Fascism and Ideology

Italy, Britain, and Norway

Salvatore Garau

NEW YORK AND LONDON

114. Lanzillo, *La dittatura del proletariato*, 48.
115. Ibid., 50.
116. Ibid., 50.
117. Ibid., 83.
118. Alceste De Ambris, "I rimedi eroici," in *Il rinnovamento*, May 1, 1919.
119. Sergio Panunzio, "Un programma d'azione," in *Il rinnovamento*, March 15, 1919. Quoted in Emilio Gentile, *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista, 1918–1925*, 143. On the necessity of synthesising 'revolution' with 'conservation', see also Sergio Panunzio, *Diritto, forza e violenza* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1921), 63.
120. On the national syndicalists' theory of violence, see Panunzio, *Diritto, forza e violenza*.
121. Angelo Oliviero Olivetti, "Nazione e classe," *L'Italia Nostra*, May 1, 1918.
122. Olivetti, *Il Manifesto dei Sindacalisti*, 33–34.
123. Lanzillo, *La dittatura del proletariato*, 84
124. Olivetti, *Il Manifesto dei Sindacalisti*, 33–34; the topic of a federative republic is also treated in Angelo Oliviero Olivetti, "Sindacalismo e repubblica federativa," *Pagine Libere*, November 1921.
125. Roberts, *The Syndicalist Tradition*, 171–172.
126. Roberts sees the national syndicalist movement as the main source, along with the ANI, of Fascism's totalitarianism. See Roberts, *The Syndicalist Tradition*, 11.
127. Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*.
128. Angelo Oliviero Olivetti, *Dal sindacalismo rivoluzionario al corporativismo* (Rome: Bonacci, 1984), 262–264. See also Angelo Oliviero Olivetti, "Il supercapitale," *Pagine Libere*, July 1920.
129. On Olivetti's opposition to protectionism see Angelo Oliviero Olivetti, *Questioni contemporanee* (Naples: Partenopea, 1913), 125ff.

2 Totalitarian Inclusiveness

Italian Fascism from Marginality to Mass Movement, 1919–1922

The ANI and the national syndicalists had opened up remarkable new ideological possibilities by finding original ways to reposition political concepts that came from diverse political traditions. At the same time, however, they had failed to create a political structure that could have any real chance of acquiring political power in the emerging post-war era of mass politics. Mussolini's *Fasci di Combattimento*, on the contrary, would show themselves capable of building on the ANI's and national syndicalists' set of ideas and stretching these already far-reaching beliefs even further; and, simultaneously, managing to create an exceptionally effective political structure. Fascism's struggle for power in 1919–1922 has been seen as the 'successful' political story of a fully revolutionary movement that aimed to break radically with the past, construct a new kind of society and, even, engineer a new kind of man. Particularly through the last two decades solid arguments to support this view have been proposed, and this chapter certainly does not wish to refute this reconstruction. However, it will be argued that the interpretation remains only partial.

Fascism's revolutionary and palingenetic tendencies existed alongside tendencies that were conservative, and even reactionary. Acknowledging this fact is hardly ground-breaking: Fascism's heterogeneous and syncretic nature has already been pointed out by many other scholars. As early as 1925, for instance, Benedetto Croce described Fascism as

> an incoherent and bizarre mixture of appeals to authority and demagoguery, professed reverence for the law and violation of some laws, ultra-modern concepts and mouldy old-fashioned ideas, absolutist attitudes and Bolshevik tendencies, unbelief and courtship of the Catholic Church, abhorrence of culture and sterile efforts towards a culture deprived of its own premises, mystic swoons muted by cynicism.[1]

More recently, fascism's syncretic nature has been traced out in masterly interpretations such as those offered by Linz,[2] Eatwell[3] or Griffin.[4] Yet despite these scholars' acknowledgement of fascism's variety, there remains the problem of how to interpret the position of all those various elements

within fascism's ideological morphology, that is to say, which forces occupied a more central position and which were instead more peripheral. The conservative presence within fascism is a particularly thorny issue, and still presents a theoretical stumbling-block to those who argue for fascism's fully revolutionary character. In general such scholars tend to dismiss this presence as a substantially non-fascist force within fascism. Griffin, for instance, treats the 'conservative fascists' as fellow-travellers rather than proper fascists, since they did not espouse the revolutionary character that he supposes fascism to have had.[5] This is not, however, a fully convincing interpretation, as it ultimately cuts off from fascism individuals and internal groups that were absolutely key to its growth and success.

In contrast to the idea that Fascism ought to be understood as a fully revolutionary phenomenon, this chapter aims to offer a more balanced perspective, based on the idea that the 'success' of Fascism was due much less to the 'revolutionary' nature of some of its ideas than to precisely the opposite. Namely, to its integrative power and synthesising potential, which led it to include also less 'revolutionary' and more mainstream ideas and political platforms. As such, Fascist ideology is seen as a space where highly diverging forces operated; and instead of trying to identify which among these forces were 'truly' Fascist and moving the others to a more peripheral or even non-Fascist position, it is argued that this combination of different forces was itself the source of Fascism's nature. In order to suggest the full significance of this multiplicity within unity, Fascist ideology is viewed from a variety of distinct viewpoints. From the most abstract perspective it is seen to have been driven by a blend of metapolitical forces; in this chapter, most notable among these is its call for a deep renovation of the country's political and social life. From another direction, what springs to prominence is what Fascists called 'spirit', that is, Fascism's mentality. No less important is what they called 'doctrine', Fascism's political morphology; finally, Fascism's political practice, and particularly the methods it used to achieve political power, are seen to be an emanation of all the aforementioned aspects. Each of these characteristics energised Fascism by means of tendencies that were often in contradiction to each other. However, it was the interaction between these contradictory impulses that resulted in Fascism's remarkable dynamism, as well as the two very important qualities that are labelled here as totalitarian inclusiveness and ideological ubiquity.

THE FOUNDING OF THE *FASCI ITALIANI DI COMBATTIMENTO*

On 23 March 1919, less than a year after the end of the First World War, the Piazza San Sepolcro in Milan witnessed a meeting that marked the official birth of the *Fasci di Combattimento*. At the time the meeting was largely ignored by the press and received only scanty attendance. Yet with this meeting the movement that was to dominate the Italian political scene for more than two decades had formally entered Italy's political scene.

The name that Mussolini chose for his new movement, *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento*, suggested some aspects of its character. The word *fascio* (pl. *fasci*) was derived from the Latin *fasces*, the bundle of rods which were sometimes tied around an axe in a representation of Roman authority.[6] Mussolini used it to evoke an idea of unity, as his political project aimed to bring about 'the coexistence and the community of action of all those—whatever their political, religious and economic beliefs—who accept a certain solution to certain problems'.[7] The open reference to *combattimento* (fight) expressed the movement's determination to unite those who had fought in the First World War with civilians who had embraced a pro-war position. It also, however, had a more subtle meaning, for it indicated the *Fasci*'s readiness to employ violent methods of political struggle to achieve their goals.[8] Finally, the movement's stress on its own 'Italian-ness' was a sign of its strongly nationalist nature, a rebuttal to the internationalist, pacifist and non-interventionist forces, primarily socialist, that Mussolini had been quarrelling with since 1915. Besides these nuances in the movement's name, however, there were no overt references to any other mainstream ideology, whether liberal, conservative, socialist or nationalist. The *Fasci* were meant to be something else, although it was not yet quite clear what that was.

Fascism was born from the major political restlessness that moved Italy in the period immediately following the First World War.[9] Despite the fact that Italy had won the war, those who had supported intervention began to feel and voice a growing fear that their government, which 'has never known a moment of passion' and 'of greatness', might fail to secure the territorial expansion that the interventionists had expected to follow naturally upon military triumph.[10] Mussolini asked the government to be 'equal to the situation' in demanding Italy's territorial claims, so that 'wherever the Italian flag has arrived, it may not flutter for a day or a month, but forever'.[11] He also took a strong stance against what he called 'Yugoslavian imperialism', and in the face of Italy's own territorial claims following the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, wrote that it was 'absurd' to even think that Italy might have 'sacrificed the flower of 10 generations (all Italian blood, because we did not send coloured or colonial troops to the front line) [. . .] to give Trieste and Gorizia, which are Italian, away to the Slovenians, Fiume and Zara, which are Italian, to the Croats', concluding that 'it cannot and will not be'.[12]

These fears matured into widespread resentment when Italy did indeed lose what were seen as her rightful rewards. The indignity against this *vittoria mutilata* (mutilated victory) was soon to fuel a general climate of disillusionment that was further reinforced by major post-war social and economic problems.[13] These were the effects of a need to shift down from war-time to peace-time levels of production, the consequent rise in unemployment deriving from the loss of those jobs, and the need to find a way of preventing that

unemployment from leading to first 'famine' and then 'tumult and revolt';[14] all of which was coupled with the problem of reabsorbing the masses of demobilised soldiers into the civilian economy and society. The First World War had taken unprecedented numbers of young men onto the battlefield; the problems of their return were as magnified with respect to the past as the scale of the war itself had been.

Fascism, therefore, was created to voice the 'ferments of impatience with the entire lot of institutions and men who represent the anachronistic past' and encouraged 'a profound desire for renewal'.[15] However, Fascism was far from the only response to the general and growing sense of frustration; many similar associations had already appeared in Italy in the immediate post-war period.[16] Primarily made up of ex-interventionists, syndicalists, nationalists and war veterans, these associations expressed their members' dissatisfaction with the present situation.[17] They also, like Fascism, represented a reaction against the *vittoria mutilata*, as well as the impatience of the younger generation with the drabness of a political class that, in the changed social and political post-war climate, they found outdated and unrepresentative. Politically these groups failed to make an impact, or even to forge any strong links with each other. Numerically, however, their strength was considerable and Mussolini began to view them as an element of political novelty and promise.[18] In particular, he watched with great hope the 'associations of combatants that are springing up in every city and in every village in Italy, and which very probably will group together soon into a single powerful organism, which will have unified means and goals'; in his view, this 'trench spirit' (*trincerismo*) might even be able to grow strong enough to 'annihilate' all other political forces.[19]

Besides his hopes in the numerical strength of the ex-soldiers and interventionists, Mussolini gave voice to their belief in their own moral superiority over all those who either had not fought, or had not supported the war. 'If ours, in a sense, was the war, ours must also be the post-war', he wrote, describing the current time as a period of transition that 'must find us in the lines, in the vanguard'.[20] The interventionists and veterans had therefore 'the right' and 'the duty to transform Italian life, even with revolutionary methods if necessary'.[21] Indeed, the interventionists were 'the only ones in Italy who have the right to talk about revolution' because 'we have already fought in a revolution' by bringing Italy to war in 1915.[22] This argument was a common one, and cast the Socialist Party in a reactionary light inasmuch as its opposition to the war had favoured the 'forces of European reactionism', namely Germany and Austria-Hungary.[23] In a political context in which, according to Mussolini, 'the programmes of the different parties, old and new [. . .] are all alike', the future Duce used these moral credentials of having supported and fought in the war to claim that the platform he was trying to build was profoundly different.[24]

While Fascism was undoubtedly a response to a mounting frustration, it was not at first an expression of a strong sense of national decline.[25] To the contrary, upon Fascism's establishment, Mussolini could state that 'we can affirm with full assurance that the Fatherland today is greater: not only because it reaches to the Brenner Pass [. . .] not only because it extends to Dalmatia. But it is greater [. . .] because we ourselves feel greater in having had the experience of this war'.[26] Despite the post-war difficulties and political problems, the 'internal situation' of Italy was not 'catastrophic and it is not, all told, even too serious'.[27] In sum, Mussolini did not believe that Italy was facing a decline; rather, he thought of it as being at the pinnacle of its power in recent history, although the inadequacies of its political class threatened to compromise all this.[28] Indeed, it was for this reason that 'it is imperative that the post-war period should not squander the war but should make even more glorious—morally and materially—the future of the Fatherland'.[29] For this to happen, the people who had supposedly made Italy greater, namely the soldiers and the war hawks, had to be unified and transformed into Italy's new ruling class. Mussolini made it clear that he wished his new movement to be a gathering place for 'all those who still boast of having been interventionists';[30] since 'if the combatants wish to face down the internal peril [. . .] they must unite into a single body, instead of dividing among themselves.'[31] This unified front should then fight for the 'material and spiritual elevation of Italian citizens [. . .] and the greatness of our people in the world.[32]

Mussolini's call was answered by three main groups. The first were the *arditi*, the officers and soldiers who had served as elite storm troops in the First World War. Joining the *arditi* were the futurists, following their leader Giacomo Marinetti. The final main group in the *Fasci*'s early nucleus were the interventionist revolutionary left, most notably the national syndicalists.[33] Fascism was very much the product of these forces' unification around Mussolini's call to action, and it was these groups which, together, gave Fascism its earliest character. In particular, it is possible to identify in that early internal composition the seeds of two fundamental tendencies that sprouted within Fascism: the immutable intransigence of its 'spirit', shaped by the radicalism of the *arditi* and futurists, and its adaptability to concrete circumstances, which belonged to the doctrine of the national syndicalists. This bifurcation between 'spirit' and 'doctrine' is key to understanding not only early Fascism, but also its subsequent development.

THE IMPACT OF THE FUTURISTS

The futurists offer a fundamental window into Fascism's mind-set, for they were a product of the same profound cultural change that was expressed in Mussolini himself and in many Fascists. It was characterised by a reaction against positivism, rationalism and materialism, which had dominated a large part of the nineteenth century; and a proclamation of the superiority of irrationalism, spiritualism and violence, which were seen as the keys to a new century.

Futurism had been created as a cultural and artistic movement by the writer Filippo Tommaso Marinetti.[34] The Futurist Manifesto was officially published on 20 February 1909 in the French journal *Le Figaro*, and lauded a mind-set imbued with the 'love of danger, the habit of energy and rashness' and characterised by 'courage, audacity and revolt'. Marinetti exalted 'movements of aggression, feverish sleeplessness, the double march, the perilous leap, the slap and the blow with the fist'; while from a more political point of view, he aimed to 'glorify war—the only cure for the world—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of the anarchists, the beautiful ideas which kill, and contempt for woman.' More simply put, futurism existed to 'fight morality, feminism and all opportunist and utilitarian cowardice.' Marinetti and the futurists admired all that expressed modernity, such as advanced technology, speed, cars, airplanes and industrial cities. The old culture, in their view, quite plainly needed to be destroyed ('we want to demolish museums and libraries') to make room for the new.[35]

As followers of an artistic movement, the futurists tended to have a relatively high level of education, with most members having attended secondary school or university. They perceived themselves as being both a cultural and a political elite, and took upon themselves the duty of renovating Italy.[36] They dreamed of a great future for their country, achieved through the efforts of young geniuses who would precipitate war in order to create a new Italian empire.[37] Thus, war ought to be considered not an 'exceptional occasion' but the 'normal system of relationship among peoples', as one of the leading futurists, Volt, argued.[38] The ANI, as has already been shown, shared a very similar belligerent agenda. Yet there was a profound difference between them, in that the ANI was in many respects an expression of bourgeois sentiments and was happy to establish close links with ruling elites, industrialists and big business. Conversely, although the futurists came prevalently from middle class backgrounds, their radical ethos was fundamentally opposed to bourgeois materialism.[39] During the debate over Italy's entry into the war, they had displayed their wholesale opposition to bourgeois attitudes by enthusiastically embracing interventionism and joining the army as volunteers.[40] The ANI too, of course, had supported Italy's involvement in the First World War, but while the Nationalists saw the war primarily as a great opportunity to boost Italy's power in foreign affairs and assure territorial expansion, the futurists saw it as a total revolution. For them, it was an opportunity to obliterate the ruling class and replace them with a young generation of heroes.[41]

The experience of the First World War convinced Marinetti that the movement should not be confined merely to the arts but should also enter the political arena.[42] While up to 1918 the futurist manifesto had been only a premise for artistic creation, in early 1918 the futurists actively turned to politics and founded the *Partito Politico Futurista* (Futurist Political Party).[43] In their nationalist political programme, the radical mind-set that had been expressed by the 1908 manifesto was knit together with their concrete experience of the First World War. It avoided an organised set of ideas, as the futurists deprecated doctrines in favour of improvisation, but it did articulate an agenda based on a 'revolutionary nationalism', a 'very intransigent and integral anti-clericalism', motivated in part by the pacifist position assumed by the Church at the outbreak of the First World War,[44] and firm anti-socialism.[45]

In spite of its lack of a definite system of thought, the futurist political programme contained several elements which, taken together, called for a radical renovation of public life and government. In particular, the Futurist Party wanted to transform the parliament through an 'equal participation of industrialists, farmers, engineers and merchants in the government of the country'. Parliament should therefore be smaller, 'rational and practical', but in the event that this failed it would simply be abolished, the result being a government *sans* parliament, composed of twenty technical experts elected via universal suffrage. The Senate was to be abolished and replaced by an assembly composed of twenty men, all younger than thirty years old and again elected via universal suffrage, whose purpose would be to control and 'excite' the government. Finally, the monarchy was to be abolished and replaced by a republic.[46] In foreign policy, the ultimate futurist goal was a 'total victory' against the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which was to be 'dismembered'. Only after Austria-Hungary had entirely disappeared could the Italian army be returned to its minimum size. Alongside these political aims were also more utopian visions such as 'the gradual degradation of marriage and the gradual advent of free love and "sons of the state"'.[47]

Several ideas are apparent in the futurist programme which were soon to appear in Fascism. Among these, for instance, were a fascination with corporatism, a distrust of parliamentarianism, an aggressive military policy and fervent nationalism; there was also a drive toward modernity and technological development that Fascism was to incorporate.[48] However, the impact of the futurists affected Fascism's ethos and methods of political struggle more than its actual political programme.[49] For example, the manifesto of the futurist party declared that its goals should be attained by means of 'violence and bravery'; what the futurists meant by this expression became clear within a matter of months when, together with the *arditi*, they created Fascist *squadrismo*.[50]

THE NEW ELITE FROM THE TRENCHES

The 'spirit' that the futurists embodied was very similar to that exhibited by the *arditi*, the second major group making up early Fascism.[51] The *arditi* were the elite of the Italian army: before being sent into battle they were put through highly rigorous training,[52] and in the war itself, the most dangerous missions were reserved for them.[53] Thus the *arditi* became famous for their courage and disregard for death, in many respects symbolising what

nationalists and interventionists saw as the efforts of the Italian youth to win glory and greatness for Italy. Returning after the war, the *arditi* brought back from the trenches their sense of belonging to an elite. Mario Carli, a futurist and *ardito*, wrote an appeal to the *arditi* in *Roma Futurista*, the journal of the futurist party, in which he depicted the *arditi* as central to the renovation of Italy. In his vision they were a heroic vanguard which, having defeated Italy's external enemies, must now turn on Italy's internal enemies, for within the country it was necessary to 'disembowel, break off, clean out in every sense'.[54]

Nevertheless, despite the superiority that the *arditi* claimed over the old Italy, they found it difficult to adapt to the new post-war situation. In general their cultural level was relatively low, and the skills required by a country at peace were not necessarily the skills that had established them as an elite group during the war. Their condition was not helped by the economic difficulties afflicting Italy, which made it difficult for society to absorb and find work for the floods of returning soldiers. In order to better protect their interests, the *arditi* organised themselves into an association called the *Associazione Nazionale Arditi d'Italia* (National Association of the *Arditi* of Italy, ANAI).[55] Although its programme, published in Mussolini's *Il Popolo D'Italia*, stated that the association was apolitical, the group also claimed the support of the journal of the Futurist Party, *Roma Futurista*.[56] This in itself is significant, in that it clearly shows strong links between the *arditi* and the futurists right from the beginning of the ANAI's activity.[57] This closeness was founded on more than a common programme, since the futurists and the *arditi* obviously shared a pro-war ethos and their identity as veterans of the First World War. Marinetti explicitly defined the futurists as '*arditi* of art and thought'[58] and the *arditi* as 'artists of danger'.[59] These descriptions testified to the remarkable similarity of the two groups, attempting, indeed, to present them as essentially identical groups operating in different areas—the futurists in the arts and culture, the *arditi* in war.[60]

Despite the ultra-radical mentality of the group, the programme of the ANAI concerned itself first and foremost with protecting the group's own interests, especially by seeking to achieve public acknowledgement of the merits of the *arditi* and guarantee them a job after demobilisation. Although it demonstrated a strongly anti-socialist and anti-clerical character, in reaction to the Socialist Party's and the Church's opposition to Italy's participation in the First World War, the programme had little to say beyond its defence of the rights of the *arditi*, and it lacked any articulate idea of reforming society. For example, the *arditi* preached the destruction of Old Italy, yet after April 1919, and thus only months after the end of the war, they instead began to develop strong links with industrialists.[61] Accompanying this move, as the Italian historian Rochart has argued, was a quantity of industrialist money that found its way to the *arditi* and allowed them to create their own journal.[62]

When in October 1918 Mussolini's *Il popolo d'Italia* began to host a number of articles celebrating the *arditi* as national heroes, the relationship between the *arditi* and Fascism was born. In the March 1919 meeting in Milan, the *arditi* were among the first adherents of Mussolini's new movement,[63] and their commitment to the *Fasci* would prove seminal to the early development of Fascism. It is easy to underestimate how important they really were, for their own lack of a clear ideology or definite programme meant that their impact on the Fascist ideology and programme was subtle. The ANAI's demand for special rights to be given to veterans of the First World War did surface in the Fascist programmes, but this aside, no real programmatic influence is recognisable. Where the impact of the *arditi* does appear, however, is in Fascism's complete absorption of their pro-war ethos.[64]

FASCIST ETHOS

The cult of physical strength, disregard for death, exaltation of action and indifference to danger that formed the the mentality of the *arditi* and futurists also shaped Fascism's ethos.[65] According to *Il Popolo D'Italia*, the first nucleus of Fascists in Piazza S. Sepolcro was composed of 'audacious people' and 'heroic elites' that were ready to undertake 'extremely dangerous action';[66] in Mussolini's words, Fascism was 'a defiant mentality, full of restlessness, impatience'.[67] While many of the features of early Fascism were destined to change or be abandoned during the movement's development, the descriptions of the Fascist mentality would remain a constant throughout Fascism's lifespan both as a movement and as a regime. In the first official definition of Fascist ideology, written in 1932, for instance, Mussolini and the philosopher Giovanni Gentile described the Fascist ethos in terms that did not vary from those used in 1919. Indeed, Mussolini reaffirmed that Fascists should be moved 'by a fighting spirit which accepts all risks', for what Fascism sought was 'an active man, one engaged in activity with all his energy' who was 'conscious of the difficulties that exist in action' but was nonetheless 'ready to face them'. The Fascist man should 'conceive of life as a struggle' and disdain the 'comfortable life' because Fascism aimed to transmit an 'anti-pacifistic attitude into the life of the individual'.[68] One could go through the Fascist publications from 1919 right up to 1945 and find exactly the same description of the Fascist ethos—an immutability that is very important indeed, for it represents one of the relatively rare constant factors in Fascism, and was certainly one of its defining features.

The impact of such a mentality on the development of Fascism was truly enormous. On one hand it shaped the ideal of a Fascist militant that created a very strong identity and sense of belonging and, later when Fascism became a regime, also a model for a homogeneous national community. On the other hand, it expanded the array of methods that Fascism was willing

to employ to achieve its goals. It was what led the Fascists to look beyond the traditional methods of political struggle to include paramilitarism and an unprecedented degree of political violence. Indeed, from the very beginning Mussolini had understood that if he was to appeal to the groups he most wanted to attract, he had to embrace not only the ethos of the *arditi* and futurists, but also fully accept their new methods of political struggle.[69] In the article calling for the meeting in S. Sepolcro, Mussolini had already declared that the new movement would be ready to accept both 'legal and illegal means'.[70] At the time, such a statement seemed little different from the usual call for direct action made by some members of the revolutionary left. However, approximately one month after the founding of the *Fasci*, the new scope and potential of Fascism's 'illegal means' became clear when futurists and *arditi* devastated and burned the headquarters of the socialist journal *L'Avanti*; Mussolini called it 'the first incident of the Civil War'.[71] Fascist squadrismo had been born.

This attack was to change the political climate profoundly,[72] and marked the beginning of the brutalisation of politics that the First World War experience had done so much to create.[73] The burning of *L'Avanti* is not only remarkable because it marked the beginning of squadrismo: it also for the first time gave a hint of the possible sympathy of sectors of the established order for Fascism's anti-socialist activity. Indeed, the connivance on the part of the state, particularly from 1921 to 1922, had a great deal to do with the extraordinary expansion of Mussolini's movement.[74] When Minister of War Enrico Caviglia called up the *ardito* Ferruccio Vecchi and the futurist Marinetti following the burning of *L'Avanti*, the minister was said to have claimed that their action had 'saved the country'.[75] Although Caviglia later denied having said these precise words, he never denied that this Fascist action ought to be considered patriotic and hence fully justified.[76]

The *L'Avanti* incident was the beginning of Fascism's offensive against its enemies, an offensive based on increasingly brutal violence that Mussolini saw as 'very moral, sacrosanct, and necessary' when it was used to cure a 'gangrenous situation'.[77] Reflecting this, the Fascist movement described its paramilitarism as idealistic, modern and even spiritual, thus incorporating the ideas on violence embraced by the futurists and *arditi*.[78] Yet Fascism planned to be much more realistic than the futurist movement. Despite the fact that the anti-socialist camp generally welcomed violence against socialists, the Fascists knew that to present their violence as a form of aesthetics might turn public opinion against them.[79] Instead, they called it a defence against the socialist threat. As the Fascist journal *Gerarchia* asserted, 'the Fascists allow and pursue violence; not as a goal, though, but as a necessary reaction against attempts to subvert the Nation'.[80]

The insistence on the defensive, 'surgical' and 'chivalrous' nature of Fascist violence has much deeper implications than its overt purpose as a justification for public opinion might suggest.[81] As recent research has shown, Fascist violence was intended to win the approval of many more people than

those who, like the squadristi, had learned to glorify a radical war-like spirit through their direct experience of the trenches. For most bourgeois Italians, the First World War had not destroyed their view of war as a respectable duty, nor their romantic image of the gentleman officer who carried this duty out.[82] Although squadristi violence was extremely attractive to individuals who had been too young to take part in the war themselves, it was regarded with a certain wariness by very many members of the bourgeoisie, including veterans. The Fascists' efforts to present their violence as defensive and chivalrous, therefore, was part of an endeavour to extend their appeal beyond young radicals to larger groups of the bourgeoisie. This balancing act with their public image was to remain a constant through the years, especially through Mussolini, who embodied both the family man and the womaniser, the anti-order agitator and the statesman. It was also part of a wider tension that was to pervade the development of Fascist ideology and contribute to its incorporation of very different internal drives.

THE OTHER FACE OF FASCISM: BUILDING ON NATIONAL SYNDICALISM'S SYNCRETIC CAPACITY

The image of Fascism that emerges from these opening pages is not too dissimilar from that shared by the dominant scholarship. Fascism's desire to prevent the fruits of victory from being lost and to shape a new ruling elite from supporters of the First World War was imbued with a highly revolutionary potential; so was Fascism's activist and pro-war ethos, and its desire to realise new and violent methods of political struggle. However, from a different perspective Fascist ideology becomes considerably more complex and less clear-cut.

The previous chapter has already analysed the contribution of groups such as the ANI and the national syndicalists to creating a general situation of increased ideological fluidity, through their innovative adaptation of political concepts. Fascism began to construct its own ideological profile on precisely these new ideological combinations that the ANI and national syndicalists had achieved. Mussolini acknowledged that 'Italian syndicalism' had 'extraordinarily brilliant theoretical "precedents"'[83] and that 'the programmatic premises' of Fascism 'are inspired, with regard to the working class's demands, by the premises of national syndicalism'.[84] A very important point that needs to be made, though, is that the continuity between the national syndicalist movement and Fascism did not stop at ideas. Individual men were also a major aspect of the blending of the two groups, as leading exponents of the national syndicalist movement such as A. O. Olivetti, Panunzio, Bianchi, Orano, Lanzillo and Casalini joined Mussolini's movement. As for the national syndicalist union itself, the *Unione Italiana del Lavoro* (Italian Labour Union), it was divided on how it should relate to Fascism, and its congress discussed various possible ways to approach the Fascists.[85]