is to see post-1948 politics as a gradual process of 'reconciliation' among the anti-Fascist parties. Firstly the Socialists returned into the system, in the late 1950s and early 1960s; and then, a decade later, so did the Communists. 'Reconciliation' is the polite term for this process; those who dislike it speak of 'absorption', or '*trasformismo*'. Alternatively, it can be seen as a gradual shift to the Left. The Christian Democrats, bereft of enough support on their Right, were forced to turn to the two mass left-wing parties (Socialists and Communists) in order to maintain their parliamentary majority. At any rate, the 'Christian Democrat regime' was never wholly Christian Democrat: coalition and compromise were constant necessities.

The major parties were the Christian Democrats (Democrazia Cristiana, DC), the Communists (Partito Comunista Italiano, PCI), and the Socialists (Partito Socialista Italiano, PSI). These three parties normally won between 75 per cent and 80 per cent of the vote. The Christian Democrats were, originally, hardly a party at all, merely a coalition of laymen from Catholic Action, from the pre-Fascist Catholic unions and co-operatives, or from the old Popular Party. Their leader, De Gasperi, tried to win greater autonomy from the Church, and after his death Amintore Fanfani tried to build them up as a nationwide organization; but they were always a heterogeneous, ramshackle party, and their vote remained predominantly 'religious' – even in the 1970s church attendance was still the most significant correlation with Christian Democrat voting, and at least two-thirds of their voters claimed to have gone to mass the previous week. Not that the DC was simply a 'confessional' party. Anti-Communism brought it much support, even from non-Catholics. It appealed particularly



**TABLE 16.1** *Votes (%) and deputies in the Chamber of Deputies 1948–79*

| | 1948 | | 1953 | | 1958 | | 1963 | | 1968 | | 1972 | | 1976 | | 1979 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | % | D | % | D | % | D | % | D | % | D | % | D | % | D | % | D |
| Radicals (PR) | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | 1.1 | 4 | 3.4 | 18 |
| Social Proletarians (PSIUP) (Democratic Proletarians, DP, in 1976; United Proletarians, PDUP, in 1979) | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | 4.5 | 23 | 1.9 | – | 1.5 | 6 | 2.2 | 6 |
| Communists (PCI) | 31.0 | 183 | 22.6 | 143 | 22.7 | 140 | 25.3 | 166 | 26.9 | 177 | 27.2 | 179 | 34.4 | 227 | 30.4 | 201 |
| Socialists (PSI) | | | 12.7 | 75 | 14.2 | 84 | 13.8 | 87 | 14.5 | 91 | 9.6 | 61 | 9.6 | 57 | 9.8 | 62 |
| Social Democrats (PSDI) | 7.1 | 33 | 4.5 | 19 | 4.5 | 23 | 6.1 | 33 | 2.0 | 9 | 5.1 | 29 | 3.4 | 15 | 3.8 | 20 |
| Republicans (PRI) | 2.5 | 9 | 1.6 | 5 | 1.4 | 6 | 1.1 | 6 | | | 2.9 | 15 | 3.1 | 14 | 3.0 | 16 |
| Christian Democrats (DC) | 48.4 | 304 | 40.1 | 263 | 42.3 | 273 | 38.3 | 260 | 39.1 | 266 | 38.8 | 267 | 38.7 | 263 | 38.3 | 262 |
| Liberals (PLI) | 3.8 | 19 | 3.0 | 13 | 3.5 | 14 | 7.0 | 39 | 5.8 | 31 | 3.9 | 20 | 1.3 | 5 | 1.9 | 9 |
| Monarchists (PNM, later PDIUM) (National Right, DN, in 1979) | 2.8 | 14 | 6.9 | 40 | 4.8 | 25 | 1.7 | 8 | 1.3 | 6 | 8.7 | 56 | 6.1 | 35 | 0.6 | – |
| Neo-Fascists (MSI) | 2.0 | 6 | 5.8 | 29 | 4.8 | 25 | 5.1 | 27 | 4.5 | 23 | | | | | 5.3 | 30 |
| Others | 2.4 | 6 | 2.8 | 3 | 1.8 | 6 | 1.6 | 4 | 1.4 | 4 | 1.5 | 3 | 0.8 | 4 | 1.3 | 6 |
| Total no. of deputies | | 574 | | 590 | | 596 | | 630 | | 630 | | 630 | | 630 | | 630 |

to women (who provided 60 per cent of its votes), to the elderly, to small landowners and to rural or small-town dwellers, especially in the 'White Belt' of Northern Italy. It stood for anti-Communism, for religion and the family, for peasant landownership and small-scale local enterprise, for co-operatives, profit-sharing and *voluntary* welfare. The DC was a complex, ill-disciplined body with many different local bases and bosses, some of them of dubious origins and talents. Still, it was an inter-class party, as it claimed; it was 'populist', sometimes even progressive; and its support (though not members) remained essentially 'Northern'. In 1963, for example, the DC won over 50 per cent of the vote in only ten provinces: eight of them were in the North, and in the province of Vicenza the party won 64 per cent.

The Communists, on the other hand, began as a well-organized party, indeed as the victorious party of the Resistance. They inherited, or took over, many of the traditional areas of Socialist strength in pre-Fascist times – the rural labourers of Emilia, the share-croppers of Tuscany, the industrial workers of the Northern cities. They soon dominated the 'Red Belt' of Central Italy: their highest vote was in the share-cropping province of Siena, where a quarter of the electorate were party *members*. Organization and discipline were their great strengths. The party built up a network of workplace cells and local 'sections' throughout the land; it had hundreds of full-time officials, organizing not only the party but trade unions and other flanking bodies, running local government, publishing a host of newspapers and local weeklies; and it had ample funds, allegedly seized from Mussolini at the end of the war.

As for strategy, the party proclaimed an 'Italian Road to Socialism', a long-term policy reminiscent of that of the 'intransigent' Catholics in the nineteenth century. Communists were to infiltrate all corners of society, and be 'present' and active in every social gathering. The ultimate aim was to establish Communist 'hegemony', to use Gramsci's term: automatic acceptance of Communist values and leadership. It was a peaceful strategy, with little talk of revolution or bloodshed; but it was uncompromising for all that. These were the years of the Cold War and of ideological struggle. The party preached a rival Gospel to that of the Church, celebrated rival martyrs and proferred a rival Heaven. Above all, it built up a rival hierarchy.

The Socialist Party was very different. It was badly divided, and it lacked effective organization or leadership. In 1947 the PSI's right wing split away to form a new 'Social Democrat' Party. The remaining Socialists maintained their alliance with the Communists. They even fought the vital Cold War election of 1948 on a joint PCI–PSI slate, thus obscuring the



difference between the two parties. In 1946 the PSI had won 20.7 per cent of the vote, the PCI 18.9 per cent; the next time the two parties fought separately was in 1953, when the Socialists won 12.7 per cent and the Communists 22.6 per cent. The Socialists remained largely a Northern party in the 1950s. In 1953, for example, they won 15.4 per cent of the vote in Northern Italy, but only 8.4 per cent in the mainland South and 7.5 per cent in Sicily – where the Communists had already managed to spread their influence and organization.

So had the minor parties of the Right, i.e. the Monarchists and neo-Fascists. In 1953 the Monarchists picked up 15.4 per cent of the vote in the mainland South, and the neo-Fascists won 11.8 per cent in Sicily. Southern conservatives were clearly angry at the Christian Democrats, because of the land reform (see §17.2). As monarchist memories faded, the neo-Fascists were left as the main party of Southern protest. They also won many votes from 'nostalgic' civil servants in Rome. Indeed, by the early 1970s the neo-Fascists had become the fourth largest party in the country. The other three parties – Liberals, Republicans and Social Democrats – were lucky to pick up 10 per cent of the vote between them. The Liberals claimed to be the party of the Northern entrepreneurs, the Republicans that of 'managed' capitalism, and the Social Democrats that of democratic labour – though their critics called them the 'Voice of America', in an unkind reference to their sources of finance.

These political parties were huge organizations, bigger than any other parties in Western Europe. The PCI had over 2 million members every year from 1946 to 1956, and retained at least 1.5 million thereafter; the Christian Democrats had over 1 million by 1948, reached 1.6 million in 1963, and peaked at almost 1.9 million in 1973. The Socialists claimed 700,000 members between 1947 and the late 1950s. Why were the parties so big? Giorgio Galli has suggested that Italians had become used to joining a party under Fascism, and carried the habit over into post-war life.[1] This seems unlikely, if only because it persisted for so long.

There were two other plausible explanations, the 'ideological' and the 'materialist'. In the 'ideological' view, the parties were the secular arms of rival Churches and rival sub-cultures. Political rhetoric, therefore, revolved around the great ideological divides: Church–State conflict, East–West relations, capitalism or Socialism. Each speaker appealed to a known, reliable audience, rightly confident that his listeners were even more 'partisan' than he was. Deputies regarded themselves as being responsible to their own parties, or at most to their own voters, rather than to the electorate as a whole. And the parties recruited mainly from huge

rival networks of 'flanking organizations' – Catholic Action, trade unions, youth clubs, peasants' co-operatives, tenants' unions, ex-partisan associations, even cinemas and sports clubs – in which the right values were transmitted and the right loyalties rewarded. In short, the parties were not mere electoral bodies, appealing for votes at election time and then vanishing from sight. They were permanent social networks, and mutually exclusive. The Catholic and Marxist 'sub-cultures' were realities, at least in certain regions, and had been so since the late nineteenth century. The electoral system helped perpetuate them, for proportional representation does not much penalize ideological intransigence, and may even encourage it. The parties did not need to court the 'floating voter'; they needed only to rouse their own faithful. Elections did not decide who was to form the next government. They simply gave the voter an opportunity to affirm his beliefs. Italian politics became cast in an ideological mould. It accurately reflected the 'little world of Don Camillo', but it ignored much else, and it was slow to adapt to changing values.

However, the 'ideological' interpretation of Italian parties was not the only one. The parties could, equally plausibly, be seen as huge political 'machines', distributing benefits to members and voters. These benefits were nothing if not material: jobs, pensions, increased pay, cheap seeds, crop insurance and so forth. The voter, in this view, did not express an ideological commitment when he went to the polls. He simply engaged in trade. He sold his vote for cash, or for payment in kind. Italian politics was not about ideology at all; it was about favours, patronage, jobs. That was why parties had huge memberships: it paid to join. The 'flanking organizations' were not so much 'embodiments of social values' as dispensers of material gratifications. However, the two rival interpretations were not really incompatible. Parties could provide both ideological and material resources. A party card could proclaim both a set of beliefs, and a willingness to be helped find a job. And, of course, the parties could base their appeal on different grounds in different regions, or among different classes.

Indeed, the parties were not homogeneous. Most of them were divided into factions (*correnti*), each with its own finances, its own journals and its own organization throughout the country. These factions were sometimes 'ideological' in nature, but usually they were regional, or linked to some pressure group, or simply the supporters of some leading politician ('friends of the Honourable Moro'), clustering round their man in hope of jobs and reward. They were numerous – the Christian Democrats usually had between six and nine, the Socialists four or five – and they were, arguably, the real parties in Italy.



Furthermore, they too were perpetuated by the electoral system. Most electors voted only for a party, but they could also, if they wished, express a 'preference' for particular *candidates* of that party: almost 40 per cent of Christian Democrat voters did so in 1972. The party's seats in parliament were allocated to the candidates with the most 'preferences'. Hence each candidate had to beware of rivals within his own party, normally much more of a threat than the candidates of other parties. Factions and preference votes were interlinked. The factions helped to group the rival candidates within each party, and channel the preference votes. They gave electors a choice between candidates on different wings; and they limited the personal rivalries and animosities between politicians. They were the real heirs of the shifting parliamentary groupings of pre-Fascist Italy. Only the Communists, true to the Leninist tradition of democratic centralism, had no organized factions; but their voters used the preference vote system to excellent effect in 1948, when 132 'Communist' deputies were elected from the joint list with the PSI, compared to only 51 'Socialists'.

It was factionalism, rather than multi-party coalition government, which was responsible for the instability of Italian politics. From June 1945 to December 1970 there were twenty-eight governments, with an average life of eleven months; they were led by twelve Prime Ministers. Governments rarely fell because of a parliamentary vote or a major policy dispute; but they often fell because some faction leader was discontented. Perhaps his followers had done well in a local or regional election, and felt they deserved better jobs at national level; perhaps government policy was hitting particular groups of a faction's supporters, or failing to reward them adequately; or perhaps he was simply jealous of his rivals. Whatever the reason, his faction would withdraw its backing; and that meant government legislation might be lost, for the deputies' voting in the Chamber was usually secret. Prime Ministers had constantly to reassure and reward everybody; and so did the party secretaries, whose task it was to conciliate the various faction bosses and persuade them to compromise. Indeed, arguably the most important post in the country was not Prime Minister, nor President of the Republic, but secretary of the Christian Democrat Party.

Thus Italian politics was, superficially, complex; but underlying it there was stability, even monotony. Every eleven months the pack was reshuffled; but the same cards kept coming out on top. Some ministers remained in their posts for years, and the key jobs – Interior, Foreign Affairs, Treasury – rarely changed hands. Elections came and went, but the Christian Democrats always ruled. Many of the party leaders in the

mid-1970s – Andreotti, Moro, Fanfani, La Malfa, Pertini – had been prominent thirty years earlier, in the age of Truman and Stalin.

Parliament, then, was where the parties and factions competed for jobs and favours. And the individual deputy competed too. He could not rely solely on his party, or his faction; he had to win his own preference votes if possible. He had to find people jobs, he had to arrange for soldiers and officials to be transferred nearer home, he had to write 'recommendations' and give advice on land deals, wills, even marriages. He was the poor man's friend, the advocate in Rome through whom all things were possible. Often he *was* an advocate: lawyers retained, at least in the early years, much of their traditional dominance of parliament, together with journalists and teachers. Another traditional feature was the link with local government: 70 per cent of the deputies up to 1963 had been, or still were, mayors or local councillors.

One of the deputy's main tasks was to push through legislation on his clients' behalf. The Italian parliament approved about 400 laws a year, compared with less than 100 in Britain. Most of them were '*leggine*', little laws, granting favours to small groups of people – raising the pensions of prison warders, say, or subsidizing orphans' homes. Passing such laws was made easier by the fact that Chamber and Senate were divided up into parliamentary committees, or 'Commissions', each covering a major area (Defence, Agriculture, etc.). These 'Commissions' could discuss and amend all bills, but above all they could and did act as 'mini-parliaments', approving over three-quarters of all legislation without any general debate by other members, and usually without press publicity. Deputies could, therefore, push their pet ideas through, or reward their supporters, if they sat on the right 'Commission'; in that way they could build up support and keep their seats.

Even the Communists worked the system, although in their case it was the party machine, not the individual deputy, that dealt with constituents' affairs. The Communists had no factions, nor were their deputies reliant on preference votes. Almost two-thirds of them had been full-time party or trade union officials. They sat for two terms in parliament as part of their bureaucratic careers, and paid back more than half their parliamentary salary to the party. Here was a very different kind of deputy. But the rest of the Chamber conformed surprisingly closely to the pre-1914 pattern. In the 1958–63 Chamber, for example, out of 596 deputies there were 124 advocates, 75 teachers, 36 university professors and 24 journalists, as well as the (mainly Communist) 177 trade union or party officials.[2] Party officials were much more likely to sit for Northern or Central Italian



constituencies. Generalizing grossly, the 'typical' Southern deputy was a lawyer, of middle or upper-middle-class background, still practising his profession and resentful of party discipline; the Northern-Central deputy was a Communist organizer, of lower-middle or skilled working-class origins, who had worked long years in local government or the trade unions, and who owed everything to the party.

'Preference' votes at elections, and the 'Commission' system in parliament, had further consequences. Outside pressure groups like farmers' associations and industrialists' federations needed only to lobby 50-odd deputies instead of 600; the system greatly encouraged their influence on legislation. Furthermore, each deputy had an interest in supporting the schemes of the others; tomorrow it would be his turn to need their votes. So there was no real opposition. The deputies of opposition parties voted for most bills, including those brought in by government supporters. In 1968–72, for example, neo-Fascist, Liberal and Communist spokesmen all declared that their deputies were backing most of the laws going through parliament, and even at the height of the Cold War the Communist deputies voted for almost two-thirds of all laws. Similarly, there was no real government party. Governments could not control the agenda, nor push their own unpopular bills through, nor prevent unwelcome legislation being passed. That was true even for major bills, discussed in plenary session of parliament: in the 1970s laws were passed legalizing divorce and abortion, both strongly opposed by the 'majority party'.

The Italian parliament, in short, was 'scrambled' – government and opposition deputies were all mixed up together. The system gave real influence to minority groups outside parliament, and to factions and 'opposition' parties within. In that way it helped to integrate or 'absorb' them into the general political system. However, there were snags. The economic cost was considerable. And such a parliament was no good at 'controlling' public spending, or at watching over the government or civil service: deputies' questions were usually ignored. Above all, there were always more people wanting favours than could possibly be satisfied. The individual deputy might win popularity, but parliament as a whole lost respect, especially among the high-minded.

## 16.2 Government, subterranean and local

So did the dominant party. From the early 1950s onwards the Italian press was full of tales of scandal and corruption. The Christian Democrats were always in office; and permanent power corrupts permanently. The

CHAPTER 18

# The Great Cultural Revolution: Italy in the 1970s

In May 1968 France experienced a totally unexpected social upheaval. Students rioted, factories were occupied, workers went on general strike. De Gaulle's regime seemed on the point of collapse. Yet within a month it was all over. The Gaullists were confirmed in power with a huge parliamentary majority, and the economy soon recovered. In Italy events went very differently. There, too, workers joined a huge protest movement of strikes and occupations, culminating in the 'Hot Autumn' of 1969. But the struggle continued for years. Student riots became an everyday occurrence scarcely noticed by the media. Industrial militancy also became routine. The economy staggered from recession to stagflation. Protest spread to the schools, to the welfare services, to the police and army, to all the political parties, to the Church, even to the family. Most startling of all was the outbreak of urban terrorism in 1969. Italy had been fairly free of political violence for two decades, except in Sicily and the South Tyrol; but in the next few years she reverted to her earlier traditions. Bombings and assassinations became a normal part of the Italian drama. The crisis obviously had deep social and cultural causes, absent elsewhere – the legacy of rapid industrial growth, of migration into the cities, of inadequate schools and public services, of 'secularization' and of excessive expectations. These issues could not easily be tackled by the existing political system, constructed as it was for weak government and constant compromises.

## 18.1 The universities

The universities were a particularly striking example, both of social conflict and of political inertia. Their problems were not new: libraries and



laboratories had been overcrowded long before 1968. But in 1969 admission to university became a great deal easier (see §17.6). In 1968–69 there were 416,000 students attending courses; three years later there were 631,000, and the number of law and medical students had doubled. By 1978–79 the total had increased to 778,000 – over a quarter of the age group. The number of graduates rose from 40,000 in 1968 to 77,000 ten years later. Only about 15 per cent of them were in science or mathematics, most of these being girls – a curious Italian tradition. Industry employed 2,391 new graduates in 1969, but that was the peak year; by 1976 it was taking 1,278, about 2 per cent of the country's graduate output. The reluctance of Italian firms to employ graduates was understandable. By law, graduates had to be paid more than other people, yet there was no guarantee they would know anything, and a fair possibility they might turn out to be revolutionaries. As for the professions, they were all in much the same state as medicine. In 1978 almost 15,000 new doctors qualified (compared to 3,800 in Britain); and 35,000 medical students began their training. Yet already there were 30,000 unemployed doctors. Italian universities had always produced too many unemployable intellectuals, but never on such a scale as this. There seemed to be a whole generation of perpetual students, born around 1950, too highly educated to stoop to manual labour, too numerous for bureaucratic posts, bitterly resentful of the system that had reared them, and hopeful only of overthrowing it.

Successive governments did little to mitigate these problems. Italy did not found new universities, nor did she expand her few polytechnics. She simply pushed more students into the existing universities, and provided some extra Chairs. Thousands of temporary 'assistants' were hastily recruited, to do the actual teaching. The policy was not a success, but the only ones that might have worked – restricting university entrance again, or raising the fees – were politically unthinkable. The universities were left to fester. Most students never saw their professor, except at examination time when he might well fail them. Ill-taught students began, not surprisingly, to riot; many of the 'assistants', desperate for permanent jobs, began to join in. So the new 'mass university' generated new mass movements. The best-known was the *Movimento Studentesco* – a spontaneous, radical 'Maoist-Catholic' body, demanding an end to capitalism, bureaucracy and the academic Establishment. Student demonstrations were lively and exhilarating, but they did not achieve Utopia. Indeed, the various student organizations soon burned out; their members joined left-wing 'extra-parliamentary' parties. Student rioting continued, but by the late 1970s it

seemed a fairly trivial concern. By then the universities had evidently become one of the main breeding grounds for terrorists. Even some of the professors were arrested for organizing terrorist gangs.

## 18.2 The economy

The crisis was no less evident in the factories. In November 1967 shipyard workers in Genoa and Trieste went on strike, protesting against 'rationalization' plans already accepted by their unions. It was the first of a vast series of unofficial 'wildcat' stoppages, street demonstrations, protest marches and factory occupations, spreading throughout Northern Italy in 1968–69. These events were totally unexpected – they happened suddenly, after two decades of fairly peaceful labour relations – and they had huge economic and political consequences.

Why did they occur? There were, obviously, economic reasons. Despite the increases in 1962–64, wages in Italy were still lower than elsewhere in Western Europe. Jobs were fairly secure, and there were few unemployed: people expected to be able to find new jobs easily. Furthermore, the workers in Northern Italy were changing. In the car industry, for example, new technology and work methods meant that unskilled men – often young Southern immigrants – replaced skilled craftsmen. The newcomers often detested industrial discipline, and were suspicious of the old trade unions. In any case, the existing unions were weak, absent from the shopfloor and divided on political lines into three major confederations. Only about a quarter of Italy's engineering workers belonged to any of these unions in 1968, and they tended to be the skilled workers jealous of their now outmoded craft status and privileges. In short, the unions were out of touch. They had no real contact with most workers, and were unable to negotiate on 'factory' issues – hours, working conditions, etc.

Thus one explanation for the clashes of 1968–69 is that the unions could not channel grievances effectively. Other factors also played a part. Students in France and Italy were busy showing the way, and radical '*gruppuscoli*' helped found many workers' committees and liaison groups (e.g. at Pirelli). In those heady days, it seemed essential to avoid the routine bureaucratic channels, and to rely instead on mass meetings and mass participation. Moreover, workers in the crowded Northern cities had many grievances *outside* the factory: housing, public transport and health services were all inadequate. 'Centre-Left' coalition governments (Christian Democrat and Socialist) had been in office since 1963, yet little had been done for ordinary workers. In these circumstances the Italian



tradition is to riot; and that is what people did. The only difference from usual was that in 1968–69 many of the riots took place inside factories.

The agitations were not confined to young unskilled immigrants. Many of the older, skilled, unionized workers joined in too, and sometimes provided the initial impetus, as at the Innocenti works in Milan. Some of these men had a Resistance past, and the 'Hot Autumn' of 1969, although it involved millions of people, was reminiscent of the Resistance. It, too, was a largely spontaneous revolt against harsh industrial discipline, a celebration of solidarity against the 'Fascist' oppressors, a strike wave without parallel elsewhere in Europe. It, too, saw new institutions arise, to lead the host of local movements. In the factories, the workers elected 'delegates' to 'Factory Councils', and demanded workers' control over factory conditions, the end of skilled workers' differentials, and equal pay rises for all. They denounced not only the bosses, but also the 'complicity' of the official unions and parties, and even the irrationality and inhumanity of the industrial process itself.

Employers and unions naturally tried to regain control of events. One way was to 'buy off' unrest. They negotiated big rises in the basic wage – over 15 per cent on average, a huge increase in those days of low inflation. Hourly wages in industry almost doubled between 1969 and 1973, from 489 to 957 lire. More importantly, the militant 'delegates' and 'Factory Councils' were absorbed into the official union structure. Employers negotiated with them on local issues like piece-rates and working conditions. The union branches helped in these negotiations, co-ordinated the various factories' efforts and often signed the eventual agreements. So the 'delegates' became, in effect, shop stewards: elected by the workers, but usually loyal trade unionists themselves, and co-operating closely with local union officials. Indeed, in 1972 the unions defined the 'Factory Councils' as the 'primary trade union body, with powers of negotiation at the workplace'.[1] The 'delegates' often won real benefits, especially on bonuses, hours and job-enrichment schemes; but they had also become more responsible and respectable.

Thus the 'Hot Autumn' agitations strengthened the trade unions. They put down roots in the factories, and they attracted more workers. By 1976 over half the workers in the country were union members, about the same as in Britain. The unions also began to co-operate much more among themselves, and the three leading engineering unions actually merged into one. Similarly, in June 1972 the three major confederations signed a 'Pact of Federation', supposedly the first step on the road to eventual unity. Little came of this, but for some years relations between

Communist, Socialist and Catholic trade unionists remained cordial, and party politicians had less say in union affairs. In 1970 a new law, rather grandiosely entitled the Statute of the Workers, made many of the unions' conquests – including the 'right of assembly' within the factory – legally binding.

The trade unions sometimes took other political initiatives. There were repeated short 'general strikes' in favour of better pensions, social security, health services, public transport, housing or investment in the South. Such campaigns were designed to demonstrate to local members that factory extremism was not enough: permanent national organizations were needed for any real, lasting improvement in living conditions. They also showed that the various union confederations were active, and could join together on a common platform. And they won some successes. Regional differences in wage scales were abolished in 1968–69. A new pension law was passed, providing around two-thirds of a worker's final wage at age 60, with some indexing for inflation. A housing law in 1971 provided for compulsory land purchase, and was thought likely to increase the stock of public housing. In 1972 most workers won the right to 150 hours of paid education or training each year – a great opportunity to contact radical students. There was a big increase in Southern investment. Above all, in 1975 the existing limited system of index-linked pay rises was greatly extended. Henceforth the 'mobile scale' gave automatic protection against inflation, the same increases for everybody.

These provisions were a triumph for the unions. They had clearly done a marvellous job in protecting their members' interests. Yet the snags soon became clear too. Since inflation was over 20 per cent p.a., the index-linked portion of pay soon grew larger than the union-negotiated basic wage. That left the unions without much to do, especially since any extra pay rises, over and above the automatic ones, were only likely to come from increased productivity – and 'productivity' had become synonymous with 'exploitation'. In practice, the Communist-led unions in the 1970s followed the party line of responsible, co-operative behaviour, preaching 'austerity' and wage restraint. They were much abused for their pains. The major union confederations had undoubtedly helped to 'absorb' working-class militancy after 1968, and had been co-opted on to a host of government agencies and regional planning boards, but by the late 1970s they were becoming irrelevant. The leaders could neither control their own members nor provide them with significant benefits. Membership began to fall: by 1978 a quarter of the CGIL's members were in fact retired.



Indexing posed other problems too. Since the inflation-proofing was equal for all, skilled workers soon began complaining that they were paid little more than labourers. In the late 1970s working-class militancy increasingly reflected the frustration of skilled or 'professional' workers (e.g. air traffic controllers) anxious to preserve their status and differentials. This kind of militancy was usually in State-owned enterprises (Alfa Romeo, railways) or services (hospitals, courts). It was usually either unofficial or led by small 'autonomous' unions whose leaders had nothing but contempt for the major union confederations and for the major political parties. It could not be bought off, without annoying the unskilled majority; yet, as it persisted, it led to a virtual collapse of some public services and discredited all the unions together.

The large pay rises of 1969–70 had obviously raised industrial costs. Inflation-proofing of wages simply froze this situation for the indefinite future: real wages could not fall without everybody noticing. The result was that many firms were priced out of the market. They could not lower wages, nor did they dare to dismiss anybody; all they could do was to lay people off 'temporarily'. That did not worry workers too much, for in 1975 the State insurance fund (*Cassa Integrazione Guadagni*) had also been greatly extended. Henceforth people continued to receive at least 80 per cent of their pay if laid off, and this happy arrangement could continue for a year. But it did not solve employers' problems. Industrial labour costs rose by 90 per cent in three years after October 1975; by 1980 the Dresdner Bank estimated wage costs per unit of production were 39 per cent higher in Italy than in West Germany or Britain.[2] Profits suddenly disappeared. Fiat, faced with constant stoppages and high absenteeism, responded to indexing (and to the 'revolt against the assembly line') by installing robots. Many firms could not adapt so readily, and went bankrupt; the larger ones invited takeover bids, either by the State or by foreign competitors.

Other firms, especially in textiles and light engineering, simply carried on decentralizing and sub-contracting their operations (see §17.1). Factories had become uneconomic. Henceforth individual workers, or tiny firms, received the raw materials and worked on them at home, being paid at piece-rates for the product. Employers thus avoided paying index-linked wages, avoided unions, avoided safety regulations, avoided taxes and avoided social security contributions; the costs of unofficial 'cottage industries' were reckoned to be about one-third of those in a factory. There was nothing primitive or backward about this small-firm, clandestine sector. It thrived in vital export industries like fashion and shoes, it could

'mass-produce' millions of goods (e.g. jeans), it was most widespread in the prosperous Northern regions, and it obviously employed millions of people – many of them absentees from 'official' jobs in factories. It was a great economic success story. But it did little for the State's revenues, and even less for the unions.

Moreover, index-linking made it almost impossible for young people to find a 'regular' job. Who would employ a 15-year-old, if it meant giving him a guaranteed real income for life? By 1977 there were almost 1 million unemployed young people (aged 14–24) in Italy; they were the bulk of the officially unemployed, and the number would have been much greater without the 750,000 students and the 250,000 conscripts, to say nothing of the 2 million emigrants abroad. This was a horrifying outcome. The cities were full of disgruntled young people, existing precariously off 'black' labour or off their families. What was worse, these young people knew that their elder brothers and sisters, who had jobs, were doing extremely well, indeed were the most affluent age group in the country. No wonder the under-thirties seemed a real threat to public order. In 1977 the government set up a Youth Opportunity Scheme, subsidizing employers to take on young people; in the first two and a half years 898,000 people applied, but only 59,000 were found jobs, and 44,000 of these were in central or local government.

Indeed, the 'official' economy was in real trouble. It was not merely a matter of low investment and high unemployment. Inflation remained high, at least 15 per cent p.a.: since wages were indexed, industrial costs were bound to keep rising. And the fivefold increase in oil prices at the end of 1973 hit Italy particularly badly. She had virtually no coal, oil or nuclear power, and her natural gas supplies, vital to her growth in the 1950s, were quite inadequate to her needs in the 1970s. So she had to import oil, at huge cost (almost $20 billion in 1980). It all contributed to semi-permanent 'recession'. In 1975 the gross national product fell by 3.7 per cent – the first time it had fallen since 1945. Public spending, too, seemed out of control. The State spent huge sums on Southern development, on its attempts at social welfare and on industrial subsidies. By 1979 the budget deficit was over 30,000 billion lire. Here was a real 'fiscal crisis', which would have been even worse if government agencies had spent the money allocated to them. As for the lira, it had to be 'floated' in February 1973, and thereafter fell steadily against other European currencies and the American dollar. The average exchange rate in 1972 was 183 lire to the Deutschmark; by 1976 it was 330 lire, and by December 1979 468. For years the country lived off foreign loans. Governments also,



of course, increased taxes – most Italians began paying income tax, for example, only in the mid-1970s – and raised interest rates, but just when these policies started having some effect the renewed oil price rises of 1979 brought in another recession. By 1980 Italy had had ten years of virtually unrelieved 'crisis', mitigated only by the unofficial economy. Admittedly the Italian GDP *had* grown, by about 3 per cent p.a.; but that was about half the rate of the 1960s. Italy's lack of energy, and her growing backwardness in research and technology, were ominous signs for the future.

So, too, were the problems of the major State-owned firms (see §17.1). The IRI broke even in 1973, but lost 500 billion lire in 1975, 900 billion lire in 1977, 1,346 billion lire in 1979 and around 2,200 billion lire – 6 per cent of gross domestic product – in 1980. Steelmaking was the major culprit, but the new Alfa Romeo car plant near Naples allegedly made greater losses than any other car factory in the world, and there was close competition from the petrochemical group Montedison, from the State shipbuilding firms, from the State mining and minerals agency, and even from telecommunications. It was not necessarily the managers' fault. Governments forced them to charge low prices, to invest in the South, to employ redundant workers and to accept 'political' appointments.

The disasters of the official economy were accompanied by a series of financial scandals, spectacular even by Italian standards. In 1976 it emerged that several international oil companies had paid large sums to Italian parties, probably in return for tax concessions. The Lockheed aircraft company was also revealed to have bribed leading politicians, in order to sell its Hercules C 130 planes to the Italian air force. Throughout the 1970s the Italian press was full of such rumours. Parliamentary committees of inquiry sat regularly; investigating magistrates questioned Prime Ministers; two former Cabinet ministers were imprisoned. It all contributed to an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust, of accusations and counter-accusations, of scapegoats and villainy – a crisis of ethics as much as of economics.

## 18.3 Divorce and the family

Indeed, cultural changes were even more striking than economic decline. By the 1970s only just over one-third of the people went to mass weekly; over half declared that they were 'indifferent to religion'.[3] Vocations to the priesthood fell away sharply, and the average age of priests and

nuns became ever higher. Church-run institutions, whether schools, co-operatives or trade unions, appealed only to a minority. Religious practice had ceased to be a social habit and had become a minority sub-culture, or even a matter of private belief.

Most churchgoers had been women, and 'secularization' made its major impact on them. A survey of Italian women in 1972 produced some startling responses. Twenty or thirty years previously, these women thought, most of them would have wanted a husband, children, a well-equipped home and someone to protect them; by 1972 the four main priorities were education, a job away from the house, freedom to think and act as they liked, and prosperity. Not that these women were particularly liberated, by most Western standards. Of the married ones, only 10 per cent reported that their husband 'helped regularly' with the housework, and only 16 per cent thought he should do so; 93 per cent would disapprove of their daughter living with a boyfriend; over two-thirds of them had never heard of 'feminism'.[4] Still, it was clear that migration, urbanization and secondary education for girls had done their work. Moreover, by 1972 there were already over 250,000 female graduates. For the first time in Italian history there were substantial numbers of educated young women. Naturally there was also a great deal of male prejudice against them, except in some traditional women's jobs like teaching – and even these jobs were becoming rarer. By the mid-1970s Italy had a vociferous 'women's movement', agitating for at least equal rights and opportunities. Most of the active women were young and educated. They greatly embarrassed the existing political parties by their demands. These demands were much the same as those of their sisters elsewhere, except for one – divorce.

Until 1970 there was no divorce in Italy. Church marriages could be 'annulled' (i.e. declared invalid) by the Vatican on certain grounds, and in fact over 800 annulments were granted in 1970. Alternatively, the State's tribunals could grant a 'legal separation', which might include maintenance orders and decisions on the custody of children (normally granted to the father). These 'legal separations', some 9,000 p.a. in the late 1960s, were tantamount to divorce, except that the ex-partners could not remarry. Many people, therefore, contracted 'illicit' unions, with illegitimate offspring – as did many of those who separated unofficially. Emigration and urbanization helped to break up marriages, and led to new partnerships. The whole issue could not be ignored for ever, for huge numbers of people were affected.

In 1965, therefore, a Socialist deputy, Loris Fortuna, put forward a bill introducing divorce after five years' legal separation. The next year a new



pressure group was founded, the *Lega per l'Istituzione del Divorzio* (LID). This was a rare type of organization in Italy, for it grouped together people from all parties and from none, although it was necessarily anti-Church and anti-government. Its main appeal was to the radical middle classes, especially journalists and lawyers, and its first secretary was Marco Pannella, who was also secretary of the tiny Radical Party. Italian Radicalism, dormant since the 1940s, suddenly revived. The divorce campaign provided the Radicals with their first real opportunity for years, and they made the most of it. Pannella, for example, became a national figure by staging a successful hunger strike outside parliament to protest against filibustering on the bill. The constant pressure was, eventually, successful. By December 1970 Italy had her first divorce law, allowing divorce in certain restricted circumstances.

Many Catholics were horrified by this law. Pope Paul VI argued that it was a breach of the 1929 Concordat, by which the State had agreed to 'recognize the civil effects of the sacrament of marriage' (article 34). Catholic lawyers argued that it was unconstitutional, but to no avail. However, the Italian Constitution includes provision for a referendum, if 500,000 electors request it; the referendum can 'abrogate', i.e. repeal, all or part of most laws. In other words, there is a potential popular veto on legislation, although no referendum had actually been held since the 1946 one on the monarchy. Here was a marvellous opportunity. Catholic laymen founded a National Committee for a Referendum on Divorce on the very day the law was passed. It soon collected the necessary signatures, and it expected to win.

But it was three and a half years before the referendum was eventually held. By this time about 90,000 divorces had been granted. Public opinion, as measured by the polls, had swung round. All the political parties except the Christian Democrats and the neo-Fascists spoke out in favour of divorce, and even these two were divided. By 1974 there was a 'Committee of Democratic Catholics' campaigning for the divorce law; it claimed that over 20 per cent of the priests it had contacted supported its views, and polls showed that many practising Catholics did accept the new law. In the event, 19 million voters (59.1 per cent) opted in May 1974 to retain the divorce law, with 13 million against. Anti-divorce sentiment prevailed only in the Catholic North-East (Veneto and Trentino-Alto Adige) and in the mainland South, although in all areas the countryside was more traditional than the towns. The result was a great victory for the Radicals and for the lay Left generally, and a crushing defeat for the Church and for the Christian Democrats. It symbolized the triumph of lay, 'progressive', 'Enlightenment' values in Italy.

Divorce was the most spectacular aspect of the 'crisis of the family', but it was not the only one. In 1975 parliament hastily updated its family legislation. Dowries were abolished, wives were allowed to keep their maiden name, and it was solemnly laid down that wives and husbands should jointly agree on where (and how) to live. Meanwhile civil marriages had become more common, partly because divorced people could not remarry in church: from 1.2 per cent of all marriages in 1967, they had risen to 8 per cent in 1972, and to 11.9 per cent in 1979. In the big cities, one marriage in three took place outside church. But many couples did not bother to get married at all. In 1973 there were 418,979 weddings; by 1979 there were only 325,598. Ironically, divorce also became rarer: what was the point, unless you wanted to remarry? People preferred to 'separate' instead, just as they had done before 1970. In 1979 there were 10,800 divorces, but 25,900 separations (8 per cent of the marriages in that year). And 'living together' (*convivenza*) became socially acceptable, even to many parents. It replaced the former period of 'engagement', and some people thought it would replace marriage itself.

Others began worrying about the next generation. Would there be one? The birth rate had been declining for years from its 1964 peak, but from 1974 onwards the fall became acute: 868,882 live births in 1974, 670,078 in 1979. Furthermore, almost half of them were in the South, which stimulated Northern fears of 'meridionalization'. In the North-West and in the 'Red Belt' of Central Italy there were more deaths than births by 1979. Part of the explanation is that reliable contraceptives, such as the Pill, were freely available; and economic hardships no doubt played their usual role. But the real reason seems to me more fundamental. Younger people, especially women, had changed. They were now urban and literate. They wanted satisfying jobs, not domestic chores.

They also wanted, and secured, legal abortions. After 1974, when divorce had been won, abortion on demand became the great battlecry of Italian feminists. It was not easily granted. Illegal abortions were apparently fairly common, but that was no reason, in Catholic eyes, for legalizing them. Many doctors, too, had conscientious scruples, and many of the others did not want to lose a lucrative sideline. And in many hospitals most of the nurses were nuns. Altogether, it needed very determined pressure by the various women's movements and by the Radicals and Socialists before the 'lay' majority in parliament could finally be persuaded to approve an abortion law – unthinkable just a few years previously, and still surprising in a country with a Christian Democrat-dominated government. But there was to be no abortion on demand, at least in principle. The decision was



formally left to the doctors, but they were only supposed to carry out abortions in public hospitals, on women over 18 and during the first three months of pregnancy. Once the law was passed, two-thirds of Italy's doctors refused to perform them; but there were so many other doctors left that 200,000 legal abortions took place each year, more than a quarter of the figure for live births.

There was naturally a great deal of controversy about abortion. As in the case of divorce, committed Catholics soon began petitioning for a referendum. Anticlerical Radicals and feminists also wanted one, in order to secure 'the woman's right to choose'. As previously, most political parties were embarrassed and anxious not to become involved. Nearly all Christian Democrats were hostile in principle to abortion, but hesitated to ally yet again with the neo-Fascists, fighting another losing crusade on an issue calculated to alienate women and young people. Even the Church was perplexed, for the eventual 'Catholic' proposal at the referendum was not that abortion should be banned altogether, but that it should be limited to cases of real danger to the woman's life or health. So the bishops proclaimed that the 'Catholic' proposal 'should not lead anyone to think that the remaining provisions on abortion may be considered morally permissible and practicable'.[5] In the event, the two referenda on abortion in May 1981 confirmed the 1978 law: 88.5 per cent voted against the Radical proposal for abortion on demand; more significantly, 67.9 per cent voted against the 'Catholic' proposals. Only in one region, Trentino-Alto Adige, was there a popular majority for them; in Rome itself only 27.2 per cent of the voters supported them. The anti-abortionists of 1981 secured a smaller vote than the anti-divorce campaigners of 1974, and smaller even than the Christian Democrat vote in 1976 and 1979. It was an extraordinary indication of how deep-rooted 'secularization' had become.

It all posed an enormous challenge to the Christian Democrat 'regime', a challenge personified by the anticlerical Radical Party. This tiny group of journalists and mavericks won a series of astonishing victories – not just on the 'anticlerical' issues of divorce and abortion, but on conscientious objection, prison reform and admissions to State-run mental hospitals. The referendum became a favourite Radical device. The trick was to collect 500,000 signatures; even if no referendum were held, parliament might well be frightened into changing the existing law. In 1978 the Radicals collected the signatures for eight referenda, although the Constitutional Court ruled out six as unconstitutional. In 1981, in addition to the call for free abortion on demand, referenda were held on three other 'Radical' issues – the new anti-terrorist laws, life imprisonment and the right to own guns

(the Radicals were against all of them). Again, six other referenda had been ruled out, on such diverse topics as legalizing marijuana, hunting, courts martial in peacetime, the libel laws and nuclear power. These issues all expressed a 'libertarian' or 'environmental', even 'post-materialist' approach to politics, and they all appealed to young, educated, affluent urban voters. The Radicals were accused of being 'irresponsible', but that was their whole point. They set out to shock the bourgeoisie, and they delighted in making both the Christian Democrats and the Communists seem terribly staid and old-fashioned. Soon they elected their first deputies – four in 1976, eighteen in 1979 – who had an enjoyable time in parliament, publicizing other politicians' shady deals and filibustering energetically against laws they disliked. Admittedly the Radicals usually lost their referenda, but they kept Italian politics on the boil. They symbolized the values of a new generation, perhaps of a new way of life.

Perhaps the biggest 'Radical' achievement was in helping to dismantle the State's broadcasting monopoly. In 1976, after years of agitation, the Constitutional Court ruled that RAI's monopoly infringed the citizen's right to freedom of speech. Hundreds of local radio and television stations sprang up immediately, many of them very tedious but some (e.g. 'Radio Radicale') a constant source of embarrassment to the Establishment. Broadcasting, like the economy, had acquired a local, cheap, unorganized and lively sector, quite outside State control. No longer could governments dictate the issues of political debate; no longer could political parties dream of establishing a cultural 'hegemony'. Even the official television became less reverent, and actually began discussing live issues. Italy had become a multi-media society, with no control over nor consensus about news, values or morality. Hard-core pornography, for example, could henceforth be seen on television: it was already available, from the mid-1970s onwards, in freely-sold magazines and in many cinemas. It all confirmed the Great Cultural Revolution of the previous few years; a revolution, moreover, from below.

## 18.4 Terrorism

The most disturbing and dramatic aspect of all this social and political ferment was the growth of violent crime, including political terrorism. The student and workers' demonstrations of 1968–69 really frightened many respectable people. Like their counterparts fifty years earlier, some of them turned to the Fascists to deal with the 'Red Threat'. In 1972 the neo-Fascist vote went up to 8.7 per cent nationally. But it was not just Fascism



of the ballot. Fascist 'squads' revived too, bent on 'restoring order' and repressing the Left. The various groups – Ordine Nuovo, Squadre di Azione Mussolini, Avanguardia Nazionale, Rosa dei Venti, etc. – were ill-coordinated and ill-led, but they had plenty of money, they had (ambiguous and rarely acknowledged) links with the official neo-Fascist party, the Movimento Sociale Italiano, and they obviously had some influential sympathizers within the police and security services. Apart from beating up student leaders or Communists, the Fascists apparently adopted a 'strategy of tension', i.e. they aimed at causing chaos. This would, they hoped, force the army to step in, impose martial law and overthrow parliamentary democracy. Although it was never proven, the Fascists were generally believed to be responsible for the first major terrorist act of the decade, the bomb in piazza Fontana, Milan, in December 1969, when sixteen people were killed and ninety injured; they killed seven left-wing demonstrators at Brescia in May 1974; they derailed the Rome–Munich express in August 1974, with twelve dead; and in August 1980, after some years of relative inactivity, they blew up the restaurant at Bologna station, killing 84 people and injuring 200 more.

Fascist violence was at its peak in the early 1970s. Rumours of plots and army coups abounded. Communist leaders, surrounded by armed bodyguards, slept in different houses each night. Prince Valerio Borghese, former commander of the 'Tenth Torpedo-boat Squadron' in the war, actually occupied the Ministry of the Interior for a few hours in December 1970. One former head of the Secret Intelligence Service was arrested for treason (he later became a neo-Fascist deputy); another was imprisoned for procuring a false passport for a Fascist squad leader. Perhaps the Republic was in serious danger – Greece, after all, was run by its Colonels from 1967 to 1974 – but somehow it survived; 1972 was not 1922 all over again. The Fascists lacked an effective leader, and labour militancy was less threatening after 1970 – indeed, the Communists firmly restrained their own militants. The Christian Democrats wooed the respectable Right, i.e. the Liberals, but ignored the neo-Fascists; and they retained the support of Church, Europe and Washington. Furthermore, after Franco's death Spain was no longer available to the Fascists as a refuge and source of arms. So Fascist violence died down. The 'strategy of tension' had failed.

Right-wing terrorism had been, essentially, a response to student demonstrations and to the 'Hot Autumn' of 1969. So, too, was left-wing terrorism. It emerged from the semi-revolutionary ferment of the late 1960s – from hopes of Utopia, from outrage at slum housing and injustice continuing under Centre-Left governments, and from disillusionment with

the Communist Party's 'reformist betrayals'. The 'generation of 1968' rejected 'the system', deeming it Fascist. Moralistic, uncompromising and blindly convinced of their own righteousness, small groups of students and intellectuals set out to overthrow the State. Many of them were young, affluent, urban, self-confident and as well educated as Italy's universities permitted. But there were other kinds of terrorist too. Many young unemployed were recruited, for example, as were immigrant workers horrified by factory conditions. Some Northern factories – e.g. Magneti Morelli, Alfa Romeo at Varese, Sit Siemens – became virtual terrorist enclaves. So did some of the prisons, where captured terrorists mixed freely with ordinary criminals. Some terrorists, like Alberto Franceschini, emerged from the Communist sub-culture of Emilia-Romagna; others, like Renato Curcio and Margherita Cagol, from Catholic backgrounds; many others from the desperate, violent world of the urban poor. Some aimed simply at 'fighting Fascism'; others at overthrowing the 'imperialist State of the multinationals'. Some were cool, clever intellectuals; others were impulsive *enragés*. By 1976, indeed, there were 140 separate left-wing terrorist groups active in the country; it was not surprising that they differed from each other. But what they had in common was perhaps more significant. They all shared a fierce hatred of the 'regime', a hatred that had its roots in Italian history. Some were the sons of Resistance fighters. Their fathers had risked all in the struggle against Fascism; now it was their turn. The leaders of the Italian Republic had spent thirty years lauding the legitimacy of revolt against tyranny; they could hardly complain now if young men took to guerrilla warfare against the new Fascists.

The other common features, at least until 1978, were plenty of money and some public sympathy. Terrorism was partly self-financing through bank robberies, kidnappings, etc., but that did not account for all the costly exploits of the mid-1970s. The first left-wing groups, the Gruppi di Azione Partigiana (GAP), were founded by a guilt-ridden millionaire, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, who later blew himself up planting a bomb at Segrate, near Milan. Left-wing terrorism might never have become a serious threat without his money and his organizing drive. Later on, international links became more important, particularly in providing advanced weaponry training. The terrorists learned their trade in Czechoslovakia, Cuba or South Yemen. Feltrinelli himself had been inspired by the Tupamaros in Uruguay, as well as by Castro and Mao.

As for public support, this was evident enough on the Left. To use Mao's image, the terrorist fish were swimming in a warm, sheltered sea. Many Communists felt a sneaking sympathy for the terrorist 'comrades':



their methods might be 'mistaken', but clearly their hearts were in the right place. Certainly they should not be denounced to the police, nor to the bosses. Many young people felt the same. The 'extra-parliamentary Left' was more actively involved. After 1969 there were several small political movements on the Left – e.g. Lotta Continua and Potere Operaio – which sometimes had their own military units, whose journals spread much the same message as the terrorist groups and whose members often joined them. Above all, there were the autonomous groups – unofficial, militant, powerful in the factories, dockyards and universities, and thoroughly contemptuous of capitalists and Communists alike. Here terrorists could acquire weapons, recruits and information: where the money was kept, and which managers deserved a taste of 'proletarian justice'.

By the late 1970s terrorist acts had become fairly commonplace – over 2,000 a year, according to official figures, including about forty murders. The favourite targets for the bullets were industrial managers, journalists, prison warders, judges, policemen and Christian Democrat politicians; but threats could be made against anyone, and bombs could easily kill passers-by. Some cities, notably Bologna and Padua, lived through periods of virtual guerrilla war. Captured terrorists could not be tried, for nobody would serve on the jury. Kidnapping, too, could be used against anyone thought rich enough to pay the ransom. Italy enjoyed world leadership of this industry – about 300 *reported* cases a year – although most kidnappings had financial rather than (or as well as) political motives. Newspapers were filled with accounts of terrorist exploits, of police coups and failures, of irreproachable heroes and degenerate villains. Terrorist communiqués, drivelling on about imperialist hegemony, were treated as tablets of stone; private radio stations played tapes of kidnap victims' 'confessions'. It was a national melodrama, difficult to take too seriously unless you knew someone personally affected. There were, in fact, probably never more than a few hundred professional terrorists active at any one time, although there were thousands of part-timers, free-lancers and sympathizers.

The most famous group was the Red Brigades, founded by Renato Curcio and others in Milan in 1970. It had, like the other groups, a complex and unstable history, beginning in romantic, even quixotic style – e.g. short-term kidnappings with the victim released unharmed without needing to pay a ransom. Indeed, the Red Brigades did not murder anyone until 1974. By 1976, however, Curcio was in prison, his wife Margherita Cagol had been killed, and the Brigades were led by tougher men. In March 1978 came their most famous exploit. They kidnapped Aldo Moro, President of the Christian Democrat Party and former Prime Minister. Here was real

'propaganda by the deed', especially when Moro was 'persuaded' to write incriminatory letters against his former colleagues. For two months the politicians agonized over their choice. Should they release a number of imprisoned terrorists, as the Red Brigades demanded, and hope for Moro's safe return? Or should they refuse to negotiate with terrorists, and risk Moro being killed? The hardline argument, backed by Christian Democrats and Communists and opposed by Socialists, prevailed. The Red Brigades then killed Moro. They had proved their own efficiency and ruthlessness; they had shown up the incompetence of Italy's various police forces; and they thought they had delegitimized the Christian Democrat 'regime'.

## 18.5 The political response: the 'historic compromise'

How did the ruling politicians react to all this social upheaval? As usual, they sought to 'absorb' potential troublemakers into the existing political system. This process of 'absorption' took several forms. I have discussed the new role of the trade unions already; the other outstanding example was the 'historic compromise'.

The 'historic compromise' was a 'flirtation of convenience' between the Christian Democrats and the second largest party in the country, the Communists. It may seem surprising that Christian Democrat politicians should woo their Communist rivals, but they had little choice. Their 'regime' was collapsing around them, amid economic crisis, financial scandal, incipient terrorism and rampant 'secularization'. Drastic economic and security measures seemed necessary, and these presupposed agreements – on the shopfloor, between the major trade union confederations, in parliament and between the major parties. In any case, by the mid-1970s the Christian Democrats had no alternative allies. The Socialists were refusing to join any more 'Centre-Left' coalitions, having lost too many members and voters to the Communists and Radicals. They would not enter another government unless the Communists were in it too: let them share the blame in future for things going wrong. So moderate Christian Democrat leaders like Andreotti and Moro began making approaches to the PCI.

The Communist Party secretary, Enrico Berlinguer, was happy to accept these advances. Communist strategy had been based for years on the need for popular, 'anti-Fascist' alliances. In particular, the party had been visibly helping the Church ever since the Constituent Assembly in 1947, when it voted in favour of recognizing the 1929 Concordat; and it had occasionally been able to mediate in favour of Catholics in Vietnam and Eastern Europe. The party leaders welcomed a further opportunity to make themselves useful, to pursue their strategy of '*presenza*' (see §16.1), of being 'present' everywhere in Italian society, organizing and influencing, providing order and leadership for popular agitations.



Moreover, Berlinguer was also deeply worried by the national crisis. He believed that many key institutions – the police, the army, the judiciary, the senior civil service – were under Fascist influence. He also knew what had happened in 1922. Labour militancy and Communist success at the polls might frighten the middle classes into the Fascist arms. Alternatively, the Communists might find themselves in government without any real control over the 'State': the fate of Allende in Chile was a dreadful warning of what might happen next. The party was not respectable enough, and Italy's economy was not strong enough, to make any *sole* exercise of power a feasible proposition. Nor would Italy's allies have tolerated a Communist government. Power-sharing with some respectable party like the Christian Democrats was the most that the Communists could hope for; indeed, power-sharing was essential, for fear of what worse might befall.

In September 1973, therefore, Berlinguer put forward his famous proposal for a 'historic compromise' with the other political parties, especially the Christian Democrats. The Communists, he proclaimed, were available as partners. They would act responsibly, they would help to restore the economy and maintain public order, they would respect the Church and civil liberties; in return, they would expect to secure some social reforms and to influence general policy. And he was as good as his word. In the next few years the Communists discouraged labour militancy, and they arranged profitable trade with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The party even endorsed Italy's membership of Nato, on the grounds that it had no wish to endanger détente. Just before the 1976 elections Berlinguer stated, no doubt truthfully, that he felt 'more secure' in the West.[6] And in December 1977 the Communist deputies formally voted in favour of Italy's foreign and defence policies.

All this was meant to be reassuring; and for a time it worked. After 1975 the Communists not only ran six regions and most of the big cities, but their deputies in the Chamber rose from 179 in 1972 to 227 in 1976, only 36 fewer than the Christian Democrats. Parliament could not function without them, and did not try. In August 1976 Giulio Andreotti formed a new Christian Democrat government, which could count on PCI

abstention on votes of confidence; in 1977 the Communists helped to draw up the government programme; by March 1978 the PCI was part of the government's parliamentary majority, and so voted *for* the government. Only the final step, Communist ministers in the Cabinet, remained to be taken.

However, the 'historic compromise' failed at the final fence. There were many reasons. Most Christian Democrats remained implacably hostile to Communism, and Moro's death removed the most persuasive advocate of an 'understanding'. International tensions also grew worse in 1978–79, and this naturally affected inter-party relations in Italy: the Italian Communists could not hope to share power overtly after the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. The election of Cardinal Wojtyla as Pope John Paul II in October 1978 undoubtedly strengthened the Vatican's resolve to struggle against Communist doctrines. Relations between the Church and the Communists were much worsened by the 1977 regional laws (see below, §18.6), which for a time brought thousands of Church-run charities under political control. There were also furious squabbles among the politicians over jobs. The PCI claimed its share in State industries, banks and broadcasting; thousands of ordinary Christian Democrats held grimly on to their own.

Many Communists disliked the 'historic compromise' too, and refused to co-operate. Most of them detested the Christian Democrats, and had little sympathy for the Church. Berlinguer's supporters began drifting away. Party membership fell, for the first time in years, and the Communist vote declined (down at the 1979 general election from 34.4 per cent to 30.4 per cent). Communist trade unionists found that their pleas for wage restraint were spurned; worse, that workers were turning to the unofficial 'autonomous' unions. So the Communists had to become militant again, to win back the rank and file. Certainly they could no longer guarantee peaceful labour relations, a fact which removed much of their usefulness in Christian Democrat eyes. In any case, the economic crisis appeared less acute in 1978–79: there was even a brief surplus on the balance of payments. Perhaps Communist backing was not necessary after all. The Communists were not, therefore, fully 'absorbed' into the government. By 1979 they had returned formally to opposition, and Berlinguer was praising Lenin.

Even so, an enormous change had occurred. Thousands of party members held posts in regional and local government, in advisory bodies, on schools or health councils. There was *de facto* co-operation with other parties in parliament and unions, and throughout the country. The party



*was* 'absorbed into the system' at all levels except the very top. Moreover, it was distancing itself ever more from its international affiliations. The Communist leadership was extremely sympathetic to the Solidarity movement in Poland, and shared most of its aims. So the military takeover in Warsaw at the end of 1981 appalled the party leaders in Rome. Berlinguer wondered aloud whether the Soviet experience still had any relevance for Western Europeans; Moscow replied by branding the PCI as 'anti-Soviet' and accusing it of giving 'direct aid to imperialism and anti-Communism'.[7] The dispute caused some unrest among the party faithful, but in the long run it helped the PCI. It reduced the influence of the remaining pro-Soviet 'Stalinists' within the party's ranks; above all, it diminished the 'international' reasons why it should not be allowed to join an Italian government.

## 18.6 The rebirth of regionalism

In one sense the Communists were already in Italian government – in six regional governments, that is. The regions were another fine example of 'co-involvement', and not just of the Communists. The principle of regionalism had been included in the Italian Constitution in 1947–48 (see §15.6), but in practice regional governments existed before 1970 only in the outlying fringe areas – Sicily, Sardinia, Trentino-Alto Adige, the Valle d'Aosta and (since 1963) Friuli-Venezia Giulia. None of them was a great success, nor did regional government in Trentino-Alto Adige prevent terrorism by disaffected German-speakers. The rest of the country was governed from Rome, with weak local government at municipal (*comune*) level. The Christian Democrats, firmly entrenched in central government, were not anxious to hand over any power, especially if it meant allowing the Communists to run the 'Red Belt' regions of Central Italy. By the late 1960s, however, the old centralized system was visibly breaking down. It was clearly not providing welfare, housing and schools, let alone urban renewal. A new breed of technocratic planner urged the need for greater co-ordination with local government and for decentralizing the civil service. These planners were prominent in the Socialist Party, and most governments were then 'Centre-Left' coalitions between Christian Democrats and Socialists. Above all, the Communist Party appeared less of a menace than it had at the height of the Cold War. Other politicians saw that it might be useful to give it some experience of governing, and to make it 'co-responsible' for Italy's intractable problems.

Thus the long-term arguments for 'efficiency' were boosted by a favourable short-term political situation. In 1968–70 the Centre-Left

governments carried through an astonishing transformation. After a century of centralized government, Italy became a 'regional State'. Henceforth, in addition to the five existing 'special regions', there were to be fifteen 'ordinary regions' throughout the land, each with its own elected council and its own powers to pass laws 'within the framework of national legislation' on agriculture, town-planning, public works, health services, social welfare and many other matters. The regions would also have their own officials, responsible for the same topics, and their own sources of finance. Few people took much notice. There was little or no popular agitation for regionalism in 1968–70; indeed, it was about the only issue over which people were not rioting at that time (except in Reggio Calabria). The change was pushed through by a coalition of party élites – left-wing Christian Democrats devoted to 'participation', Socialist technocrats anxious for efficient planning and Communist politicians wanting to run Central Italy and prove the party's fitness to govern.

The first councils in the 'ordinary regions' were elected in June 1970, but throughout the 1970s disputes continued about their powers. The regions might pass laws on certain topics, but in each region there was a 'Government Commissioner' with a temporary delaying veto. If the dispute continued, the regional law might be overruled by parliament, or it might be deemed unlawful by the Constitutional Court if, for example, it conflicted with the Constitution or with Italy's international and EEC obligations, or with 'the fundamental principles established by the laws of the State'.[8] In practice, the regions usually accepted the Government Commissioner's directives, although the Constitutional Court did overrule many regional laws, especially in the early 1970s. As for regional administration, it was the same story. The central State – i.e. the Government Commissioner or the 'regional department' of the Prime Minister's Office – retained a general power of 'direction and co-ordination' of administration; and regional 'control commissions' or the Council of State itself could overrule regional officials on points of law. Furthermore, central civil servants were reluctant to let any power slip out of their hands, and even more reluctant to be transferred from Rome to the regional centres. For some years, therefore, administration in the regions was restricted and hesitant. The regions had little money of their own, and certainly not enough to carry through independent policies. They were usually 'delegated' specific tasks by the ministries: Rome provided the instructions and the cash, regional administrators did the work under Rome's supervision.

However, in the mid-1970s this picture began to change. The Christian Democrat Party was under siege. Socialists and Communists insisted on



'real' regionalism as the price of their support. So in 1975–77 parliament passed another series of regional laws, transferring more powers and far more civil servants to the regions, and – much more significantly – abolishing or 'handing over' most of the national or local agencies (*enti pubblici*) on which Italian public administration had come to depend. Fifteen 'general directorates' in the central ministries were abolished; thousands of quangos were suppressed, including such venerable institutions as the National Agency for Assistance to Workers (the former *Dopolavoro* of Fascist memory), the Italian Hunting Federation and the Italian Fashion Agency. Henceforth the regions, or the municipalities under regional supervision, could found and staff their own specialist agencies for welfare, run their own subsidy schemes for farmers and artisans, and organize their own co-operatives and nursery schools. They could draw up regional development and land use plans; they could take over the Chambers of Commerce. For a time they could even close down, or take over, most of the Church-run, publicly subsidized charities, some of which had been operating ambulances or welfare schemes for centuries; but the Constitutional Court eventually ruled this out, after much clerical protest. Even so, the regions' new powers were huge, and expanded constantly as they were 'brought into' new legislation. The Southern ones, for example, acquired a role in industrial planning for the South in 1976; all of them were expected to run the youth employment scheme in 1978. By 1980 the regions were spending 18 per cent of the national budget, and had become the main bodies responsible for health and social services. Perhaps most startling of all was the handing over of the vital task of 'safeguarding public morals' – i.e. the power to issue licences to restaurant-owners, shopkeepers, taxi-drivers, gun-owners and the like. These were real powers of patronage and policing. Here, at last, was a revolution in government.

For all these tasks, the regions needed people. Most of the regional officials were former central civil servants, many transferred against their will, but the top jobs were naturally kept for local men. In the Marches, for example, only one 'director' (*dirigente*) came from Rome, and 'very few' did in Piedmont.[9] They were political appointments, so it obviously mattered which parties were in control. In fact, the regions were a mixed bag politically. In 1975–80 the Communists helped run six of the twenty regions (Piedmont, Liguria and Latium, as well as their three Central Italian strongholds of Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany and Umbria). The Socialists shared power with the Communists in these six, and with the Christian Democrats in six others. The Christian Democrats ran two by themselves, and shared control of eleven others with various parties. The

minor parties also retained considerable influence – the Social Democrats were present in twelve regional governments, the Republicans in seven. After the 1980 elections the Communists lost their power in Liguria, but joined the coalition in Sardinia; the Christian Democrats were still in thirteen regional governments, as were the Socialists and Social Democrats.

This diversity was important. As the regions acquired more powers, *regional* élites were forming and governing on regional lines, not just in the regional governments themselves but in the host of specialist agencies that they created or absorbed. It all helped to make regional politicians ever more independent of their central party leaders. In the 1950s the Christian Democrats had used their control of central agencies to break the power of the (then) local élites. Now the boot was on the other foot. The regions – six of them run by Communists – had acquired the bulk of this vital patronage. The Christian Democrats fragmented even further into local baronies; even the Communists showed similar tendencies. The local politicians naturally enlisted the advice and help of local pressure groups. Trade unionists, businessmen, amenity campaigners, self-appointed experts and spokesmen, all found that their voices were listened to respectfully at long last. Building speculators flourished as never before; so did the Calabrian 'Mafia' (*'ndrangheta*) and the Neapolitan *camorra*. That, too, was important. There may have been little popular enthusiasm for the regions, but many of the organized interest-groups thought they were splendid. By the late 1970s 'co-involvement' was clearly well advanced. Everybody who mattered had been brought into the system. Local councillors sat on the new health boards, which had huge resources at their disposal. Voluntary bodies became included in regional and national legislation, e.g. on family counselling or drug abuse. And there were plenty of other efforts at inducing 'participation', e.g. in the new 'schools' councils' and the 'district councils' set up within big cities in 1976. No longer did all roads lead to Rome.

Was Italy simply reverting to type? Had United Italy been merely a temporary interlude in the long history of Italian city-states? It is, perhaps, still too early to be sure. However, the regions' essential task was to reconcile people to the State, not to supersede it; to help the central State become more efficient, not to dismantle it. Italy was not a federal State like Switzerland or West Germany: the regions had limited powers, subordinate to central government, in certain specified spheres only. Admittedly these spheres were important, but they were not the central ones of High Politics. The old unitary State remained in being, and remained, too, in control of much of the cash. It was simply being updated, that was all. But



it was an unusual kind of updating – dispersing the old elephantine bureaucracy, abolishing or transfering many of the key resources of political patronage, abandoning any hope of centralized, one-party control. Only an exceptional political crisis could have forced the politicians to act so resolutely.

## Notes

1 *Rassegna Sindacale*, 30 July 1972.

2 Survey by Dresdner Bank, quoted in *Financial Times*, 22 Oct. 1980; also Eurostat (Luxemburg), *Wages and Incomes*, 5 March 1980.

3 D. Wertman, 'The Catholic Church and Italian politics: the impact of secularisation', *West European Politics*, v (1982), 99–100; S. Burgalassi, *Le Cristianità Nascoste* (Bologna, 1970), pp. 164 ff.; E. Pin, *La Religiosità dei Romani* (Bologna, 1975), p. 342.

4 *Bollettino della Doxa*, xxvii, 20 June, 1 and 30 July 1973, pp. 69–134.

5 Declarations of the Italian Bishops' Conference, 9 Feb. and 17 March 1981.

6 *Corriere della Sera*, 15 June 1976.

7 'Vopreki Interesam Mira i Sotsializma', *Pravda*, 24 Jan. 1982.

8 Article 117 of the Italian Constitution.

9 F. Sidoti (ed.), *L'Organizzazione e il Personale delle Regioni* (Milan, 1979), p. 24 and p. 104.

CHAPTER 19

# The economy and society, 1980–2006

## 19.1 From 'thoughtless prosperity' to introspective stagnation

By 1980 there were signs that the long years of economic and social crisis were coming to an end. Pirelli, for example, made a small profit that year, the first for ten years; Olivetti turned, just in time, to computers and word-processors. As the European recession ended in 1983–84, Northern Italy embarked on a period of rapid growth and very considerable prosperity. The Italian economy imported raw materials and exported much of its manufactures. Cheaper commodity prices – especially the falling oil price after 1986, a 1970s-style 'oil shock' in reverse – were therefore a huge stimulus. Manufacturing increased by 7.5 per cent p.a. between 1986 and 1991; inflation, over 20 per cent in 1980, still 14.6 per cent in 1983, after 1986 was at a mere 5–6 per cent p.a.; balance of payments problems disappeared; even the lira was fairly steady, having joined the European Monetary System in 1979. It was Italy's traditional areas of strength – engineering, furniture, ceramics, footwear and clothing, office machinery – that flourished most, helped by more clandestine and even more profitable activities like arms sales to the Middle East and a virtual Sicilian monopoly of the heroin trade. Even on official figures, Italy had become the world's fifth industrial power. Her GDP overtook Britain's by 1987; per capita income was $15,120 by 1989, compared with Britain's $14,610 (and the USA's $20,630). And there was a real consumer boom at home. Economists wrote of Italy's 'second economic miracle' – achieved, moreover, without any indigenous coal or oil.

Labour costs and labour agitations, perhaps the major economic issue of the 1970s, were far less evident in the 1980s. In October 1979 Fiat actually fired sixty-one of its most troublesome workers, alleging that they had sabotaged production and threatened other workers with violence. A year later the management went further. It announced plans to lay off 23,000 workers. The unions naturally called a protest strike. After several weeks the unthinkable happened: 40,000 Fiat workers marched through Turin, defying their leaders and demanding a return to work. The strike collapsed. Tough management had reasserted its authority at Fiat for the first time since 1968, and the precedent was noted all over Italy. Industrial tribunals began upholding the dismissals of employees who rarely turned up for work.

The trade unions never recovered from this defeat. In 1982 the employers' federation formally challenged the system of automatic indexed wage rises applied since 1975, and managed to get the indexed part of wages reduced by 15 per cent; further reductions followed later. Craxi's Socialist-led government, faced with soaring public sector deficits, used the issue to tackle the Communist unions in the public sector. The 'federation' between Communist, Socialist and Christian Democrat-led trade union confederations fell apart in 1984. The following year, after much agitation, a national referendum confirmed the wage-index reductions. The economic effects were not significant, at least in the short run. By 1984 only just over half the average wage had been indexed anyway, and price-driven wage rises would have slowed after 1986 in any case. In the longer term, however, it meant that skilled workers could now expect to be paid significantly more than their unskilled counterparts. The real effects were political. It was a historic defeat for the Communist unions and the Communist Party, comparable to the defeat of the miners in Britain, and furthermore ratified by popular vote.

The trade unions were also hit by the shake-out of 'traditional' industrial and agricultural jobs in the early 1980s: over a million industrial jobs were lost between 1981 and 1991 (from 7.4 million to 6.4 million, according to the Census). Henceforth jobs were to be found, if at all, in commerce, transport and services; above all, in small firms (firms with less than 50 employees employed 37.4 per cent of Italy's industrial workforce by the 1990s) and among the self-employed artisans and the 'white-collar' middle classes. These were not fertile areas for union recruitment, except among health workers and teachers. By 1986 the three major union confederations represented only 5.4 million 'active' (i.e. not retired or unemployed) workers, 1.5 million fewer than ten years earlier, and most of these were in the public sector. Nearly a third of all trade unionists were pensioners; only 27.9 per cent of industrial workers were union members. The unions

had no real shopfloor presence, and little influence over the Factory Councils. Fiat ignored the unions altogether for eight years after 1980, and even in 1988 only summoned them in order to 'dictate' a three-year wage agreement. There was some union recovery in the boom years of the late 1980s, but eventually, in the budget crisis of 1992, wage indexation was abolished altogether and wages frozen for a year. In July 1993 it was agreed that national minimum wages should be negotiated for each industry, so the unions regained a significant role. But by this time they had become orphans, as the major political parties were discredited. The Italian trade unions – which had always been highly political bodies – survived the political storm of 1992–93, but were left facing, on their own, a hostile, market-oriented environment and another big labour shake-out.

The restructuring of industry did lead to big productivity gains. In Northern and Central Italy, a host of small businessmen flourished as never before. Lombardy alone had 350,000 companies, two-fifths of them in manufacturing – often flexible, family-run 'cottage industries', sometimes *de facto* decentralized outposts of major corporations and nearly always specialized, dynamic and export-oriented. They tended to be found in geographic clusters – Sassuolo for ceramic tiles, Arezzo for jewellery – where specialized skills were common, local government supportive and inter-family rivalry intense. In short, a 'Renaissance model' of industrial development predominated. The most successful *condottieri* – Luciano Benetton in textiles, Silvio Berlusconi in the media – built up huge family-owned businesses, unconstrained by professional managers or institutional shareholders.

The gap between dynamic export-oriented family firms and the slothful 'guaranteed' sector of State firms and major corporations became ever more significant politically during the 1980s, but probably diminished economically. The big firms (e.g. Fiat) became more efficient too, although admittedly Fiat was much helped by governments keeping Japanese cars down to 1.4 per cent of the Italian car market. State holding companies like the IRI regained some of their 1950s *élan*. And of course the relationship between big and small, between 'market' and 'State', was often symbiotic. The small firms often relied on big ones for contracts; there were plenty of public subsidies for 'artisans' and small entrepreneurs; many workers in the 'market economy' also held undemanding and generously paid jobs in local government or public sector agencies, with long holidays and early pensions. Indeed, it was thought that 15–30 per cent of employed Italians had second jobs: the first job provided security, the second ready cash. Less obvious forms of State subsidy came through the tax system and social security. Tax inspectors were not noted for excessive zeal, and tax evasion among small businessmen was on a heroic scale. As for welfare, 8.1 million people were drawing invalidity benefit in 1988.



The 'years of prosperity' were real. Northern Italy by 1990 was one of the richest regions in the world. But Italy had several major weaknesses. Much of the public sector was still notoriously inefficient. It provided much patronage and subsidy, but lousy services (incompetent health care, long-delayed pensions, hopelessly malfunctioning postal and telephone communications) to an increasingly sophisticated and impatient public. Its members had minimal job satisfaction; its top posts, and many of its middle and junior ones too, were political appointments distributed among the leading parties. Above all, it was expensive. Government spending was 33 per cent of GDP in 1980, but by 1989 had reached 41.1 per cent. The annual budget deficit, 71,000 billion lire in 1982, had doubled by 1990, and reached 12.1 per cent of GDP in 1992. Each year the accumulated National Debt rose accordingly, reaching 1,487,986 billion lire by 1992; by 1995 it was 125 per cent of GDP. In the boom years of the middle and late 1980s this issue – a debt of Third World proportions – was largely ignored, but in 1990 a European recession began after German unification, and real interest rates rose sharply. Treasury bonds paid over 14 per cent in December 1990, and rates stayed high for years. So Italian governments found themselves paying out huge sums – 125,700 billion lire in 1990, virtually the entire deficit – just to service the public debt. Every time interest rates went up, the debt increased. Here was a real vicious circle, or rather spiral, that threatened to bring down the whole financial system.

By 1992 the party was over. Italy found herself at the wrong end of International Monetary Fund (IMF) advice: cut spending, freeze wages, impose higher taxes. European Community pressure was applied to the same purpose, for Italy could not hope to meet the Maastricht monetary criteria for a single currency, yet was reluctant to be left out of the European mainstream. Italian governments had to be led by a former Treasury Minister like Giuliano Amato in 1992–93 and by the former Governor of the Bank of Italy, Carlo Ciampi, in 1993–94. They did what they were told and raised taxes very sharply. In the summer of 1992 the situation was eased by leaving the European Monetary System; the lira was allowed to 'float', but promptly sank by around 20 per cent. This was a boost to exporters and to the real economy, which thereafter recovered

rapidly from the 1990–92 recession, but even the recovery did little to resolve the inexorable rise in debt. The collapse of the currency, with attendant hyper-inflation, had become an ominous possibility.

For this reason the Prodi government of 1996–8 decided to give up on the lira before everybody else did. Like a fat businessman suddenly deciding to run a marathon in the hope of becoming fitter, Italy rejoined the European Exchange Rate Mechanism in 1996, and committed herself to joining the new European currency introduced in 1999. However, this meant that Italy had to meet the agreed qualifying criterion, that her budget deficit should not exceed 3 per cent of GDP in the target year, 1997 (the other criterion, that overall National Debt should not exceed 60 per cent of GDP, was clearly impossible and was soon quietly forgotten, especially since several other countries could not meet it either). To general astonishment, this 1997 target *was* met, although it took some heroic creative accounting to meet it, including a special 'eurotax' levied in 1997 and repaid (most of it) the following year once Italy was safely in. And so Italy abandoned her national currency and joined the stern new European regime, at the fixed rate of 1,936.27 lire to the euro. She did so despite strong German misgivings and also against the advice of the Governor of the Bank of Italy, who foresaw trouble ahead.[1]

Just as the marathon-running businessman would certainly lose weight, so the new currency certainly reduced interest payments on the Italian National Debt, by an estimated 60–70 billion euros p.a. But marathon-running can have disastrous consequences. The euro did not suit the wider Italian economy. On joining, shopkeepers naturally took the opportunity to round up their prices. Then the euro-using countries signed a Growth and Stability Pact, whereby the annual budget requirement (maximum deficit 3 per cent of GDP) was made permanent, not just a one-off fix in 1997. On the foreign exchanges, the new currency initially fell quite sharply, so in dollar terms middle-class savings went down by nearly a quarter in 1999. Later on, the opposite problem prevailed, and proved even worse: the euro rose too high and priced Italian goods out of the market, just as Mussolini's '*quota novanta*' had done in the 1920s (see §13.1). Exporters could no longer rely on a steadily declining currency to make Italian goods ever cheaper abroad. On the contrary, it was Chinese goods that became ever cheaper in Italy, and domestic producers could not compete. The great engine of Italian prosperity, small family-centred firms in Northern Italy exporting high-value goods, began to falter. Italy's share of world trade declined from 4.5 per cent to 3 per cent between 1995 and 2003; the decline was particularly noticeable in clothing and furniture,



fashion industries whose products were easy to copy. In 2005 shoe production fell 17 per cent in one year.

Larger firms were in trouble too. Fiat itself, after years of decline, was in effect taken over by General Motors, although it bought itself back again in 2005; Benetton retreated from international markets to the safety of operating motorways at home; Cirio, Parmalat and others succumbed, amid a host of scandals and law-suits. These collapses, particularly that of Parmalat which left 100,000 bond-holders holding worthless pieces of paper, revealed not just fraud and mismanagement by individuals but also showed that Italy lacked an effective regulatory system: auditors, credit agencies and banks all failed, over many years, to notice fictitious profits and balance sheets. In other words, no Italian firm was a safe investment. Furthermore, Italy was clearly not managing the transition to high-tech products. Her leading firms, faced with corporation tax of 53 per cent and total labour costs 45 per cent higher than the employee's wages, could not afford research and development; nor could they afford to train highly skilled workers. The country experienced years of near-stagnation: in 1996–2005 annual GDP growth averaged only 1.3 per cent. There was no more talk of 'overtaking' Britain or anyone else; indeed, by 2005 Italian GDP was about 80 per cent that of Britain.

Successive governments of Left and Right sought solutions, in vain. The Left sought 'social partnership' with the trade unions, i.e. wage restraint, compensated by extra spending on the South. The Right (in power 2001–06) sought tax cuts, but could implement them only very moderately because of the budget requirement. It also sought to abolish the job security guaranteed by the 'Workers' Charter' of 1970. The resulting unrest forced it to withdraw, although it did introduce more flexible, part-time contracts. But essentially governments were helpless. By 2004 Northern League ministers, and some others, were calling for Italy to leave the euro, but Italy's massive National Debt ruled that out: restoring the lira would mean far higher interest rates and therefore even lower growth, at least in the short term.

The only feasible option for politicians was to cut public spending, but this would be unpopular and politicians still needed votes. Pensions were a particular problem, costing 194,000 billion lire in 1991, more than the entire budget deficit; they had gone up by 50 per cent in the previous four years. There were simply too many pensioners – over 20 million of them, in fact. The population was ageing: people were retiring earlier and living longer. The Ciampi government in 1993–94 tried to cut entitlements and to remove the more obviously bogus 'disability' pensions, largely in vain.

In October 1994 similar proposals by the Berlusconi government provoked the largest demonstrations seen on Italy's streets since 1945. The Dini government that followed it in 1995 was more successful: State pensions were thenceforth to be based on contributions, the full amount being paid only after 35 years' contributions. Further changes in 1998 ended the 'baby-pensions' paid to those with 20 years' service in the public sector, and in 2004 another Berlusconi government reduced the pension per year of service, raised the contribution years to 40 and brought in tax incentives for people in private firms to retire later. So, slowly and reluctantly, change was brought in. People retiring from 2008 onwards could expect substantially lower pensions. But the birth rate remained low and longevity high (77.3 years for males, 83.1 for females, in 2005), so pensions remained an intractable problem for the future.

The only other way of cutting public spending was to 'privatize' State-owned firms, but this was hardly less contentious. 'Privatization' had, of course, always been part of the 'IRI formula' (see §13.1): private firms in trouble were supposed to be taken over *temporarily* by the State holding companies, given some restructuring and new investment, and then sold off again in a healthier state. In the 1970s rescuing had been very common but there had been little sign of 'rationalization' and few resales. In 1981 the IRI had shares in over a thousand companies, with over half a million employees; it produced half Italy's steel, owned many of the banks and even made a quarter of Italy's ice cream. It also made huge losses – 3,000 billion lire in 1983 – and almost collapsed. However, from October 1982 until 1988 an effective economics professor, Romano Prodi, took over, and the old formula was re-applied. Four or five major firms a year were sold off, usually to other companies (e.g. Alfa Romeo to Fiat in 1986). The IRI also sold off minority stakes in other firms, while retaining overall control (e.g. Alitalia, Banca Commerciale). All this raised about 1,500 billion lire a year; by 1986 the IRI was almost breaking even, and by 1990 it made a net 1,100 billion lire profit. The point, however, is that 'privatization' in the 1980s still meant essentially what it had meant in the 1930s or 1950s: rationalizing production, boosting productivity and selling off slowly. Italy had, as yet, no 'Reaganite' or 'Thatcherite' revolt against State industries or State welfare.

By 1992–93, as the IRI's deficit soared again in the recession, and as public protests about corruption and '*sottogoverno*' became more strident, the long-delayed reaction occurred. A different model of 'privatization' was advocated as the remedy for both political and economic ills. The need now was to bring in the money as quickly as possible, and to 'depoliticize' much of the economy. In 1992 the leading State holding companies – still publicly owned – were turned into joint stock companies, and told to become more market-oriented; the Ministry of State Participations was suppressed in 1993, after a referendum; at ENI, the second largest holding company, there was a wholesale clear-out of the old directors and managers, and the company disposed of 60-odd medium firms. The leading banks were sold off – Banca Commerciale to a host of small shareholders – and plans were made to sell the State telecommunications and electricity supply businesses. Then the problems began. One was that there was no effective regulatory agency, apart from a weak 'anti-trust' authority hastily set up in 1990 with a remit over both private and public firms. A public monopoly was therefore likely to be replaced by a private one, admittedly subject to less political interference, but even less accountable to the public interest. Another problem was that privatizing utilities often meant big price rises for consumers, for previous prices had been held low for political reasons. Above all, it meant job losses – a real threat to millions, particularly in the subsidized South.

By 1993–94 the whole issue had become enmeshed in political bargaining. As in Eastern Europe or East Germany, many of the old firms were simply too inefficient to compete in a fair market. As for the rest, how should they be sold: *en bloc*, or split up? Selling them *en bloc* would mean making existing firms even bigger, as had happened when Fiat swallowed Alfa Romeo; and there were not many potential cash-rich purchasers within Italy. Most of the IRI's holdings were simply too big; where would the money come from, to buy them? The financial sector was not big enough, or experienced enough, to handle massive 'privatizations'; nor were there lots of competent new managers around to run them. So privatization would simply mean foreigners taking over Italian industry very cheaply, with little benefit to State coffers. Or it might mean management buy-outs – i.e. the old gang of political appointees continuing to run things as previously. It was difficult, in these circumstances, to see how privatizing firms would boost competition, the great justification for privatizations elsewhere. In any case, the political will to push through privatization was not overwhelming, even on the Right. In 1994 Berlusconi's brief government, the most ideologically committed of all to the programme, managed in seven months to sell off half of the State insurance fund INA, but nothing else. The 'Centre-Left' governments of 1996–2001 did rather more, abolishing the IRI and selling off Telecom-Italia, although the State retained a 'golden share' (i.e. veto on decisions) in the latter.

So Italy did not acquire a new breed of 'robber-barons', buying up State firms on the cheap and then running them more ruthlessly. Nor did she have a flourishing 'private equity' sector, with a similar function. She simply kept her State-trained technocrats, sometimes now in private firms but operating much as previously; competent men, for the most part, but not known for initiative or international perspective. Moreover, soon the international fashion began to shift. The French and other European governments were manifestly backing their 'national champions' – i.e. State-backed and State-financed corporations, seeking to expand abroad. So there was less talk in Italy of 'privatization', which would clearly mean foreign takeover, and not even by truly private foreign firms. The Berlusconi governments of 2001–06 sold off the State tobacco agency and a few public buildings to private hands, but little else.

When Romano Prodi came back from Brussels to form another 'Centre-Left' government in 2006, he faced much the same economic problems as had faced him ten years earlier. The budget deficit was still too high (over 4 per cent of GDP), as was the National Debt (107 per cent of GDP), and the whole economy seemed stagnant. Italy had not only missed out on the Asian boom, but was threatened by it. There was plenty of vitality and flair in unexpected sectors and regions, but the country lacked efficient big firms and high-tech exports. The small and medium firms lacked access to credit, and stayed small and medium. Italy also lacked competent regulation and an efficient legal system: in 2006 it took nearly four years to recover a debt in the civil courts, and at least sixteen different permits were needed to open a business. The 'new economy' of high-tech innovation proved elusive everywhere, but nowhere more than in Italy.

Italy's most serious economic problem remained the condition of the South. The successive oil price rises and steel gluts of the 1970s had devastated the South's most modern industries, and they never recovered. Even in the boom years of the late 1980s unemployment in the South was around 20 per cent, and far higher among young people (44.1 per cent in 1990). Moreover, young Southerners could no longer emigrate, for there were few jobs available in France or Germany, and the car factories of Northern Italy were now manned by robots. In any case, why move? Welfare benefits were available, rather more easily, at home, and housing was expensive in the North. The South, with 36 per cent of Italy's population, produced about 24 per cent of its output, much the same as in the 1950s. Disposable income per head was around 65 per cent of that in the Centre-North, and even that figure was only reached because of transfer payments from the North, through the social security system.[2]



The production gap between North and South grew after 1983, despite the efforts of myriad Italian and European agencies. The whole 'development model' of the 1950s–1970s was long discredited, a fact symbolized by the abandonment of the Gioia Tauro steelworks in 1979. But it had left behind a network of inefficient, loss-making big State corporations, usually in declining industries and certainly unlikely to employ more people.

In 1984 the much-criticized Fund for the South, perhaps the most expensive regional development programme in the world, was finally abolished. Thereafter investment decisions were taken by a complex series of institutions, including Cabinet committees, a new Department for the South, a central financial agency, a parliamentary commission and a committee of representatives from the Southern regions. The aim was that the regions should make the initial proposals; the others should co-ordinate and distribute resources. In practice, the old 'infrastructure and incentives' system continued; 5,000 billion lire p.a. was spent in 1986–93 on 'extraordinary intervention' in the South. Texas Instruments was given huge subsidies to produce there; Fiat opened new plants (e.g. at Melfi), to attendant fanfares of publicity and much self-congratulation by local notables, just as in the old days. But these were exceptions. Most international corporations gave Southern Italy a wide berth, and there was a net outflow of industrial firms in the 1980s.

As the Southern regions took more decisions, subsidies went to job-creation rather than to capital, and were often selective – given to favoured entrepreneurs, not to all. Similarly, incentives and public works contracts tended to go to smaller, local firms; and the grants were handled by Southern banks, dominated by local politicians. The pre-1984 Fund for the South had been a real source of centralized, Christian Democrat patronage and power in the South. The new system boosted regional élites and local – especially Socialist – politicians. It soon proved even more obviously corrupt than the old one, and in some regions organized crime moved in for the pickings. Public contracts, jobs, subsidies, incentives, State-owned firms: these became the familiar themes of political debate and, by the early 1990s, of judicial investigation. To Northerners, it seemed a hugely expensive system of patronage and clientelism, failing to 'develop' or industrialize the South but all too successful in transferring wealth away from the North, and in keeping corrupt politicians in office. And, of course, this argument applied not just to 'extraordinary interventions' in the economy, but even more forcibly to the routine spending of the social security system, through which far greater resources were transferred.

These arguments were persuasive, but one-sided. The transferred money was not useless. It certainly improved Southern education, transport, housing and health; it also enabled Southerners to buy Northern goods, and gave some Northern industries a cheap supply of processed materials. Moreover, quite large parts of the South did prosper. Textile and furniture firms in Abruzzi and Molise, light engineering in Apulia, electronics near Caserta – these sectors all flourished, as did Northern Sardinia and much of Sicily, the latter for less reputable reasons. Indeed, by most international (as opposed to Italian) standards Southern growth rates were impressive: the North–South gap did not widen much in the 1980s, even though the North was becoming one of the richest regions in the world. And State spending in the South was not actually all that high: per capita, it was less than in the Centre-North, although the Northerners paid far more in taxes.[3]

However, in December 1992 Northern resentment and the State's need to cut spending ensured that the 'extraordinary' incentive system for Southern development was finally abolished, together with the associated agencies. The State even closed down some of the old steel complexes and oil refineries. It looked as if the Southern regions had lost their major institutional input into central funding decisions – just at a time when the chemical industry was in recession, tourism had collapsed, welfare spending was being curtailed, agriculture was being hit by European Community quotas and competition from Greece and Spain, and State industries were being sold off. In 1993 Southern unemployment rose 57 per cent in one year, to three times the Northern rate. Hit by recession, bereft of its traditional political patrons and threatened by militant Northerners, the mainland South turned resentfully to its traditional post-1950 protest party, the neo-Fascist MSI, now renamed 'National Alliance' (Alleanza Nazionale, AN).

So politicians *had* to think again. In fact, incentives were still given after 1993 by the Ministry of the Budget (later by the Ministry of Productive Activities), and the Ministry also supervised the regions' policies both in the South and the North. It later claimed to have helped create nearly 270,000 jobs, between 1996 and 2002. Moreover, in 1999 a new national agency, *Sviluppo Italia*, was founded, essentially to fill the development planning gap, although for the whole country rather than just the South. It set up the usual public–private partnerships on specific big projects, and provided tax incentives for jobs in particular areas. In 2000 quite generous tax credits were given to Southern firms that took on full-time workers, and Southern unemployment began to fall quite sharply, from around



20 per cent in 2001 to 14 per cent in 2005. *Sviluppo Italia* worked essentially as a post-IRI holding company distributing national and European funds to projects proposed by regions and approved by the Treasury. In other words, the old system was largely restored, although it was now rather more complex and under greater Treasury control; and the emphasis now was not so much on developing the South as on reducing the disparities within it. By this time, indeed, the South had some unexpected high-tech successes, including electronics at Catania and internet provision at Cagliari (the first newspaper in Europe to go online was *L'Unione Sarda*, in 1994), both started by individual local pioneers helped by regional and State incentives.

## 19.2 Social change and the family

The 1980s' prosperity ensured material gratifications of all kinds. Car ownership reached saturation point: by 1990 there were 27.4 million cars on the road, one for every two inhabitants. Most families had colour television and washing machines, and nearly everybody had a refrigerator and a telephone. Nearly two-thirds of Italian families owned their own houses; over 5 million had holiday homes as well. Homelessness was rare, even among immigrants. And people moved out of the big cities into smaller towns: Milan's population fell by 16 per cent in the 1980s.

The new 'post-industrial' jobs were more likely to go to women than to men. Some ancient discriminations were removed: after 1977 women could even become judges. The number of working women increased by 50 per cent from 1970 to 1985, and by the latter date 60 per cent of married women of child-bearing age had jobs. This was a real shift in the nature of marriage and in cultural values, as well as of the economy. Since married women earned their own income, they became less dependent on their husbands. By 1991 half the couples in Italy's Northern cities were opting, on marriage, for each individual to keep his/her own income and property legally separate from that of the spouse.[4] Women with jobs spent less time at home, had wider social contacts and, above all, fewer children.

In the 1980s the Italians, long renowned for their love of children and their family-centredness, had probably the lowest birth rate in the world (with the possible exception of China). By 1991 each female gave birth, on average, to 1.3 children, a rate which, if sustained, and in the absence of net immigration, would lower the population by 40 per cent every generation. Between 1980 and 1989 there were 588,712 births p.a., down 288,202 on the previous decade. The difference may be partly accounted

for by legal abortions of around 150,000 p.a. However, until 1993 births still just exceeeded deaths, so the overall population did grow in the 1980s, albeit slowly, from around 56.5 million to 57.2 million. It also became more 'Southern' – the birth rate in the South was twice that of the North – and grew older. Life expectancy, indeed, was very high – 73.5 for males, over 80 for females by 1990; it rose by about two and a half years in the 1980s, and by rather more in the 1990s. Here was a demographic time bomb. By 2004 there were 130 over-60s for every 100 children under 15. Few were being born, but the old were living longer. Who would look after them in old age? It was unlikely, on existing trends, to be 'the family'. Already old people were expected to live separately, or in care. And 'social' old age, i.e. retirement, might occur long before biological old age. D'Azeglio's famous dictum 'now we must make Italians' had acquired a new significance.

Over much of the country the one-child family became the norm, with the mother returning to work as soon as possible after the birth, helped by plentiful crèches and nursery schools. By 1991 37 per cent of all Italians lived alone, or in couples; another third lived with one child only. No longer could young Italians count on a vast support network of brothers, sisters, aunts and cousins. This was an astonishing transformation. Arguably the true foundations of Italian society were being rapidly eroded.

Or were they? Certainly, the innovations of the 1970s and 1980s – civil marriage, divorce, legal abortion, reliable contraception, equality within marriage, fewer children – were all huge social changes. But family life remained important. Over 300,000 couples married each year, and since most people lived longer, most marriages lasted longer too: orphans were fewer, and widows were older. Furthermore, the 'unofficial' economy, with its range of part-time jobs done at home, greatly helped domestic stability. Since young people could not find jobs, parents were needed for longer; they provided the cash, as well as a 'refuge of affection' at home, and some of them provided separate housing as well. Arguably, too, some of the other changes were more apparent than real. Abortion, contraception and premarital sex were not invented in the 1970s. Divorce was low by international standards – 15,650 in 1985 – although the number rose significantly after 1987 when the 'waiting period' after the initial grant of legal separation was reduced from five years to three. It was 17,890 in 1991, rising to 41,835 by 2002. Most divorced people were in their forties, affluent, educated and Northern. The new 'living together' was often just the old 'marriage', though unblessed by Church or State. But few children were born outside marriage (only 6.7 per cent in 1992). Unmarried mothers still suffered social stigma, and most one-parent families were headed by widows. The Italian family, in short, was not dying out. It became smaller and older, but also richer and more tranquil. It adapted, painfully but surprisingly quickly, to the modern urban world, to the age of the microchip, of working at home and increased leisure. After 1995 it even began to produce a few more children; births rose from a low of 528,000 in 1995 to 582,000 in 2004.



As Italy produced fewer people of her own, she began to import them. In the 1980s Italy became a country of immigrants – a total transformation from the 1960s or even the early 1970s. The incomers were predominantly from Somalia, Senegal, Eritrea or North Africa; after 1989 further waves came from Eastern Europe, particularly Albania and Romania (Albanians were the largest group by 2005, at over 300,000), later on from Niger, Chad and the Philippines. No ethnic group predominated; Italy took in immigrants from all over the world. They took ill-paid and often clandestine jobs on building sites, in agriculture, fishing or domestic service, or (a Senegalese speciality) worked as street pedlars. They arrived, of course, in a country with increasing unemployment and a declining need for unskilled labour. Many arrived illegally, coming ashore at night on Italy's vast coastline; the coastguards reckoned to catch one in ten. In 1986, 1990, 1995, 1998, 2002 and again in 2006 amnesties were granted to illegal immigrants, amid much controversy. No one knew how many immigrants there were: the official figure, based on residence registrations, showed a net immigration of 110,765 (including 62,000 from Africa) in 1990, and a total settled immigrant population of around a million (excluding European Community nationals); by 2002 the former had gone up to 220,000 and by 2004 the latter had gone up to 2.2 million. However, these figures omitted most of the 'illegal' immigrants, i.e. those not yet 'regularized' by amnesty, as well as the more transitory ones. In 2006 the Berlusconi government invited all clandestine immigrants to apply for regular permits, and was inundated. It granted 170,000, and the incoming Prodi government had to let in about 350,000 more. To many Africans – especially North Africans, where population pressure was intense – Italy, even Southern Italy, was a prosperous, peaceful and nearby country, a land of opportunity and a refuge from persecution. Many had a Catholic or kinship network in Italy, to help them on arrival; the majority of immigrants were Christians of various types, although there were also at least 450,000 Moslems by 2005.

So Italy at last became, like other European countries, a mixed multiracial society. Resentment and occasional racial violence soon appeared in

the cities, and crime was certainly blamed on immigrants: by 2004 about 80 per cent of those arrested for pickpocketing, and 30 per cent of the known drug traffickers and of the prison population, were immigrants. Politicians naturally tried to stem the flow. The Centre-Left in 1998 set up camps to house 'illegals' temporarily, until they could be sent home; the 'Bossi–Fini' law of 2002 laid down that immigrants were only allowed residence permits if they had already secured a job and housing. Neither scheme was effective, although official figures claimed that 88,500 immigrants were actually sent back in 2002. In practice, it was very difficult to curb immigration. The Italian navy was not willing to sink immigrant boats; businessmen and housewives were happy to employ cheap labour; the Church sympathized with the immigrants' plight. Despite the crime statistics, immigration was surprisingly slow to become a really contentious political issue. The real problem was that the immigrants had few useful skills, knew little if any Italian and had no knowledge of Italian customs or values. It was not a recipe for successful integration, and without integration it was easy to foresee trouble ahead.

While the immigrants flowed in, the Italians themselves became remarkably immobile. Only scientists and engineers went abroad to work. Few even moved within Italy: the huge flows from South to North had slowed. The 2001 Census showed that less than 20 per cent of Italians had moved house in the previous ten years (the British figure was 52 per cent), mostly within the same *comune*; only 7.8 per cent of them dared to venture into another municipality.[5] The land of Columbus had become a nation of stay-at-homes. This was particularly true of young adults: 40 per cent of the 30–34-year-olds still lived with their parents. Perhaps this was yet another indicator of economic stagnation, but equally it might be seen as a sign of family cohesion and contentment: why move, if you are happy where you are?

## 19.3 Health and welfare

The longevity of Italians clearly owed much to plentiful supplies of good food. The Fascists had boasted of growing 2 tonnes of wheat per hectare, but by the early 1990s the yield was around 10 tonnes, produced by a far smaller labour force. By this time the average Italian ate 76 kilograms of meat a year, twice as much as in the late 1960s. Furthermore, Italy pioneered the 'slow food' movement, partly for enjoyment but also as a protest against over-powerful, standardizing food corporations. Conscripts into the army grew taller each year: by 1992 the average recruit



was 173.6 centimetres tall, 1.16 centimetres more than in 1981, and the height gap between Northerners and Southerners, at 2.6 centimetres, was half what it had been thirty years earlier. A width gap soon replaced it: by 2005 11.3 per cent of Southerners were reckoned to be obese and 38 per cent overweight, compared with 8 per cent and 32 per cent in the Centre-North.

Another reason, presumably, why people lived so long was better health care. But the 'National Health Service', founded on the British model in 1978 when the Left was influential, was always highly controversial. It was much criticized for overstaffing, for being run by politically appointed managers, and for being grossly inefficient and expensive. Nor was it free to the user. Patients were expected to pay a bewildering set of constantly changing fees, unless they could secure one of an equally bewildering set of exemptions. The system ignored mental illness and failed to adapt to new health needs, such as drug addiction and AIDS-related illnesses. However, the service did provide lots of jobs for medical staff – Italy had more than twice as many doctors as Britain, for a very similar population. It also ensured lots of benefits for political parties (who ran the health boards and made the appointments), and lots of money (over half of NHS spending) for private health providers – specialists, private hospitals, old people's homes, etc. – contracted to provide services. Spending on drugs doubled, in real terms, in the 1980s. By the early 1990s 63 per cent of Italians thought the quality of health care provided was 'bad', and 10 per cent relied entirely on private health insurance. Indeed, the health service had become one of the great 'delegitimating' institutions of the country, and in 1992 the Northern League began collecting signatures for a referendum to abolish it altogether. Everyone knew of at least one case of harrowing incompetence or neglect, and blamed the politicians, often rightly: the 1992–93 corruption investigations began in the health sector, and led to many charges against managers and politicians. At the end of 1992 the system was therefore recast and 'regionalized'. The local health boards became much larger, and run by a professional manager; policy-making, finance and supervision were to be provided by the regions, not the communes; specialized hospitals were allowed to opt out of regional control and become '*aziende*' (independent trusts). But this reform, also influenced by British precedents, was not likely to make the service any more popular, especially as it was accompanied by a marked increase in prescription charges. In effect, the 1970s' aspiration to create a universal health service, with similar provision throughout the country, was no more. It had been brought down by, and by its

weaknesses had greatly contributed to, popular resentment against the established parties.

The major health issue of the 1980s was linked to the sudden spread of illegal drug usage, from the late 1970s onwards. The first official death from heroin overdose occurred in 1973; by 1989 there were over a thousand. By then estimates of intravenous drug users varied from 100,000 to 250,000, and of course there were far larger numbers using cocaine and cannabis. Until 1990 it was not illegal to possess a 'small quantity' of drugs for personal use, although trafficking was a criminal offence, and users were expected to undergo treatment – which brought about an astonishing growth in private residential 'therapeutic communities', run by Catholic charities or lay volunteers, both of them totally contemptuous of the State's efforts at regulation. However, in 1990 a tough new law inspired by Craxi's Socialists, bowing to the usual American pressure, imposed automatic jail sentences for possession of more than a 'daily dose', even of soft drugs. The result was predictable. Within a couple of years there were 14,000 drug users in prison, about a third of all convicted criminals. They cost the Italian taxpayer 400,000 lire a day each, and brought the penal system close to collapse. The Amato government of 1992–93 had to revoke the law, amid much controversy, and in 1993 an unlikely alliance of libertarian Radicals and 'therapeutic' Christian Democrats secured a referendum victory (by 55 per cent of voters) decriminalizing the 'personal use' of all drugs. The issue remained contentious, the more so as two-thirds of Italy's AIDS cases were reckoned to be drugs-related, and by 1992 over 7,000 people were dying of AIDS-related illness each year. And, of course, the drug trade was dominated by organized crime.

One striking feature of 1980s Italy was a big expansion of voluntary work. By 1990 over 5 million people gave their time freely to such activities. Innovative, non-profit-making 'associations' and 'communities' became responsible for running much of the welfare and health-related services, especially for the mentally ill and handicapped, drug addicts, ex-prisoners, immigrants and the old. Most welfare had been decentralized to the regions in the 1970s, and many regions were anxious to encourage 'participation' and often to subsidize volunteer groups – Lombardy spent one-third of its social assistance budget this way. More leisure, education and prosperity also no doubt contributed, as did youth unemployment. At any rate, the corrupt, inefficient and profligate 'welfare state' was increasingly replaced by a host of 'welfare associations'. The State, or the region, provided much of the cash, but the volunteers provided the services. This rosy picture needs some qualification. Dubious 'welfare' associations could and did



attract politically motivated funding; even genuine ones could easily become simply 'arm's-length' regional bodies, run by a handful of paid professional managers rather than by the original volunteers. Even so, such cases seemed relatively rare. Most of the voluntary sector was flexible, committed and performed immensely valuable work, if only in 'humanizing' social relations in an impersonal society, and reducing the grip of the bureaucratic State.

## 19.4 The Church

About two-thirds of the volunteers were practising Catholics, and volunteer work became the most prominent activity of the Church, or rather of committed lay bodies associated with the Church. The parish was often the organizing centre of local voluntary bodies. The Church, threatened by secularization and consumerism as she still was, had rediscovered a mission. Voluntary bodies were admirably suited to a 'post-materialist' world in which people distrusted State institutions, political parties and professional management alike, and sought instead satisfaction and identity in 'face-to-face' associations and civil solidarity. Many Catholics, too, had lost interest in older, more formal bodies including the Christian Democrat Party, which had let them down badly on divorce and abortion, and which collapsed in 1993. They turned instead to education (7 per cent of pupils were in Catholic schools), to social welfare (especially for immigrants, drug addicts and the handicapped) and above all to religious associations, which by 1990 had an astonishing 4 million members. *Comunione e Liberazione*, founded in 1969 as an association for pious laymen, had 60,000 members in 1979, became very influential in universities, and in the late 1980s became active in local politics.

But some more formal aspects of organized religion revived too. Karol Wojtyla proved an extremely popular choice as Pope John Paul II, and was also a hugely influential figure on the international scene. Another very influential body in the post-Christian Democrat age was the Italian Bishops' Conference, which became the very prominent voice of the Church and robustly proclaimed Catholic teaching on major social issues, unhampered by any need to win votes. In 2005 a Radical attempt to modify by referendum the 2004 law restricting embryo research and artificial insemination was defeated by a low turn-out (25.9 per cent), after a very public campaign by Church leaders to boycott the vote. Church attendance ceased to decline in the 1980s: in 1990 around 30 per cent of Italians claimed to attend Mass every week, and although this had gone down to

26 per cent by 2006, there were large numbers who attended less regularly. Among the young, Marxism was no longer fashionable by 1980, and sex was no longer a novelty. Attention turned in the early 1980s to anti-nuclear protest, in which Catholics were very prominent, and later to issues of genetic engineering. Surveys found that three-quarters of the population regarded themselves as 'religious'; priests enjoyed high social prestige, and fewer of them left their ministry; over 80 per cent of marriages were in church, although this figure declined to 69 per cent by 2004. Of course, most Italians ignored the Church's teachings on sexual matters, but they used the Church's 'rites of passage', and respected her role in society. In short, they were not anticlerical, nor materialist; and arguably they were more charitable than ever before.

In February 1984 a new Concordat revised formal Church–State relations for the first time since 1929. Catholicism ceased to be the official religion of the Italian State (although it was stated that 'the principles of Catholicism are part of the historical patrimony of the Italian people') and religious teaching ceased to be compulsory in State schools. But in practice between 90 and 95 per cent of pupils opted for it anyway. Church property became fully taxable, and the Vatican bank came under Italian legal regulation. State stipends for priests were phased out, replaced by tax-deductible contributions by the faithful and by a voluntary 0.8 per cent allocation of income tax, which almost half Italian taxpayers paid in 1992; it brought in 936 million euros in 2004.

Elsewhere in Europe the year 2000 was celebrated in a secular manner, as the 'millennium'. In Italy it was the Church's 'Jubilee', predominantly religious in nature. Twenty-five million pilgrims came to Rome; the Holy Shroud went on show in Turin; churches and monasteries throughout the land were restored and updated, often with public money. The Church, and Italy, coped superbly with the influx. They coped again in 2005, at John Paul II's funeral. These huge public events were symbolic, as were the regular World Youth Days and the formal canonization of saints. The Church, in 1960, had seemed hopelessly old-fashioned and cumbersome; but by the late 1980s she had transformed her structure, her activities, her liturgy and her whole mentality. There were still nearly 35,000 diocesan priests and 20,000 ordained monks and friars, as well as 108,000 nuns, throughout the land. She had lost many of her pretensions to power, but retained a great deal of influence. She had become, once again, a sanctuary from a heartless world – and perhaps also, after 2001, from militant Islam.



## 19.5 The press and media

By the 1980s the media apparently dominated Italian society. The average Italian watched 25 hours of television a week, and Italian television was one of the least regulated in the world. It was also arguably one of the worst, a relentless diet of old films, soaps, chat shows and sport. In 1976 the Constitutional Court had ended the State broadcaster RAI's monopoly of local broadcasting (see §18.3), but upheld it at national level. RAI's three national television channels were in practice shared out among the major parties, including the Communists after 1978. However, private (local) television broadcasters soon realized that there was nothing to stop them using videotapes and relay stations to transmit their programmes nationwide at virtually the same time; and this device led to the rise of *de facto* 'national' channels (four by 1983, nine by 1990) owned by private entrepreneurs. Silvio Berlusconi, originally a builder in Milan (and later Prime Minister), created a huge media empire in this way. He operated three channels that could reach 70 per cent of the population, were virtually unregulated, had no restrictions on advertising, obscenity or violence, had no obligations to be politically impartial, and certainly none to provide programmes with any educational or cultural content. His programmes were hugely successful. By the mid-1980s 44 per cent of prime-time viewers were watching Berlusconi's channels, compared with 40 per cent watching RAI's. RAI soon adapted to the competition, as did the genuinely local stations.

But Berlusconi's operations were legally somewhat dubious: they soon attracted judicial investigations and temporary bans. He therefore turned to his political protector, the Socialist Prime Minister Craxi, who in October 1984 issued a special decree legitimating Berlusconi's stations. In 1990 a further made-to-measure law permitted a single owner to control 25 per cent of the 'national' networks: Berlusconi had three out of twelve channels (but nearly half the audience). Moreover, Berlusconi also owned a Milan daily newspaper and many periodicals, a leading publisher, a chain of cinemas and a hugely profitable television advertising agency, not to mention the Standa supermarket chain and Italy's most successful football club, A.C. Milan. All this triggered a long resentful debate, which lasted for over twenty years. How should the media be regulated? Which anti-monopoly methods would be effective? Could one man be allowed to control private television, and thus dominate access to information, including political information? Might he not abuse this monopoly power

for his own ends? Might there not be an obvious 'conflict of interest' between his media ownership and his political activities? And should not all political parties have equal access ('*par condicio*'), especially at election time, to broadcasting channels and advertising slots?

When Berlusconi became Prime Minister in 1994 (see §20.5), his government's immediate concern was to dismiss the existing board of RAI, replacing it by four businessmen and a conservative historian. Three more national television channels thus came under Berlusconi's influence. Berlusconi promised to relinquish control of his Fininvest business empire temporarily, while Prime Minister, but he showed little sign of doing so and it proved impossible to agree to legislation on this matter, nor on rules guaranteeing equal access to the media to opposition parties, nor on limits to one man's media ownership. Soon the Constitutional Court stepped in, confirming that no individual should control more than a quarter of national television channels.

'Centre-Left' governments were in power again from 1996 to 2001, but they, too, did not resolve the various issues – monopoly, '*par condicio*' and the potential conflict of interest if Berlusconi were to resume office. It was not so easy to tackle Berlusconi, whose channels were very popular. He could hardly be forced to sell what was essentially a family business. Moreover, his media empire was too big to be sold off: no one else in Italy could afford it, and even if someone did buy, the sale would simply create another monopoly, probably in foreign hands. In any case, the 'Centre-Left' governments spent their first two years drawing up sweeping new constitutional schemes (see §20.6), which needed the support of Berlusconi's opposition party in parliament. After 1998 this constraint was removed and a tough 'blind trust' bill did go through the Chamber of Deputies, but it was held up in the Senate and eventually ran out of time. The Left governments had failed dramatically, on a matter of great public concern.

When Berlusconi came back to power in 2001, the issue became more acute, as he not only still controlled his own three channels but could now put his own men in to run the RAI ones as well. After more acrimonious debate, the 'Gasparri law' of 2003 allowed a 'single producer' a maximum of 20 per cent of 'integrated communications' – not just television, but films, newspapers, etc. as well (the limit for Telecom-Italia was set lower, at 10 per cent, because it already dominated telecommunications). The 20 per cent limit would apply to RAI, and the law also laid down that a 'Commission of Vigilance' was to appoint RAI's board. This law had some obvious defects, not least the problem of calculating the percentage



controlled by individuals (or groups) in a wide variety of media. It was supplemented by another law in 2004, limiting potential conflicts of interest – of all kinds, not just in the media – and giving powers to the Anti-Trust Authority to prevent them; it also charged the 'Communications Guarantor' with ensuring that media outlets were impartial and did not furnish 'privileged support' to their owners. All this did not stop the endless debate, which soon shifted to arguments about the membership and accountability of the various regulators.

The press remained more diverse than television, and also more critical. Indeed, by the late 1980s there was a marked contrast between the bland, consumerist ethos of television and the strident denunciations of political and financial scandal that filled much of the press. Eugenio Scalfari's *La Repubblica*, with a circulation of 375,000 in 1985 and almost double that in 1992, was perhaps the most prominent critic of the Establishment, but it had many rivals. However, the press was also subject to takeover bids and political pressure. By 1989 four industrialists controlled over half the national newspapers. *La Repubblica*, together with the weekly *L'Espresso*, ended up partly owned by Carlo De Benedetti, boss of Olivetti. Far fewer people read daily newspapers (5.3 million copies in the early 1980s, 6.7 million by 1988) than watched television, but newspapers were still hugely influential, and their ownership raised the same issues as did that of television.

## Notes

1 J. Blitz, 'Hawk among the Doves', *Financial Times*, 10 Nov. 1998.

2 Svimez, *Rapporto 1991 sull'economia del Mezzogiorno* (Bologna, 1991), p. 49.

3 C. Trigilia, *Sviluppo senza Autonomia* (Bologna, 1992), p. 56, quoting F. Padua Schioppa, *L'Economia sotto Tutela* (Bologna, 1991), pp. 93 ff.

4 M. Barbagli, 'Comunione o separazione dei beni?', *Polis*, vii, 1 (1993), 143–60, at 149.

5 *Corriere della Sera*, 9 July 2003.

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