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The Uncertain Friendship: Hitler-Mussolini 1922-1933

by

Michael Palumbo

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Jan. 29, 1979
date

William O. Sharsch
Chairman of Examining Committee

1/29/79
date

John H. Hagan
Executive Officer

Louis L. Snyder

Donald J. Harvey

Bela K. Kiraly

Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

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INTRODUCTION

Between the World Wars, fascist movements came to power in two major European countries, Germany and Italy. By the end of this period the affinities between these two nations had hardened into a political and military alliance in which Germany was to emerge as the most powerful partner. From 1922 to 1933, after Mussolini's March on Rome and before the Machtergreifung (Hitler's "seizure" of the reins of German government through technically legal means), relations between the two movements had been on a quite different footing. Benito Mussolini and his Partito Nazionale Fascista (PNF) had become an established governmental power while Adolf Hitler and his Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP) remained a struggling opposition group whose success, and indeed very survival, were far from being assured.

Attempts to identify the underlying similarities and differences between these and the other European fascist movements have been made by a number of scholars.¹ The present study will not attempt to resolve the questions about the sociological and ideological affinities between Nazism and Italian Fascism. But by providing new and detailed information about the relations between the PNF and the NSDAP prior

to 1933, the question can be illuminated from a new direction. A recent work on the fascist era states that "the full story of the early relations between Hitler and Mussolini remains to be written."² While not pretending to be definitive, the present study hopes to add significant information on this important topic.

First of all, we must consider the attitudes of the two party leaders toward each other. Similarities between Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler were certainly perceived by their contemporaries, even at this early stage of their careers. But did these two leaders always see themselves as natural allies? Equally important, how did the members of the PNF and the NSDAP see each other? It must be remembered that while both the Duce and the Fuehrer imposed considerable control over their respective followings, their political views were not necessarily shared by all party members. An examination of the party press of both movements before 1933 shows very diverse attitudes toward a Nazi-Fascist alliance.

Another closely related question concerns the aid which the PNF, already in power in Italy, might have given to the emerging NSDAP; and, if so, in what form: weapons, military training, propaganda, money or diplomatic support? It would appear natural, given the south German origin of Nazism, that the Nazis would look to the PNF for assistance. And although

Mussolini denied, at first, that "fascism was for export," his vanity and his quest for wider European influence prompted him to take an interest in a kindred fascist movement in a neighboring country. Indeed, accusations that Hitler was a pawn of Fascist Italy were made by his political enemies as early as the 1920s. How true were they? To answer such questions one must know how contact between the two parties was maintained; whether the communications were regular or sporadic; and the identity of the agents who maintained a liaison between the NSDAP and Fascist Italy.

The present study also has relevance to the issue of Nazi-Fascist relations after 1933. Most works on this period generally begin their discussion of the association between Hitler and Mussolini following the Nazi seizure of power.³ Nonetheless, to understand the formation of the Axis, and eventually of the Pact of Steel, it is necessary to study the first contacts between the NSDAP and Mussolini's regime. It is significant that in the early 1920s both the Duce and the Fuehrer had already begun to give the question of a German-Italian alliance considerable attention. However, their attitudes toward the alliance were not necessarily the same.

Alliance with Italy became Hitler's fixed foreign policy goal very early in his career, and, like his other foreign policy considerations, it played a large role in his political

perception during the long years of his struggle for power. One of the most interesting aspects of Hitler's policies during the 1920s and early 1930s is the extent to which he was willing to compromise his chances of gaining domestic power in the name of a foreign alliance which he was not yet in a position to effect. Hitler was convinced that an alliance with Italy would help fulfill his dream of making Germany a major power in European affairs.

Mussolini had also emphasized the need of restoring Italy to a prominent place in Europe. Before the March on Rome, the Duce constantly discussed his intention of making Italy a respected and feared Great Power. However, Mussolini did not share Hitler's preoccupation with foreign policy. After gaining power, the Duce made many contradictory pronouncements on Fascism's role as either a purely Italian or an international movement. In addition, there were conflicts among leading fascists over this question. In the end, Mussolini's foreign policy consisted largely of an attempt to promote Fascist aims without diverging substantially from traditional Italian diplomatic aims. A regime that constantly boasted of its nationalist basis could readily seek both goals.

Mussolini attempted to present himself as a leader of an international movement against Marxism, but only insofar as this could be done without provoking an open confrontation with

other governments. Rome's support of movements such as the Heimwehr in Austria and radical right groups in Eastern Europe is well known. Dealing with Germany called for a more cautious approach, since the Duce could not afford to antagonize openly the Weimar government. And Germany, in the 1920s, had spawned a number of competing right-wing groups. Besides the NSDAP, these included the Stahlhelm, the Reichswehr, the Monarchists and the Nationalist Party. Most of these groups appeared to have at least as much chance of gaining power as the Nazis. While Hitler may have had no difficulty projecting a relationship with the Duce as a key part of his destiny, the cultivation of Hitler--even as a vassal--was a far from obvious move on Mussolini's part.

Most students of history are acquainted with the period after 1933 when Hitler was a dominant world figure and Mussolini's regime was little more than a satellite. This study of the previously neglected years of Nazi-Fascist relations is not the familiar story of Hitler and Mussolini, but one which could add substantially to our knowledge of the more familiar later period.

Notes

1. See Ernst Nolte, Three Faces of Fascism (London, 1965); F.L. Carsten, The Rise of Fascism (Berkeley, 1971); Walter Laqueur and George L. Mosse, eds., International Fascism 1920-1945 (London, 1966).

2. Michael A. Ledeen, Universal Fascism (New York, 1972), p. 98.

3. Allan Bullock, Hitler, A Study in Tyranny (New York, 1962); Ivone Kirkpatrick, Mussolini, A Study in Power (New York, 1964); Joachim Fest, Hitler (New York, 1974). The one work which attempts to cover the complete history of Nazi-Fascist relations has extremely little real information on the period before 1933. Elisabeth Wiskeman, The Rome Berlin Axis (London, 1966).

CHAPTER I

THE ORIGINS OF THE AXIS CONCEPT

There has long been a bond between Germany and Italy. Although the Alps separate the two peoples, history has tended to join them. In the nineteenth century their struggles for national unity took place simultaneously, with the Hapsburg Empire providing a common enemy for the two movements for self-determination. Later, Austria-Hungary played a different role, acting as a land bridge joining its former adversaries in the Triple Alliance. Statesmen, intellectuals, and military men in both Germany and Italy frequently voiced the opinion that their countries were natural allies. Nevertheless, friendly relations between Rome and Berlin were often strained by the practical problems Italy faced in dealing with Austria-Hungary over the disputed border regions. This situation led to a complete break during World War I, when a disagreement over Article VII of the Triple Alliance, having to do with Italy's entitlement to compensation for territory that the Dual Monarchy would acquire after the invasion of Serbia, led Italy to declare war on Austria-Hungary. Although the Treaty of London between Italy and the Western Allies had also called for Italian belligerency against Germany, Rome was not anxious for

such a conflict. There was never any real doubt from the Italian point of view that Austria and not Germany was the true enemy. For centuries, Austria had dominated Italy, which had been the hated enemy during the risorgimento. Italian patriots such as Mazzini, Cavour and Garibaldi had often spoken out against the resented occupier. On the other hand, Germany was admired because of her great achievements in the arts and sciences. Indeed there were many Italians who greatly feared a struggle with the Kaiser's legions. Yet finally, in August 1916, Italy, under pressure from her allies, reluctantly declared war on Germany.

Quite naturally, the Germans bitterly resented Italy's failure to honor the alliance in 1914 and her decision to join the war against the Central Powers. This feeling of having been betrayed by their former ally turned many Germans against Italy and was a definite factor hindering good relations between the two countries for several decades. By the close of the war, however, talk of the natural alliance was already reviving in some quarters. It was inevitable that both countries, out of their sense of defeat, would gravitate toward each other. This was perhaps stronger in Germany than in Italy. Many right-wing groups saw Italy as a possible savior from the perfidious British and the vindictive French. The United States could be of little help in this situation.

In 1918, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, the high priest of the Teutonic cult wrote: "Italy and Germany, in consequence of

their geographic position as well as their population are destined to be friends."¹ As the country chafed under the hated Treaty of Versailles, those Germans most interested in striking back against French domination of the continent began to reconsider the proposition that Italy and Germany were tied together by a common destiny. There were many factors which brought the two countries together. Besides the common animosity towards France, both countries shared a desire for an alliance with Great Britain. Italy wished British friendship in order to maintain her Mediterranean position. Germany also desired an alliance with the greatest naval power in the world. There is little doubt that many in Germany and Italy saw a Rome-Berlin alliance as a first step towards a London-Rome-Berlin constellation.

A young political agitator in Munich who greatly admired Chamberlain shared his views on the desirability of an Italian alliance. There are many references in the early speeches of Adolf Hitler to Germany's former enemy to the south. One of the first allusions by Hitler to Italy is in a speech of December 10, 1919, which unfortunately has come down to us in a garbled version from police reports. It contains some indication that the future dictator believed that Italy should not have been Germany's enemy in the World War but was forced into the opposite camp by the Reich's unwise policy.² In a speech in April 1920 Hitler listed Italy among a group of states that opposed Germany temporarily, as distinct from those nations which were the Reich's permanent enemies.³ On several occasions, Hitler

later stated that he had begun actively advocating an alliance with Italy in 1920.⁴ In fact there are a number of his speeches for that year which indicate that he already saw Italy as a key element in his strategy for overturning the Versailles settlement. There is every reason to believe that these early leanings had nothing to do with Fascism but were based on his desire to gain a diplomatic ally for Germany. The Fuehrer later stated that he did not hear about Fascism until 1921.⁵ This assertion is accepted by most historians. It is possible that during these early years Hitler hoped that the Italian nationalist party might win control of the government and follow policies similar to those which he was advocating in Germany.

But his main interest in Italy at this time was as an ally against France. In a speech on July 6, 1920, the young agitator stated that "For us the enemy sits on the other side of the Rhine, not in Italy or elsewhere."⁶ In a speech in Nuremberg on August 1, he asserted his position more directly when he said "Our basic demand is: Off with the Peace Treaty! Toward this end we must use everything we can, especially the differences between France and Italy, in order to win Italy to our side."⁷ It may be coincidental, but Hitler's references to Italy in these years became more positive with each speech. Since one of his main interests was the Treaty of Versailles, it is quite understandable that Hitler would stress the one country which might offer

aid in overcoming the settlement which most Germans considered to be unjustly harsh. Many Italians also were unhappy about the peace terms imposed after World War I. By the summer of 1920, the Nazi leader had become convinced that the clash of interests between France and Italy would be aggravated by disputes in the Mediterranean, North Africa and the Balkans, which would eventually lead to a war to Germany's advantage.

Hitler's idea of gaining Italy as an ally predated his interest in an agreement with Great Britain. Although he later asserted that in 1920 he favored an alliance of Germany and England, there is considerable evidence that, while his attitude toward Italy never wavered, at the outset of his career his feelings about Britain were ambivalent. In his early speeches he often associated her with France as an enemy of Germany. On July 6, 1920, he stated, "It is time now to clear the table and to set straight those who cannot cease to flirt with England and France. . . ." ⁸ Hitler characterized England as one of the chief supporters of the Versailles Treaty. In addition, the young Nazi leader resented the London government's efforts in the League of Nations, which he saw as an agency for British world domination, particularly at Germany's expense. Although he may have felt a latent desire to be the ally of such a successful economic and colonial power, there is little doubt that it was Italy rather than England which was Hitler's first choice as an ally.

This desire for an Italian alliance was of course greatly increased by the rise to power of Benito Mussolini and his Fascist movement. As Hitler later wrote, ". . . with the victory of Fascism, the weak Italian government . . . was eliminated and a regime took its place which had nailed the exclusive representation of Italian interests as a slogan on its banner."⁹ Obviously he believed that the new Italian government would be less subject to Anglo-French pressure and more amenable to suggestions of an agreement with a resurgent Germany to revise the Versailles settlement.

A few years later, as reflected in his books and speeches, Hitler was to develop the ideas about Italy which he expressed in his early days in Munich. [It is not very easy, however, to see why Hitler was so persistent in his desire for an alliance with Germany's former southern enemy. Granting that this was part of the Zeitgeist in postwar Germany, it is still difficult to understand why Hitler advocated an agreement with Italy so consistently at such an early stage in his career. One scholar explains Hitler's Italophile tendency by the failed painter's and architect's attraction to the homeland of classic art.¹⁰ Although there are speeches in which he expressed admiration for Italian art, was not France, which he always strenuously opposed, also the home of many great artists? August Kubizek, Hitler's friend from the early days in Vienna, tells us that he preferred

a second-rate production of Wagner to a first-rate production of Verdi.¹¹ There is little reason to believe that the Nazi leader's inclinations toward an Italian alliance can be found in his early cultural background. What is particularly puzzling to some is how Hitler, an Austrian, could advocate an alliance with the hereditary enemy of his native land. But perhaps it is not so strange, since Hitler had a vicious dislike for all attitudes associated with the country which had rejected him. Hitler's stress on the need for friendship with the Latin country beyond the Alps may be understandable as a reaction against the traditional Austrian policy of antagonism toward Italy. There is no definite proof for this particular explanation, but it makes as much sense as any other analysis of why Hitler was so favorable to an Italian alliance at the outset of his public life.

At about this time, there was also considerable feeling in Italy favoring an alliance with Germany. The Italians had shown relatively little resentment against Germany during the war. Italians, like most other peoples, had a great respect for the Prussian military tradition and considered the war against Germany an unfortunate by-product of the conflict with Austria-Hungary. The defeat suffered at Caporetto was seen by most Italians as a victory of Prussian arms. Though the blow was severe, the country rallied its strength and with

help from the Western Powers managed to turn the tide in 1918. But the experience of Caporetto left few Italians willing to face Germany again, instead preferring to fight as her ally in case of a new conflict.

From an Italian point of view alliance with the colossus of Central Europe made a great deal of sense since Germany could bolster Italy's claim to Great Power status. With the threat of pressure on the Rhine, Italy could challenge France on the colonial or any other question. In a victorious war against France, Italy could hope to gain Tunisia, Corsica, Nice and Savoy. It is no wonder that at the end of World War I, there was renewed interest in Italy for an alliance with her northern neighbor. Ironically, however, Hitler's future Axis partner was by no means an early supporter of such an alliance. The young socialist agitator Benito Mussolini did not begin his public career as a Germanophile. In fact, his early career showed an exactly opposite tendency. In 1909, Mussolini visited the Trentino. On his return he wrote an article in which he gave his opinions, which were not noticeably moderate.¹² He bitterly attacked Pan-Germanism, which he traced to Gobineau, Lapouge and Houston Stewart Chamberlain. He particularly attacked the Austrian politician L. Reimer for his Pan-German sentiments. Mussolini described the Pan-German Organizations and

the Italian groups operating in the Trentino. He included in his report a linguistic survey of the region. In general, he demonstrated an extreme aversion to Pan-Germanism and considered himself its implacable enemy.

In 1914, Mussolini favored neutrality but soon began urging entrance into the war against Germany and Austria-Hungary. He founded a newspaper, Popolo d'Italia, which advocated an interventionist policy. In an article on February 16, 1915, he bitterly attacked Germany. According to Mussolini, the Hohenzollern Empire was founded by Bismarck in three plundering wars of conquest. His article "The Twilight of Germany" pointed to growing war-weariness in that country. He urged Italians to give Germany the "mortal blow." He believed that Italy must enter the struggle to crush "Prussian militarism" since "then and only then will the marauding Germans regain the right of citizenship in the human race."¹³ Popolo d'Italia intensified its anti-German tone after Italy declared war on Austria-Hungary. On June 10, 1915, Mussolini bitterly attacked the German Socialists. The leitmotif of the piece is a quotation which he attributes to Bakunin: "The socialism of Marx and the diplomacy of Bismarck work together for Pan-Germanism in Europe."¹⁴ Mussolini goes on from there to denounce Marx and Engels as nationalists and militarist fanatics.

After the war, Mussolini continued for a time in his anti-German attitude. In January 1919, he opposed Germany's admission to the League of Nations despite the founding of the Republic.¹⁵ But soon Mussolini took a position in foreign affairs which was less pro-French and not as consistently anti-German. The former socialist was now adopting the nationalist foreign policy line which affirmed that Italy must assert herself in the Mediterranean at the expense of her Latin neighbor. Also, Mussolini's disappointment over the Versailles settlement gradually began moving him in the direction of revisionism, which Germany also favored. For a time he supported the right of Austria to be annexed by Germany, for example. But in the years before the March on Rome, the Duce did not have a consistent German policy, since his attitude toward Central Europe was overshadowed by his greater interest in relations with the West.

In March 1922, the Duce visited Germany, where he met many leading figures of the Weimar Republic. These included the newspaper editor Theodor Wolff, the leader of the German Peoples Party Gustav Stresemann, as well as Chancellor Josef Wirth and Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau. Mussolini's impression of the Weimar Republic was that it was a farce. He wrote, "Where is the Republic? Don't search for it externally . . . Street names (there are 22 still dedicated to the various Hohenzollern), statutes, plaques, etc. of the old regime, everything is still

intact as before."¹⁶ Mussolini made no mention of the Nazis during this period. When he saw the swastika in Berlin, he merely identified it as an "anti-Semitic emblem" without reference to the Hitler movement.¹⁷ After his return to Italy, where the Duce was criticized for having contact with pro-Fascist groups in Germany, he did not mention the Nazis in his denial but instead referred to Reinhold Wulle, one of Hitler's rivals.¹⁸

Of course, the Duce did not visit Berlin to contact extremist groups but to evaluate the general political situation in Germany. He returned with the impression that Germany unanimously rejected the Versailles settlement and desired revenge. In a preface to "La Germania repubblicana," by Roberto Suster, Mussolini expressed apprehension about Germany. He wrote:

The downfall of the Monarchy has left an emptiness in the German soul. The Republic has not filled it up. Despite and perhaps because of the Republic, Germany is gradually and continually moving toward the Right. . . . Germany as a result of war and defeat represents the axis around which everything turns and cannot be ignored.¹⁹

The Duce never lost sight of the fact that despite her temporary weakness, Germany was a force to be taken into consideration. He was particularly aware that in the not too distant future,

there might be a change of government in Berlin. What form the new regime would take, he did not know. But he strongly suspected that it would be oriented to the political right. This fact accounts for Mussolini's constant flirtation during the 1920s with various groups in Germany, including the Nazis.

It took Mussolini much longer to realize the importance of Germany than it did Hitler to see the key role of Italy for his program. But by the time he assumed power, the Duce viewed Germany as a useful pawn in his struggle to establish Italy as an unquestioned great power. He saw Berlin as the axis around which European events, including those which were crucial to Italy, revolved. This recognition by both leaders of the need for German-Italian cooperation was an important prerequisite for a future Nazi-Fascist alliance.

NOTES

1. Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Briefs (Munich, 1928), II, 93.

2. Hitler's speech in Munich of December 10, 1919, NSDAP Hauptarchiv: reel 3, folder 61, Hoover Institute, Stanford University, California (hereafter cited as Stanford: NSDAP).

3. Reginald H. Phelps, "Hitler als Parteiredner im Jahr 1920," in Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte (hereafter cited as VFZG), XI (1963), doc. 3, p. 297.

4. In 1928, he wrote, "in the year 1920, I pointed to the possibility of a later association with Italy." Adolf Hitler, Hitlers zweites Buch, Ein Dokument aus dem Jahr 1928, ed. by Gerhard Weinberg (Stuttgart, 1961), p. 182. In 1930, in a conversation with an Italian diplomat, he indicated that as early as 1920, he had maintained that Italy and Germany had common interests. See I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani (Rome, 1954), vol. VIII, no. 367 (hereafter cited as DDI). In 1932, in a letter to Colonel Reichenau, Hitler suggested that he had been working for closer ties with Italy "for roughly 12 years now." "Hitlers Brief an Reichenau vom 4 December 1932,": in VFZG, VIII (1959), 435.

5. Adolf Hitler, Secret Conversations 1941-1944, trans. N. Cameron and R.H. Stevens (New York, 1953), p. 217.

6. Phelps, op. cit., Doc. 7, p. 305.

7. Cited in W. W. Pese, "Hitler und Italien 1920-1926," in VFZG, III (1955), 113. In a speech on May 8, 1929, Hitler

stated, "I have emphasized since 1920 that Italy will be the future enemy of France." Adolf Hitler, Hitler's Word, ed. by G.W. Prange (Washington, D.C., 1944), p. 11.

8. Voelkischer Beobachter, Munich, July 11, 1920 (hereafter cited as VB).

9. Hitler, Zweites Buch, p. 187.

10. Meir Michaelis, "I rapporti tra fascismo e nazismo prima dell'avvento di Hitler al potere 1922-1933," Rivista Storica Italiana, LXXXV (1973), 548.

11. August Kubizek, The Young Hitler I Knew (New York, 1954), p. 188.

12. Benito Mussolini, Opera Omnia, ed. by Edwardo and Diulio Susmel (Florence, 1953), XXXIII, 153-241 (hereafter cited as O.O.).

13. O.O., VIII, 204.

14. O.O., VIII, 11.

15. O.O., XII, 123.

16. O.O., XVIII, 94.

17. O.O., XVIII, 97.

18. O.O., XVIII, 305.

19. O.O., XX, 29-30.

CHAPTER II

THE MUNICH PUTSCH

Mussolini's interest in German affairs included a rather close surveillance of Bavaria by his agents. This is not difficult to understand in view of the proximity of this region to the Italian border. A number of nationalist groups in South Germany expressed strong interest in Fascist Italy. In this light, it is very important to consider the question of how large a role Mussolini played in Hitler's attempt to seize power in Munich. A substantial amount has been written about the abortive Nazi coup of November 1923. However, although most scholars acknowledge the relationship between Hitler's attempted revolution and Mussolini's seizure of power, few works dealing with the Beer-hall Putsch offer much information on the influence of the Italian Fascists on the Nazi uprising. In studying this subject two key questions emerge. First, to what degree was Hitler consciously trying to imitate Mussolini? Could the timing of the revolt have been coincidental? Secondly, we may ask if there was any direct Fascist financial aid to the Nazi Putsch. Both questions are important and are central to understanding the meaning of Hitler's attempted coup.

Relative to the issue of Italian influence on the Munich uprising, we must first consider the contact between the Nazi and Fascist movements. It was in 1922 that relations

between the two movements were initiated. There is some dispute as to exactly how this was begun. There has been speculation that on the Duce's visit to Berlin in March 1922, he made contact with the Nazi Party, but this contention is not widely accepted.

There is also disagreement as to the authorship of an article printed in the racist journal La Vita Italiana in July 1922. It was asserted somewhat later that the article had been written by Hitler. However, there is still controversy over whether it is possible that the Nazi leader could have been the author.¹ If so, this would imply that the Nazis had already established contacts in Italy, possibly as an offshoot of Mussolini's trip to Berlin in March. The article was signed "A Bavarian" and was very anti-Semitic in content. But it could have been written by any member of one of the Voelkisch groups then active in Bavaria.

The first documented contact between the Nazi and Fascist movements took place in September, 1922. Kurt Ludecke was sent to Italy by Hitler to meet with Mussolini, on the eve of the March on Rome. Ludecke was ideal for the mission because of his undeniable charm and wide knowledge of foreign languages. In later years, even after Ludecke was in disfavor, the Fuehrer praised his earliest diplomatic representative. Ludecke's memoirs, written as a refugee from Nazi Germany in the 1930s, contain an account of his first trip to Italy. According to Ludecke it was he who suggested the mission to

establish contact with the Fascist movement. When he first asked Hitler what he knew about Mussolini, Hitler replied that he knew only what he read in the newspapers. Ludecke indicated that it might be useful for the Nazis to initiate contact with a nationalist movement which was directed against Marxism. Hitler was impressed by the argument that it might be helpful for the fledgling Nazi Party to ally itself with a movement which was so close to success. Thus he authorized Ludecke to undertake the mission, and it was agreed that he would use General Erich Ludendorff's name.

When Mussolini met Ludecke, he indicated that he had never heard of Hitler. The Duce spoke out against the Versailles settlement, which was one of the main points of agitation of the Nazi movement. He also mentioned his struggle against Marxism. However, on a number of key issues, Mussolini was not entirely in agreement with Ludecke. In regard to anti-Semitism, he indicated that the problem was not as serious in Italy as in Germany. Ludecke found the Duce somewhat evasive on this point. On the question of the South Tyrol, Mussolini was much more emphatic. Before Ludecke could finish his question, he interrupted and stated categorically, "No discussion about that--ever. The Alto Adige is Italian and must remain so."² Obviously he wished to make it clear that even with a National-Socialist Germany he would never consent to any change in the status of the region. These positions attributed to the Duce by Ludecke sound very believable, since they correspond to the views which we know Mussolini held during this period.

However, the Nazi emissary's account of his report to Hitler on the mission appears suspect on several points. Though Hitler in later years praised his reliability, many historians, while accepting the general outline of his story, do not credit many important specifics. For one thing, Ludecke gives the impression that it was he who persuaded Hitler to give up all claim to the South Tyrol, in order to gain an alliance with Italy. We know that it was at about this time that the Fuehrer began to advocate abandoning the South Tyrol, but it is very doubtful that his conversation with Ludecke was enough to cause him to alter his position on this key issue. At most it was one incident in a process of reevaluation on his part. Even more debatable is Ludecke's assertion that Hitler stated that he wanted an agreement with Italy only as an alternative to a far more desirable alliance with Great Britain. This is not credible, since the Nazi leader did not seriously consider an agreement with England until the following year. Even then, he never saw Italy as a substitute for England, since his wish was for an alliance with both in a London-Rome-Berlin Pact. Obviously, while Ludecke's story is not a fabrication, there is reason to believe that it should not be accepted uncritically. Written in 1937 while the author was in exile from Nazi Germany, Ludecke's memory was almost surely influenced by the subjective evaluation which sometimes clouds his narrative.

Luedecke visited Italy on a most propitious occasion. Shortly after Luedecke's first trip to Italy, there occurred the famous March on Rome, which resulted in a fascist dominated government. Mussolini's claim that he represented a barrier against the red tide of Bolshevism in Italy and perhaps elsewhere was widely accepted throughout Europe. Right wing elements in such diverse places as Portugal, Sweden, Hungary, and Poland took heart from the March on Rome.³ This was especially true in Bavaria, where there were a number of radical right groups, most of which sought some type of separation from the German Reich. Mussolini's interest in this area was understandable. Only five days after he assumed office, the Duce sent an urgent request to the Italian Consul in Munich for information on the possibility of action by the extreme right.⁴ Mussolini suspected that his March on Rome might be imitated in Munich. The democratic government in Rome had shown itself remarkably weak in the face of a demonstration of strength by a strong-willed minority. It appeared that the March on Rome had given a measure of courage to those Germans who were opposed to the democratic government in Berlin. This was especially true of the National Socialists under the leadership of Adolf Hitler.

As we have seen, Hitler welcomed Mussolini's seizure of power. There is a great deal of evidence that it influenced him the following year. The sources which indicate the impact of the Fascist example on the young Nazi leader are numerous and varied. The most interesting is a letter written by Hitler to Mussolini during World War II, on the twentieth anniversary of the March on Rome. In it he dwells on the close connection between the Fascist triumph in Italy and its impact on the fledgling Nazi movement:

When you, Duce, led to victory your Fascist Revolution, I myself was involved in a battle for power. . . . The first act of my battle ended in a serious defeat for me. . . . In 1921-22--when I saw you from afar--you and your movement raised itself and affirmed itself. . . . Since that moment . . . you became a symbol by the heroic battle you waged to assume power. . . . From that point I have often studied your Fascist Revolution.⁵

It is interesting that twenty years after the event the German dictator vividly recalled the great impression that the Fascist Revolution made on his thinking. In particular there is a clear indication that at the time he was greatly impressed by Mussolini's success in using direct methods against his enemies. This is

further attested to by Hitler's statement in 1941, talking about the March on Rome; "The mere fact that a thing of this kind could be attempted and succeed gave us an impetus."⁶ At about the same time, Hitler also stated that "The brown shirts might never have come into being without the Black shirts. The March on Rome was one of the turning points in history."⁷

There is much contemporary evidence of the influence of the Fascists on the young Nazi movement. As early as October 18, 1922, Hitler was referred to by the London Times as the "very promising Bavarian pupil of Mussolini."⁸ There can be little doubt that there was a considerable stir among the Nazis as a result of the March on Rome. On November 1, the Volkskischer Beobachter stated, "In Italy the Fascist leader has become Lord of the land, not by means of 20 votes more or less but thanks to his energy, thanks to his followers' blazing will to liberate the fatherland from the bolshevik plague."⁹ This call to action was repeated several days later by the NSDAP leader, Herman Esser, who said, "What a group of courageous men could accomplish in Italy we can do in Bavaria too. We too have a Mussolini, his name is Adolf Hitler."¹⁰ On the 19th of that same month Hitler himself stated at a Party meeting that "Mussolini had demonstrated what a minority was capable of when the holy national will dwelt in it."¹¹

About a week later Hitler was observed by Adolfo Tedaldi, an Italian attached to the allied Rhineland Commission at Bad Ems who also acted as informant for Mussolini on conditions in Bavaria.¹² According to Tedaldi, Hitler copied a great deal from the Italian Fascist Party, with whom he wished to establish close contact. The Nazi leader showed himself a friend of Italy by publicly renouncing the South Tyrol and urging an alliance with Mussolini. Hitler asserted that for the Nazis the question of the Alto Adige no longer existed and called the Germans living under Italian rule "well treated." Tedaldi noted that the Nazi leader stated that Germany required an ally to raise her out of the current difficulties and that for many reasons Italy was the only great power able to fill that role. It is interesting that Hitler made his pro-Italian statements in an open and unmistakable manner at a meeting which was attended by leading German newspaper executives. Tedaldi's report as well as many other documents suggest that during this period Hitler often included favorable references to Fascist Italy in his speeches.

Such statements created an atmosphere in which many in Munich believed that the Nazis would immediately attempt

to imitate their Fascist models. At about this time the Minister President of Bavaria told the emissary Moser from Württemberg of his apprehension that the March on Rome would stir up the National Socialists. This was a commonly stated fear just then. An American Army officer, Captain Truman Smith, on a visit to Munich in November 1922, constantly heard similar expressions of concern. On the 16th he spoke to General Kress, a popular figure in Bavarian politics, who felt that Hitler's movement had received a strong impetus from Mussolini's success, as well as from the recent revolution in Turkey. A few days later, Captain Smith spoke to General Erich Ludendorff, who indicated that "The Fascist movement is the beginning of a reactionary awakening in Europe." Smith wrote that "Ludendorff believes that Mussolini has real sympathy for the national cause in Germany."¹³ In his final report the American Captain, expressing a common sentiment, referred to the Nazis as "German Fascisti."¹⁴ Indeed, another American, the Embassy Councillor in Munich, in a personal message on December 5, 1922, wrote, "Hitler . . . is now leading a Fascist movement along the same lines as Mussolini did."¹⁵ Councillor Robbins noticed a number of similarities between Nazis and Fascists, but indicated their differing approach to the Jewish question.

However, despite expectations, it was not until the Ruhr invasion of the following year that an opportunity was presented

for the Hitlerite movement to make its own bid for power. This event created the chaotic conditions which left the field open for the National Socialists and other extreme groups. It was during this period that Hitler's attitude toward England began to change, since he saw a split between England and the French enemy. On January 27, the Nazi Fuehrer stated at a Party Congress: "Those nations that have an interest in the continued existence of the German state would help the 'national groups.' Of course, not France, and not Russia, not even America . . . but England would, and Italy."¹⁶

At first Italy cooperated with France in her occupation of the Ruhr, but this did not deter Hitler in his desire for an alliance with Mussolini's government. Any disillusionment which the Fuehrer may have experienced was surely dissipated when Italy gradually withdrew her support of the French in the course of 1923. By August, Mussolini was definitely taking a pro-German stance, principally because of his need for Berlin's support against the Western Allies over the Corfu incident. Also, at about this time, the Duce was involved in intrigues with German nationalist circles. These groups were primarily the military-monarchist elements, which he believed could supply Germany with a strong authoritarian government to counterbalance his own current opponent, France.

For our purposes, the chief question to consider is whether Mussolini also gave aid to the Nazis in the period immediately preceding their attempted coup in Munich. It would seem that Hitler's effort to win over the Fascists in 1923 was connected to his planned Putsch. His aim was to find foreign political backing for the risky operation while at the same time winning a first alliance partner for his future international policy. In order to achieve these goals, Hitler again sent Kurt Ludecke on a mission to Italy. His assignment was to offer the South Tyrol in exchange for Italy's benevolent neutrality in case of a Franco-German war following a successful Nazi coup. Ludecke was also charged with swinging the Italian press toward a pro-Nazi stance and countering the influence of the Weimar representatives in Rome.¹⁷

There are various indications that there may have been other Nazi emissaries sent to Italy between Ludecke's two missions.¹⁸ But Ludecke was surely the man Hitler relied upon most in this area. On September 10, 1923 Ludecke spoke briefly to Mussolini on a train between Milan and Rome. The Duce was courteous but noncommittal. The Nazi emissary received no promises of money and could not get any written neutrality agreement in case of a Franco-German conflict following a right-wing seizure of power. In Rome, Ludecke was received by Baron Russo, Mussolini's Secretary of Foreign Affairs. Because Italy had friendly relations with the government in Berlin, the Duce could not officially take

notice of a group opposed to the Weimar Republic.¹⁹ But Ludecke was invited to the first reception given by Mussolini for the King. This was an extraordinary privilege for a representative of such a small party.

The Nazi emissary was particularly successful in influencing the Italian press. Before Ludecke's second trip there were a number of articles in Italian newspapers which were not favorable to the NSDAP.²⁰ While Ludecke was in Rome there was a noticeable change in the tone of the press.²¹ He also persuaded Il Corriere Italiano to send Dr. Leo Negrelli to Munich, where he interviewed Hitler on October 16, 1923. In this interview, the Nazi leader dwelt on the South Tyrol and his renunciation of any claim to that region. German irredentism, he indicated, must be centered on the Rhine:Strasbourg more than Bolzano was sacred Teutonic soil. This, of course, was aimed to correspond with Mussolini's current anti-French policy. Because of these sentiments, Negrelli gave Hitler a favorable review, linking his movement to the Fascist Revolution. However, not so popular with Negrelli or his readers were Hitler's anti-Semitic remarks. The Fuehrer called the battle in Germany against the Jews "the decisive battle for all Europe."²² Hitler linked the Jews to Bolshevism, which he saw as a danger for all Europe, including Italy. The Nazi leader did not understand that such anti-Semitic remarks could gain him few friends in Italy.

Ludecke ran into a similar problem in the interview he granted to Epoca on October 25, 1923. After giving a description of recent events in Germany, especially the French invasion of the Ruhr, the Nazi emissary was asked if his movement was inspired by Fascism. He answered, "Benito Mussolini, Italy's saviour, has shown . . . a country can be governed in a national sense if a dominant personality with a bold blow takes in hand the destiny of his people."²³ But Ludecke went on to criticize Fascist Italy for fighting the "manifestations of Judaism," i.e., Marxism, but unfortunately not the Jew himself. He claimed growing Jewish control of the government and economy and compared the situation to Germany. Ludecke probably did not realize that anti-Semitic remarks could gain the Nazis little support in Italy.²⁴

Despite Ludecke's assertion that he got no promise of financial aid while in Italy, there is some evidence which suggests direct Fascist assistance in the preparations for the Munich Putsch. Though by no means conclusive, much of what we know makes Italian aid to the Nazis plausible. As early as 1922 there were reports of Italian agents operating in Bavaria.²⁵ On June 25, 1923, the Police Director of Munich sent a report to the Ministry of Interior on the activities of the Fascist Party organization in his city. He stated: "a large part of the Munich population has been following the activities of this group with lively attention. . . . These fascists do not stay away from

internal German affairs. They occupy themselves with the financial as well as the political happenings in Bavaria."²⁶ The Germans suspected the Fascist agents of seeking to further "Pan-Italian expansion into Bavaria."²⁷ However, it was unlikely that Mussolini really wished to annex Bavaria or any portion of southern Germany. But it is possible that his agents may have aided local groups that desired to set up a pro-Fascist government in Munich.

There are definite indications that link the Fascist agents with the NSDAP. It is of some interest that while he was in Italy Ludecke tried to meet with de Fiori, a well-known Fascist agent who operated in Germany.²⁸ On May 1, 1923, some months previous to Ludecke's visit to Italy, the Ministry of the Interior had made a report to the Berlin Foreign Office on charges that the NSDAP was being supported by the Italian government. It concluded that "These allegations are to a certain extent confirmed." The report continued:

I humbly request that the Italian government be advised that support of the National Socialists, who are fighting the government of the Republic in the sharpest manner, would have to be regarded in Germany as an unfriendly action and an undesired interference in internal political matters. Political activity on the part of Italian citizens in favor

of the National Socialist German Workers Party
could easily lead to undesirable consequences for
the Italian citizens themselves.²⁹

Conceivably, the "support" received by the Nazis included
weapons. We know that throughout the period before the revolt,
the NSDAP was attempting to obtain arms by every means possible.³⁰
Shortly after the Munich Putsch, on November 26, the German Embassy
in Rome reported that:

The presence in Rome a few weeks ago of a Count
Isenberg, . resident in Hungary, is thought by
Hungarian circles to be connected to an attempt to
transport weapons for the benefit of the National
Socialists or similar organizations.³¹

At about the same time, the Berlin Foreign Office received
a report from the representative of the Reich government in Munich
"concerning the relations between the Hungarian representative
Ulain and the National Socialists."³² Since Mussolini had very
close contacts with right wing elements in Hungary, it is very
possible that he was supplying weapons or money to the Nazis through
them.

There are other indications that the Nazis may have received
aid from Fascist Italy for the Munich Putsch. Perhaps most famous
is the case of Werner Abel. In 1929, Hitler won a libel action
against certain German newspapers because they could not prove
their accusation that he accepted Fascist money in 1923 in
exchange for his renunciation of South Tyrol. During appeal
proceedings Werber Abel testified that he had introduced

Hitler to the Italian attaché Captain Giuseppe Migliorati, who gave him 60,000 gold marks for the Beerhall Putsch. This legal battle dragged on until 1932, with Abel eventually receiving a three-year sentence of hard labor on a conviction of perjury. However, because of the bias of the court in favor of Hitler, most historians consider the verdict meaningless. Thus the story of Fascist money being passed to Hitler through Captain Migliorati remains neither proven nor disproven.

Another possible link between Nazis and Fascists was suggested at the trial of Gustav Kahr, the Bavarian "dictator" who was charged with complicity in the Beerhall Putsch. Evidence at his trial indicated that Kahr had been with the Italian Consul at midnight on November 8th, at which time he reportedly criticized Hitler's take-over of the plot. On the witness stand Kahr himself could not recall whether he had been with the Italian Consul on November 8. But if it were true, it would not be surprising that he would refuse to verify it, since the incident suggested that he had been in collusion with the Nazis on plans for a coup which was financed by a foreign power. This was the last thing to admit at a trial for treason. Other indications that Mussolini was involved in the Munich Putsch were the reports in January 1925 from the legation in Bern of a Nazi plot against the Duce. The reason suggested was that the Italian leader had not given aid to the National Socialist Putsch in November 1923 as had been

expected. Since no one was apprehended, it is difficult to ascertain the accuracy of this report.³³

There is some evidence that suggests that there was no Fascist involvement in the Putsch. Most notable are the reports of Constantin von Neurath, the German Ambassador in Rome. While admitting that there were Nazi-Fascist contacts, Neurath denied that Mussolini ever gave money to Hitler's movement. On March 29, 1923, Neurath reported that "Hitler's party made an attempt in Munich to make closer contacts with the Fascist party leadership. Hitler's request was presented to Mussolini by a member of the Italian government." But according to the German Ambassador, "Mussolini is too intelligent to allow himself to be compromised by hangers-on such as the Hitler people"³⁴ and so he did not comply with the request. After the Putsch on November 29, 1923, Neurath wrote that "it would be a great error to assume that a reactionary-nationalist government would be welcomed with satisfaction in Italy."³⁵

There is also evidence from the Duce that suggests that he never aided Hitler. In an interview with the New York Times in 1924, Mussolini himself spoke very scornfully of the Nazis and denied any relationship between Fascism and National Socialism.³⁶ Finally, and most importantly, the report of the Italian Consul in Munich immediately after the Putsch gives no hint of any Nazi-Fascist collusion. In fact, the Consul, Durini di Monza, calls

the Nazis clowns (buffoni), a name which he indicates Mussolini had used for them himself.³⁷ It would appear unlikely that Mussolini would give aid to men he considered to be clowns. But then again, Mussolini was a temperamental individual quick to make snap judgments. In fact, there was nothing in the Duce's character that would exclude the possibility of his giving money to people he considered buffoons if he believed that they might be useful. There can be little doubt that Hitler was in need of money. There is evidence that in June 1923 his movement seemed doomed since the Nazis were cut off from all local sources of financial aid.³⁸ The appeal by the Nazi movement to Fascist Italy for assistance is understandable.

It is obvious that when he initiated the attempted coup, Hitler saw himself as repeating the Duce's triumph of the previous year. This he held responsible in part for his own lack of success. As he told the correspondent for the Daily Mail, G. Ward Price, in 1935:

I was following Mussolini's example too closely. I had meant the Munich Putsch to be the beginning of a "March on Berlin" which should carry us straight to power. From its failure I learnt the lesson that each country must evolve its own type and methods of national regeneration.³⁹

After the Putsch, Hitler was arrested and put on trial along with Ludendorff and the other conspirators.⁴⁰ During the proceedings Hitler again showed his admiration for Mussolini. Once more he referred to the example of the Fascist seizure of power when in his final statement to the court he said, "Mussolini's deed was legalized by the tremendous work of purification, the March on Rome. . . ." ⁴¹ The Nazi leader indicated that he wished to purify German life of corruption just as the March on Rome had purified Italian public life. In his opinion this was legal justification enough for his Putsch.

It has been charged by André Francois-Poncet, the well-known French Ambassador to both Germany and Italy in the 1930s, that those members of the NSDAP who were not arrested after the coup failed received financial aid from Fascist Italy. This charge was corroborated by Giuliano Cora, who was Italian Consul-General in Munich in 1924-25. The Italian diplomat states that money was given to the Nazis after the Putsch through unofficial intermediaries. Cora asserts that he was forced to leave the consulate because of his opposition to the disbursements of these funds.⁴² For some reason, despite his statements to German diplomats and in public, the Duce took a personal interest in the survivors of the Munich coup.

In summation, we can address ourselves to the two questions about Italy's role in the Munich Putsch which we initially raised.

In regard to the influence of Mussolini's example by the March on Rome, there would appear to be little doubt that the Fascists served as models for the Nazis. Most contemporaries saw the Nazis as German followers of Mussolini. Hitler himself, on a number of occasions, indicated that he was attempting to repeat the Fascist success of the previous year. On the issue of Fascist material support for the coup, definitive proof is not available. There is considerable mystery surrounding Hitler's source of financial support in this period. The Fuehrer kept only very scant records concerning contributions, keeping most of this information memorized.⁴³ Thus the reports of Italian aid to the NSDAP before the Munich Putsch may never be substantively confirmed or denied. However, Cassel's "strong suspicion" that Mussolini gave aid to the Nazis appears plausible.⁴⁴ The numerous police reports, the various trial proceedings and the testimony of Giulliano Cora that he gave money to the Nazis in 1924--all these suggest, but do not prove, Italian fascist aid to the Munich Putsch. What is certain is that there were numerous Italian agents in Bavaria, and that the NSDAP was probably one of a number of groups who were being watched and who the Duce believed could eventually be of importance. Thus, because of these agents and the missions of Kurt Ludecke, the first steps in a Nazi-Fascist relationship were being taken.

Notes

1. Michaelis, "Avento," pp. 551-54; Renzo De Felice, Mussolini e Hitler, i rapporti segreti (Florence, 1975), p. 18.
2. Kurt Ludecke, I Knew Hitler (New York, 1937), p. 69.
3. DDI(7) vol I nos. 24; 31, 45, 69, 223.
4. DDI(7), vol. I, p. 30.
5. Brief und Telegrammwechsel Zwischen Hitler und Mussolini 1931-1945, ed. Josef Schröder (Göttingen, 1978), pp. 202-3.
6. Hitler, Conversations, pp. 8-9.
7. Adolf Hitler, Hitler's Tischgespräche im Fuehrerhauptquartier 1941-1942, H. Picker ed. (Stuttgart, 1963), pp. 133-34.
8. London Times, October 18, 1922.
9. VB November 1, 1922
10. Georg Franz-Willing, Die Hitler-Bewegung (Hamburg, 1962), p. 221.
11. Police report of November 11, 1922, quoted in Günther Schubert, Anfänge Nationalsozialistischer Aussenpolitik (Cologne, 1963), p. 63.
12. DDI(7) vol. I no. 131 p. 79-80.
13. Truman Smith, "The National Socialist Movement, 1922-24," Unpublished Papers of Captain Smith, Yale University Library, New Haven, Conn. Notebook, November 16, 1922, p. 34.

14. Smith, unpublished report, November 25, 1922, p. 47.

15. U.S. State Dept. M-336, roll 20, document 862.00/1515, United States National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as NA).

16. Vorwärts, January 27, 1923.

17. Ludecke, op. cit., p. 135. While Ludecke was in Italy, it was rumored that his mission was to offer the Brenner frontier in exchange for Fascist help in a planned Hitlerite march on Berlin. DDI(7), II, no. 431.

18. Min. Interno Dir. gen. PS Div. affari gen. e ris. (1923) bb 21 e 22 fasc. H. Esser, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome (hereafter cited as ACS). See also NA: T-120/4154/151953; Filippo Anfuso, Da Palazzo Venezia (Rome, 1952), p. 34.

19. The German government made every effort to get information on Ludecke and gathered considerable biographical material about him. While Ludecke was in Rome, the Embassy communicated with him and disputed the statements which he made about the Ruhr and the South Tyrol. See Fb-32, frames 447558, 60-1, 66, 68-9, 78-83, Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich (hereafter cited as IfZ).

20. "Una parodia del Fascismo in Germania," Il Popolo d'Italia (Milan). December 22, 1922. This article is based on German reports that the Nazis were shipping arms which they received from the Reichswehr. The National Socialists are called "pseudo-fascists" and there is reference to their "reactionary agitation." See also Il Corriere Italiano, March 24, 1923.

21. The Nazi Party newspaper summarized numerous articles in the Italian press which contained a favorable point of view on conditions in Germany. These were probably mostly the work of Ludecke. VB, October 31, 1923. Ludecke's statement (op. cit., p. 143) that there were many articles in the Italian press about his visit to Rome is accurate. On October 10, 1923, L'Idea Nazionale (Rome) printed an article about him which reflected Ludecke's view of the situation in Bavaria. But not all the articles about Ludecke were favorable. The socialist newspaper Avanti (Milan), October 30, 1923, contained a front page column on Ludecke. It was critical of the Nazi emissary and of Mussolini's contact with Hitler and right wing groups in other countries. Il Nuovo Paese (Rome), October 10, 1923, printed an article which referred to Hitler as a "wretched imitator of Mussolini." It should be noted that until 1925 there was a considerable amount of press freedom in Italy.

22. Il Corriere Italiano, October 16, 1923. Hitler probably did not know that the principal owner of this newspaper was the Fascist Undersecretary of the Interior, Aldo Finzi, who was of Jewish origin. ACS: Carte R. Farinacci, busta 2 (1923), fasc. F. telegramma di A. Finzi a Farinacci, 30 ottobre 1923.

23. Epoca October 25, 1923

24. In an article which Ludecke sent to the Nazi newspaper, he boasts that he was expounding a desirable image for the Party in Italy. See VB, October 21/22, 1923.

25. NA: T-120/3617/K003449-50.

26. Report of Munich Police Director, June 25, 1923, Abteilung II, Politik 29 (Nationalsozialismus, Faschismus und ähnliche Bestrebungen), vol. 1, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Bonn (hereafter cited as Bonn: Abt. II, Pol. 29/NF).

27. Report of Munich Police Director, September 12, 1923, Bonn: Abt. II, Pol. 29/NF, vol. 1. Another report by the Police Director on May 27, 1923 stated that there was a fascist group in Munich. Its goal was to organize Italians in Germany. Much money was said to be poured into this effort by Italy. The police feared the promotion of pan-Italianism in Germany. IfZ:Fb-32-frames E447520-4.

28. IfZ:Fb-32-frames E447579-80. de Fiori is listed by Anfuso as a liaison between the NSDAP and the Fascist government, Anfuso, op. cit., p. 34.

29. IfZ:Fb-32-frame 447532.

30. Ibid., frame E447571.

31. Ibid., frame E447572.

32. NA: T-120/2810/E442331. On May 16, 1923, Neurath reported to the Foreign Office, "I think that it is not impossible that relations exist between Fascist individuals or groups and the German National Socialists. However the Embassy considers financial support of the German National Socialists by the Fascio, let alone the Italian government, to be completely improbable."

33. Ibid., frame E447578

35. Neurath to Foreign Office, November 29, 1923, N.A.:T-120, roll 4007, frame K123516.

36.. New York Times Magazine, September 11, 1924.

37. D.D.I., Series 7, vol. II, no. 474, p. 318.

38.. See note signed by Ludendorff, Stanford: NSDAP/reel 5/
Folder 114I.

39. G. Ward Price, I Know the Dictators (London, 1937), p. 79. An American observer at this time noticed a number of outward similarities between the German racist right wing and Mussolini's movement. He noted, "The uniform of field grey if not black, the military formation, the stilted Roman greeting, the never ending demonstrations aiming to influence the masses, these symbols have been taken in block from the Fascisti," Smith, unpublished article, June 1924, p. 59.

40. For evidence on the details of the Putsch, see report to the chairman of the Peoples Court, January 8, 1924, Stanford: NSDAP/reel 5/Folder 114I.

41. Adolf Hitler, Adolf Hitlers Reden, Ernst Boepple, editor (Munich, 1933), p. 111. The German Foreign Office had hoped that the trial would show a divergence between the NSDAP and Fascist Italy. A report of January 26, 1924 stated "Hitler's thesis that Nazism and Fascism have the same ideology (a frequent theme of Nazi propaganda) is based on complete ignorance of Fascism. It will be good for Germany's relations with Italy if

this assertion of the Nazis is effectively destroyed in the course of the trial." Bonn: Abt. II, Pol. 29/NF, vol. 1.

42. Guillianio Cora, "Un Diplomatico durante l'era Fascista," Storia e Politica V (1966), 90-91; André Francois-Poncet, Fateful Years (New York, 1972), p. 238. It should be noted that the Fascist group in Munich admitted that they had been repeatedly approached by the National Socialists to form a connection. The Italian Fascists however told the German authorities that they had responded in a negative manner. Report to Foreign Ministry of Bavaria, March 4, 1924. Bonn: Abt. II, pol. 29/NF. vol. 1. For additional information on Fascist agents in Bavaria in early 1924, see D.D.I.(7), III, no. 39, Report to Foreign Office, February 15, 1924. Bonn: Abt. II, Pol. 29/NF, vol. 1.

43. Gordon op cit p. 59-60.

44. Cassels op cit p. 173.

CHAPTER III

ITALY'S ROLE IN HITLER'S WELTANSCHAUUNG

After the abortive uprising, Hitler was sentenced to Landsberg Prison, where he wrote Mein Kampf. This work set out the Nazi leader's ideas on a great number of subjects, including his attitude toward various foreign countries. One of the main controversies surrounding Hitler's early theories is the question of whether they expressed a consistent plan for foreign policy. Hermann Rauschning's view that Nazism was a "Revolution of Nihilism" has been challenged by a number of historians.¹ Although there is no reason to believe that the Nazi Fuehrer had a concise blueprint, there is a substantial amount of evidence that he was influenced when he came to power by the ideas he had developed during the Kampfzeit. Hitler placed a surprisingly great importance on foreign policy considerations during the years of his struggle for power. There has been some research on the role of Britain² and other countries in Hitler's worldview, but little is available on the Nazi leader's early attitude toward his future Axis partner. Using Hitlers zweites Buch, his speeches, various documents, the interviews which he had with a number of Italian diplomats and journalists, and of course Mein Kampf, we can get an idea of the Fuehrer's evaluation of Italy and the role it played in his Weltanschauung. From the outset of his public career, Hitler advocated an alliance with Italy. After 1925 he further developed

his positive attitude toward Mussolini's regime, and if we examine his writings and utterances during this period, we see that they reflect a high regard for the role which the southern neighbor could play as an ally of a future Nazi Germany.

Recent research suggests that Hitler read and studied much more widely than generally believed.³ However, he, of course, tended to retain only those facts which supported his previously held convictions. This was true with respect to his careful study of the history of German-Italian relations. Hitler noticed an affinity between the two countries, since "at the same time that Germany tried to achieve a new national unification, the same process took place in Italy."⁴ But what impressed Hitler most about the German-Italian relationship in the nineteenth century was its military aspect. He stated that "Bismarck had made an alliance with Italy in order to finish off Austria more easily."⁵ In his opinion this agreement was a success, since in 1866 Italy "honorably fulfilled the obligations of her alliance." She played a key role in the Prussian victory "by tying up a considerable and great part of the Austrian Army."⁶ Over the years that followed on up to World War II, the idea that Italy could be a useful military ally by pinning down Allied forces as she had pinned down Austrian troops in 1866 was a recurring theme of the Fuehrer's and the basis for the military alliance with Italy.⁷ Hitler believed that even if the Italians were not successful, they could play an important role by drawing off enemy strength

from the principal theater and relieving some of the pressure on the German forces. Just as the Italians had allowed the Prussians to have a numerical superiority at Königgrätz, they could also ensure German victory against France in any future war by tying up a large portion of the latter's forces on the Alps and in North Africa.

In Hitler's view, Italy and Germany had complemented each other in the years before World War I. As he noted, "The Italian people primarily and the Italian intelligentsia were always able to rally sympathy for Germany. At the turn of the century every ground ahead existed for an alliance between Italy and Germany...."⁸ Why then did Italy fail to fulfill her alliance obligations in 1914? Two reasons are suggested. First, the incompatibility between Rome and Vienna. In this dispute the former Austrian subject sympathized with Italy against the Hapsburg Monarchy. He states that "The sins of the House of Hapsburg against Italian freedom and independence in the course of centuries was too great to be forgotten."⁹ Hitler bitterly criticized the Kaiser's government for choosing to support Austria-Hungary: "Our opponents say . . . Italy betrayed us in the World War. . . . I would have let Austria fall. I would never have led millions into battle in order to save a political cadaver."¹⁰ Not surprisingly, another reason offered for Italy's entrance into the war on the opposing side was the influence of the Jews. This, of course, was the Fuehrer's usual explanation for any failure of events to take a

desired course. He used such an argument to explain Russia's hostility to Germany in 1914. In any event, there can be little doubt that Hitler believed that Italy could have been a very useful military ally for the Second Reich,¹¹ and that he desired her help for his Third Reich.

In one study of the Axis alliance, however, the assertion is made that Hitler never showed any interest in Italian military cooperation. The supposed basis for this is that the Fuehrer had only assigned Italy the role of neutralizing, by the threat of intervention, British and French forces in the Mediterranean and North Africa.¹² But this was not a minor role. The Nazi leader believed that Italy could provide the forces to cover Germany's rear while she expanded into Eastern Europe. Hitler believed that Germany could never again risk a two-front war which had been her ruin in 1914-18. With Italy as his military ally he believed that he was assured that the threat of her intervention would either prevent the Western Powers from interfering in his eastern expansion or tie down so much Allied strength that their intervention would never be more than a formality. Obviously in the years before World War II Hitler rated the military potential of Fascist Italy rather highly. There were, however, some very persuasive reasons for this.

In the late 1920s, Italy possessed the third largest army in the world, probably the second largest air force, and a formidable

navy. The quality of her military equipment, particularly of her air force, was considered to be high. Germans were surreptitiously coming to Italy on military missions, since Italy, like Russia, was being considered as a base for overcoming the military restrictions of the Versailles Treaty. In a certain sense, then, there were contemporary developments which tended to make Hitler's plans to have Italy as a military ally seem very realistic. The Nazi leader was not the only one who overrated Italian military potential. Many experts in France and England also believed that the military establishment of Fascist Italy was a formidable force. Under Mussolini's regime Italy had a head start over other nations in the armament race and was not overtaken until the late 1930s when Germany, France and Britain spent much larger amounts for military appropriations. By the time she entered World War II, Italy was well behind the other nations, which had a much greater industrial base. But in the 1920s, Hitler believed that Italy's armed forces could be useful in diverting the English and the French in a war with Germany. With Italy as an ally, the Western Powers, he believed, would be less likely to interfere with his plans to expand in Eastern Europe.

Underlying Hitler's desire for an alliance with Italy were its advantages from a geopolitical point of view. The Fuehrer had been influenced by geopolitics through one of its leading exponents, Dr. Karl Haushofer. The professor had as his assistant

Rudolf Hess, who soon became Hitler's private secretary. Hess was a fellow prisoner of the Fuehrer at Landsberg Prison, and Haushofer visited there every week while Mein Kampf was being written.¹³ In an interview with the journalist Richard Breitling in 1931, Hitler referred to Haushofer as one of his "experts."¹⁴ During the period when Hitler was dictating Mein Kampf to Hess, the latter is known to have made suggestions based on his theories.

Hitler's obsession with expansion into Eastern Europe and his demand for Lebensraum were concepts commonly used by a number of German and foreign geopoliticians beginning in the late nineteenth century. It was through Haushofer that they were passed on to Hitler. The professor of geopolitics was particularly concerned with the need for Germany to gain vital and energetic allies. Haushofer had a great interest in and knowledge of Japan. He was also favorably disposed toward Italy, and may have inspired Hitler with the idea for a Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis. Italy, like Japan, was in Haushofer's view a nation with a future as well as a past, which he admired.¹⁵ But most importantly he saw her as a power whose natural area of expansion was in the Mediterranean, which would not clash and indeed would coincide with Germany's interests.

Hitler learned his lessons from Haushofer well. In particular, he believed along with the Professor that both Italy and Germany

suffered from the same geopolitical malady, which could serve as a rationalization for expansion. He wrote: "Like the German people, the Italian people lives on a small surface which in part is fertile."¹⁶ He bemoaned the fact that Italy must export a large part of her population. One preferable solution was for her to enlarge her influence on the shores of the Mediterranean basin, which he linked with Germany's desire for Lebensraum in Eastern Europe.¹⁷ This expansion by Italy would take her into conflict with France, her natural enemy as well as Germany's. As Hitler stated in a speech in March 1927, "Italy needs room for her people. She must therefore turn on France."¹⁸ The Nazi leader saw Italy as a "power which is itself young and strong and which has a superabundance of vitality."¹⁹ This vitality compared very favorably with France. In a discussion with the Italian journalist Pietro Solari in 1930 he noted: "A sterile France with 37 million inhabitants, on the other hand a fertile Italy with 42 million citizens. . . ."²⁰ Italy needed North Africa as an outlet for her surplus population. This she would eventually take from France, which had no real need for it, since she was a sterile country past the peak of her growth and vitality. Hitler expounded these geopolitical maxims as dogmatically as a Marxist with his Weltanschauung predicts the victory of Socialism.

But geopolitical considerations were not the only reason why Italy was a desirable ally against France. In the area of diplomacy,

Germany needed the Rome government's support to overthrow the Versailles settlement, which was most staunchly defended by the French. One of Hitler's most persistent and popular appeals was his intention to revise the 1919 Treaty, which prevented Germany from exercising her rightful place in European affairs. Since Germany could not do this alone, the diplomatic support of Italy was essential. Hitler greatly appreciated Italy's action in the direction of disassociating herself from her wartime allies, which could end Germany's isolation. In 1928 he wrote, ". . . I see in Italy the first possible ally of Germany who can step out of the camp of the old coalition of enemies.. . ." ²¹ Somewhat later the Fuehrer expressed his sympathy with Italy, commending her for being the first power to abandon the war spirit and to display a determination to revise the Treaty and put an end to Germany's unilateral disarmament. ²² Of course Hitler realized that even after the Versailles settlement was overthrown, Italy would be a useful diplomatic ally against France.

The Fuehrer's attitude toward France was to undergo considerable change in the 1920s. He originally viewed her as Germany's principal enemy. Gradually, however, as he concentrated more on Eastern expansion, he began to see France as the hereditary rival who must be fought, not so much to gain Alsace-Lorraine but in order to secure Germany's rear in its war against Soviet Russia. Hitler believed that there was nothing to be gained in a war in the West. ²³ Given a real possibility, the Nazi leader would have preferred an agreement with France, just as he preferred one with

England. But he realized that in view of the depth of Franco-German animosity, a victory over the Western neighbor would be necessary before the Drang nach Osten could begin. Any policy of detente with Paris, he believed, was doomed to failure.

Hitler recognized that the ruling elements of the Weimar Republic favored a rapprochement with France over an alliance with Italy. But he wrote, ". . . the National Socialist movement fights unswervingly advocating an alliance with Italy against the ruling Francophile tendency."²⁴ Since an alliance with France was unrealistic, there was no doubt that Italy should be favored. Besides, if Germany allied herself with France against Italy, all that she could hope to obtain was South Tyrol. No government in Paris would ever permit Germany to conquer Poland or Czechoslovakia. Only a joint Nazi-Fascist victory over France would create the opportunity for truly large-scale expansion in the East.²⁵ Hitler believed that Italy would support Germany because she also was dissatisfied with the post-World War I settlement and desired revisions. Her dispute with Yugoslavia was to a large degree the result of Italy's dissatisfaction with the rewards she received after the 1915-18 conflict. France was in a poor position to make treaty revisions for Italy while attempting to prevent Germany from doing the same. Thus the Nazis anticipated a Franco-Italian clash in the Balkans as well as in North Africa.²⁶ Also, the rise of Fascism would impel France to use her system of

alliances against Italy. There were, then, other reasons in addition to geopolitics which ensured that France and Italy would be enemies, thus creating conditions for a Rome-Berlin alliance.

Besides Italy, the Nazi leader believed that Germany should also ally herself with Great Britain. At first Hitler put Britain into the same category with France as a supporter of the Versailles settlement. However, he gradually softened his hostility to her, and about the time of the Ruhr invasion, he expressed the view that she would make a useful ally for Germany. Mein Kampf, which was written somewhat later, contains many references to the desirability of an alliance with England. Hitler was particularly anxious for an agreement between Italy, Germany and England. The military advantages of a London-Rome-Berlin pact would be great. Germany would be ensured a period of time to prepare for war against France. During the conflict, the Reich would find her flanks secure. Such an alliance would be economically viable and complementary. But the best reasons for the three-power alliance was that England was the greatest "world power" and Italy was a "youthful national state," unlike Turkey and Austria-Hungary, the Reich's allies of World War I.²⁷

Hitler believed that his Triple Alliance, in addition to being a desirable military grouping, could also work together diplomatically to revise the Versailles Treaty and to prevent French domination of the Continent. In the years before his

seizure of power, this was a common theme, not only in his writings but also in his speeches and interviews.²⁸ However, he had serious reservations about how realistic an alliance with Britain would be. Mein Kampf had expressed fear about the power of Jewish interests in England which would obviously make her less likely to become an ally. Hitlers zweites Buch, in 1928, asserted that the struggle in England was still "undecided."

In the years immediately preceding the Machtergreifung, the Fuehrer had doubts about England, and in fact he occasionally suggested using Italy against her. In a 1931 interview, he spoke of Italy's protecting Germany's "southern flank against England."²⁹ By 1932 he was telling Kurt Ludecke, his emissary to Fascist Italy: "There can be no doubt of Mussolini siding with me . . . and that checks France. As for England, why worry about her? If she doesn't want to join us, she'd better keep quiet and stay neutral--Mussolini could raise hell in the Mediterranean!"³⁰

Many historians speak of Hitler's love-hate feelings for Britain. Because of her racial kinship with Germany and because he greatly admired her colonial and economic power, the Nazi leader desired her as an ally. But in view of her liberal parliamentary tradition and her balance-of-power policy, it obviously would not be easy for a Nazified Germany to gain her as an ally. The Fuehrer really did not wish to use Italy against England. This was only a plan he held in reserve in case Britain did not realize

that it was in her interest to come to terms with Germany.

Hitler's real desire from Mein Kampf until the outbreak of World War II was a London-Rome-Berlin pact. If Germany could gain the support of London and Rome, the revision of Versailles could be accomplished without a major war in the West and the Reich would set on its true mission of expansion to the East. Some writers have suggested that Hitler preferred an alliance with England instead of Italy. But there is no evidence that in this period Italy was a substitute for England, since his interest in her predated his interest in Britain. To Hitler the two nations were not mutually exclusive. The interest of both in the Mediterranean could be satisfied at the expense of France. Britain might be a more desirable partner from a racial point of view, but Italy had a Fascist government and, perhaps more importantly, it was led by one of the few men whom Hitler genuinely admired.

Hitler's adulation of Mussolini was constant from the time he wrote Mein Kampf to his last days in the Berlin bunker in 1945. In all these years, it is difficult to find any negative comments by the Fuehrer about the Duce. The exact reasons for this will perhaps never be known. But we should not forget that for over a decade, while Hitler was an unsuccessful struggling politician, Mussolini was the leader of his country and a world figure. The Duce was a shining example of what could be achieved and a major source of inspiration during the lean years of the Nazi movement.

This, more than any particular incident, explains Adolf Hitler's admiration for Mussolini.

There were many examples of Hitler's great devotion to the Italian dictator. On a number of occasions, Hitler wrote in vain to Mussolini for a signed photograph, which he did not receive until 1931. Visitors to the Brown House in Munich noticed a picture of Mussolini on his desk. In his study there was a large bust of the Duce. One of the most popular books in Nazi homes in the early 1930s was a gaudy volume of photographs which emphasized the similarities in the careers of the Nazi leader and the Italian dictator. Hitler consciously attempted to mimic his idol. One writer in 1931 noted that Hitler imagined himself to be "a Teutonic Mussolini." It was also noted that Hitler imitated the Duce's style when he spoke to a crowd using the famous "hypnotic stare." There is, then, a fair amount of evidence that the Nazi leader made a detailed examination of Mussolini's persona. Certainly, the use of the Fascist salute was a direct imitation encouraged by Hitler.³¹

The Fuehrer insisted that the Nazi press show deference to the Italian dictator. As early as 1923, Dietrich Eckart complained in a private letter that the Voelkischer Beobachter would not publish an article he submitted which was hostile to Mussolini.³²

One of Hitler's own articles in the party newspaper referred to Mussolini as being more Prussian than one of his enemies who was born in Pomerania.³³

Other writings and utterances definitely reflected the strong feelings he had about the Italian dictator. In Mein Kampf, he ranks Mussolini "among the great men of this earth."³⁴ His strong feelings for the Duce could not fail to make an alliance with Fascist Italy seem more desirable. In a speech in May 1929 he stated, "This statesman is the only possible ally for Germany. . . . I have admiration for such a person. I have more than admiration."³⁵ In a statement he made in 1931, Hitler's adulation reached what was perhaps its highest level. He told an interviewer, "We shall put up a memorial to Mussolini in every city. . . . Mussolini is the perfect representative of the Alpine race which in everything it does has its eye on eternity."³⁶

Admiration and loyalty certainly were not common characteristics of Hitler's career. How many of his own party comrades from the early days, such as Röhm, Feder, Hess, Goering, et al., did he either drop, ignore, or actually turn against. But he considered Mussolini to be a world-historic

individual, in the same category with Napoleon, Frederick the Great, and, of course, himself. From his perspective, it was only logical that he should be the ally of his only living equal. During the Kampfzeit he opined that the leadership of Weimar Germany could not in any way compare with Mussolini. In 1937 in the Hossbach memorandum he remarked that Italy was led by a "genius." At a conference with his generals in August 1939, Hitler listed two great imponderable personal factors which guided the destiny of Germany: his own life, and that of Mussolini. About his ally he stated, "The second personal factor is the Duce. His existence is also decisive."³⁷ During World War II, even after numerous Italian military defeats, in speaking about the Duce, Hitler stated " . . . I have a deep friendship for this extraordinary man."³⁸

Because he was so eager to have Mussolini as an ally, Hitler engaged in much self-delusion, particularly in regard to the Duce's attitude toward anti-Semitism. In Mein Kampf, the Fascist opposition to the Masons, the international press and Marxism was seen as really a struggle against the Jews.³⁹ Hitler believed that

this imagined anti-Semitism of the Fascist regime made Italy a more desirable ally. As he wrote, "The struggle of Jewry for its hegemony is also decided in Italy. . . . For this reason also, no state is better suited than Italy as an ally for Germany."⁴⁰ Actually Mussolini never really had any consistent policy on the Jewish question.

During World War I, Mussolini's anti-German crusade sometimes had anti-Semitic overtones. At this stage in his career Mussolini was still a socialist. His newspaper Popolo d'Italia identified the Jews as agents of the German economic penetration of Italy before 1915. Otto Joel, director of the powerful Banca Commerciale Italiana, was a German Jew, as were many bankers and other capitalists who greatly influenced Italian economic life in the pre-war era. Thus the Jews became associated with this hated Teutonic economic influence. This was not an unusual development, since during this period anti-Semitism and anti-German feeling were closely associated in many countries. After the war, as Mussolini moved to the political right, he tended to criticize the supposed Jewish character of Bolshevism. However, his exact attitude toward the Jewish people was not clear, since a number of the leaders of his movement were of Jewish origin. The Duce's rise to power caused some apprehension among the Jewish community of Italy. To calm these fears Mussolini received the Chief Rabbi of Italy and reassured him that Fascism had no

anti-Semitic tendencies. But Mussolini's government permitted anti-Jewish propaganda in the journal Vita Italiana under the unsavory editorship of Giovanni Preziosi. In addition, in December 1924 the Fascist newspaper Trevere was founded, which followed a strongly anti-Semitic tendency. There is some evidence that this paper had the personal sponsorship of Mussolini, but such support was not given publicly.

By about 1926-27, however, despite the Fuehrer's fervent hopes, Mussolini established more cordial relations with Jewish community leaders. In January 1928 the Duce spoke out against anti-Semitism. In 1929 the Italian dictator considered a Jewish department for the foreign office, but the negative opinion of Jewish community leaders caused him to drop the project.⁴¹ Hitler, in brief, had very little factual basis to conclude that Mussolini was an anti-Semite. At most, the Duce could be characterized as highly uncertain in his attitude toward the Jews.

It should be noted that whereas Italian Fascism was never as virulently anti-Semitic as Nazism, this does not mean that it was devoid of racism. In latter years the Fascist treatment of Ethiopians, Libyans, Greeks and Croats would bear a striking resemblance to the Nazi attitude toward the conquered peoples of Eastern Europe. Moreover, the Fascist glorification of Rome was an implied justification for Italian rule of the Mediterranean world. Although Hitler may have overestimated Mussolini's

anti-Semitism, he was right in seeing Fascist Italy as a kindred movement which was also carrying modern nationalism to its illogical extreme. The Fascists did not stress anti-Semitism, not because that was beneath their dignity but because it never was nor could ever be made into an issue in Italy. Jews were ten times more numerous in Germany than in Italy and there had been a long history of anti-Semitism in Central Europe, which was not the case south of the Alps.

In Italy the campaign against the Masons substituted for anti-Semitism to a large degree. Mussolini portrayed the Masons as a conspiratorial group that was a danger to his government. The anti-Masonic campaign sometimes took the form of public violence. The Masons were a convenient scapegoat for the regime. Nazi opinion supported this campaign in Fascist Italy as a step toward an attack on the real enemy--the Jew.⁴² But when Hitler was asked by an Italian reporter in 1930 if National Socialism was anti-Masonic, he gave an evasive reply.⁴³ Although the Nazi leader did not commit himself to an anti-Masonic campaign in Germany, he saw Mussolini's efforts as a camouflaged attack on world Jewry. At any rate, in his opinion, Italy was a much more anti-Semitic power than England.

Hitler's ability to believe whatever suited him also affected his opinion of the racial character of the Italian people. To him the Italians were not Mediterranean Latins but culture-

bearing Aryans. He greatly admired ancient Rome with its history of conquest and imperial rule. The Renaissance he saw as a pure expression of Aryan creativity. Hitler believed that in terms of culture, the Germans were more closely linked to the Italians than to any other people. He considered the Renaissance art of northern Italy as very similar to the contemporary German art. The fact that the French were closer racially to the Germans did not affect his tendency to see them as natural enemies and the Italians as natural allies. Of course, this anomaly goes to the very heart of the confusion of Hitler's racial theories. Basically, the Fuehrer reserved the right to decide which races had Aryan characteristics. In his view Italy's history and her present acceptance of Fascism were proof enough of her racial purity. In a speech in April 1929, he stated, "In Italy, Fascism draws incredible strength from the people."⁴⁴ Later in the same year he stated that Italy was "also producing great works in the field of art because a people had been rejuvenated with all its virtues and passions."⁴⁵ Hitler was anxious to find signs of Italian racial superiority, and it is interesting that he chose art, which presumably was his own field of expertise. However, the Nazi leader rarely dwelt on any racial comparison between the Germans and the Italians. On certain occasions the word Aryan meant Nordic. In that case the Germans were more closely related to the British and Scandinavians than to the Italians. Thus he

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avoided any direct reference to Italy's racial composition. Hitler did not have any real desire to expand into the Mediterranean and was happy to leave this area to Fascist Italy. In effect, he saw the Italians as the Aryans of the Mediterranean world, just as he saw the Japanese as the Aryans of the Far East.

Another important consideration in Hitler's world view was the similarity between the Nazi and Fascist ideologies. Many years later, in speaking about the Italians, the Fuehrer stated, ". . . purely from the point of view of world philosophy, they are the only people on earth with whom we can see eye to eye. When I read the history of Fascism, I feel as if I am reading the history of our movement."⁴⁶ Hitler claimed in a speech in 1929 that "party politics have never yet determined my actions in foreign policy."⁴⁷ But in the previous year he had written that the rise of Fascism had turned the probability of a German-Italian collaboration into a certainty.⁴⁸ There can be little doubt that the existence of Fascism was a prime consideration in his desire for an alliance with Italy.

Although one noted scholar has stated that National Socialism was closer to the French Action Francaise than to Italian Fascism,⁴⁹ there were many similarities between the movements of Hitler and Mussolini. The closest bond between the leaders was their belief that the road to power lay through the mastery of collective psychology and the manipulation of mass passions.

They were both disciples of Gustave Le Bon and his psychology of the crowd. Le Bon and his fellow Frenchman Georges Sorel called for an appeal to basic human instincts as a reaction against the positivism and liberalism of the late nineteenth century.⁵⁰ The NSDAP, as well as the PNF, tended to base their appeal on the conservatism of crowds, clinging ~~tenaciously~~ to traditional values.

Also similar was the lack of a fixed party program in the two movements. "Dogmatism" was anathema to both Nazis and Fascists, activism was a common tendency, particularly when it was directed against the existing liberal order. This activism was an outgrowth of the elan of the battlefield. The uniforms and paraphernalia of the SA and the Fascist militia were a direct result of the experiences in the trenches in World War I. Most early Nazis and Fascists were war veterans and the two movements tended to make particular appeals to the generation of the trenches. Many of these uprooted men found it difficult to adjust to normal civilian life so that the activism of the radical right movements offered them the excitement and simple solutions which they craved. Both the NSDAP and PNF were movements dominated by young men. Indeed, there was a common appeal to youth. In the 1920s Hitler admired an Italy which was ruled by men of his generation. Mussolini had been named Prime Minister at 39. Many men who held key positions in the government and

party were considerably younger. This emphasis on youth was something which Hitler emulated very closely in his own propaganda.

Another characteristic which Hitler greatly admired in Fascism was its opposition to Communism. In Mein Kampf, he wrote: "What will rank Mussolini among the great men of this earth is his determination not to share Italy with the Marxists."⁵¹ Hitler favored common action by Fascist Italy and a Nazi Germany against international Communism. Even before he came to power Hitler was speaking about a joint anti-Comintern policy.⁵² It must be remembered that Mussolini had first attracted attention because of his combat with the Socialists. Many bloody street battles occurred in Northern Italy between the Fascists and their left-wing opponents. In Germany there were many clashes between the Nazis and the Communists, though there was an element within the NSDAP which favored some conciliation with the Reds. In Italy many nationalist, industrialist and military officers supported the Fascists out of fear of the Communists. The same situation prevailed in Germany, since equivalent elements supported Hitler for the same reason.

But whereas conservatives in both Germany and Italy frequently supported Hitler and Mussolini, Nazism and Fascism represented something very different. Gaining their greatest strength from the lower middle class, the two groups had different values and goals from the conservatives, and were much more

openly brutal in their methods of achieving and maintaining power than the traditional Right. Both movements were able to attract a wider following than the older conservative movements which appealed to only a narrow stratum of the population. The way in which Hitler allied himself with the conservative nationalists in order to gain power bears a striking similarity to the methods used by Mussolini. However, in later years the Fuehrer was to criticize the Duce for allowing conservative institutions such as the Church and the Monarchy too much influence in his regime. But in the 1920s, Nazism and Fascism derived much strength from their alliance with conservative forces.

Another common feature of Fascism and Nazism was their anti-parliamentarianism. Mussolini had limited the power of the old political parties and eventually created a one-party state. One of the most common appeals of the Nazis before 1933 was against the multiparty system of the Weimar Republic. Obviously, it was Hitler's goal to neutralize the opposition groups and create a one-party state similar to Fascist Italy. During election campaigns the Nazis would pass out copies of the election ballot showing the numerous political groups then in existence in Germany. The NSDAP portrayed this as "democratic chaos" which would be solved by the ascension to power of one powerful united group. Like Mussolini, Hitler sought a coalition with the Nationalists who shared a similar position on certain issues. Hitler did not

intend to share power since he planned to discard his conservative allies and set up a dictatorship of the NSDAP under one leader.

This of course constituted the doctrine of the "Fuehrer Principle," in which all members of the movement were subordinated to one leader. It has been suggested that the "Fuehrer Principle" was the central core of identification between Nazism and Fascism, with everything else being merely ideological decoration.⁵³ This is probably too extreme a statement of the situation. But it does seem likely that at least part of Hitler's admiration for Mussolini was that his idol was in theory an absolute leader in the PNF as the Fuehrer was in his movement. Though perhaps not the main point of identification, it is hard to imagine either party without its charismatic leader. Hitler, like Mussolini, put a personal stamp on his movement. Neither leader tolerated any potential rival. They were both jealous of any person who might gain too much popularity or support.

Hitler admired Mussolini's establishment of one man rule in place of a liberal parliamentary government. The Nazi leader was a great believer in the idea of the "Great Man in History." He saw human events as being dominated by special, rare, isolated individuals who could shape history. Hitler's tendency to dominate the NSDAP like a dictator led to much opposition from left wing elements within the party who wished a more democratic leadership structure. Greatly resented was the use of the term Fuehrer, which

was borrowed from the Italian "Duce." But Hitler would never compromise the "Fuehrer Principle," modeled after the system created by Mussolini.

An important aspect of the "Fuehrer Principle" was the semi-religious cult which surrounded the person of the Nazi party leader. A speech by Hitler was the most wished for event in the life of any NSDAP organization. The Fuehrer held himself aloof from his devoted followers. Loyalty to the person of the leader was the one unifying force in the party. It is interesting to note that at a closed party meeting in 1930, Hitler compared the NSDAP's system of administration to the Church and himself to the Pope.⁵⁴ The Nazi Fuehrer began creating his personality cult during the 1920s.

During this same period, millions of Italians were deifying the Fascist Duce. It has been stated that in Italy, it was Mussolinianism and not Fascism that won wide allegiance.⁵⁵ Mussolini strove to develop a personal image while tending to play down the importance of the party. The cult of Mussolini took on many bizarre forms. The two dictators shared a flair for spectacular choreography during public ceremonies. Hitler was eventually to surpass Mussolini in this respect. But it was the Duce who was the trailblazer in this area.

Another aspect of Fascism that obviously impressed Hitler was its deemphasis of economic considerations. Hitler had little knowledge of and even less interest in economics.⁵⁶ Nazi economic goals were purposely vague in order to appeal to all elements of the population. In effect, Hitler allowed for a Fascist corporate structure of society, but this was never stressed.⁵⁷ Though it has been suggested that both Nazism and Fascism sought to protect big business, their economic theories were not very similar.

Overall, there were numerous ideological similarities which increased Hitler's desire to ally himself with Italy. To him the thrust of the two movements had much in common. During his struggle for power, the Nazi leader pointed to Italy as an example of the national renewal he intended for Germany. The extent which ideology played in German-Italian relations after 1933 is less certain.

Hitler's espousal of a pact with Italy during his years of struggle gained him few followers and quite possibly lost him considerable support. The principal reason was the South Tyrol question, an emotional issue on which he stood opposed to the overwhelming majority of Germans. Mein Kampf blamed the agitation over the South Tyrol on Jews and Hapsburg legitimists who were preventing the necessary alliance with Italy. The South Tyrol could only be taken from Italy by war, which he regarded as impossible.⁵⁸ During the 1920s there were a number of incidents which inflamed feeling in Germany against Italy. In response to one of these incidents (and the public reaction to it in Germany), Hitler's greatest effort to explain his position on the South Tyrol question, the Zweites Buch, was written. It was perhaps fortunate for the Nazis that the book was never published, since it could have lost them considerable support. In it the future dictator attempted to deflect public wrath away from South Tyrol: ". . . National official Germany wails over the denationalization of our language in the South Tyrol, but in Germany itself they

de-Germanize the German names in Alsace Lorraine etc. in all official ways and manner." ⁵⁹ While constantly referring to the need to concede South Tyrol, he was not uncritical of the Italians. First, he urged Italian moderation in the Alto Adige. Second, he lamented Italy's efforts to prevent the union of Austria and Germany as unsound. ⁶⁰ We see in the making his formulation that Nazi Germany will guarantee the Alto Adige if Italy will consent to the Anschluss. The Nazi leader publicly asserted that the best way to help the Germans in South Tyrol was by forming an alliance with Italy. In a speech in 1928, he stated: "All the hue and cry has not helped in South Tyrol, let us consider it rather as a bridge between Germany and Italy. That will help the Tyrolese more." ⁶¹ Of course he did not wish an alliance with Italy just to help South Tyrol; that was simply the price he realized he had to pay in order to come to an agreement. It is apparent that a pact with Italy was a key point in Hitler's Weltanschauung; otherwise he would not have been willing to make such an unpopular concession in order to attain his goal.

Basically the Nazi leader tended to ignore those areas of potential disagreement between Fascist Italy and a future Nazi Germany. In our examination of Hitler's attitude toward Fascist Italy we must keep in mind his tendency to use information only as a reinforcement of his previously decided upon policy. However, though Hitler was selective in his utilization of facts, there was

a consistent pattern in his pro-Italian policy. Despite the Nazi leader's proverbial verbosity, the documents reveal a man who has attempted to educate himself on the important historical, economic and other social science information relevant to Fascist Italy and Germany's relations with her.

The question arises of course as to which of the areas examined is the most important in explaining Hitler's desire for an alliance with Italy. The tendency for most writers on this period has been to focus solely on the personal relationship between the Duce and the Fuehrer. Most historians assume that Hitler's admiration for Mussolini was really the only reason why he desired to have Italy as an ally. This personal bond is usually suggested as the basis for the Rome-Berlin Axis.⁶² Hitler's biographers and other scholars have seldom made any effort to examine the early sources by the Nazi Fuehrer which clearly reflect a variety of reasons for his enthusiasm for an agreement with Italy. Unfortunately most standard works on Hitler have little or no information on his attitude toward Fascist Italy before 1933. In view of this lack of research, the most obvious reason for the Axis alliance, Hitler's admiration for Mussolini, tends to be overemphasized. The exceptions to this have been very few. Gerhard Weinberg, a noted student of Nazi foreign policy, mentions ideology and geopolitics besides the personal bond as reasons for Hitler's desire for an Italian alliance.⁶³ But he does not

develop his ideas in a book primarily devoted to the diplomacy of the 1930s. Elisabeth Wiskeman has written the only work which deals with the entire history of Nazi-Fascist relations. In her first chapter, she mentions geopolitical and philosophical reasons besides admiration for Mussolini as explanations for Hitler's early desire for an alliance with Italy. However, she tends to dismiss geopolitics since "it conveniently justified the policy toward Italy upon which he [Hitler] has determined."⁶⁴ Her philosophical explanation centers on the claim that both leaders were "pupils of Nietzsche" and therefore an alliance between them was inevitable. But little evidence is offered for this often repeated fanciful philosophical argument. Indeed there is no reason to believe that Hitler was really familiar with Nietzsche.⁶⁵ Thus, like so many others, she is left with his personal admiration for Mussolini as the only serious explanation offered for Hitler's original motivation for an Italian alliance.

But the evidence would indicate that in the 1920s Hitler was also motivated by military, diplomatic, ideological and geopolitical arguments as well as personal admiration for Mussolini in his desire for a strong German-Italian bond. Clearly all five were important to Hitler, with no single consideration the dominant one. Although there is some overlap between these areas, they emerge as distinct considerations in Hitler's Weltanschauung. The Nazi leader's military view of Italy was greatly

influenced by the war of 1866, when Prussia's southern ally was defeated but nonetheless was of great value to her. From a geopolitical perspective he saw Italy as a dynamic expansive power that would have no conflict with and could be of great help to a resurgent Germany. On the diplomatic front, Hitler saw the Reich's southern neighbor as a key factor in overthrowing the Versailles settlement and French hegemony in Europe. Ideologically, he wished to be allied with Fascism, which was anti-Communist, antiparliamentary, and, as he believed, anti-Semitic. And of course the presence of his model Benito Mussolini as leader of Italy convinced him of the desirability of a Nazi-Fascist pact. In the years after 1933 each of these factors was to play some role in the story of the Axis Alliance.

Notes

1. See H.R. Trevor-Roper, "Hitlers Kriegsziele," in VFZG VIII (1960), pp. 88-96; Eberhard Jäckel, Hitlers Weltanschauung (Tubingen, 1969), Chapter II; Andreas Hillgruber, Hitlers Strategie: Politik und Kriegsführung 1940-41 (Frankfurt/M, 1965); Hermann Rauschning, The Revolution of Nihilism (New York, 1939).
2. For recent studies, see Andreas Hillgruber, "England's place in Hitler's plans for world dominion," Journal of Contemporary History IX, no. 1 (January 1974), 5-22; also Josef Henke, "Hitlers England-Konzeption," in Hitler, Deutschland und die Mächte, ed. Manfred Funke (Dusseldorf, 1977), pp. 584-603.
3. Werner Maser, Hitler: Legend, Myth and Reality (New York, 1973), chapter V.
4. Hitler, Zweites Buch, p. 196.
5. Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf (Boston, 1943), p. 656.
6. Hitler, Zweites Buch, p. 94.
7. The best example of this is contained in the Hossbach memorandum of November 5, 1937, and the O.K.W. report of November 30, 1938, Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945 [From the Archives of the German Foreign Ministry] (Washington, D.C., 1951), Series D. Vol. I, no. 19, p. 37; Vol. IV, no. 411, pp. 531-34. (Hereafter cited as GD).
8. Hitler, Zweites Buch, p. 93.
9. Hitler, Mein Kampf, p. 130.

10. Adolf Hitler, Hitler's Words, ed. G. W. Prange (Washington, D.C., 1944), p. 280. ". . . through the Triple Alliance the offensive forces of Germany and of Italy were harnessed in the service of maintaining the Austrian State. Germany remained in the harness and thereby perished, Italy kept out of it and saved herself." Hitler, Zweites Buch, pp. 98-99.

11. Shirer's assertion that in Mein Kampf Hitler criticized Hohenzollern Germany for allying herself with the "untrustworthy" Italians is completely unfounded. William L. Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich (Greenwich, Conn., 1960), p. 142.

12. F. W. Deakin, The Brutal Friendship (New York, 1962), pp. 8-9.

13. Haushofer letter, May 8, 1934, NA: T-253, roll 48, frame 1502826-27.

14. Richard Breiting, Secret Conversations with Hitler, ed. by Edouard Calic (New York, 1971), p. 73.

15. ". . . Rome was able to celebrate a thousand year history the glory of which surrounds Fascist Italy and goads it to world-politically expansive moves." Karl Haushofer, Weltpolitik von Heute (Berlin, 1934), p. 224.

16. Hitler, Zweites Buch, p. 177.

17. "The easc coasts of the Baltic Sea are for Germany what the Mediterranean is for Italy." Ibid., p. 206. See also Enzo Collotti, "Il 'secondo libro' di Hitler," Studi Storici, III (1962), 164. In several interviews Hitler stressed that Italy could expand in the Mediterranean while Germany moved toward Eastern Europe. In 1927, he told an Italian journalist that the two countries had no conflict about their "absolutely different fields for expansions." DDI(7) vol.V no.680. In 1930 he stated that Germany would expand toward the East and North-east because of her need for grain; this would not clash with Italy's struggle to attain the influence and resources in the Mediterranean to which she had a right. Orsini Baroni to Grandi, July 28, 1930. De Felice, rapporti, doc. 18. In 1931, Hitler told the President of the Italian Senate, Luigi Federzoni, "Italy has all its interests in the Mediterranean, in which we do not want to involve ourselves. As far as Germany is concerned . . . it can colonize areas in the East through political and economic expansion. Italy has no reason to oppose such a development." Luigi Federzoni, Italia di ieri per la storia di domani (Milan, 1967), p. 127.

18. Hitler, Hitler's Words, p. 277.

19. Ibid., p. 63. In 1932, Hitler told Carlo Scorza, "Our two countries, which represent the two most compact and vital ethnic and historic units in Europe today, must be united." Carlo Scorza, Fascismo. Idea imperiale (Rome, 1933), p. 87.

20. Pietro Solari, Hitler e il Terzo Reich (Milan, 1932), p. 102.

21. Hitler, Zweites Buch, p. 207.

22. Adolf Hitler, The Speeches of Adolf Hitler, ed. by Norman Baynes (London, 1942), II, 1000.

23. He wrote "We [must] stop the endless German movement to the south and west and turn our gaze toward land in the East." Hitler, Mein Kampf, p. 654.

24. Hitler, Zweites Buch, p. 45.

25. In 1927. Hitler indicated that it was in Italy's interest to aid Germany in the destruction of Czechoslovakia. DDI(7) vol V no 680.

26. VB, March 17, 1927.

27. Hitler, Mein Kampf, pp. 664-66.

28. "Italy and England . . . an aversion to a boundless and unlimited French hegemony is common to both." Hitler, Zweites Buch, p. 217. Goebbels notes a similar statement by Hitler at a party meeting in April 1926, while Rosenberg testified at Nuremberg that at a meeting in 1927, the Fuehrer stated that Germany could only depend on two nations--Italy and England. In 1930, Hitler told an Italian envoy that he desired an alliance with Italy and England. Joseph Goebbels, The Early Goebbels Diaries, ed. by H. Heiber (New York, 1963), p. 78; Trial of Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal [Nuremberg Trials] (New York, 1946), XI, 453-54 (hereafter cited as IMT).

29. Breiting, op. cit., p. 64. See also Hitler, Mein Kampf, pp. 637-38; Hitler, Zweites Buch, p. 223.
30. Ludecke, op. cit., p. 460
31. Louis L. Snyder, Hitlerism: The Iron Fist of Germany (New York, 1931), p. 218. See also Breiting, op. cit., pp. 19, 45; Hans Frank, Im Angesicht des Galgens (Munich, 1953), p. 92; Franco Ciarlantini, Hitler e il Fascismo (Florence, 1933), p. 19; Mario Donosti, Mussolini e L'Europe (Rome, 1945), p. 80. For a copy of Hitler's letter thanking Mussolini for his signed photo, see Appendix A
32. Eckart to Amann, October 1, 1923, NA: T-81, roll 1, frames 547468-69.
33. VB, April 5/7, 1931.
34. Hitler, Mein Kampf, p. 681.
35. Hitler, Words, p. 281. In another speech, the Fuehrer stated :ⁿMussolini. . . I envy Italy because of him and regret that we do not have him [in Germany]." VB, July 18, 1928.
36. Breiting, op. cit., p. 77.
37. GD (D), vol. VII, no. 192; see also ibid., vol. I, no. 19.
38. Hitler, Conversations, p. 218.
39. Hitler, Mein Kampf, p. 637.
40. Hitler, Zweites Buch, p. 223.
41. DDI (7) VIII, no. 20.
42. VB, February 2, 1927, Alfred Rosenberg, Der Zukunftsweg einer deutschen Aussenpolitik (Munich, 1927), p. 27.

43. "The only thing that concerns us here are the positions that associations and sects take in our regard and that of our children." Solari, op. cit., pp. 101-02.

44. Hitler, Words, p. 139.

45. Ibid., p. 142.

46. Hitler, Conversations, p. 498. This was similar to what he said in 1931: "Mussolini is inspired by the same ideals as we are." Breiting, op. cit., p. 64. Also in that same year in a preface to a book, he wrote that Fascism was nothing more than Italian National Socialism and National Socialism was nothing other than German Fascism. See Vincenzo Meletti, Die Revolution des Faschismus (Munich, 1931), p. 7.

47. Hitler, Words, p. 280.

48. Hitler, Zweites Buch, p. 187.

49. Ernst Nolte, Three Faces of Fascism (New York, 1966), p. 276.

50. George L. Mosse, "The Genesis of Fascism," Journal of Contemporary History, vol. I, 1966, pp. 15-16.

51. Hitler, Mein Kampf, p. 681.

52. In 1932, the Fuehrer spoke to Carlo Scorza about a united block of Italy and Germany along with Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, and perhaps Rumania, which would stave off the Bolshevik menace. Scorza, op. cit., p. 84.

53. Rudolph Vierhaus, "Faschistisches Fuehrertum," Historische Zeitschrift, Vol. 198 (1964), pp. 614-39.

54. Dietrich Orlow, The History of the Nazi Party (Pittsburg, 1969) p. 83-84, 200-201.
55. Piero Melegrani, "The Cult of the Duce in Mussolini's Italy," Journal of Contemporary History, vol. 11 (1976) p. 223.
56. Hjalmar Schacht often told Franz von Papen that Hitler's grasp of economics was that of a sixth grade schoolboy. Franz von Papen, Memoirs (New York, 1952), p. 388.
57. Hitler, Speeches, I, 112.
58. Hitler, Mein Kampf, pp. 626-28.
59. Hitler, Zweites Buch, p. 203.
60. Ibid., pp. 207-08. In a talk with an Italian diplomat in February 1930, Hitler asserted that the whole South Tyrol question would not exist if Italy had allowed an Anschluss in 1919. He also criticized Italy's harsh rule in the Alto Adige, but admitted that Mussolini had no choice in view of the German press attacks. DDI(?) VIII no. 367.
61. Hitler, Words, p. 280. In 1930 Hitler stated: "The friendship of such a great nation as Italy can't be prevented by the obstacle of South Tyrol, as it is also without doubt that Germans subject to Italy will receive better treatment by an Italy as friend than by an Italy as our indifferent neighbor." Solari, op. cit., pp. 102-03. In 1932, Hitler told Hermann Rauschning, "I will make an end to the silly sentimentality of South Tyrol. I will never be swayed because of this question in the basic line of our politics for an alliance with Italy." Hermann Rauschning, Conversations with Hitler (Zurich, 1940), p. 43.

62. Deakin, op. cit., p. 6; Werner Maser, op. cit., p. 146; Joachim Fest, Hitler (New York, 1974), pp. 522-25; Alan Bullock, Hitler: A Study in Tyranny (New York, 1962), p. 361; Ivone Kirkpatrick, Mussolini (New York, 1968), pp. 186-87.

63. Gerhard L. Weinberg, The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany (Chicago, 1970), pp. 16-17.

64. Elisabeth Wiskeman, The Rome-Berlin Axis (London, 1966), p. 35.

65. Maser, op. cit., p. 124; Percy Schramm, Hitler: The Man and the Military Leader (Chicago, 1971), p. 89.

CHAPTER IV

GOERING'S SECRET CONTACTS

While Hitler was in Landsberg Prison, one of his chief disciples was in exile in Fascist Italy. Hermann Goering, who was to become a key figure in Nazi-Fascist relations, dated his familiarity with Mussolini's regime from his residence in Italy in 1924-1925. Until now there has been little reliable information on this important early example of contact between the NSDAP and Mussolini's government. But with newly uncovered evidence, it has become possible to give a clear picture for the first time of Goering's exile. It is unfortunate that most of Goering's recent biographers have based their description of this episode on previous inaccurate accounts, often adding details that can only be described as sheer invention. The truth about the future Reich Marshal's visit to Italy is, however, in many ways as interesting as the generally accepted version.

The story begins when Goering, as leader of the SA, participated in Hitler's uprising in Munich in 1923. He received a bad wound in the leg which was complicated by an increase in fever and severe pain. With his wife Karin, Goering eventually escaped into Austria.¹ There he met with Kurt Ludecke, who, as we have seen, had undertaken two missions for Hitler to Italy in 1922 and 1923. Goering spoke to Ludecke about the recent abortive putsch

in Munich. They probably also discussed Ludecke's trips to Fascist Italy and his meetings with Benito Mussolini. In his memoirs Ludecke gives the impression that his missions to Italy were widely known in Nazi circles, so that Goering was sure to raise this subject. Whether Ludecke influenced Goering to go to Italy is not known, but the discussion probably left him with the impression that Mussolini's regime was accessible to an emissary from the NSDAP.

While in Innsbruck, Goering was operated on in the local hospital. Still suffering from agonizing pain, he acquired a dependence on morphine, which was administered copiously. It is during this period that the future Reich Marshal developed his well-known drug addiction. Goering's wound failed to heal properly, and he experienced a number of relapses. Many of those whom he met in Austria and Italy report that he limped rather badly. He also lost his youthful physique and began to develop the girth that characterized him later on. When his health permitted, Goering was active in various political activities. He established contact with Austrian Nazis and German followers of Hitler who were also in exile. His activities aroused the interest of the authorities--particularly his efforts to raise funds for the National Socialist Movement. When one of his associates was arrested in Vienna, Goering was quietly asked to leave the country. The Nazi exile and his wife were fortunate to receive aid from the Wagner family. As Friedelind Wagner relates, his bills in Innsbruck were paid by her father and

arrangements were made for the Goerings to go to Venice to live at a hotel which was owned by a Nazi sympathizer.²

The couple arrived in Venice in the spring of 1924. They took up residence in the Hotel Britannia. Its owner, Rudolfo Walther, was a German national whose family had lived in Italy for many years. Karin's first reaction to Italy was one of sheer enchantment by the charm and beauty of Venice; she regretted only that her knowledge of the language was so poor. Her husband's command of Italian, however, was substantial, and he decided to utilize his visit to carry on the work of his movement. There is no evidence that he was invited to Italy by Mussolini or any Fascist official. His choice in going there appears to have been motivated chiefly by the offer from Walther. However, it couldn't have failed to cross his mind that this trip might provide an opportunity to further the cause of Nazi-Fascist relations; it seems safe to assume that this was at least a secondary consideration. After a short stay in Venice, the couple set out for Rome.

There has been considerable misinformation about Goering's visit to Rome in 1924. Though the exact chronology of his stay is still unclear, it is possible to document much of what he did in the Italian capital. Most important is the question of whether he actually met Mussolini. Karin's sister states in her book that Goering met the Italian dictator "often." This

contention has been repeated and embellished by many biographers.³ But a number of letters written by Goering at a later date requesting an interview with Mussolini make it evident that the Nazi exile never met the Duce in 1924-25. However, Goering did have considerable dealings with the Fascist government while he was in Rome. His contact was Giuseppe Bastianini, secretary-general of the department for fascist groups abroad. Bastianini wished to develop a close link between fascists of different nations. At a state banquet in November 1923, Mussolini stated, "Though fascism is a typical Italian phenomenon, there is no doubt that some of its postulates are of a universal nature, seeing that many countries have suffered and are suffering from the degeneration of the democratic and liberal systems."⁴ In February 1925, in a published article the Duce wrote "possibly before long a large part of Europe will have become more or less fascist."⁵ But Mussolini was reluctant to undertake any affirmative action to help foreign fascist groups. Bastianini however tried to put the Duce's words into practice. For example, there were contacts with the radical right groups in Lithuania. Bastianini claimed credit for the coup d'etat which they staged and saw it as an extension of the Italian Fascist movement.⁶ Although the enthusiasm of the

youthful fascist leader for relations with other right wing groups was not entirely shared by other members of the Rome hierarchy, Bastianini definitely gave Goering a warm reception.

Goering came to Rome with Giuseppe Renzetti, who was a fascist agent in Germany.⁷ Bastianini met Goering several times in Rome; they talked at length in his office, at restaurants and at certain castles in the Rome area. The Italian diplomat records that Goering gave him a letter addressed from Hitler to Mussolini concerning the question of South Tyrol, the German-speaking region occupied by Italy after World War I. According to Renzo De Felice, the leading contemporary historian of the Fascist era, no trace of this document has ever been found.⁸ However, Goering himself wrote a letter to Mussolini while he was in Rome, which may well be the document referred to by Bastianini.⁹ In this memorandum Goering pledges that if the Nazis came to power there would be no quarrel over the South Tyrol. A National Socialist Germany, he said, would guarantee the reparations awarded to Italy by the Treaty of Versailles. Goering also promised that the Nazi press would work for good relations between Germany and

Italy. In return, the letter requests Italian help for the Hitler movement which would include favorable press reports, public statements of support, and financial assistance. Mussolini was also asked to adopt an attitude of neutrality in regard to the Treaty of Versailles, including the question of reparations. Goering's memorandum is remarkably similar to the goals established by Hitler for Ludecke's second mission to Italy. Though there is no evidence that Goering received any direct commission from Hitler, there is reason to suspect that he decided to carry on Ludecke's objectives after speaking to him in Innsbruck.

Of potentially great importance in this memorandum is Goering's assertion that the NSDAP might come to power by "legal or illegal means." This statement runs counter to the prevailing interpretation that after the failure of the Munich Putsch, the Nazis gave up all plans to come to power by violent methods. Goering in his letter to Mussolini does not rule out the possibility of another Nazi uprising. It is not clear if this reflects only his own attitude or was a widely held viewpoint within the NSDAP at that time. It is possible that the abandonment of armed revolt was not as fully accepted in the party as generally believed. In any event, it was not wise for Goering to drop this hint to Mussolini that the Nazis were considering a new revolt in which they hoped for Italian Fascist support.

Unfortunately for the Nazis, Goering's visit to Rome

Italian Fascism. There are many indications that Mussolini was overwhelmingly absorbed with the crisis and was not in a position to make new commitments. Thus no concrete agreement was reached. Goering returned to Venice, possibly at the request of Bastianini. It was there that he began a long and aggravating correspondence with Dr. Leo Negrelli of the Corriere d'Italia. This Italian journalist had been in Germany, where he had interviewed Hitler in October 1923. He was known to be sympathetic to Nazism, and Goering hoped to use him as an intermediary between himself and Mussolini. Negrelli worked as a functionary for the Italian dictator, and the Nazi exile believed he might have some influence on or at least access to Mussolini. His letters are filled with requests which he hoped Negrelli could convey to the Duce.

One of Goering's most persistent requests was his petition on behalf of Rudolfo Walther, his host in Venice. As a result of the Treaty of Versailles, the Hotel Britannia was sequestered because it was German-owned. Goering argued that Walther would make an ideal Nazi representative in Italy, and that since he had always been pro-Italian, the property of his family should be spared. No fewer than ten letters written in 1924 and 1925 reflect Goering's constant efforts to gain a favorable judgment for Walther. He had raised the question with Bastianini in Rome, but had received no satisfaction and did not trust the youthful Fascist official on this question. Of course a large part of

Goering's motivation may simply have been a desire to repay Walther for the hospitality he had shown him and his wife for so long.¹⁰ However, this seemingly trivial incident provides us with some significant information, for Goering's letters on this subject reflect a quite virulent anti-Semitism.

Many biographers of the future Reich Marshal describe him as a "moderate" on the Jewish question.¹¹ While of course he was certainly not as obsessed with anti-Semitism as Hitler, there is abundant evidence from this period that he had a very deep and personal hatred for the Jews. In a private letter from Austria on February 22, 1924, he indicated his unwillingness to return to Germany so long as it was a "Jew Republic." In Rome, Bastianini was unfavorably impressed by Goering's tirades against the evil influence of world Jewry.¹² In his letters on the Walther affair, Goering argued that there was a Jewish plot against the proposed Nazi representative in Italy. He stated that the Jewish-owned Banca Commerciale wished to gain control of the Hotel Britannia and thus form a monopoly of hotels in Venice. On September 23, Goering wrote to Negrelli: ". . . I have found out that the Jewish Banca Commerciale, behind the scenes and in typical Jewish lowness, wants to seize the hotel."¹³ Ironically, the official who had the power to decide in the Walther matter was Guido Jung, the Italian Minister of the Treasury, who was of Jewish origin. Goering in his correspondence displayed a great distrust for Jung

because of his Jewish background, and he warned Negrelli against him on that basis. He saw the Jews as enemies of both Fascism and Nazism:

The Jew above all--out of racial unity-- must be against a national movement, for in the final analysis he wants to rule internationally; so the national groups must form a closed phalanx against them. Most of the national movements today are already anti-Semitic. . . . [He then lists ten such groups in various countries] . . . At this moment anti-Semitism grows everywhere. Why did the Fascists in a great outcry declare the Banca Commerciale to be its greatest enemy? This already displays an unconscious anti-Semitic tendency!'¹⁴

Such an outpouring of hatred against the Jews could have been written by Hitler himself, and it is typical of Goering's attitude during this period. Like the Fuehrer, Goering believed that the Fascists were really anti-Semitic, and that this unconscious tendency would eventually manifest itself. It should be noted that the Nazi exile received no satisfaction on the Walther issue. It is doubtful that his expressions of anti-Semitism did anything to help his cause. This is also true of his attacks on the Catholic Church.

Goering's antagonism toward the Vatican and the clerical forces in Italy was almost as consistent and as vicious as his

attack on the Jews. On September 23, he wrote to Negrelli: "The Vatican is cunning. . . . Spiritually and basically, the Vatican is an enemy of Fascism."¹⁵ A few weeks later, the Nazi exile continued his attack on the Catholic Church:

The Vatican is very deceptive. While in Italy it is apparently very well disposed toward Mussolini, in other countries . . . it is entirely against Mussolini. . . . Mussolini made powerful temporary concessions to the Pope and he may some day regret this . . . the large Catholic Party in Germany is expressly anti-Italian and anti-Fascist.¹⁶

Like his anti-Semitism, Goering's attacks on the Church could gain him few friends in Italy. While Mussolini and the Fascists had an anticlerical tendency, any overt opposition to the Church was not good policy in Catholic Italy. On these issues, Goering showed a distinct lack of tact that was typical of the Nazi movement.

Along with his prejudices, Goering's letters also exhibit a deep and apparently sincere admiration for Mussolini and for the Fascist movement. When he heard of the political assassination of a high-ranking fascist official by the Socialists, Goering offered to fight to defend Mussolini's regime if the murder proved to be a prelude to a left-wing uprising. He wrote to Negrelli: "I offer my services as a simple fascist . . .

I am ready to go anywhere. . . . I ask that you do everything possible to enable me to take part in the fighting."¹⁷ The former World War ace volunteered to go as a reporter, but if necessary he would serve as a pilot in the struggle against an anti-Fascist uprising. Such sentiments on the part of the Nazi exile suggest that he saw the NSDAP as a German auxiliary of the Fascist Party. Of course he may have been seeking to impress his Italian hosts, but there is little doubt that Goering believed that the Nazi party should emulate the Duce's movement in many respects.

The main purpose, however, of Goering's letters to Negrelli was not to express his opinions but to get aid for the Nazi movement from Mussolini's government. This of course meant primarily financial assistance. The Nazi exile claimed that a loan was needed to pay for a pro-Fascist propaganda campaign in Germany: ". . . a loan of two million. For this you would have in your press an important speaking trumpet. Besides you will get your two million back in five years at the latest."¹⁸ In an undated memorandum to the Directorate of the Fascist Party, Goering made his most serious bid for a loan. He indicated that it would be kept secret and listed several reasons for it. In addition to the plan of building a pro-Fascist press in Germany, the need to fight Communism was also stressed. According to Goering, the large debt incurred by the movement in electoral campaigns necessitated the loan, especially since Nazi property was under

sequester as a result of the Munich Putsch.¹⁹ The evidence available indicates that Goering never received any money while he was in Italy and gradually dropped the request for a loan. However, after the Munich Putsch, the Italian Consulate in Munich provided money to the survivors of Hitler's abortive revolt. But Goering probably did not know about this. It should be noted that at this time the Nazis were involved in a court case against a political opponent who accused them of receiving financial support from the French;²⁰ actually it was the Italians whom the Nazis were looking to for such aid.

In exchange for the financial support he was requesting, Goering promised a position by the Nazis on the key question of the South Tyrol that would be favorable to Italian interests. This issue involving Italian rule of a German-speaking area aroused nearly unanimous opposition in Germany. Almost every political party, right, left and center was outraged by Mussolini's efforts to Italianize the region which the Fascists called the Alto-Adige. Goering was not far from the truth when he stated that a pro-Italian position on this issue would mean that "all the rest of the press will come down on us [National Socialists.]" He added that "therefore we must be prepared and fore-armed--

that is [we must] already have the money for the strengthening of our press."²¹ The NSDAP was the only party that took a moderate position on this issue, though it should be mentioned that Hitler was not unopposed even within his own movement. Goering stressed "that Hitler had been denied his Austrian citizenship because of his sharp support of the Italian point of view in regard to the South Tyrol question."²² This was not true, since Hitler remained an Austrian until April 7, 1925, when he resigned his citizenship voluntarily. But Goering was more accurate when he stated that the NSDAP position on the South Tyrol question demonstrated the sincerity of the movement's friendship toward Fascism. He wrote: "Mussolini has an assured ally in Germany and that is us! This is proved by our sacrifice of the South Tyrol."²³ Hitler had repeatedly made declarations to Fascist agents of his disinterest in the South Tyrol, over which he was willing to recognize Italian sovereignty. Thus Goering was following Hitler's policy on this question.

The Nazi exile emphasized the foreign policy implications of the South Tyrol question. An anti-Fascist German government, Goering wrote, would be forced to ally itself with France and Yugoslavia against Italy because of the South Tyrol issue. Thus

it was in Mussolini's interest to have the Nazis in power in Germany, so as to prevent this anti-Italian coalition. Of course Goering believed that this was a major reason for Fascist Italy to support the Nazis. It should be noted that Goering advocated an alliance of Italy, Germany and Britain. Bastianini mentions that Goering spoke in favor of such a grouping in their conversations in Rome.²⁴ This was a coalition which Hitler continually advocated during this period, and it was also the key aim of his foreign policy in the 1930s. Like his Fuehrer, Goering was to dedicate much of his career to a Rome-Berlin-London alliance.

Goering's greatest desire while he was in Italy was to express his views on foreign policy and other matters to Mussolini directly. Since he did not get a chance to visit the Duce while he was in Rome, he constantly brought up the subject of an audience with the Italian dictator in his correspondence with Negrelli from Venice. In a letter that was probably written in early 1925, Goering wrote:

. . . I ask that you do all that you can to arrange an audience in the next few days, since I can no longer wait and must soon depart. . . . I am to write a little book about him [Mussolini] and Fascism for propaganda in Germany. It would be stupid to do this if I had never seen him.²⁵

Goering linked his request for an interview with the Duce with a supposedly impending visit by Hitler to Italy. On October 15, 1924, he wrote: ". . . Hitler will certainly be released in the next few days and will then perhaps go to Rome with me. . . . This will happen only if he could be sure of having an audience with Mussolini. . . ." ²⁶ But by January 25, 1925, Goering wrote: "Hitler will soon have a meeting and an audience with Mussolini. I don't know how this was arranged, but it has been done." ²⁷ The Nazi exile went on to claim that because of the Fuehrer's impending visit, it was even more important that he have a prior audience as a press representative. A few weeks later, Goering wrote that Hitler had commissioned him to speak to an influential member of the Fascist Party who had promised the Fuehrer to secure an audience for Goering with Mussolini. ²⁸

Goering's letters of this period suggest a number of interesting possibilities. First we see that Goering claims to have corresponded with Hitler while he was in exile. This has been alleged by some biographers, but no proof has ever been produced. We also have the suggestion that Hitler was in contact with Fascist agents in Germany while he was in prison working on Mein Kampf. If these revelations are true, it would mean that Hitler was involved politically, while he was in prison, to a much greater degree than previously believed. Most accounts maintain that Hitler tended to avoid involvement in party affairs while

he was at Landsberg.²⁹ Perhaps he made an exception with regard to relations with Fascist Italy. At any rate it would be interesting if we could get an accurate list of visitors to Landsberg prison to see if it included any possible Fascist agents. The fact that Hitler would try to arrange a meeting with Mussolini is plausible, for during the Kampfzeit he made repeated efforts toward this end.

Although Renzo De Felice denies that there were plans for a Hitler visit to Italy in 1925,³⁰ there is some evidence to verify Goering's statements that the Fuehrer planned a trip at this time. We know that Hitler was reported to have told the Nazi Gauleiter of Württemberg that in order to meet Mussolini he needed a large retinue of cars so that he could make the appropriate impression. It is interesting to note that a police report (Lagebericht) of March 2, 1925, states: "Hitler now possesses a second car which he also uses on his trips outside Germany."³¹ It is possible that this second automobile was purchased during a time when the Nazi party was short of funds, in anticipation of a trip to Rome to see Mussolini. Fillippo Anfuso, an Italian diplomat, states that in 1925, Hitler sought an interview with Mussolini but that his request was refused. At about this time Mussolini told the Chief

Rabbi of Rome that the Nazis were angry because the Duce had refused to receive Hitler. ³²

The question we must ask is why Goering himself did not get a chance to meet Mussolini. One possibility is that Negrelli never passed on to the Duce Goering's urgent requests. One gets the impression from the letters that Negrelli may not have been as close to Mussolini as he claimed. But it is unlikely that both Bastianini and Negrelli would have dealt with Goering without some indication of this reaching Mussolini. Why should they risk their positions in unauthorized negotiations without the Duce's approval? What is more plausible is that Mussolini knew of the negotiations but for various reasons did not wish to make any commitment to Goering. What must be emphasized in this connection is the previously mentioned fact that Goering's stay in Italy coincided with the Matteotti crisis, which surely occupied much if not all of the Duce's attention; for the outbreak of public indignation following the murder of the opposition leader posed a direct threat to his regime. The Italian diplomatic documents show that Mussolini was particularly sensitive about foreign reaction during this period--including opinion in Germany. ³³ He was certainly in no mood to make any commitments to a revolutionary leader who was exiled after an unsuccessful coup.

There were a number of other factors which may explain why Mussolini refused to make any firm commitment to Goering. Although Goering and Hitler were known to favor Fascism, the Nazi party at that time was controlled by groups opposed to Mussolini's Italy. Despite Goering's assurances, Mussolini surely must have been aware of the true feelings of a great many leading Nazis. It was to take Hitler a considerable time after he returned from prison to suppress the anti-fascist Italian elements in Nazism. While Goering was in Italy, such tendencies were definitely dominant in the NSDAP.

This anti-Italian attitude was of course not appreciated in Fascist circles. Also, Nazi anti-Semitism was not popular in Italy. Although not as numerous as claimed by the Nazis, there were many Jews prominent in Italian life, including the government and the Fascist Party. Many Nazis when dealing with the Fascists in the 1920s lost considerable support by their imprudent verbal attacks on the Jews. This happened to Hitler in October 1923 when he was interviewed by Negrelli in Munich, and to Kurt Ludecke when he visited Italy in 1922 and 1923 as a Nazi emissary to Mussolini. The story is often told that when two other Nazi delegates came to Mussolini and asked for joint cooperation on an anti-Semitic basis,

he referred them to his Minister of the Interior, Aldo Finzi, who was of Jewish origin. This story may not be literally true, but it gives a good indication of the attitude of Mussolini and many other Fascists toward the Nazis' anti-Semitism. Also unpopular in Italy were the Nazi attacks on the Catholic Church and its influence in German life. Many Fascists saw Nazism as pagan and un-Christian. Despite a number of superficial similarities, there was a considerable undertow of resentment against Nazism in Fascist Italy.

During this period Mussolini was reluctant to openly support foreign groups which were pro-fascist. He, of course, was unwilling to offend the incumbent governments of these countries. The Duce refused to receive the Hungarian fascist leader Stefan Friedrich publicly and forbade any formal agreement with his party. In 1926, Mussolini denied that there had ever been any relations between the PNF and the Hungarian Fascists.³⁴ Mussolini was unlikely to risk his relations with the Weimar Republic by helping a group whose fortune appeared to be on the wane. Obviously, during this period, the Duce was hedging his bets on the NSDAP, which had made such a poor showing during the Munich uprising. That failure and the apparent eclipse of Hitler's movement politically were

perhaps the main reasons why Mussolini was unwilling to make any firm commitment to Goering. In his letters, the Nazi exile attempted to answer Negrelli's charge that the NSDAP was a spent force. One gets the impression that he was rather hard put to deny that the movement had sustained a heavy blow. He calls Hitler "the coming man in Germany."³⁵ In other passages, too, he speaks of the future potential of the movement, but avoids any references to the current situation of the NSDAP. Such was the weak position in which Goering found himself.

Although Mussolini was obviously not overly anxious to grant Goering's requests, his policy was to give the Nazi exile just enough encouragement to prevent a complete break. After all, he could have expelled Goering or refused to allow Bastianini or Negrelli to have any dealings with him. Mussolini may have believed that the Nazis might serve some useful function at a later date. A memorandum on this subject was written by Bastianini to Mussolini in February 1925.³⁶ Although we cannot be sure that Mussolini received the report, it gives a good indication of the Fascist attitude toward the Nazis in this period. Bastianini indicated that an agreement in substance if not in form had been made by Goering and Negrelli on a pact between the Fascists and the Nazis.³⁷ But Goering (probably out of frustration) asked Negrelli to drop the question of this agreement. He now requested only two things: a press interview with Mussolini and settlement

of the Walther affair. In his memorandum to Mussolini, Bastianini argued against "a dangerous break of contact and relations with the Nazis." Bastianini suggested that Goering should receive some satisfaction before leaving Italy. There is no indication of Mussolini's response to this memorandum, but Goering left Italy without obtaining either an interview or a settlement of the Walther affair. His letters, however, give the impression that he received assurances on at least some of his requests. Mussolini's policy was probably in line with Bastianini's suggestion. Apparently the Duce allowed Negrelli and Bastianini to make statements to Goering that were just encouraging enough to avoid an open break but without yielding anything of substance that could embarrass the Fascist regime. One gets the impression from Goering's letters that he suspected what was happening, and that he decided to leave Italy when he realized that there was nothing to be gained.

There is a small possibility, however, that Mussolini may finally have given his consent to a meeting. On February 14, 1925, Goering sent a telegram to Negrelli in which he stated "Thanks for Telegram. Everything all right."³⁸ He could have meant this as a positive response to Negrelli's notification that a meeting had finally been arranged. This interview with Mussolini may have failed to take place because of Mussolini's preoccupation with the Matteoti affair or because of illness. The Duce's ghost-written autobiography indicates that he was ill throughout most

of February and March 1925.³⁹ Though this source is unreliable in political matters, there is no reason to believe that the authors would fabricate an illness on the part of the Duce. In view of his often stated impatience to get to Sweden, it is possible that Goering may have left Italy even though he was promised a meeting with Mussolini. There is no way of knowing if this was the situation, but a telegram by Goering from Sweden makes it clear that the Nazi exile never met the Duce, whether a promise of a meeting was given or not.

There is also an unnecessary misunderstanding over Fanny von Williamowitz-Moellendorf's assertion in her book that her sister Karin Goering visited Germany several times, where she met Hitler while the couple was living in Italy. Many historians have accepted as genuine a photo given by Hitler to Karin. However, the date on the photo is April 15, 1924, not April 15, 1925 as reported by most writers. Karin received this photo from the Fuehrer while he was incarcerated in Landsberg Prison. But the story that he gave Karin money is probably a fabrication.⁴⁰ Also untrue is a German police report⁴¹ that Hermann Goering was requested to leave Italy. There is no evidence for this. It is possible that the couple had overstayed their welcome at the Britannia Hotel in Venice, especially since Rudolfo Walther had received no satisfaction on his petition despite Goering's intervention.

The Goerings arrived in Sweden in April 1925. Karin, who had preceded Hermann, had gone by way of Germany, where she sold their house in Munich. On April 22, 1925, Hermann Goering sent a letter indicating that the couple was settled in Stockholm.⁴² From Sweden Goering eventually sent articles to the Voelkischer Beobachter in which, as we shall see, he urged a close link between the NSDAP and Fascist Italy. Obviously, despite the difficulties and disappointments he had experienced, Goering left Italy with a feeling that Mussolini's regime could play a significant role in the resurrection of the Nazi Party.

Goering's stay in Italy had a noticeable effect on the Nazis' view of Fascist Italy. André Francois-Poncet, the well known French ambassador to Rome and Berlin in the 1930s, states that Hitler's admiration for Mussolini was largely based on the refuge he offered to Goering after the Munich Putsch.⁴³ This is surely an exaggeration; but Goering's Italian exile helped maintain Nazi-Fascist contact during a very difficult period in the history of the NSDAP.

Notes

1. For Goering's exile in Austria, see Ludecke, op. cit., pp. 177-81; the letter sent by Karin from Innsbruck on November 13, 1923, is reproduced in her sister's book, viz. Fanny von Williamowitz-Moellendorf, Karin Goering (Berlin, 1934), pp. 68-69; Stanford: NSDAP reel 52/Folder 1225.

2. Friedelind Wagner, Heritage of Fire (New York, 1945), pp. 13-14. This story is confirmed in a personal letter by Frau Winifred Wagner to Ben E. Swearingen. The author would like to thank Mr. Swearingen for his kind permission to use the Goering-Negrelli Correspondence. Facsimiles of this collection of 16 letters and memoranda may be examined at the Library of the Graduate School and University Center of The City University of New York (hereafter cited as GNC).

3. Williamowitz-Moellendorf, op. cit., p. 106. See biographies Charles Bewly, Herman Goring and the Third Reich (New York, 1962), p. 59; Leonard Mosley, The Reich Marshal (Garden City, 1974), p. 96; Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel, Goering (New York, 1962), p. 60. At least half a dozen other writers repeat the story that Goering met Mussolini at this time.

4. O.O., XX, 113.

5. Giorgio Pini and Fulvio Sumel, Mussolini, l'uomo e l'opera (Florence, 1925), vol. III, pp. 43-44.

6. See DDI (7) I, p. 531, IV, pp. 126, 551; for additional information on Bastianini see NA: T-586, roll 1200.

7. There are a number of documents which suggest that Renzetti was leader of the Italian fascists in Germany and worked directly with Bastianini's office. A German police report states that Renzetti was "in close personal contact with . . . Bastianini, who is part of Mussolini's immediate entourage." See Police Report of February 10, 1926, as well as the May 11, 1926 report of the German Embassy in Rome. Bonn: Abt. II, Pol. 29/N.F., vol. 3.

8. Giuseppe Bastianini, Uomini, cose, fatti: Memorie di un ambasciatore (Milan, 1959), pp. 147, 183; De Felice, rapporti, p. 25.

9. Appendix B

10. In 1931-32, Walther, who was then a Stahlhelm leader in Venice, had serious economic problems. He was accused by the local Fascists of unethical business practices. Walther appealed to Goering for help but there is no evidence that he was ever repaid for allowing the Nazi exile and his wife to live at his hotel for over a year completely rent free. Letter from Stützpunkt Venedig to Nieland, December 14, 1931, Kapfer to Nieland, March 5, 1932, NA: T-580 [no frame numbers in this series], roll 58; see also GNC: Goering to Negrelli, September 23, 1924.

11. For a typical example, see Mosley, op. cit., p. 16C.
12. Bastianini, op. cit., p. 185; Williamowitz-Moellendorf, op. cit., p. 93.
13. GNC: Goering to Negrelli, September 23, 1924.
14. GNC: Goering to Negrelli, October 15, 1924.
15. GNC: Goering to Negrelli, September 23, 1924.
16. GNC: Goering to Negrelli, October 15, 1924.
17. GNC: Goering to Negrelli, September 12, 1924.
18. GNC: Goering to Negrelli, September 19, 1924.
19. GNC: Goering to Directorate of the PNF n.d.
20. Report of March 1, 1925, Stanford: NSDAP, reel 85/
Folder 1738.
21. GNC: Goering to Negrelli, September 19, 1924.
22. GNC: Goering to Negrelli, January 25, 1925, Goering
memorandum, November 1925; Report of May 25, 1925, Stanford:
NSDAP, reel 85/Folder 1738.
23. GNC: Goering to Negrelli, October 15, 1924.
24. Bastianini, op. cit., p. 186.
25. GNC: Goering to Negrelli, n.d.
26. GNC: Goering to Negrelli, October 15, 1924.
27. GNC: Goering to Negrelli, January 25, 1925. Hoepke's
assertion that Goering while in Italy helped arrange an invitation
for Hitler is unfounded. Klaus-Peter Hoepke, Die Deutsche Rechte
und der Italienische Faschismus (Dusseldorf, 1968), p. 314.

28. GNC: Goering to Negrelli Feb. 12, 1925.
29. Gordon op. cit. p. 573; Orlow op. cit. p. 49-50.
30. De Felice, rapporti, p. 127.
31. Munich police report, March 2, 1925, Stanford: NSDAP, reel 85/Folder 1738.
32. Filippo Anfuso, Da Palazzo Venezia al Largo di Garda (Rome, 1950), p. 34; Guido Bedarida, Ebrei d'Italia (Livorno, 1950), p. 10.
33. DDI Series 7, vol. III, nos. 270, 279, 294.
34. DDI (7), IV, p. 219.
35. GNC: Goering to Negrelli, October 15, 1924.
36. GNC: Bastianini to Mussolini, February, 1925.
37. Though not specified in Bastianini's memorandum, this tentative agreement probably included Fascist loans to the NSDAP, Nazi recognition of the Alto Adige, mutual press support, Italian promise of recognition of a new Hitler regime when it came, Nazi guarantees of reparations to Italy, and Fascist neutrality over the Treaty of Versailles imposed on Germany.
38. GNC: Goering to Negrelli, February 14, 1925.
39. Benito Mussolini, My Autobiography (London, 1928), p. 236.
40. Mosely, op. cit., p. 98; Williamowitz-Moellendorf, op. cit., pp. 108-09. Mr. Swearingen is an expert on Hitler's handwriting.
41. See cumulative police file, June 12, 1924, Stanford: NSDAP, reel 52/Folder 1225.
42. GNC: Goering to Negrelli, April 22, 1925.
43. André Francois-Poncet, op. cit., p. 238.

CHAPTER V

THE ATTITUDE OF THE NSDAP TOWARD FASCIST ITALY

Throughout the history of the Nazi Party, Hitler's firm support of an alliance with Fascist Italy was never very popular with considerable elements within the movement. It took many years of bitter struggle before the Fuehrer was able to establish even outward Party discipline on this issue. During most of the 1920s, many Nazis were not happy that their party was the only sizable group which openly proclaimed a pro-Italian policy. Hitler's singlemindedness with regard to Fascist Italy ran into opposition within the NSDAP on a number of key issues. Mussolini and the PNF were criticized because of the stand the Duce took on the South Tyrol and on anti-Semitism. The Nazi left wing also was disenchanted with Mussolini's position on various economic and social questions.

Opposition to Fascist Italy within the NSDAP had begun in the early years of the movement. Many articles appeared in the party newspaper which were hostile to Mussolini and the PNF. On July 29, 1922, before the March on Rome, an article in the Voelkischer Beobachter took note that Mussolini planned a second visit to Germany. Nationalist groups were warned that any collaboration with the Duce would lead to a "stab in the back" of

the deutsch-völkische movement. The article went on to characterize Mussolini as a tool of international Jewish finance and claimed that his newspaper Il Popolo d'Italia was subsidized from French Jewish sources.¹ Apparently Mussolini was not forgiven for having been so active in bringing Italy onto the opposing side in World War I. After the Fascist seizure of power, a number of articles appeared in the Nazi press which described the Italian leader as a dupe who was under Jewish influence. It has been suggested that many negative articles may have been printed in order to avoid any possible rumors that the Nazis were eager to follow the examples of the Fascists by taking direct illegal action.² While it is believable that many Nazis may have been cautious in their praise of Mussolini for fear of being suppressed by the authorities, there can be little doubt that much of the criticism of Fascist Italy was the result of serious misgivings by a large number of Hitler's followers.

During this period Hitler had renounced all German claim to the South Tyrol, but for many Nazis it was still a burning issue. A large number of party members found it difficult to take a position which was directly opposite to the feeling of the overwhelming majority of Germans of all the other political parties. The Voelkischer Beobachter was not averse to reporting the most minor incidents involving the mistreatment of the German minority living under Italian rule. One of the leaders of the opposition

to Hitler's position on the South Tyrol was Alfred Rosenberg.

The national socialist philosopher wrote a number of cautiously worded articles in the party newspaper which reveal a lack of enthusiasm for the Fuehrer's position on the South Tyrol issue.³

In June 1923, Rosenberg wrote that it would be foolish to allow the South Tyrol question to lead to war with Italy. He postponed the liberation of the South Tyrol until "we have a true German state."⁴ The Nazi theorist suggests that perhaps Mussolini could be compensated in other areas when a resurgent Reich took back the South Tyrol along with all other German-inhabited regions. This contradicted Hitler, who on a number of occasions after November 1922 repeated that he considered the border problem with Italy permanently settled. This dispute between Rosenberg and Hitler over Italy was to be a recurring theme during the 1920s.

In the area of Italy's foreign affairs, there was far from universal support within the Nazi Party for certain actions taken by the Fascist government. In particular, Mussolini's failure to openly oppose Britain and France on the German question was criticized. Many party members found it difficult to accept Hitler's analysis that France and Italy would soon come into violent conflict. The Voelkischer Beobachter was very disappointed in Italian policy during the Ruhr crisis. But of course it was unrealistic to expect that so soon after the March on Rome before

he consolidated his power at home, Mussolini could openly oppose the Western Powers on the German issue. During the Corfu crisis between Greece and Italy, the Nazi paper was impressed with Mussolini's resolute conduct, since on this issue he opposed a state backed by the West. However, Italian ambitions for imperialist expansion in the Eastern Mediterranean were **generally** scoffed at. Clearly, a large number of Nazis did not share their leader's view that Italy was a major power.

On the subject of Marxism, the Fascists and Nazis took a very similar position. Mussolini's squads fought the Communists in the streets in the towns of northern Italy. Hitler himself in October 1922 praised the Fascists for their willingness to fight the Marxist terror despite the small size of their movement.⁶ But after the March on Rome, Fascism's struggle against the Communists was only minimally covered by the party newspaper. Many Nazis were reluctant to give Mussolini much credit for being anti-Communist because the Fascists "have not yet published or distributed anything enlightening concerning the leaders and nature of Bolshevism."⁷ This of course referred to world Jewry, with whom it was felt the Fascists did not link Marxism closely enough. Mussolini's lack of an anti-Semitic policy was one of the most common criticisms leveled at him in the Nazi press. In February 1923, the Voelkischer Beobachter

noted that "already Jewish subversion is at work in the ranks of Fascism. Italy has not yet realized that there is a world struggle."⁸ In March 1923, the fact that the head of the Society of Fascist Academicians was a Jew was cited as evidence of continuing Jewish influence in Mussolini's regime. Obviously, there was much disagreement with Hitler's opinion that Fascist Italy would be a future ally in the struggle against world Jewry.

During the period when the Fuehrer was in prison, the anti-Fascist tendency was dominant in the Nazi party. This opposition did not end when Hitler came out of Landsberg prison. In 1925 the Voelkischer Beobachter reappeared. It contained few expressions of friendship for Mussolini's regime. Articles appeared on the Jewish influence in Fascism and there was also a call for a boycott of Italy over the South Tyrol question.⁹ As before the Munich Putsch, Alfred Rosenberg was the editor of the party newspaper. While Hitler was in prison, Rosenberg had acted as head of the NSDAP. Many scholars believe that the Fuehrer had left Rosenberg in charge because he realized that the "intellectual" would be unlikely to demonstrate administrative ability and thus represented

no challenge to Hitler's role as leader. In the realm of ideas, however, Rosenberg had considerable influence on Nazi policy during the Kampfzeit. His negative view of Bolshevism and of the "Jewish conspiracy" probably reinforced Hitler's already strong inclinations on these topics. But it is difficult to assess the exact extent of his influence since the contact between Hitler and Rosenberg was personal and not recorded. We do know that there were some definite differences between the Fuehrer and the party ideologue. Before the Munich Putsch, for example, Rosenberg had opposed Hitler's policy of open hostility to France. In 1922, Rosenberg had believed that it was folly to risk a conflict which would prolong French occupation. But for our purposes what is of greatest interest is the differing views of Hitler and Rosenberg on Fascist Italy. The Nazi philosopher was not critical on all issues, but on such questions as anti-Semitism and the South Tyrol he found much to be desired in Mussolini's regime. Italy was not an important element in his worldview so that unlike Hitler, he was not willing to overlook or rationalize those areas where the Nazi and Fascist programs came into conflict. When the Fuehrer came out of prison there developed a split between the two men who had once been rather close. A letter written by Rosenberg to Hitler in 1926 indicates that the Nazi philosopher no longer had easy access to the party leader, who did not appear anxious to speak to his former confidant.¹⁰ The disagreement

over Italy was not the only conflict between them, but it was a principal factor. When Rosenberg became editor of the Voelkischer Beobachter, he agreed to follow Hitler's orders. But Rosenberg maintained many of his anti-Italian attitudes.

One area which greatly concerned Rosenberg was the question of anti-Semitism in Italy. As we have seen, Hitler's view was that Fascism was basically anti-Semitic and would sooner or later launch a policy of oppression against the Jews. The Fuehrer saw Mussolini's anti-Masonic campaign as a sublimated attack on the Jews. The Fascist attack on the Freemasons was popular among many Nazis. Rosenberg agreed with this consensus: he wrote ". . . there is one thing that World Jewry can't forgive Mussolini: the fight against the Freemasons."¹¹ Rosenberg also noted with approval the Fascist anti-Semitic newspaper Il Tevere. However, Rosenberg believed that Mussolini was forced to depend on Jewish finance for support. He commented with disapproval on the large number of Jews who were prominent in the Fascist party and the government. For example, in writing about the promotion of Count Volpe to Italian Minister of Finance, Rosenberg noted that he had made a brilliant career because he was Vice-President of the Jewish Banca Commerciale Italiana. Rosenberg added that this signified that "Mussolini has allowed the dictatorship of Jewish high finance, giving to the Jewish financier the economy of the entire country."¹² The Nazi philosopher called the Jewish president

of the Banca Commerciale Italiana the recognized dictator of Italy.

Rosenberg saw the Jews as the element most dangerous to Fascism. He believed that Fascism would not be realized in its purity until Mussolini adopted the Nazis' absolute anti-Semitism. In one of the first issues of Rosenberg's newspaper Der Welt-kampf, an Italian anti-Semite, Giuseppe Fredrigotti, published an article "Fascism and Its False Friends"--Fredrigotti was referring to the Jews and the Jesuits who he believed should be purged in Italy. Rosenberg drew material from Fredrigotti's article, including the phrase "false friends."

Another Nazi who borrowed from Fredrigotti was Dr. Adolf Dresler, a leading journalist and contributor to the Voelkischer Beobachter. In his book on Mussolini, he criticized the Duce for being soft on Jews and accused him of moving Fascism into a capitalist direction and away from its proper social role. He held the Jews responsible for Italy's recognition of Soviet Russia. He also speculated that the Duce may really be a Jew who emigrated from Poland. He noted with disapproval the number of Jews prominent in Fascist Italy, and included in this group Giacomo Acerbo, Aldo Finzi, and Gabriele D'Annunzio.¹³

Dresler's socialist critique of Fascism exemplified the meaning of "Socialism" in the imagination of the "voelkische"

groups. This was not a fixed point of orientation for a process of social renewal but a variable quantity determined by the degree to which the Jews were socially eliminated or deprived of political effectiveness. Dresler's anti-Semitic critique of Mussolini was popular among Nazis. Julius Streicher, never known for moderation, called Mussolini a Jewish lackey (Judenknecht). Clearly, when it came to the NSDAP's evaluation of Jewish influence in Italy, Hitler's authority to shape opinion was not yet effective in the 1920s.

In the period after the Munich Putsch, the South Tyrol continued to be an issue in the NSDAP. It was very difficult for the Party to have a concise policy on this question because of the divisions of opinion within the movement. Many Nazis were disturbed that their political opponents labelled them as traitors because the NSDAP did not wholeheartedly join the universal chorus of condemnation of Fascist Italy which was indulged in by the other political parties. On February 13, 1926, the Berliner Beobachter stated, "Almost nowhere has our present position in the current German-Italian conflict [over the South Tyrol] been understood."¹⁴ The Nazis, of course, were in a very delicate position on this issue. How could they write off a group of Germans suppressed under alien rule in view of their strong stand favoring the unity of all German-speaking people in one Teutonic Reich? This created a potentially dangerous schism in the movement. On

August 10, 1926, Hans Frank wrote a letter announcing his resignation from the Nazi Party. He stated that Hitler's arguments on the South Tyrol were incorrect. He affirmed that the suffering of the South Tyroleans was real and not simply, as the Fuehrer contended, the fabrication of the Jewish press.¹⁵

In the Nazi party newspaper there were occasionally articles which were almost hysterical in their outrage at the suppression of Germans in the South Tyrol. One story on January 20, 1926 stated of the South Tyrolese: "Never has a people been more tortured and humiliated." The article went on to advocate a boycott of Italian goods and an end of German tourism in "this anti-German country."¹⁶ In the following year a report was carried of an Italian ski patrol crossing the Brenner frontier and engaging in target practice facing north. This same issue of the Voelkischer Beobachter also carried a story in bold print of the arrest and removal of an old man in the South Tyrol. It was stated that his only offense was to be a schoolteacher who gave instruction in the German language.

Alfred Rosenberg continued to be critical of Italy in the South Tyrol issue. He wrote of the "useless violence perpetrated against Germans."¹⁷ Rosenberg had stated in 1923 that a resurgent Reich should get the South Tyrol, but he had advocated giving Italy compensation for it. In an article in February 1926, Rosenberg gave his position on this question. He stated that first the

dispute with France must be settled, "then Germany will be strong enough to carry weight in its negotiations with Italy."¹⁸ The Party ideologue believed that a strong National Socialist Germany could get the South Tyrol from her Italian ally. This would go hand in hand with the Anschluss of Austria, which Rosenberg argued could be in Italy's interest. But Rosenberg's position on the South Tyrol did not meet with Hitler's approval, since the Fuehrer did not advocate the acquisition of the region south of the Brenner pass, even by negotiation. Hitler believed that the whole issue was only a diversion from more important tasks such as the expansion into Eastern Europe.

During the critical period when opposition against Fascist Italy was rampant in the Nazi Party, the Fuehrer enlisted some of the movement's leaders to defend his position on the South Tyrol. Paul Josef Goebbels, whom Hitler won over from the Strasser left wing of the NSDAP, participated in the struggle against those who opposed close Nazi-Fascist relations. In an article on the subject, Goebbels accused the "Elders of Zion" of being the authors of the peace treaties and of deliberately arranging a border problem in order to cause dissension between Germany and Italy. Goebbels opposed an economic boycott of Italy which he believed would cause the Germans considerable grief. He also pointed out the miserable condition of millions of Sudeten and Alsacian Germans as well as those living under Polish and Yugoslav rule.

He ended his article by stating that "We national-socialists wish to warn the German people against participating in the free-masonic attacks on Italy."¹⁹

From Sweden, Goering sent to the Voelkischer Beobachter a series of articles in which he argued for a close link between the Nazis and Fascist Italy. This was necessary to support Hitler's struggle to suppress the strong anti-Italian sentiment within the movement. It is of some significance that these articles were the first major political undertaking by Goering after he left the hospital. On March 3, 1926, the Nazi paper published the first article, "Zum Deutsch-Italienischen Konflikt I." In this piece, Goering blamed the dispute between Italy and Germany over the South Tyrol on the Jews. He was forced to admit that the Germans living under Italian rule were mistreated, but he believed that the Fascists would soon recognize their error. He wrote:

As much as we condemn and reject this suppression of our Tyrolean brothers, we nevertheless entertain the hope that the Fascists will soon recognize how much they are harming themselves by these violent measures and how the common enemy--Jewish Freemasonry--is as always helped by them.²⁰

The second article of this series contained more of Goering's anti-Semitic outbursts. He also tried to show a close affinity

between Fascism and Nazism. He wrote: "Although Fascism is a purely Italian movement, there is much in its basic make-up that is related to our National Socialist Weltanschauung." Goering mentioned the fight against Marxism, parliamentarianism, and degenerate capitalism as well as love of the native land and cultivation of race as basic similarities of the two movements. He called Mussolini's Rome "the model and example for the national movements"²¹ all over Europe. In the last article of the series,²² Goering stressed foreign policy and Italy's quarrel with France and Yugoslavia. He stated that at Locarno, the Weimar government reconciled itself with France, Italy's foe and the true enemy of the German people. This, he said, forced Mussolini into a harsh policy in the South Tyrol. A new Nazi government would seek eastern expansion by working together with Italy against France.

Of course, there were some features of Italian Fascism which had genuine appeal to all Nazis. In particular, Mussolini's nationalism and his opposition to the liberal-democratic political parties were very popular. In this respect he was accomplishing what the NSDAP wished to achieve in Germany. Both movements saw the liberal parties as weak and contemptible in both foreign and domestic affairs. The Fascist alliance with the Nationalists against the liberal parties was applauded in the Nazi press. On March 2, 1923, the Nazi paper noted with approval the union of

the Fascist and Nationalist parties in Italy. This foreshadowed a similar alliance in Germany which was to bring National Socialism to power. Later in the same year it praised the Fascist regime, saying that "for the present the Italian state is the first experimental proof that the collapsing edifice of democracy can be supplanted by a national government."²³

A number of other articles in the Nazi newspaper before the Munich Putsch noted the increased efficiency of the Fascist government. Although the tiresome observation of the trains running on time was avoided, improved taxi and restaurant service were noted by a correspondent who claimed to be familiar with Italy. The dishonesty of the former liberal parliamentary government was contrasted with the improved economic measures to control profiteering. Also noted was the correctness and swiftness of Fascist judicial proceedings.²⁴ Such articles served the purpose of painting a picture of national regeneration in Italy which was held up as a model for a future Nazi-dominated Germany.

Even during the period of the worst criticism of Fascist Italy in the mid-1920s, there were favorable articles in the Nazi paper on Mussolini's regime. On November 4, 1926, Hermann Esser wrote that the Italian workers had the right to work and the duty of discipline, which is better than the duty to keep one's mouth shut and the right to be hungry as in Germany. He claimed that Italian workers supported their government and would

be willing to defend it with arms. In Germany the workers opposed the government. Overall, Esser saw Fascist Italy as a country where the workers had a definite opportunity of improving their lot. In another article, Johann von Wisler praised Fascist Italy's labor policy which he stated had replaced the class struggle with cooperation between capital and labor. Fascist syndicate leaders, he pointed out, have seats in the Senate, which is proof of the great respect in Italy accorded to the working class and of the cooperation between intellectual and physical labor.²⁵

There were many other aspects of Fascist Italy which were generally approved of by most Nazis. The organizational structure of Fascism--i.e., dictatorship--was praised without exception by all members of the NSDAP. Most Nazis also appreciated the revolutionary activist element in Fascism. The central role accorded to physical violence and to intellectual "struggle" was very similar to Nazi theory. Mussolini preached action and the Fascists had proven themselves willing to seize power rather than spending time in useless parliamentary debate. Militancy is what had drawn many supporters to both movements, so that it was natural for Nazis to praise their Italian counterparts. In particular, Fascist militancy against the communists was lavishly praised in Nazi circles. In December 1926, a campaign by Mussolini against Communist "subversives" was hailed as a model to be emulated some day in Germany.²⁶

By about 1928, Hitler's positive view of Fascist Italy became more dominant in the NSDAP. In that year, in the Foreign Policy Committee of the Reichstag, the National Socialists sang a hymn of praise to Italy. Also in 1928, the Voelkischer Beobachter set up a permanent office in Rome. The purpose indicated for this action was to gather more information to oppose the "Marxist-democratic lies about Fascist Italy."²⁷ The Party newspaper also began to use material from the Nord-Süd Korrespondenz, a weekly pro-Fascist propaganda sheet which appeared in Munich and was paid for by the Italian government. Gradually more and more articles favorable to Mussolini's regime began to appear in the Nazi newspaper. Col. Constantin Hierl, for example, wrote an article in which he lauded the military might of Fascist Italy. He saw a war by France and Yugoslavia against Italy as imminent. Hierl praised Mussolini's transformation of the entire Italian armed forces. The beneficial effect of Fascism on the morale of the people was also noted, particularly in increasing their will to fight. The greatest asset of the Italians was the total power given to Mussolini, whom the people regarded as a genius.²⁸ Such views, of course, were similar to those of Hitler, who rated both the Italian military and the Fascist Duce rather highly.

Many articles were also written by Nazis which tended to praise various aspects of Fascist culture. Adolf Dresler in an

article in 1929 showed a considerable moderation of his early negative view of Mussolini's regime. Dresler wrote of the influence of the Futurist movement on Fascism and praised its positive attitude toward war and its opposition to Bolshevism.²⁹ Dr. Dresler, a noted Nazi intellectual who had once written that Mussolini was really a disguised Polish Jew, also wrote a number of articles in the Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte in which he praised many aspects of contemporary Fascist Italy. In May 1930, he wrote very favorably about the Fascist youth organization. In December of the same year Dresler also praised Mussolini's population policy, which he hinted could be a model for the new Germany.³⁰

Other articles praising Fascist Italy appeared in the Nazi monthly journal. In April 1931, Mussolini's Concordat with the Vatican was highly praised, comparing it favorably to an agreement made between the Bavarian state government and the Catholic Church. Mussolini was credited with getting the better deal, which the author states should be studied carefully in Germany. In 1932 an article in the Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte by Klaus von der Wieden gave a very laudatory account of the rise of Fascism, which he indicated had much to teach the NSDAP.³¹

During the late 1920s and early 1930s there were few references in the Nazi press to the good relations between the Fascist

government and the Jewish community. The Duce's favorable references to the Jews in his interview with Emil Ludwig went unreported in the Voelkischer Beobachter. Goebbels' diary entry of February 1932 gradually became unassailable dogma in the NSDAP. He wrote, "Fascism confronts a simpler problem with the Jews than we do. There are hardly any Jews in Italy. Most Italians deep down are anti-Semitic."³² There was little evidence for such an interpretation, but Hitler was able to suppress any alternate point of view within his movement. By 1930, when Alfred Rosenberg wrote Der Mythos des 20 Jahrhunderts, the Nazi philosopher was careful not to criticize the Fascist regime. There is very little about Italy in his book. His main stress is on the need to revitalize the Nordic sources of power in Northern Europe. This German-Scandinavian bloc would serve as a bulwark against Soviet Russia. There would also be a Mediterranean alliance under Italian leadership in the South. Rosenberg accepted Hitler's idea for a Rome-Berlin-London alliance, but there can be little doubt that to him Italy would be a decidedly junior partner in this arrangement. The Nazi ideologue gave up his former misgivings over Mussolini's attitude toward the Jews. He praised Fascist Italy for its rejection of the entire democratic ideal. His only jibe at Mussolini's government was a reference to excessive influence of bank capitalism.³³

Rosenberg's criticism of the Fascist economic structure was echoing the sentiments of the Nazi Left. This group

within the NSDAP constantly criticized Fascist Italy during the Kampfzeit. In the 1920s the left wing of the Party, led by Gregor and Otto Strasser, stressed the socialist aspect of the Nazi program. With their greatest strength in the northern industrial regions of Germany, the left wing of the NSDAP urged policies which were closer to the Communists and Socialists than those advocated by Hitler and the more conservative Munich element in the party. The Strasser group found little to admire in Mussolini's regime. In their attacks on Fascist Italy, they stressed economic and ideological differences. Fascism was accused of merely superficially smothering the class struggle, which would resume after the death of Mussolini. The Nazi Left asserted that the NSDAP had a more justified claim to being the future pioneer of the "new world." The group led by the Strasser brothers criticized Hitler, who, they charged, wished to become a "German Mussolini." They especially resented Hitler's position as "Fuehrer" and wished to restore democracy within the Nazi Party. Naturally the left-wingers were unenthusiastic about the introduction of the Fascist salute and other Italian symbols into the NSDAP.

The northerners believed that their program represented the true principles of the NSDAP which had been corrupted by the Munich clique of Julius Streicher, Hermann Esser, and Max Amann. In the 1920s the Strasser group was not seeking to create a separate party

but to push the NSDAP in the direction which they favored. Ironically, although the northerners were critical of Mussolini, they favored many of the institutions that existed in Fascist Italy. In late 1925, Gregor Strasser privately circulated a detailed draft constitution for the future National Socialist Germany. Its economic provisions included a system of syndicalist structures similar to those advocated by the Italian Fascists.

In January, 1926, at a conference in Hanover, the Nazi left formulated its program. In foreign affairs they advocated a policy which was favorable to the Soviet Union, instead of an alliance with Fascist Italy (and Great Britain). In particular, they opposed the "Fuehrer Principle". Strasser and his group did not wish to overthrow Hitler, but they did wish to introduce a less rigid system of absolute leadership.

On February 14, 1926, Hitler held a conference in Bamberg. At this famous meeting the Fuehrer asserted his absolute leadership of the NSDAP. Goebbels, who had been associated with the Strasser wing of the party, was won over by Hitler. The Fuehrer rejected most of the left program. In particular on foreign policy he reiterated his conviction that the East was a fertile area for German colonization. Hitler had no sympathy for Strasser's plans for a Nazi-Soviet alliance. The corner-stone of his foreign policy remained an alliance with Fascist Italy and Great Britain.³⁴

Despite Hitler's reassertion of his authority, constant criticism of Italy continued on the Nazi left. A common charge made against the Fascists was that they were dependent on foreign capitalists, especially the British and the Americans. As an article in the Voelkischer Beobachter stated:

Italy wants to get out of the so-called deflation crisis and nationalize its economy. This striving of the government is hindered by financial circles in Italy who in concert with their connections in the world of international finance seek to profitably invest foreign money in Italian industry. ³⁵

Another article in the Voelkischer Beobachter during this period decried the Fascist control of labor unions in Italy. In the view of the writer, Fascism had failed to provide many of the goals aimed at by the unions. Thus there is in Italy still a great disparity between rich and poor, and only a very small middle class. The inference was that Fascism had not provided a social revolution. ³⁶ These were common charges of the Nazi Left..

In 1930, Otto Strasser broke with Hitler and founded the Black Front. This group of heretical left-wing Nazis adopted a position which was extremely hostile to Fascist Italy. Strasser's group was anti-Western and favored greater emulation of the Soviet Union and closer political ties with this eastern socialist colossus. Otto Strasser saw Mussolini's regime as part of the West, since her system was a disguised form of capitalism and in international affairs Italy was one of the signers of the Versailles Treaty, which was the instrument of Western domination. The Black Front saw Italian Fascism as alien. Their wish was to create a

system based on the Germanic ideal of self-government instead of the command from above which characterized Mussolini's regime. Strasser wished to build up a corporate structure in Germany that would embody the Protestant idea of self-responsibility. In Italian Fascism, he believed, the corporate system was merely an extension of state authority. The Nazi heretics believed that in Germany a corporate structure could be created alongside or even against the State.

Strasser characterized Fascism as a "liberal reactionary movement." He believed that Hugenberg's DNVP was even more emphatic than Hitler's NSDAP as being the German reactionary movement which imitated Italian Fascism most closely. Hugenberg's movement was true German Fascism which, according to Strasser, simply favored the old capitalist system found under the Second Reich.³⁷ The Black Front never had a very large following, but Otto Strasser's view of Fascist Italy was common among many Nazi Party members.

Though not as negative as the heretical Otto Strasser, Graf Ernst Reventlow, editor of the Nazi journal Reichswart, can be cited as an NSDAP intellectual who had serious reservations about Fascist Italy. Reventlow believed that there was basically not much in Italian Fascism that was worth imitating. He stressed that each nation was unique and could not really borrow very much from other countries. In foreign affairs Reventlow saw

Italy as an imperialistic expansionist country which contrasted drastically with Germany, where most people had no passion to rule other nations. Like Strasser, he saw Italy as a beneficiary of the 1919 treaties, which put her in a good position to expand her territory.

On economic questions Reventlow saw the bourgeoisie as the dominant element in Fascist Italy, but he believed that the NSDAP should base its revolution on the working class, which predominated in Germany. Like many within his party, the Nazi editor saw Mussolini as an ally if not a tool of international capitalism. In particular, Reventlow was critical of Mussolini's attachment of Italy to the system of the gold standard, while the NSDAP wished to take Germany out of this monetary group. In general, the left-leaning Nazi intellectual did not see Fascist Italy as a true socialist nation. He wrote, "a socialism such as it is understood by a German is unknown in Italy."³⁸ An important part of this school of German socialism was anti-Semitism, which, Reventlow notes, Mussolini attacked with the greatest intensity. The Italian Fascists could not understand the importance of excluding the Jews from all areas of German life.

Reventlow's opinion of Fascist Italy was not entirely negative. He occasionally praised Mussolini personally as a genius and great leader of his people. He also lauded the nationalist ethos which Fascism generated in Italy. This was an admirable

theme for Nazism to emulate. Like most of the Nazi Left, Reventlow opposed Hitler's doctrinaire anti-Soviet and pro-Fascist policy. But he was totally pragmatic in foreign policy and for geopolitical and economic reasons was willing to consider an alliance with Fascist Italy. He believed that in the short run Mussolini might make a desirable alliance partner for Germany. But Reventlow was not enthusiastic about such a development.

Obviously, there was a considerable resistance in the NSDAP to Hitler's policy of having close ties with Mussolini's regime. Though the Fuehrer suppressed the open opposition of the 1920s, many Nazis, especially those of the left wing, made it clear that their consent to an Italian alliance was given reluctantly. It is strange that Hitler was willing to expend so much effort and prestige in order to gain acquiescence on this point. It is, of course, a further indication of his devotion to Mussolini and his Fascist regime.

Notes

1. VB, July 29, 1922.
2. Karl Egon Lonne, "Der Voelkische Beobachter und der Italienische Faschismus," in Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken, LI (1971), 555.
3. One scholar points to the Rosenberg articles as an example of Hitler's lack of control of the party newspaper (Lonne,

op. cit., p. 561). In another version of the story Hitler asked Rosenberg to write some articles on the South Tyrol issue in order to gain his reluctant support (Michaelis, "Avento," pp. 559-60).

4. VB, June 17/18, 1923.

5. VB, September 8, 1923.

6. Albrecht Tyrell, editor, Führer Befehl . . . Selbstzeugnisse aus der "Kampfzeit" der NSDAP, Dokumentation und Analyse (Düsseldorf, 1969), Doc. 14, p. 51.

7. VB, August 2, 1923.

8. VB, February 16, 1923; see also Meir Michaelis, "I rapporti italo-teseschi e il problema ebrei in Italia 1922-1938," in Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali, XXVIII (1961), 238-40.

9. VB, September 27/28, 1925; VB, January 26, 1926.

10. Rosenberg to Hitler, December 29, 1926, NA:T-81/667/5475061-62.

11. VB, February 13, 1926; see also Joseph Goebbels, The Diary of Joseph Goebbels, 1925-26 (London, 1962), p. 69.

12. VB, July 7, 1925.

13. Adolf Dresler, Mussolini (Leipzig, 1924), p. 51.

14. VB, February 13, 1926.

15. Cited in Hoepke, op. cit. p. 327.

16. VB, January 20, 1926; see also VB, February 3, 1927.

17. Alfred Rosenberg, Der Zukunftsweg einer deutschen Aussenpolitik (Munich, 1927), p. 55.

18. VB, February 9, 1926.
19. VB, February 2, 1926.
20. VB, March 3, 1926.
21. VB, March 6, 1926.
22. VB, March 9, 1926.
23. VB, September 15, 1923; see also VB, March 2, 1923.
24. VB, June 2, 1923, June 14, 1923.
25. VB, November 4, 1926; see also VB, March 10, 1926.
26. VB, December 11, 1926.
27. VB, February 5, 1928; see also Ernst von Weizsäcker, Memoirs (London, 1951), p. 101.
28. VB, June 3/4, 1928.
29. Adolf Dresler, "Der politische Futurismus als Vorläufer des italienischen Faschismus," Preussische Jahrbücher vol. 217 (1929), pp. 334-42.
30. Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte, vol. I, May 1930, December 1930 (hereafter cited as NSM).
31. NSM, vol. II, April 1931, Vol. II, June 1932.
32. Joseph Goebbels, My Part in Germany's Fight (London, 1935), p. 45.
33. Alfred Rosenberg, Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts (Munich, 1930), p. 700.
34. On the Hanover and Bamberg conferences, see Orlov, op. cit. 182-187.

35. Die Neue Front, supplement of VB, 6/7 February 1927.

36. VB, June 6, 1926.

37. Karl O. Paetel, "Otto Strasser und die Schwarze Front," Politische Studien, vol. 8 (1957), pp. 170-82; Hoepke, op. cit., pp. 213-27.

38. Graf Ernst Reventlow, Deutscher Sozialismus (Weimar, 1930), p. 308.

CHAPTER VI

MUSSOLINI'S GERMAN POLICY

Before describing the relationship between Fascist Italy and the rising Nazi Party, it might be well to discuss Mussolini's attitude toward the Weimar government which ruled Germany. It is obvious that although the Duce had stated that the Axis of European affairs passed through Berlin, he was not particularly pleased with the government which he found there. The Italian dictator had no high opinion of the leaders of the Weimar Republic in the 1920s. In particular Gustav Stresemann, sometime Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, was cordially disliked. This feeling was reciprocated, and Italy did not play a key role in the plans of Stresemann or other Weimar leaders. The distrust between Stresemann and Mussolini was to plague Italian-German relations for many years. At one point Mussolini called Stresemann "a corrupt free-mason and a political dilettant"¹ and expressed something less than overwhelming grief at the news of his death in 1929. Earlier, during Italy's confrontation with Yugoslavia and in the Corfu crisis Stresemann had refused to give any aid to Fascist Italy. In September 1923, when Ambassador Bosdari had asked Stresemann if Germany would be in a position to at least immobilize part of the French army on the Rhine in case

of an Italian-Yugoslav war, Stresemann replied that Germany could not take sides in such a conflict. In the same year, when Stresemann was asked to support Italy over the Corfu incident, he told the cabinet: "I scarcely need to say the conflict, which Italy had conjured up through its sudden and thoughtless occupation of Corfu, did not concern us in the slightest. We had to decline becoming involved in an Italian adventure."²

It is not difficult to see why Mussolini distrusted Stresemann and other Weimar politicians. The Duce's principal fear was over a Franco-German rapprochement which would leave Italy isolated. He did not doubt that the Weimar leaders were capable of an understanding with the Gallic enemy that was hated by the vast majority of German people. Ambassador Bosdari in Berlin informed the Duce that the reason why Stresemann could not give any aid to Italy was that the government in Berlin was controlled by the Social Democrats. Bosdari felt that it was necessary to encourage the more conservative forces and to that end met the leader of the National Peoples Party, Dr. Karl Helfferich. The conservative leader was opposed to Stresemann's foreign policy. In speaking with Bosdari, he alluded to a future change of regime in Berlin and a reorientation of policy resulting in a break with France. Helfferich stated that he hoped for a better understanding between Germany and Italy in view of the possibility of "fundamental changes" in international politics.³

As a result of the unfavorable attitude of most of the Weimar leaders, Mussolini turned to the German military as the element in which he placed his greatest confidence. The Italian dictator saw the military as a permanent force in German life which would remain long after the Republic was forgotten. He rightly judged that the Generals would favor a more adventuresome policy than the liberal politicians. It would be in his interest to ingratiate himself with them in anticipation of the day when the Reichswehr had a greater voice in Berlin and in Europe. Mussolini often stated that he wished to engage in close relations with Germany but he could only do so if Berlin had a government with a strong right-wing orientation. One of his favorite predictions was for a monarchist restoration in Germany. It was obvious that he believed that the Reichswehr would have an important role in such a government and that under the proper circumstance it might be a key element in arranging for a Hohenzollern restoration.

Contact was begun Between Fascist Italy and the German military in late November 1923. At that time Marquis Salvatore Denti di Piraino, naval attaché in Berlin, spoke with General Hans von Seeckt, chief of the Reichswehr. Seeckt saw a military understanding with Italy to be within the realm of possibility. Ambassador Bosdari returned to Rome with documents for such an accord which were presented to Mussolini. Because of improved relations with Yugoslavia, however, the Duce did not take any action on a military

pact with Germany. But there is some evidence to suggest that there were deliveries of weapons by Fascist Italy to the Reichswehr. On December 16, 1923, the German representative at Innsbruck reported that the Austrians had stopped

"eleven railroad cars purportedly headed for Latvia and declaring their freight as foodstuffs but actually containing 500 heavy machine guns and anti-aircraft revolver cannon plus accessories. . . . Bavarian customs director Kufstein Zech and Wehrkreiskommando Munich said consignment is addressed to the [German] defense ministry."⁴

There are other indications at about this time of Italian cooperation on avoiding the armament restrictions of the Versailles Treaty.⁵ In order to come to some kind of formal arrangement with the German High Command, in February 1924 General Luigi Capello was sent to Berlin. His mission was to hold talks with the military and national elements and report his findings to Rome. We have Capello's own extensive memorandum giving the full details of his mission.⁶ Capello spoke with Nationalist politicians as well as Field Marshall von Mackensen and General von Crammon. His impression was that a war with France was felt to be unavoidable in Germany. In Berlin he discussed the question of weapons deliveries and of Italian diplomatic support in defusing the allied military controls. Capello was asked to inquire of Rome

whether Italy was willing to supply Germany with a portion of the materials necessary for a war with France. Equipment for 50 regiments with hand weapons, machine guns and artillery were asked for, costing 40 million goldmarks. The German nationalists, Capello reported, were counting on important gains in the coming election and hoped for a nationalist dictatorship under von Seeckt. Capello spoke to von Seeckt, who again expressed interest in close contacts with Fascist Italy and offered to send a reliable General Staff officer incognito to Rome. Such a delegate was to have full authority to supply Mussolini with any information about German military needs.

Capello's account of his mission is partly contradicted in a letter sent by Count von Zech to von Neurath, the German Ambassador in Rome. In this private correspondence, von Zech quotes General von Crammon to the effect that it wasn't the Germans who asked for arms but that Capello had offered the equipment and was turned down.⁷ This of course is a significant distinction. The discrepancy may be attributed, however, to a verbal misunderstanding, vanity on the part of Prussian officers who were loath to admit that they had asked Italy for aid, or a purposeful effort to misinform von Neurath by the Generals who may not have trusted him. At any rate, there was no immediate effect from Capello's mission. By July 1923, Ambassador Bosdari was greatly disappointed by the indecision among the German nationalists. Thus when the DNVP approached him with an offer of renewed contacts, he complained

to Rome about the political incompetence and lack of seriousness on the part of the German right-wing element.⁸

But in the late 1920s, contacts were renewed between Fascist Italy and the German military. In May 1927, the Italian military attaché in Berlin asked in the name of his government that a German Air Force specialist be sent to Italy. The German military was willing, but the Foreign Office raised objections. The main reason was that the diplomats feared giving the appearance of siding with Italy against France.⁹ Other reasons for delay were offered, since the Foreign Office obviously saw the offers of military cooperation as a trick to compromise German neutrality in case of a war between Italy and France. The Reichswehr had greater interest in cooperation with Italy. Though obviously not anxious to fight Mussolini's wars, the desire to overcome the restrictions of the Versailles settlement was very strong among the German military. In particular the ban on a German military Air Force was greatly resented. Mussolini stressed Fascist Italy's strength as a first class air power, so that this was one area where it appeared that cooperation would be of great use to the Reichswehr.

In December 1927, Italo Balbo, a key figure in the Italian Air Force, came to Berlin to negotiate with the head of

Lufthansa, the German commercial airline. Balbo expressed Italy's wish for the rearmament of the German Air Force and offered support to that end. In the summer of 1928, he again came to Germany, this time with an air squadron, and invited several high-ranking officers of the Reichswehr to Italy. This invitation was made without the participation of the Italian Foreign Ministry and contrary to the wishes of the Palazzo Chigi. The German Foreign Office urged that the invitation be handled in a dilatory fashion. The offer was not renewed until September 1928, this time in written form. The German Foreign Office gave permission for the visit so as not to anger the Italians. General Ludwig, head of the Heereswaffenamt (army weapons office), Rear Admiral Prentzel and Captain Student, and Lt. Hoffman, an air expert, visited civilian and military training institutions and factories producing airplanes and related materials in Italy. The delegation traveled secretly in civilian clothes. They were greeted as friends and were treated with kindness wherever they went. At the airport they were received by General Capazzo with words to the effect that no conflict of interest existed between the two countries and that both sides

should forget the war and form close ties of friendship. Mussolini received the German delegation. Afterwards Balbo told General Ludwig that Germany would do well to hold back politically as much as possible until 1935, and do everything in the meanwhile to create an Air Force. All construction should be completed and the factories could be ready to create the necessary strong Air Force in a single blow in 1935. Both Mussolini and Balbo proceeded in their talks with the frankly expressed premise that Germany could not adhere to the regulations of the Versailles Treaty in the field of aviation. Ludwig noted that Balbo stressed that unless Germany made herself strong, she would be devoured like a lamb by her enemies.

In his report on his Italian trip General Ludwig wrote:

Co-operation (with Italy) would be extraordinarily useful to us in areas in which, for the time being, we are not permitted to work. Especially a serviceable organization and the testing of weapons can only be prepared on the basis of practical experience. The practical answer to all presently debated problems of aviation can be found in Italy. It seems practical and possible to test German constructions with Italian ones. . . . I believe that a request to have German pilots trained militarily in Italy would

not be refused, either, so long as the necessary rules of precaution were adhered to. . . . I have the summary impression that the Italian Air Force is highly developed, both in its organization and in the training of pilots. It should also soon represent a strong force in terms of numbers.¹⁰

On December 1, 1928, the Wilhelmstrasse warned against any extremely intimate military collaboration with Fascist Italy and decided that the training of Reichswehr officers in Italy was out of the question. In view of this it is not known if the close cooperation between the German and Italian military included the training of pilots or testing of new equipment, but substantial contact did continue. An intense, constantly growing exchange of information developed.¹¹ In March 1929, Captain Freiherr von Richthofen, who later became a Field Marshall, received an unofficial post at the German Embassy in Rome for the purpose of studies in the field of aviation. Richthofen had been requested by Balbo. From 1931 on, officers of the General Staffs of both countries were regularly exchanged. In 1931, Col. Fischer, Major von Tippelskirch, and Capt. Schorner went to Italy. In the summer of 1932, Major General von Beck, Lt. Col. Faber du Faur, and Major Seeger took part in Italian army summer maneuvers.

The Italian Air Force, which was the youngest and most Fascist of the services, showed the greatest interest in working with the Germans. The Regina Marina on the contrary showed the least interest in any involvement with their Teutonic counterparts. In 1930, the Germans tried repeatedly to assign an officer in the Italian Navy. These requests were treated in a dilatory manner. Eventually, however, in 1932, Capt. Böhm and Lt. Commander Ritter, traveling as civil engineers (since the Italian Navy had expressed a wish for strict secrecy), took part in the Regina Marina's 1932 maneuvers. After the Machtergreifung, the close cooperation envisaged in October 1928 eventually came about for all services.

Under the Weimar Republic, despite a certain amount of cautiousness, relations between the German and Italian military must be considered to have been good. Cooperation might have become more intimate before 1933, were it not for the close military cooperation between the Weimar Republic and the Soviet Union, which was the main foreign support for the Reichswehr in this period. But relations between Mussolini's regime and the civilian government in Berlin were not so close. As mentioned, the personality clash between the Duce and many Weimar political leaders was a problem. But equally troublesome was the question of the South Tyrol, which in varying forms plagued Italy's relations with German-speaking Central Europe from the unification of the country to our own day. This was a particular problem for Fascist

Italy because Mussolini had built his reputation as an extreme nationalist on Fascism's aggressive policy in the Alto-Adige.

After World War I, the attitude of the Liberal government in Rome toward the German minority was generally conciliatory. The South Tyrolese were encouraged to believe that not only was their ethnic identity to be preserved but that there was some hope of reunion with Austria. If the German minority had acted quickly they might have gained some form of autonomy. However, through the winter of 1920 and into 1921, they wasted precious time in fruitless political activity and nationalist agitation. Hoping to get more from a weak government, they adopted the tactics of confrontation and continually raised their demands. By May 1921, they were demanding full self-government for their region.

The firm stand taken by the German minority provided an opportunity for the Fascists to stage a Kulturkampf against this alien element within the Italian nation. The Squadristi committed numerous acts of violence against the residents of the Alto-Adige.¹² In April 1921 a bomb was set off. About the same time a school teacher was shot in the back. The Duce struck an aggressive pose in his newspaper Popolo d'Italia. In May 1921, he wrote that friendly relations were possible with Germans only if they recognized the accession of the Alto-Adige as a completely just and irrevocable act. He also warned:

Let the Germans of the Alto Adige take note! We will not repeat our words, we will write no more articles. . . . The Fascist generation will convince the Germans living criminally in the Alto Adige that we are and will remain on the Brenner, because it is the frontier designated by God.¹³

In October 1922, a Fascist march on Bolzano preceded the march on Rome which followed in the same month. This event illustrates the close relationship between the South Tyrol question and the Fascist Party. In July 1923, Senator Ettore Tolomei announced at Bolzano a 31-point program for the Italianization of the Alto Adige which included the more frequent use of the Italian language, Italianization of place names, etc. For the next five years there was a barrage of legislation aimed at undermining the German ethnic character of the province and the establishment of the dominance of Italian influence. It should be noted that unlike many other countries, Italy at the Paris Peace Conference had never signed any treaty for the protection of ethnic minorities. Mussolini openly boasted of this fact.

In 1925, Italy was involved in the negotiations for the Locarno Pact which it was hoped would guarantee peace in Western Europe. Mussolini's principal concern was to safeguard the Brenner frontier and insure against an Anschluss of Austria and Germany. In March he was certain that existing international treaties

forbidding the Anschluss were adequate.¹⁴ But then came reports from Berlin that the British were considering offering the Anschluss to Germany in exchange for her guarantee of her other borders. On May 20, 1925, the Duce told the Senate:

There is no need, gentlemen, to guarantee only the Rhine, thereby making the guarantee of the Brenner less firm. . . . Italy could never tolerate the patent violation of treaties which would result from the annexation of Austria to Germany. Such an annexation . . . would increase the demographic and territorial power of Germany . . . making by itself the most powerful bloc in Central Europe.¹⁵

At Locarno, Mussolini was forced to sign a Rhine Pact which did not offer any guarantee about Austria or the Brenner frontier. The Germans strenuously opposed any agreement in this region being attached to the Locarno Pact. Streseman had told French Prime Minister Briand that he would regard any agreement between Paris and Rome opposing an Anschluss as a combination against Germany that would endanger Franco-German relations.

Mussolini's failure to get any assurances at Locarno forced him to take a hard line in the Alto-Adige in order to reassert Italian control of the region. Other factors also drove Mussolini in 1925 to intensify his efforts to Italianize the Alto Adige.

The Matteotti crisis exposed Italy's isolation and created a generalized xenophobia in Rome. The year 1925 also witnessed increased efforts to reorganize Italy by strengthening centralization and extending Fascist Party control over all aspects of the Italian state. It was only natural that the new non-Italian provinces would receive a great deal of attention.

This intensified effort did not go unnoticed in Germany. Ironically, the immediate sparks for the uproar in Germany were two alleged acts of Fascist repression which never actually took place. In December 1925, the German press was scandalized by news that the authorities in Bolzano had forbidden the Tyrolese to have Christmas trees. It was also alleged that the monument of a German hero had been removed from the center of the town. Both charges were untrue, but no one outside Italy believed the official denials. In January 1926, nationalist groups in Germany organized an effective trade and tourist boycott against Italy. On the 27th of that month, there was an anti-German demonstration in Naples and a similar protest took place in Rome several days later.

A war of words soon followed these initial incidents. On February 5, Heinrich Held, the Premier of Bavaria, made a violent speech calling on all Germans to help the South Tyrolese, in words that could be interpreted as an invitation to armed intervention. Mussolini answered in equally violent tones. The Duce stated:

As regards the boycott, I must say that if the boycott should actually be applied tomorrow, with the tacit sanction of the responsible authorities, we would reply with one four times as severe, and to subsequent reprisals, we would reply with reprisals which have been cubed. We are insolent and explicit in this way, because we believe that by talking like this, we are serving the interests of truth, civilization, and peace.

Mussolini then concluded his speech with his famous threat:

My speech should be interpreted as the taking of a political and diplomatic position. I hope that it may be understood by those for whom it is meant, in order that the Italian government may not be forced to reply with actions as would be the case if the German government should assume direct responsibility for what has happened and for what might happen in Germany.

Honorable colleagues, the other day a Fascist newspaper . . . headed one of its columns thus:

"Fascist Italy will never furl its flag on the Brenner." I sent the following correction to the editor of the paper: Fascist Italy can, if necessary, carry the tri-color beyond, but never lower

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it.

On February 10, 1926, Mussolini made a speech to the Italian Senate in which he finally backed down, ending the worst phase of the crisis. He first declared that "Italy will not enter upon any debate of this subject, before any assemblage or any council. Hence the decision of the Tyrol Landtag is completely untenable." After this obligatory statement of his position, Mussolini then went on to water down his Brenner threat:

It is hardly necessary for me to say that I confirm my previous speech both in the spirit and in the letter--not excluding the final reference to the tri-color on the Brenner, which Stresemann may interpret as he will, but which Italians interpret in the sense that Italy will never submit to violations of those peace treaties which guarantee to her the frontiers that have been won at so heavy a cost in blood.¹⁷

Eventually tempers in Italy and Germany cooled but Stresemann was not happy about Mussolini's words. On March 4, 1926, Luigi Aldrovandi-Marescotti visited Stresemann. Aldrovandi-Marescotti had just assumed the post of Italian Ambassador and thus had a general review of the South Tyrol situation with Stresemann. The German Foreign Minister spoke of Mussolini's "virtual threat of war"¹⁸ over the Brenner frontier. Stresemann also referred to

rumors about irregular Fascist units planning an incursion into Innsbruck. Mussolini had refused to disclaim plans for such an adventure. The Foreign Minister pointed out that the minority issue in Italy was most familiar to the German public because many had visited there on vacation. He refused to take any affirmative action to prevent a boycott of Italy. Stresemann ended the meeting, however, with a hope of better relations in the future.

But there was a great deal of mistrust between Stresemann and Mussolini over this issue. The Duce may have desired the confrontation in order to dramatize the danger of German nationalism and to counteract the so-called "Spirit of Locarno." By emphasizing the danger of an Anschluss he may have been attempting to win over the friendship of the French. Relations with France were the decisive element in Italian-German relations. Mussolini often appeared to have a contradictory policy since he vacillated between a pro-German and a pro-French policy. In both Rome and Berlin most actions directed north or south of the Brenner took into consideration their reaction in Paris. At times the Duce gave the impression that he desired an alliance with France directed against a revival of German power. On February 27, 1926, in an interview, the Italian dictator stated:

It was essential to denounce this threat of pan-Germanism. These people have forgotten nothing, have resigned themselves to nothing, and still cling to their dreams of yesterday.

The German perils should draw Italy and France

ever nearer together. Their interests are identical and they are separated by no great questions. With their joint bloc of 80 millions counterbalancing the German bloc, France and Italy together can impose peace.¹⁹

But suddenly, in December 1926, Mussolini spoke favorably of the Austrian desire for Anschluss. There were also some conciliatory steps taken in the South Tyrol by the Fascist authorities. The nationalist press in both countries down-played the Tyrol issue. A true reconciliation was not possible, however, so long as Stresemann remained in charge in Berlin. The key to his policy was a rapprochement with France. A Franco-German agreement would eventually be at Italy's expense and was the one development in European affairs which Mussolini feared above all else. Italian policy was aimed at maintaining correct relations with official Germany, while continuing to cultivate ties with presumably more congenial nationalist elements. An article that appeared in Gerarchia, a political review directed by Mussolini, in October 1927, probably reflected his views rather closely. In a piece entitled "Politica estera; sintesi di cinque anni," the author asserts that a German-Italian Treaty of Arbitration could serve as the basis of an accord between the two countries that could be developed in time. As the author points out, Germany wanted revision but was not strong enough to attain it through her

own efforts. Thus, politically, Germany gravitated towards Italy in the search for support. However, in the economic sphere, where Germany also had vital interests, the main orientation was toward France and the Balkans. In the view of the author, there was a basis for cooperation between Italy and Germany in the economic area, but all the causes for political conflict had not been eliminated. The author then went on to dispose of the hitherto most troublesome issues between Italy and Germany as lacking in substance. For instance, the author asserted, "the question of the Alto Adige, which [as a purely internal problem] is not a topic of international discussion, cannot constitute for Germany an essential matter in the vast complex of vital problems which confront her." The Anschluss was disposed of as a real problem because "it conflicts with the general political system established by the peace treaties, and could not be accomplished without their revision. The time does not appear ripe for such a vast problem."²⁰

During the same period, the last years of Stresemann's life, Mussolini embarked on an active policy of his own which among other things was aimed at preventing Anschluss. As in other areas, such as Hungary and Yugoslavia, Mussolini's policy could be described as active, expansionistic, and anti-German in its implications. Austria was ideal in many respects as a theater of operations for Mussolini. The rump of Austria that had been created out of the ruins

of the old Danubian Monarchy was no threat to Italy, as it had been as the base for Hapsburg power in centuries past. As a result, Mussolini practiced a foreign policy based upon conciliation and aid to friendly elements. Now Italy had an interest in preserving an independent Austria. Many in Austria reciprocated, looking to Italy for the aid and protection of a great power, which Germany could not provide at the time. Perhaps under Fascist tutelage with Italian economic and political support, Austria might serve as a buffer state between Italy and the Germans. Beyond this, Austria could fill a place in Italy's own dreams of creating a Danubian bloc headed, of course, by Fascist Italy and its Duce. It may well be that Mussolini envisioned Austria as a kind of northern Albania--outflanking Yugoslavia as did the Albanian satellite to the south on the Adriatic.

In Austria Mussolini followed a policy of supporting such elements as the Christian-Social Party and the paramilitary organization, the Heimwehr.²¹ The Italian dictator made it known that he was willing to supply all of the Austrian right-wing's needs in the area of armaments.²² But these subsidies did not alleviate the desire of the Austrian "clerical-Fascists" for the reacquisition of the South Tyrol, despite a renunciation which they signed. Indeed Mussolini's support of the Austrian right's efforts to suppress the Socialists was counterproductive. The destruction of the Socialists eliminated a strong force in favor of Austrian

independence, which left the country vulnerable to those Nazi elements favorable to an Anschluss with Hitler's Germany. But this of course did not occur until the 1930s. Meanwhile in the 1920s the Duce's policy toward Austria could already be seen as a failure, since his expenditures in that country won few friends for him on the South Tyrol issue.

Early in January 1928 the Manchester Guardian sent a special correspondent around the Alto Adige, and his highly critical series of articles set off another international press campaign which soon had diplomatic repercussions. An outspoken airing of South Tyrolese complaints in the Tyrol Landtag and the Vienna Nationalrat provided Mussolini with an invitation to bluster again. Since Pan-Germanism did not appreciate "this intensive and civilizing work of Italy"²³ being carried out in the Alto Adige, all German civil servants still employed in the Province would be transferred or replaced.

Mussolini also underestimated the persistence and corrosive effect of the South Tyrol problem. Unfortunately for Mussolini's policy in Austria, the very elements which he supported tended to be most violent in their defense of the German minority in the Tyrol.²⁴ The issue broke out into the open in February 1928, when the question was again raised in the Austrian parliament. There was considerable discussion of bringing the whole issue before the League of Nations, but the Austrian Chancellor Seipel in the end

backed down and did not escalate the issue. Mussolini delivered a long speech in the Italian Chamber in which he heaped abuse on Austria and threatened force, as he had in response to Stresemann in 1926. Seipel and the Austrians backed down, and this kept the disagreement from evolving into a real crisis. In July of 1928, Seipel finally gave in and acknowledged that the treatment of Austrians in South Tyrol was the exclusive concern of the Italian government. This and other recurring disputes with Austria were of course mainly important because they tended to involve Fascist Italy in confrontations with the German Reich.²⁵

In the dispute over the South Tyrol, Stresemann had as his agent in Austria and the South Tyrol a Major W. Pabst. This secret operative gave extensive information on Italian military developments in the Alto Adige. Pabst sought to commit Germany to aid Austria in the event of a military clash over the disputed territory. Stresemann appears to have agreed.

Mussolini was also in the habit of using unofficial agents. The Italian diplomatic service did not enjoy the Duce's confidence. The Secretary General of the Foreign Office, Salvatore Contarini, for example, was completely ignorant of the nature and extent of Mussolini's association with the German nationalist right.²⁷ In his relations with very many countries the Duce relied heavily on unofficial agents who were involved in every aspect of his foreign relations.²⁸

A prime area for intrigue was the Balkans. In 1927, Italian agents made contact with Macedonian terrorists, Croat separatists and other Balkan groups.²⁹ In some countries, Mussolini's

were carried out by the SIM, the Italian military intelligence. But in countries with large immigrant populations, the fasci all'estero, formed among Italians living abroad, often served as cover for clandestine operations.³⁰ These groups were established openly, but it was a poorly kept secret that they were cover for agents involved in clandestine activities. These agents reported directly to Mussolini and were often unknown to the local Italian consul. They performed assignments which the Duce would not entrust to his regular diplomats. Such men could be depended upon to fulfill tasks that were generally secret in nature and could compromise the Fascist regime if they were discovered. Thus Mussolini made every effort to create a situation where he could deny his connections to these men in the event that they were apprehended by the authorities. But German diplomats and government officials were acutely aware of their presence,³¹ and perhaps credited them with more mischief than they in fact really engaged in. It should be noted that agents of this type were commonly used in this period by most governments. The British in particular had a very large network of spies throughout the European continent. The Soviets at this time were beginning to organize the huge spy apparatus which soon would become one of the most efficient espionage networks in the world. It is quite probable, however, that Mussolini developed this tendency to use secret agents on his own initiative. Within Italy, such spies were often assigned to report on various government officials and of course the Duce's personal enemies.

Several of the Duce's agents were known to be involved in the South Tyrol controversy. In December 1926, Caetano Lorenzo Biseo contacted the German Ministry of the Interior and spoke to various people in Bavaria about cooperation over the South Tyrol situation. The German Embassy in Rome identified Biseo as a man who had direct access to Mussolini but urged that the Ministry of Interior avoid contact with him. The Embassy believed that Biseo's real aim was to ascertain which groups in Germany supported the South Tyroleans. Some time later a Ministry of Interior report on another agent, Roberto de Fiore, blamed him for writing memoranda which caused Mussolini's well-known outburst against the Bavarian Premier over the South Tyrol question. This was possibly an exaggeration, but it is highly probable that the Duce's agents played a mischievous role on the South Tyrol issue. ³²

On occasion Mussolini's agents acted as spies. They were often reported to be collecting information on German military inventions. Biseo was said to be working for the Information Service of the Italian General Staff. A report on him indicated that he "shows up whenever inventions are made, especially in the military field, and seeks to make contact with the branches of industry that work for these areas." ³³ In 1928, Roberto di Fiore was said to be interested in obtaining information on German weapons in the chemical warfare area. He was also reported to have orders to obtain information on German arms shipments to Yugoslavia, which was one of Italy's most likely potential enemies

during this period. It is obvious that the Italians wished to obtain information on the German military, which may explain part of Mussolini's desire to establish close liaison with the Reichswehr.

In 1927 Biseo was involved in economic relations between Italy and Germany. He attempted to pass himself off as an acquaintance of Gino Olivetti, head of the Italian Union of Industrialists. But the Germans found out that this was not true. Biseo proposed that an organization be set up to improve German-Italian trade. He stated that unfair French competition was responsible for the drop in Italian imports from Germany. But the Germans suspected that his real mission was to increase Franco-German antagonism, which would be to Italy's benefit.³⁴ Nothing came out of Biseo's efforts in the economic area.

At about the same time Biseo also failed in his efforts to influence a German newspaper in its Italian coverage. The Tägliche Rundschau had been tipped off about Biseo and refused his offer to supply information. But a number of Fascist agents ran the Nord-Süd-Korrespondenz, which was published in Munich, and attempted to promote good German-Italian relations.³⁵ This newspaper was successful to some extent in promoting a favorable view of Fascism. Occasionally its stories were picked up by German newspapers and served as a basis for favorable articles on Italy.³⁶

It is difficult to evaluate the success of these agents. Their activities certainly did not create a great deal of good will for Fascist Italy in Germany. Their greatest effort was made to influence the right-wing elements, but during the South Tyrol crisis it was obvious that even this mission had failed.³⁷ It would appear that men such as Biseo and de Fiore had little influence one way or another on Fascist Italy's relations with the Weimar Republic. They probably were not to any degree responsible for the shift in German policy after the death of Gustav Stresemann in 1929.

Mussolini for his part could only have been encouraged by Germany's drift toward radical revisionism in the early 1930s. The London Naval Conference in the spring of 1930 had ended in a complete deadlock between the conflicting views of France and Italy. Typically, when Mussolini had difficulties with France, he began to cultivate Germany. At the time, the evacuation of the Rhineland had encouraged revisionist sentiment in Germany and Mussolini began to support it with his usual excessive rhetoric. In the month of May 1930, Mussolini suddenly made a series of speeches at Leghorn, Florence, and Milan, in which he once again aroused all the specters of a revisionist alliance of Germany, Italy, and even Russia. Once again, as at the beginning of his regime, he aroused fears that Fascist foreign policy would become disruptive.

In October 1930, at Rome, the Duce spoke of revisionism and the need for rearmament. He stated:

Our policy of treaty revision, which is not a thing of yesterday, but has been contemplated since 1928, is directed to the avoidance of war, to save the cost, the immense cost, of a war. The revision of the peace treaties is not a predominantly Italian interest, but an interest of Europe and the world. There is nothing absurd and impracticable in such a conception. . . . The only absurdity is the pretense that treaties are unchangeable.

Mussolini then asserted what was gratefully picked up by the Germans and became the refrain of their argument for parity in armaments at the subsequent disarmament conferences at Geneva. The Duce asked:

Who are violating the Covenant of the League:
Those who--at Geneva--have created and sought to perpetuate two categories of states: the armed and the unarmed. What juridical and moral parity can exist between an armed and an unarmed man? How can one pretend that this comedy will be prolonged indefinitely when the very protagonists are beginning to get tired of it?

In December 1930, the Italian dictator made a declaration on revisionism to the German newspaper Der Tag which read:

. . . the Treaties of Peace are not eternal. . . .

I have repeated for nine years of the Fascist revolution that our wish to revise the Treaties is directed to avoid war and that the very revision is not prevalently an Italian interest but European if not worldwide. . . . We do not wish revisionism of the Treaty for reasons of national egotism but principally for reasons of justice, for reasons of ethics that are true and uniquely based for a lasting peace among peoples. ³⁹

From this time on, revisionism openly became a magnet drawing Germany and Italy together. Mussolini particularly stressed revisionism in connection with some kind of Italo-German-Hungarian bloc. His aim was to bring about a new alignment which could create opportunities for Italian aggrandizement in the Mediterranean. The constant demands by Chancellor Bruning's government for international equality made it easier for the Duce to assert Italy's manifest destiny as a great power. German revision could destabilize the Versailles settlement, which was the opportunity for which Mussolini had long waited.

But there was one familiar issue on which Mussolini's interests

clashed with those of Germany. This was the question of Austria's Anschluss with the Reich. In June 1930, Foreign Minister Dino Grandi told the French Ambassador that the Duce had "repeatedly
40 declared his opposition to the Anschluss." This was consistent Italian policy throughout this period. Thus the Fascist government in Rome was sensitive to any initiative which appeared to further the union of Austria and Germany. This occurred when in the spring of 1931, the Brüning government suddenly announced plans for an Austro-German Customs Union (Zollunion). To Brüning the Customs Union Plan held strong and obvious attractions. The economic advantages to both countries were great, particularly facing the crises that had developed over the winter of 1930-31 in Austria.⁴¹

Politically, there was always the possibility that Italy might sponsor the economic recovery of Austria if Germany failed to come to her aid. In mid-March, a joint declaration was issued that Austria and Germany had reached substantial agreement on a Customs Union. For Brüning the advantages of the plan chiefly consisted in the German public interpreting it as advancing the cause of political union. Meanwhile, of course, Europe was led to believe that the Zollunion was a purely economic step with no political implications that would violate Article 88 of the St. Germain Treaty or the Geneva Protocol of 1922. The former prohibited Anschluss specifically and the latter pledged Austria not to agree to measures which would threaten her economic independence.

It appeared for a while that Italo-German relations might be severely hampered. Mussolini first accepted the plan and then turned against it, presumably on Grandi's advice.⁴² Italy joined the French and Czechoslovakian diplomatic protests in Vienna and Berlin. Though Mussolini had joined the opposition to the Zollunion project, this did no more than momentarily retard the growing Italo-German cooperation on other issues. The main reason for this seems to be that Mussolini counted heavily on German support in his revisionist foreign policy. This was particularly true in reference to disarmament negotiations which once again emerged to the forefront in May 1931.⁴³ A draft disarmament convention had finally been produced by the Preparatory Disarmament Commission after five years' work early in December 1930. The Germans and the Russians had joined together in opposing the preparatory report. Germany opposed it as part of her campaign for parity. In May 1931, the Council of the League of Nations after further debate adopted the Draft Disarmament Convention and the report of the Preparatory Commission as the basis for the full disarmament conference which would open on February 2, 1932. The German and Italian delegations made numerous reservations to the draft convention and supported one another's position in a number of important instances.

The cause of German-Italian relations was further aided by the breakdown of the protracted conversations between France and Italy

on the subject of naval disarmament. Since the close of the London Conference on April 22, 1930, a number of attempts during the remainder of 1930 and early in 1931 to reach agreement had ended without success. In February and early March 1931, it looked for a time as though with the aid of a British intermediary the negotiations might be successful. However, when the French government learned on March 18 of the Austro-German Zollunion plan, the French used this as an excuse first to protract the discussions and finally to suspend them altogether.

The difficulties that both Italy and Germany were having with France in addition to their common interests in the disarmament question led them to play down the renewed suspicion over Anschluss. Both sides obviously had much to gain from mutual cooperation on disarmament and the final end of reparations payments as a result of the Hoover moratorium and the Lausanne Conference.

In August 1931, the improved cordiality between Germany and Italy was symbolized by the state visit of Chancellor Brüning to Rome. This meeting came off rather well. There was some talk of the Zollunion between Germany and Austria. Mussolini was rather understanding about this question during the discussions. There was also agreement on the forthcoming disarmament talks and a number of details on German-Italian trade relations were worked out between the two leaders without the help of any technical

experts. It was clear that Brüning was preferable as German Chancellor than Stresemann or the other earlier Weimar leaders.⁴⁴

It is of considerable importance that Mussolini supported the Brüning government until its last days in office in 1932. He probably hoped that the Catholic monarchist Brüning would be able to initiate the Hohenzollern restoration that he believed was inevitable. As late as the spring of 1932, Grandi on a trip to Berlin refused to see Hitler because he believed that this would be an insult to Brüning.⁴⁵ Clearly we must keep in mind Mussolini's changed view of the Weimar government as we examine his relationship with the Nazis in the last years of the Republic.

Notes

1. DDI (7) V, no. 228.

2. Werner Freiherr von Rheinbaben, Viermal Deutschland, 1895-1954 (Berlin, 1954), p. 207. On December 24, 1923, the British Ambassador in Berlin wrote "I have heard that the Minister for Foreign Affairs has been sounded through two different channels lately regarding his attitude toward a possible Italian-German alliance. From the Italian side he has been asked what would Germany's attitude be if things became critical between Italy and Yugo-Slavia. He had replied that before entering into any alliance Germany must be in a proper position to make an alliance. At the present moment she was nothing of the kind." Edgar Vincent D'Abernon, An Ambassador of Peace (London, 1930), p. 282.

3. DDI (7) II, no. 405. See also no. 389. This contact was suspected in Berlin. The British Ambassador noted "There is considerable evidence to show that Mussolini is in touch with Nationalist circles and Nationalist organizations in Germany." D'Abernon, op. cit., p. 283.

4. NA: T-120/1385/537560.

5. DDI (7) III, no. 43.

6. De Felice, rapporti, doc. 8, pp. 70-114.

7. Zech's letter to von Neurath is reproduced in Hoepke, op. cit., p. 336. De Felice, rapporti, p. 51 affirms his belief in

Capello's account since the Italian General opposed an agreement.

8. DDI (7) IV no. 66.

9. NA: T-120/4207/L067156-7.

10. NA: T-120/5183/K45839-40.

11. The Italians appeared to have been jealous of their close cooperation with the German military. In October 1929 when the Italians were not invited to a military conference between Germans and Hungarians, they protested to Berlin.

DDI (7) VIII, no. 47.

12. For a South Tyrolese view of Fascist oppression, see Eduard Reut-Nicolussi, Tyrol under the Ax of Italian Fascism (London, 1930).

13. O.O. XVI, pp. 291-93.

14. DDI (7) III, nos. 761, 774, 781.

15. O.O. XXI, pp. 319-20.

16. O.O. XXII, pp. 68-73.

17. O.O. XXII, p. 74.

18. NA: T-120/4207/L066692.

19. Petit Parisien, February 27, 1926.

20. Virginio Gayda, "Politica estera: sintesi di cinque anni," Gerarchia (1927), p. 1043.

21. For a good description of the Heimwehr, which adopted the Fascist corporate doctrine, see Ludwig Jedlicka, "The Austrian Heimwehr", in Journal of Contemporary History vol. 1 (1966) : p. 127-144

22. DDI (7) VIII, no. 382; Guariglia, op. cit., pp. 76-77. Jedlicka, op. cit. p. 134.

23. O. O. XXIII, pp. 116-23.

24. DDI (7) VIII, nos. 11, 65, 337.

25. For further details on the South Tyrol controversy in this period, see Dennison I. Rusinow, Italy's Austrian Heritage (Oxford: 1969) pp. 179-185.

26. Hans W. Gatzke, Stresemann and the Rearmament of Germany (Baltimore:1954) pp. 51-3.

27. Cassels, op. cit. p. 161

28. For evidence of Fascist agents in Switzerland, see Swiss Embassy to German Foreign Office, Sept. 18, 1926, Bonn: Abt. II, Pol. 29/NF, vol. 6.

29. Giampiero Carocci, La politica estera dell'italia fascista (1925-1928) (Bari:1969) pp. 84-9, 292-7.

30. These secret activities were sometimes resented by Italian diplomats. Giorgio Rumi, Alle origini della politica estera fascista 1918-1923 (Bari: 1968) pp. 241-5.

31. There was a great deal of distrust of the Italian agents in Germany. Many observers realized that they could not be trusted. For an example of this, see the informative report of the ever-skeptical Neurath, the German Ambassador in Rome, who wrote to the German Consulates in Milan, Naples and Genoa to inform them that "Fascist circles in Germany approach private persons and offices under the guise of seeking German-Italian contact but are really pushing fascist interests. Caution is advised." Neurath circular February 27, 1925, Bonn: Abt. II, Pol. 29/NF, vol. 2.

32. See Foreign Office to Mannhardt, February 1928, Bonn; Abt. II, Pol. 29/NF, vol. 5; also NA: T-120/3617/K003327, 31, 53-54.

33. NA: T-120/3617/K003319.

34. Ibid., frames K003334, 36, 41, 44.

35. Ibid., frames K003346, 49, 51; see also Munich Police report, November 11, 1927, Bonn: Abt. II, Pol. 29/NF, vol. 5.

36. The Fascist agents in Germany appear to have tried every trick possible in order to get their messages across. They were even accused of offering free Italian lessons in Germany to those who would agree to become fascists. See Report of German Consul General in Milan, January 15, 1930; Reichs-Minister of the Interior to Foreign Office, April 15, 1930. Bonn: Abt. II, Pol. 29/NF, vol. 8.

37. In Cologne a Fascist group was forced to meet in the Italian Consulate because they feared disruption by right-wing

radicals. Report of Oberprasident of Rhine province, von Sybel, Bonn: Abt. II, Pol. 29/NF, vol. 3.

38 . Documents on International Affairs--1930, John W. Wheeler-Bennet, ed. (London, 1931), p. 117.

39 . O.O. XXIV, p. 328.

40 . Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939, ed. E. L. Woodward and Rohan Butler (London, 1947), Series 2, vol. I, no. 220 (hereafter cited as DBFP).

41. F. G. Stambrook, "The German-Austrian Customs Union Project of 1931", in European Diplomacy Between Two Wars 1919-1939, Hans Gatzke, editor (Chicago:1972), p. 98.

42. Guaraglia op. cit. pp. 80-81.

43. For diverse views of Mussolini's aims on disarmament, see Kirkpatrick, op. cit., pp. 276-7; Dennis Mack-Smith, Mussolini's Roman Empire (New York:1975) pp. 30-31.

44. For a complete account of Brüning's version of his trip to Rome, see Heinrich Brüning, Memoiren 1918-1934 (Stuttgart:1970) pp. 354-61.

45. Graham to Simon, June 4, 1932, C 6633/2868/22 in F.O. 371/15986 Public Record Office (hercafter cited as PRO), London.

CHAPTER VII

THE ELECTION OF 1930

For some years after the Capello mission of 1924, Mussolini did not have very extensive contacts with the right-wing political movements in Germany. Although there were close relations between the German and Italian military and there is reason to believe that Fascist Italy may have supplied weapons to rightist elements in Bavaria, there was little contact between Mussolini and the major Nationalist political parties in Germany.¹ The principal reason for this was due to the controversy over the South Tyrol, which dominated German-Italian relations in the 1920s. This controversy placed a wide gulf between Fascism and all the major political parties in the Weimar Republic. After about 1928, however, Mussolini began a policy of moving closer to those elements in Germany which had a compatible platform on certain central issues.

One of the first groups in Germany to develop close relations with Fascist Italy was the Stahlhelm, the right-wing veterans organization. This group looked appealing to Mussolini for a number of reasons. Perhaps most noticeable was that several of its leaders were inclined to a moderate position on the South Tyrol question and actively sought a reconciliation with Fascist Italy

on this issue. In addition, the Stahlhelm's program projected a favorable image by avoiding any fanaticism on other issues such as anti-Semitism. This contrasted favorably to the NSDAP which took such an extreme stand on this question that it created friction with Italian Fascism. Also impressive about the Stahlhelm was its close connection with the Austrian Heimwehr, which was strongly supported by Mussolini.²

Like many other bourgeois conservative groups, the Stahlhelm was attracted to Fascism. As early as 1925, representatives of the movement had visited Italy.³ After 1929, many trips were organized for the purpose of educating the German people about the new Italy. The planning for these excursions was handled by the PNF in order to keep the government involvement a secret.⁴ The leaders of the Stahlhelm also desired an exchange of propaganda films between their group and the Fascist Party. But quite naturally, their greatest wish was for a delegation of their members to be received by the Duce. A leader of the German veterans group enlisted the help of the right-wing Hungarian Defense Minister, Julius Gömbös, who used his influence to get the Stahlhelm official an audience with Mussolini. Eventually, in the fall of 1930, the Duce personally welcomed a delegation of Stahlhelm members after they had laid a wreath at a monument for Fascists killed in the seizure of power. The deputation expressed its gratitude to the Italian dictator for his declaration that

Fascism was an idea for universal application. After returning to Germany, the delegation was reprimanded by President Paul von Hindenburg, who was an honorary member of the Stahlhelm. The organization issued an apologetic reply in which the mission was described as an unauthorized venture by overzealous subordinates, and promised it would not be repeated. But by this time definite links had developed between the Stahlhelm and Fascist Italy.⁵

At about the same time that the Stahlhelm was moving closer to Fascist Italy, the German National Party, with which it was closely allied, also began to take a more favorable view of Mussolini's regime. This party was headed by Alfred Hugenberg, a former director of Krupp, who was also a leading press baron in Germany. Hugenberg took over the DNVP and carried on a more extreme nationalist program that led to the secession of many moderate members. Hugenberg's platform included a more positive attitude toward Fascism, which led to a willingness to end the party's agitation over the South Tyrol question.⁶ In April 1928, in an interview purported to have been given by Mussolini to a representative of Der Tag, a newspaper owned by Hugenberg, both sides displayed an eagerness to reduce the friction over the South Tyrol. The gist of the interview, which appeared on the eve of a general election in Germany, was that the Duce would be most gratified if the elections brought a conservative government to power. This did not happen. But immediately after the

elections of May 1928, the German nationalists gave their promise to Mussolini's agent, Giuseppe Renzetti, that they would discontinue their agitation over the South Tyrol. On May 16, the Leipziger Volkszeitung reported a settlement reached between the German Nationalist Press Department and Signor Renzetti. The agreement specified that the Nationalist press service would remove the question of the South Tyrol from its program. Renzetti would from time to time advise the German National press about conditions in the South Tyrol. The existence of this agreement was confirmed by ex-Crown Prince Fredrick in a discussion with the Italian Ambassador in Berlin in September 1928.⁷

In February 1930, Alberto De Stefani, who was a former Fascist Minister, interviewed Hugenberg while traveling in Germany.⁸ The Nationalist leader disavowed any interest in the South Tyrol question, but instead stressed the common interest of Berlin and Rome against Paris. He also urged closer German-Italian commercial relations. Hugenberg expressed the hope that Germany would eventually develop a system similar to that found in Fascist Italy under the Duce. In viewing the current situation, Hugenberg noted Italy's dependence on coal from the Ruhr valley and stated that Italy's interest would best be served by supporting a Nationalist German policy of expansion into Eastern Europe. On the colonial question, the German leader told De Stefani that both Italy and Germany were countries which needed "living space" and both should

strive for a redistribution of colonial territories that would satisfy their legitimate aspirations. Hugenberg hoped that Germany and Italy could work together for revision without a new European war. Obviously the Nationalist leader was a sincere friend of German-Italian friendship. It is generally agreed that Hugenberg's close alliance with Hitler was a key factor in the Nazi rise to power. The German Nationalist Party's pro-Fascist position was possibly a factor favoring the Harzburg front, in which this party, along with the Stahlhelm, allied with the NSDAP to form a coalition powerful enough to gain control of the government in Germany.

It was, of course, inevitable during this period that just as Fascist Italy was moving closer to the Stahlhelm and the German National Party, it would also move closer to the Nazi movement. But for many years Nazi-Fascist contacts were not very frequent. With the exception of Goering's trip and the contacts revealed in his letters, relations between Fascist Italy and the NSDAP were not particularly close between 1923 and 1927. This movement was considered less important by most Fascists than the other prominent right-wing groups in Germany. In October 1927, Dr. Caetano Lorenzo Biseo, a Fascist agent in Germany, wrote in a report that the German right could be a "rather serious ally," having distanced itself from the "charlatan direction of Hitler and Ludendorff."⁹ The Nazi leader, of course, tried to interest Fascist

agents in Germany of the importance of the NSDAP and its usefulness to Mussolini's regime.

On December 12, 1927, the Fuehrer spoke to the Marquis Francesco Antinori in Berlin¹⁰, mainly about the common interest of Italy and Germany in foreign policy. Hitler saw no clash of interest between the two countries on the colonial question. They did face a common danger in France, which Hitler believed was subjecting a chain of vassal states from the Baltic to the Aegean. Hitler was alarmed over the situation in Vienna, which, he stated, was falling more and more under French influence through certain "Hebraic-Masonic" currents.

But Hitler's greatest concern was over Czechoslovakia, in his view the most important link in the chain directed against Germany and Italy. It was his contention that instead of aiming propaganda against the Alto Adige, Germany should have channeled her efforts at freeing four million co-nationals living in Bohemia. He cited the growth of the Nazi movement in that province and indicated the possibility that it would cause more and more trouble for the government in Prague.

Most interesting was Hitler's desire to involve Italy in the situation in Czechoslovakia. He offered to put Antinori or any other agents in touch with the leaders of the Nazi movement in Czechoslovakia. Hitler obviously realized that Mussolini had a particular hatred of the democratic Czechs, and he saw their country as a fertile area for Nazi-Fascist cooperation. Nothing came of this offer, but about ten years later,

Mussolini was to prove himself useful to Hitler in resolving the situation in Czechoslovakia in a way that was favorable to Germany.

The Nazi leader was also prophetic in his assertion that there would soon be a serious crisis in Germany that would help accumulate support for the NSDAP. The interview ended with one of Hitler's usual attacks against Stresemann, whom he blamed for poor German-Italian relations. This of course was a reference to the South Tyrol situation, the recurring theme of German-Italian as well as Nazi-Fascist relations during this period.

This was especially clear in the interview Hitler had with Ettore Tolomei in August 1928. There are a number of different versions of this meeting. First there is a report made by Tolomei in 1938; there is the version in the Senator's memoirs and an account by Luigi Aldrovandi-Marescotti, the Italian ambassador in Germany¹¹. But perhaps the most reliable description is contained in a letter which Tolomei sent to Mussolini in September 1928, in which he gave a report on the meeting while it was still fresh in his mind.¹² Tolomei's various accounts are generally contradicted by Aldrovandi-Marescotti, who tends to attribute a much firmer attitude to Hitler than does the Senator. Perhaps both of the Italian personalities genuinely believed their own accounts. It was typical of Hitler to appear to be all things to all men and allow them to believe what it was in their interest to accept.

The meeting took place at the instigation of Tolomei,

surely not acting without orders from above. The choice of this famous advocate of a harsh policy in the Alto Adige as a Fascist representative to meet Hitler appears rather strange. The motivating strategy may have been to test Hitler's sincerity, since a renunciation on his part of the South Tyrol to Senator Tolomei could be considered a firm commitment which could not easily be denied later on. Mussolini may have wished to see if the Fuehrer could resist the temptation to play the role of a German nationalist to a man who was the symbol of the repression of a German minority living under alien rule. At any rate, a report by Tolomei would be a valuable addition to Mussolini's intelligence about a potentially useful German political leader. Indeed, Tolomei was very impressed with Hitler. He saw the Fuehrer as an energetic leader who wished to rule Germany.¹³

Hitler expressed a great desire to have Italy as Germany's ally. According to Tolomei, he placed a great value on Italy as a world political factor. The Nazi leader expressed appreciation for Mussolini's support of revision of the Versailles Treaty. He believed that Italy and Germany could work together in the fields of disarmament, reparations, and colonial questions. There was no doubt that Hitler believed that a German-Italian alliance should be aimed against France.¹⁴ In order to get this desirable alliance, Hitler was willing to give up all German claims in the South Tyrol. He made it clear that since an accord with Italy was a basic condition

of his plans, a renunciation of all territory south of the Brenner pass was an absolute necessity for the NSDAP. The South Tyrol, he affirmed, would soon be so Italianized that the Pan-Germans would be forced to give it up for lost. The Nazi leader urged stronger Italian control of German newspapers that ran derogatory reports of Italian suppression of the minority in the Alto Adige. Aldrovandi-Marescotti's report contains the observation that Hitler opposed the energetic measures taken against the South Tyrolese which would poison the atmosphere for German-Italian relations. In this version Hitler condemned the forcible assimilation as a serious error on the part of the Fascist government. He urged a more moderate policy that would lead to a gradual natural Italianization of the region. None of Tolomei's accounts contain any denunciations by Hitler of Italian policy in the Alto Adige. Aldrovandi-Marescotti maintains that Hitler opposed the removal of Walther von der Vogelweide's statue. But all of Tolomei's accounts affirm that Hitler approved of the removal of the Tyrolese hero's monument which would be replaced by Drusus, the Italian hero. This may seem like a trivial question, but it should not be forgotten that rumors that Walther's statue was removed had caused a crisis in Italian-German relations in the same year of 1928. In retrospect, Tolomei's account is more believable, since the Italian Senator would have no reason to lie, especially in a direct report to Mussolini a few weeks after the

meeting. Perhaps the Nazi leader suggested tact in such a delicate matter, and Aldrovani-Marescotti exaggerated his vehemence. If Hitler had insulted the Senator, as suggested by the Ambassador, it is doubtful that Tolomei would have made such a glowing report on the Fuehrer.

On the question of the Anschluss, all accounts seem to agree that Hitler took a moderate tone affirming that it was a natural and unavoidable process. Aldrovandi-Marescotti asserts that Hitler added that if Italy opposed the Anschluss, it would drive Austria into the hands of France and the Little Entente. But even his version leads to the conclusion that Hitler was not demanding an Anschluss as a price for surrender of the South Tyrol. The clear implication is that as long as Italy did not actively oppose the union of Germany and Austria, the forces of history would bring this to pass. In his letter to Mussolini, Tolomei states that Hitler thought that the Anschluss might not take place for some time, but here again, Hitler stressed that it is a natural unavoidable process.

As was his usual custom, Hitler expressed a wish to meet Mussolini. But on this occasion, he qualified his request with the proviso that it might be best to postpone such an interview until he had gained wider support in Germany. During these years Hitler was torn by a desire to meet the Duce and a consciousness of his need to be in a stronger

position before this could come about. The mention of a Hitler-Mussolini meeting at this time did not have any direct consequence. Neither was there any other result from Tolomei's discussion with the Nazi Fuehrer. There was no promise of financial aid nor was any inducement offered in exchange for Hitler's renunciation of the South Tyrol. The interview was simply one of many contacts in the discontinuous relations between Nazis and Fascists in the period before the NSDAP gained a wide following in Germany.

But many of Hitler's opponents used his support of Italian rule in the South Tyrol as proof of their charges that the NSDAP was receiving Fascist financial support. This was particularly true in the elections of May 1928, when the Nazi Party spent a conspicuously large amount of money. A number of newspapers of various political persuasions, such as the Bayerischer Kurier, the Münchener Post, and the Deutsche Tageblatt, printed articles accusing the NSDAP of getting substantial contributions from the Italian government. Among the accusers was Albrecht von Graefe-Goldebbe, who had been Hitler's ally in 1923-24 and then broke with him. In 1929, Hitler brought Graefe and several Social Democrats to court for making false charges against him. At the trial, the Nazi Fuehrer justified his South Tyrol policy by power political considerations. He said that friendship between Italy and Germany was absolutely necessary because it would

improve Germany's world position. He told the court he was also acting in the interest of the South Tyrolese, whose condition could only be upgraded by improved German-Italian relations. Hitler stated that this had been his view in 1920, when he barely knew the name of Fascism. The charge of being paid for adopting this policy was an insufferable insult. Max Amann, Hitler's sergeant during World War I, confirmed that while he was still a soldier at the front, the future Nazi leader had already criticized the government for not seeking ties with Italy. Naturally, other Nazi witnesses knew nothing about Italian money that Hitler had allegedly received in 1923.

Fascist diplomats followed this trial very closely.¹⁵ The Italian press also took an interest in the proceedings.¹⁶ At the beginning of the trial, Eugenio Morreale, the Vienna correspondent of Il Popolo d'Italia, came to Munich, where he interviewed Hitler on May 8, 1929. In his report,¹⁷ Morreale described Hitler as the man of the future who was the head of a party of two million, including a force of 800,000 S.A. members. He compared favorably the 12 NSDAP Reichstag members to the 35 Fascist deputies at the time when the March on Rome began. During the interview, Hitler expounded his view of a future German-Italian alliance. France, as always, was the common enemy. Of particular interest, however, was Hitler's playing down of the significance of anti-Semitism in domestic politics. He

characterized his statements against the Jews as primarily of tactical importance.¹⁸ He also expressed his conviction that the NSDAP would soon come to power.

During the proceedings, von Graefe accused Hitler of being an ideological and financial lackey of Mussolini. He claimed this dependence was known to the German Embassy in Rome.¹⁹ One of his witnesses, Wilhelm von Brehem, a Berlin anti-Semite, stated that in 1927 he had met high functionaries of the Fascist secret service. They informed him of donations by Mussolini of substantial sums to the Nazis. Brehem was told that this money was given because of the NSDAP's South Tyrol policy.²⁰

Another witness at the trial was Werner Abel, who claimed to have introduced Hitler in 1923 to Captain Giuseppe Migliorati, was attached to the Italian Embassy in Berlin. Abel, who had claimed that he had acted as a middle man between Migliorati in the disbursement of funds used in the abortive Munich Putsch. The NSDAP supposedly received 60,000 gold marks on condition that they renounce German claims to the South Tyrol. Abel, however, had a police record for various offenses, and had served six months in jail in 1920 on a conviction for swindle. Hitler brought him to trial for perjury and the proceedings dragged on into 1932. Ultimately he was sentenced to three years of hard labor. Hitler also won the original case against Graefe and other defendants. All five were sentenced to fines of up to 800-1,000

marks for slander against the NSDAP. It should be noted, however, that the court was prejudiced in favor of the Nazis, so that the judgement was meaningless.

As mentioned, Italian diplomats followed Hitler's trial very carefully. On February 19, 1930, a press aide at the Italian Embassy in Berlin interviewed Goering, who spoke about the libel proceedings. Goering denied the truth of Abel's testimony and complained that the Fascist regime had made no effort to refute Abel's accusations. He stated that the silence of the government about Abel's statements gave the impression that he was speaking the truth. A few days later, his complaint was passed on to Mussolini. The Italian Foreign Office informed the Embassy that Abel's story was "an old legend." The Italian government would not issue any official denial, since it felt that this would draw attention to the issue and initiate a long polemical debate. On April 14, 1930, Renzetti spoke to Hitler, who stressed that he had used the trial to speak favorably about Fascist Italy. The Fuehrer emphatically denied Abel's charges and stated his belief in a favorable outcome of the proceedings.²¹

The evidence from the Italian documents suggests that during this period the Italian diplomats, at least, were not informed of any financial help given to the NSDAP. But any monetary aid was passed on through Fascist agents rather than the diplomatic corps. The Duce is known to have withheld confidence from diplomats in such matters. In 1924, Giuliano Cora, an Italian diplomat in Munich, had been forced to resign over his opposition the disbursement of funds to the NSDAP.²²

In Rome many chief diplomats were unaware of Mussolini's involvement with the German right.²³ Most Italian diplomats were not Fascists but conservative aristocrats. Between them and the various Fascist agents, there was considerable distrust. It is understandable that Mussolini would not let them in on any financial support of the Nazi Party.

We can assume the Duce did not issue any sweeping, firm, categorical denial of having given money to the Nazi Party because he obviously wished to protect himself from any charge of duplicity if one of his agents were caught or if evidence were brought up at the trial definitely linking Fascist Italy to the NSDAP. He wished to leave the door open so that he could claim that his subordinates were acting without his approval;

then he could launch an investigation to expose what he would portray as his overzealous agents. Such a position would be less tenable if he had already issued a categorical denial which would supposedly have been based on an investigation of the Fascist agents in Germany.

There is much evidence to suspect that certain Fascist intermediaries in Germany could have been providing financial support to the NSDAP. One such possible individual was the Fascist agent Benuzzi. He was described by the German Embassy in Rome as the "Italian liaison with the Hitler circle." He was said "to have access to considerable sums of money."²⁴ Mussolini, of course, had many other agents in Germany, any

one of whom could have given money to the Nazis, either on orders or acting on their own initiative. Whether such aid was given systematically or on a sporadic basis is impossible to say, but it is hard to believe that no money changed hands between the PNF and the NSDAP. Cassels offers a great deal of evidence to suggest that in the period from 1924-1932, Hitler was being²⁵ financed by Mussolini. He cites the testimony of Prussian Premier Otto Braun, SS General Karl Wolff (who served in Italy in World War II), as well as the Italian diplomat Raffaele Guraglia. In addition he mentions a trial in Rome of an official who was accused of embezzlement. When it became clear that the missing funds were intended for Hitler, the trial was concluded in secret.

If we add to this the testimony of Giuliano Cora, the evidence given at the trials in Germany, as well as the various German police reports, there would appear to be considerable²⁶ evidence to support those historians who contend that Hitler received money from Fascist Italy. It is of some interest that Ambassador Neurath in Rome changed his opinion and in the late 1920s²⁷ believed that Mussolini was helping the Nazis. Certainly the evidence for Fascist support of Hitler's rise to power is even more conclusive than that for Mussolini's support of the Munich Putsch.

Of course too much should not be made of Mussolini's support of the NSDAP. He was obviously also helping other groups in Germany. His assistance of the NSDAP was only an insurance policy

in the event that the group should come to power. It certainly did not signify any special relationship. It is probable that Fascist aid to Hitler increased in 1930, in anticipation of the all-important election in which the Nazis were expected to gain support.

In the months before the election of September 1930 there was an intensification of contact between Italian diplomats and Fascist agents with Hitler and other leaders of the NSDAP. On February 14, 1930, the Fuehrer met with Count Giovanni Capasso²⁸ Torre, the Italian consul in Munich. At this session Hitler spoke on a wide range of subjects. He predicted victory for the Nazi Party but affirmed that it might take several years. Such a conservative tone was odd, because the onset of the depression had by all accounts increased his chances for victory greatly. The Fuehrer pointed out that his views on an Italian-German rapprochement were now shared by the German National Party as well as the Stahlhelm. This, of course, was true. He also stated that Fascism and Nazism stood on the same platform, since both rejected liberalism and the Western democratic principles. In foreign affairs, Hitler spoke in favor of a Rome-London-Berlin alliance. France, he said, was the common enemy of all three powers. Torre noted an article in the Voelkischer Beobachter supporting²⁹ Italy's proposal at the London Naval Conference. Hitler said Italy's claim for naval parity with France was profoundly shared

by the NSDAP. On the South Tyrol, Hitler declared to Capasso Torre that the annexation of this region to Germany was absolutely impossible. It was purely and simply an internal Italian question. But significantly he noted that Italy had made a mistake in 1919 when she opposed the union of Austria with Germany. This would have rendered the South Tyrol a minor issue.

In July 1930, Hitler had several more meetings with Italian representatives. On July 24, he had an interview with Luigi Federzoni, President of the Italian Senate. They talked for several hours at Bayreuth.³⁰ Along with his usual declarations on the South Tyrol, Hitler disclaimed any interest in overseas colonies as long as Germany could expand into Eastern Europe. Such a development would not be contrary to Italian interests, he insisted. In another interview with an Italian diplomat several days later, Hitler expressed the hope that he could gain 50 seats. Wilhelm Frick, who was at the meeting, indicated that the Nazis would ask for the Ministry of Interior. By this time the Fuehrer had gained considerable confidence and spoke with conviction of eventually gaining power.³¹

The actual Nazi victory in September 1930 was far larger than expected. The NSDAP gained 95 seats, bringing their total to 107, making it the second largest party in the country. Many Nazi votes came, of course, from millions who were suffering the effects of the depression, which was the great opportunity for

which Hitler had been waiting. Hitler's victory and newly found position as a leading political figure did not decrease his desire for close ties with Fascist Italy. Two days after the election, he spoke to the Italian Consul in Munich. He told Capasso Torre that his party retained its firm loyalty to the alliance with Italy. However, he quite naturally suggested a more moderate Italian policy in the South Tyrol because his position had exposed him to charges of treason by his opponents in the campaign.³² This suggestion was not, as it might appear, a hedging of the NSDAP position on the South Tyrol. Surely his pro-Italian stance had cost him votes in the election and left him vulnerable to attack as a traitor to his own nationalistic pronouncements. There were no votes to be gained in his position, since Italy was unpopular with most segments of the electorate for various reasons. He had even publicly moderated his anti-Semitic position in order to gain votes, but this was not to happen on the Italian question. On September 27, 1930, Hitler made a public declaration in which he stated that the friendship of a great nation like Italy must not be disturbed on account of the South Tyrol. In October 1930, when Gustave Herves proposed to Hitler a Franco-German agreement, the Nazi Fuehrer refused, citing among other reasons his dutiful loyalty toward Italy.³³

But whereas Hitler maintained a consistent attitude toward Italy in this period, the Fascist press altered its view of Nazism on several occasions. It has been observed that little is

known about the reaction of the Italian press to the rise of the NSDAP.³⁴ An examination of the Italian press in this period reveals an interesting pattern. Before the election of September 1930, the NSDAP was not judged favorably by most newspapers and political journals in Fascist Italy. In an article in Cerarchia in 1929, Hitler was called a "pseudo-fascist."³⁵ At about the same time, Il Popolo d'Italia compared Fascism and Nazism. It expressed sympathy because of the Nazi position on the South Tyrol and because of its general pro-Italian position. But it contrasted the NSDAP with the PNF. In particular it noted that the Nazis used the tactics of the despised left-wing parties which it claimed the Fascists had avoided.³⁶

Also at about this time, the Corriere della Sera printed a careful analysis of the Hitler movement. Although it noted the pro-Italian position of the NSDAP, it refused to abandon itself in "excessive enthusiasm," not only because of the party's small following but also because Hitler's propaganda was essentially German. Hitler wished an alliance with Italy only to serve Germany's purpose of revenge against France. On the South Tyrol issue it was equally restrained in its praise of Hitler. The Fascist newspaper was offended by the Nazi leader's declaration to "sacrifice 200,000 Germans of the Alto Adige in order to obtain an alliance with Italy." In the Italian view, "it is not a question of sacrificing anyone but of abandoning an altogether artificial agitation."³⁷

In an article on August 24, 1930, the Corriere della Sera

examined the NSDAP on the eve of the election. It noted that the Nazi Party had a great appeal to the youth. The Nazi youth organizations were credited with providing a needed set of values for the postwar generation. But the principles of the NSDAP were noted with considerable apprehension. It stated, "The program of Hitler's partisans is so extremist that to some it can also appear dangerous."³⁸ Listed in this category were confiscation of war profits, nationalization of industry, and exclusion of Jews from citizenship. In the area of foreign affairs the Corriere della Sera was alarmed by the Nazis' wish to revoke the Treaty restrictions and unite all Germans in a greater Reich.

After the election, overnight Hitler became a politician of European importance. Foreign correspondents from many countries flocked to interview him. The London Times printed his assurances of goodwill at length. The Daily Mail welcomed Hitler's success as a reinforcement of the defense against Communism. In Italy most of the immediate reaction was positive, since the scope of the Nazi victory created for the first time the possibility that a kindred movement would take control of another large European state. An article in the September issue of Gerarchia by Guiseppe Bevione saw a number of similarities between the Nazis and the PNF. Hitler's popularity with the youth was one evident similarity. The author compares the NSDAP victory against Stresemann's conciliatory policy with France. It was a

defeat for liberal democracy. Bevione indicated that "within certain limits" Hitler's success was a triumph for Italian Fascism. The article ended with the words "The Fascist idea moves forward in the world."³⁹

The Corriere della Sera on September 16 took a tone which was noticeably different from what it printed before the election. It called the Nazi victory "very positive and truly impressive." It now characterized the Nazi program as lively and active.⁴⁰ Another article several months later continued to credit the Nazis with a positive approach. The NSDAP was praised for declining to form a negative opposition group in the Reichstag. Cooperation between the Nazis and other parties was stressed.⁴¹ A similar tone was taken by the Critica Fascista. Hitler's success was seen as a victory for the traditional German policy of revision of the Versailles Treaty. The Nazi policy was portrayed as a continuation of the goals desired by every other moderate and conservative group since the founding of the Weimar Republic. In the words of the article, "Ebert, Hindenburg, Müller, Stresemann and Hitler represent diverse groups . . . but their aims are the same, in all there is a sense of national dignity, a sentiment for unity and an awareness of the destiny of their people."⁴²

One of the most interesting discussions of Nazism in the Italian press was a series of articles debating the NSDAP which ran in a leading Fascist journal in 1931. The editor of Anti-europa, Asvero Gravelli, had serious reservations about the Hitler

movement.⁴³ The debate centered around Anton Hilckman, a German Catholic leader who wrote an open letter to Gravelli on the subject "Is German Fascism anti-Roman?"⁴⁴ Hilckman saw Nazism as being basically pagan and anti-Catholic. Hilckman was answered, among others, by Alfred Rosenberg.⁴⁵ The Nazi ideologue denied that Nazism wished to introduce a new pagan cult. According to him the NSDAP favored religious freedom for both Catholics and Protestants. He admitted, however, that the Nazis believed in a culture that would be German and not Latin. Thus he opposed Catholics like Hilckman who saw themselves as Latin first and German second.

Another contributor was Johannes Stark, a Nobel Prize winning scientist who was a dedicated Nazi. He had written a book on the Nazi Party and the Catholic Church. Naturally, he took the position that the NSDAP was not hostile to the Catholic Church.⁴⁶

Antieuropa also published a letter by Dr. Hans Reupke, a Nazi intellectual and expert on Fascist Italy. He asserted that National Socialism wished to save Europe from the danger of liberal democracy. This is what it was aimed against and not the Catholic Church, which the NSDAP saw as a positive force.⁴⁷

A number of German intellectuals contributed articles to Antieuropa which were very critical of Nazism. Most were conservatives who were friendly to Fascist Italy and wished to demonstrate that the NSDAP had little in common with the PNF. They included Alfred Missong, a leading Catholic journalist, and several

professors. The most important article of the series was Hilckman's second titled "National Socialism: A Danger for Western Civilization."⁴⁸ It was nothing less than a scathing attack on Nazism, which it compared most unfavorably to Italian Fascism. Hilckman saw Nazism as anti-Western. He saw the Christian Church as a bulwark of Western European civilization against American materialism and Russian atheistic communism. Christianity had originally westernized northern Germanic Europe but Nazism is anti-Christian and thus represents a danger to Western civilization. Besides being anti-Christian, Nazism is also racist, which is equally dangerous. Hilckman pointed to the philosophy of Rosenberg as an example of the anti-Western tendencies in Nazism. Of particular danger is the "spiritual Wotanism" of the NSDAP, which seeks to replace Western values with a barbaric system of values based on violence and race. The major point of the article is that Fascism and Nazism have very little in common. The concordat between Mussolini and the Vatican is refuted by Hitler, according to Hilckman. He admits certain superficial similarities such as opposition to parliamentary institutions and Marxism, but in spiritual and philosophical matters the Nazis have a greater affinity to the communists. According to Hilckman the reason why the Nazis have been so successful was the spiritually depressed condition of the German people. This, of course, was compounded by the foreign political situation and the domestic economic

problem. Hilckman ended his essay by asserting the hope that the West would find other forces besides Nazism to unite around in order to face barbaric eastern communism. It is significant that a major Fascist journal would publish an article of this type. It reflected a deep feeling of uneasiness on the part of many Fascists about the Nazi attitude toward race and religion.

Hitler was criticized from another direction by Curzio Malaparte, a key intellectual figure in Fascist Italy. In a book which appeared in Germany,⁴⁹ he accused Hitler of cowardly hesitation, of being a caricature of Mussolini, and of being a hindrance to the revolution he had helped start. Malaparte strongly disliked Hitler's policy of legalism which avoided the use of violence for seizing power. The implication was, of course, that this compared unfavorably to Mussolini's March on Rome of 1922. The book was used against Hitler in Germany. It was said that the Fuehrer was disturbed by this work since he was temperamentally inclined to seize power through bloody revolution but was forced by circumstances to use parliamentary tactics. In later years he lamented the fact that Italian Fascism had spilled more blood in seizing power than had his own movement.

Also irritating were the personal remarks which Malaparte made about Hitler. The Nazi leader was compared to an Austrian clerk or waiter. Malaparte portrayed him as a weak man who attempted to hide his shortcomings in a brutal exterior pose. Particularly offensive to Hitler was the description of him being "profoundly feminine." Prophetically, Malaparte predicted that the rigid control over freedom of thought and culture within the Nazi movement during the rise to power foreshadowed the eventual suppression of German culture as a whole. Mussolini forbade the publication of the book

in Italy and apologized to Hitler via the Italian Embassy in Berlin.⁵⁰

The Duce's own attitude toward the NSDAP after their victory of September 1930 is, of course, of considerable importance. Before the Nazi triumph, Mussolini tended to stress that Fascism was a uniquely Italian experiment which was not related to any foreign movement. On March 3, 1928, he stated, "Fascism isn't an article for export."⁵¹ At that time, Mussolini wished to disassociate himself publicly from his foreign imitators, including the German Nazis. In May, 1930, in an interview with Theodore Wolff of the Berliner Tageblatt, he stated that he "doesn't know Fascism outside Italy. Fascism is authoritarian democracy, it isn't an article for export, he doesn't acknowledge any imitators, and has nothing in common with foreigners who declare themselves his partisans."⁵²

But the Nazi success made it expedient to assert the universalist tendency in Fascism. Mussolini now declared that Fascism was:

universal in idea, in doctrine and in realization. . . A fascist Europe lies ahead, a Europe which draws its institutions from the theory and practice of Fascism. . . . Fascism corresponds today to exigencies of a world-wide character.⁵³

On October 27, 1930, Mussolini affirmed: "The sentence that fascism is not merchandise for exportation isn't mine. It's too banal. . . . Today I affirm that fascism as an idea, a doctrine, as action is universal."⁵⁴

Hitler's emergence as a major political force in Europe created a very interesting situation for Mussolini. After September 1930 everyone realized the possibility that a government would take power in Berlin which would demand a revision of the Versailles settlement. Thus Germany could more effectively play the role which Mussolini had hoped that she would in the 1920s. The danger of a Hitler regime made Mussolini's help more valuable to the British and French and created a very desirable diversion. How genuinely Mussolini really desired a Nazi government in Berlin is, of course, another question. The negative attitudes expressed in the Fascist newspapers and journals would not have been possible without the Duce's consent.

It is quite probable that the press reflected to a large degree Mussolini's personal attitude. He had begun his career as a journalist. He always took a personal interest in the press. Its general trends on major issues elicited his personal supervision. The burst of enthusiasm immediately after the Nazi victory probably reflected his own spontaneous reaction in September 1930. The various articles printed afterwards that question the affinity of Nazism to Fascism also probably reflect Mussolini's private thoughts, although Hilckman's articles and Malaparte's book went too far in their negative evaluation of Hitlerism. Nonetheless, there can be little doubt that despite some of his public statements Mussolini regarded the advent of Hitler as a major force in European affairs, as a mixed blessing.

Notes

1. On February 10, 1926, the Police Chief of Berlin exaggerated somewhat when he reported "there are no relations between the Fascist organization in Germany and German political circles, since such relations were broken off after the Hitler Putsch in 1923." Bonn: Abt. II, Pol. 29/NF, vol. 3.

2. DDI (7) VIII, no. 420, De Felice, rapporti, docs. 10, 11. An article in a Fascist journal described the program of the Stahlhelm, which was opposed to Marxism, Liberalism, individualism, and materialism. The Stahlhelm favored corporatism but of a different type from Fascist Italy, since it would be decentralized and based on craft guilds. See "Che cosa vogliono gli 'Elmi d'acciaio'," Antieuropa (1931), pp. 1735-48.

3. See German Embassy report, December 28, 1925. Bonn: Abt. II, Pol. 29/NF, vol. 3.

4. DDI (7) VIII, no. 492. In November 1929 a Stahlhelm study group visited Rome on a trip organized by Fascist student organizations. Secretary-General of the PNF, Augusto Turati, received the group personally. The "Berliner Tageblatt" protested against the visit. On November 22, 1929, Il Giornale D'Italia countered against the German criticism of the trip. The Italian newspaper noted that the Stahlhelm could not be engaged in treason against the state since President Hindenburg was an honorary member. See reports by German Embassy in Bonn: Abt. II, Pol. 29A, Die Beziehungen des Stahlhelm zum Faschismus, vol. 1.

5. DDI (7) VIII, no. 340, German Embassy reports to Foreign Office, November 14, 18, 1930. Bonn: Abt. II, Pol. 29A, Stahlhelm.

6. For a generally favorable Fascist opinion of Hugenberg, see "Il labirinto Tedesco," by A. Spainini, in Gerarchia (1929), 639-69.

7. DDI (7) VII, no. 14; Peterson, op. cit., pp. 28-29. After this agreement the German nationalists tended to take a more favorable view of Fascist Italy. In March 1929, a Nationalist deputy demanded reform of the Reichstag by copying the system in Fascist Italy of a strong executive. Verhandlungen des Reichstages (Wahlperiod, 1930), vol. 424, p. 1365.

8. De Felice, rapporti, doc. 9.

9. NA: T-586/1296/113305-6; for evidence from German sources that Biseo was in contact with Hitler, see NA: T-120/3617/K003319, 3333.

10. DDI(7) V no. 680

11. For Tolomei's 1938 report, see De Felice, rapporti, doc. 16. See also Ettore Tolomei, Memoria di Vita (Rome, 1948), pp. 512-13, and Aldrovandi-Marescotti's report in Giorgio Pini and Duilio Susmel, Mussolini L'uomo e l'opera, vol. III (Florence 1953), p. 447.

12. Ritschel, op. cit. pp. 133-137

13. In his accounts written in 1938 and 1948, Tolomei states that at the 1928 meeting he felt that Hitler would some day rule Germany. De Felice, rapporti, doc. 16; Tolomei, op. cit., p. 513.

14. Ritschel op. cit., p. 133-137; Tolomei, op. cit., p. 513.

15. DDI (7) VII, nos. 401, 409.

16. "The Hitler trial has aroused the attention of the Italian public to the interesting National Socialist movement in Germany, about which the left wing press has spread much inaccurate information " CdS, May 22, 1929.

17. DDI(7) VII no. 413

18. Hitler's efforts to portray himself as a moderate to the Italians was apparently a success, since Mussolini's agent Renzetti, in a report in April 1930, contrasted Hitler to his radical followers Goering, Goebbels, and Strasser. De Felice, rapporti, doc. 10.

19. Von Graefe approached the Wilhelmstrasse and the police several times in order to get evidence of Hitler's financial relations with Fascist Italy, but he could find no substantial information since the German Foreign Office denied his accusations. NA: T-120/3617/K003358-60. There is some evidence, however, that German diplomats were at least aware of clandestine Nazi-Fascist cooperation of a nonfinancial nature. German diplomatic sources reported that a South Tyrolean in Munich who wished to return home was instructed by a Fascist agent, De Fiori, to obtain a certificate from the Nazi Party that he upheld the NSDAP position on the South Tyrol issue. NA: T-120/4207/L067497.

20. NA: T-120/2582/E326357-8.

21. DDI(7) VIII nos. 377. 384. 424, 492.
22. Cora, op. cit. pp. 90-91.
23. DDI(7) II no. 2.
24. NA: T-120/3617/K003361.
25. Cassels, op. cit. p. 354.
26. Mack-Smith op. cit. p. 49, Gaetano Salvemini, Mussolini diplomatico 1922-1932 (Bari, 1952) p. 61; Cassels, op. cit. p. 354.
27. NA: T-120/4154/152086
28. DDI(7) VIII no. 367.
29. Probably Hitler's own article, "Die Hintergründe der Londoner Flottenkonferenz," VB, January 29, 1930.
30. Federzoni, op. cit., p. 127.
31. De Felice, rapporti, doc. 18.
32. Ibid., doc. 19.
33. "Herves Telegramm an Hitler," VB, October 24, 1930.
34. Peterson, op. cit., p. 42.
35. Gerarchia (1929), 641.
36. Il Popolo d'Italia, August 8, 1929.
37. CdS, May 9, 1929.
38. CdS, August 24, 1930.
39. Gerarchia (1930), pp. 706-7.
40. CdS, September 16, 1930.
41. CdS, November 16, 1930.
42. Critica Fascista, October 1, 1930, pp. 364-5.
43. After the election of September 1930, Gravelli contacted the Stahlhelm and the Heimwehr in order to form Fascist International. He acted under Mussolini's direction. Gravelli

did not include the Nazis because he had a low opinion of them. This was due in part to the Nordic racism of Alfred Rosenberg. ACS: Segreteria particolare del Duce, Carteggio Riservato Fasc. 312/R "Gravelli, Asvero."

44. Antieuropa (1931), pp. 1731-33.
45. Ibid., pp. 1810-12.
46. Ibid., pp. 1826-28.
47. Ibid., pp. 1842-43.
48. Ibid., pp. 2045-65.
49. Curzio Malaparte, Der Staatsstreich (Leipzig, 1932)
50. For Mussolini's apology to Hitler, see ACS: Segreteria del Duce, Carteggio ris. (1922-43) fasc. 442/R, "Adolf Hitler."
51. O. O. XXIII, p. 122.
52. O. O. XXIV, p. 224.
53. O. O. XXIV, p. 283. At about this time, Mussolini wrote an article on Fascism in which he stated: "If each century has its own doctrine, from 1,000 indicators it appears today that the doctrine of the present century is fascism. . . . Fascism has by now the universality of all doctrines that become realized and represent a moment in the history of the human spirit." O. O. XXXIV, p. 131.
54. O. O. XXIV, pp. 282-83. It should be noted that Mussolini had made various statements before September 1930 which indicated a tendency to see Fascism as universal in application. See his speech on May 26, 1929, O. O. XXIII, p. 139.

CHAPTER VIII

THE NSDAP IN ITALY

It is not generally realized that the NSDAP set up groups for citizens of the Reich living in foreign countries several years before its seizure of power in Germany. By 1933, there were over 230 such local units in a number of countries with German residents. The Nazis were proud that they had begun to set up a foreign organization before the Machtergreifung while the Fascists did not set up similar groups until several years after the March on Rome.¹ However, most of the NSDAP local units were established on the eve of the Nazi seizure of power. Up to the election of September 1930, the Nazi Party abroad counted only about 300 members. It was not until 1931 that these groups became a widespread phenomenon. For our purposes, of course, what is of greatest interest is the network of local cells which was established in Italy in the early 1930s.

Although Raffaele Guariglia states that there were organized Nazi units in Italy in 1929, the evidence indicates that the first steps were not taken until 1930. In July of that year negotiations were begun in Hamburg between Ludwig Karl Strieder of the Italian section of the NSDAP Auslandsabteilung [Foreign Office] and Paolo Berzanti, the Italian Consul at Hamburg. The

aim of the discussion was the establishment of a Landesgruppe [national organization] for all of the Nazi party members in Italy. In October Berzanti met with Gregor Strasser, head of the administrative department of the NSDAP and as such in charge of party foreign affairs. The Consul discussed with Strasser questions related to the Nazi party cells in Italy. While these talks were in progress, Adolf Dresler, member of the political office of the NSDAP, arrived in Rome to set up a Nazi press bureau. His visit may really have been more political than journalistic. There is some indication that he was able to make low-level contacts, probably in connection with the formation of Nazi party groups in Italy.²

On May 1, 1931, the foreign affairs section of the NSDAP opened its own headquarters in Hamburg with Dr. Hans Nieland as its head. Nazi cells had already been established in Switzerland and the United States. One by one in the course of 1931, local groups were established in Italy with the consent of the Italian authorities. Gaining permission was not without difficulty because the existence of political parties, domestic or foreign, other than the Fascist Party was forbidden in Italy. Furthermore, the presence of the Nazi groups risked Mussolini's relations with the Weimar Republic since the German government could claim that Italy was being used as a base for hostile activity by an opposition party. But the Fascist government accepted the risks and by the beginning of 1932, the NSDAP was firmly established in

Italy. On February 3, 1932, Heinrich Brand was nominated as Landesleiter with jurisdiction over all the Nazi cells in Italy. His headquarters was in Venice and he reported directly to Strasser.³

Nazi Ortsgruppen were established in Bolzano, Como, Florence, Genoa, Milan, Naples, Rome, Turin, and Trieste. Other smaller units called Stützpunkte were formed in Bologna, San Remo, Palermo, Positano, and several other towns with German populations. These groups were open to German citizens living in Italy, but not South Tyroleans or other German-speaking Italian nationals. Traditionally, there have been many Germans residents in Italy. Many were students studying art, history, and other subjects. Some were businessmen who constituted an important element in Italy's industry, trade, and banking system. Many like the Walther family in Venice had lived in Italy for most of their lives. In the South Tyrol there were numerous people who were German citizens. Other communities were found throughout Italy, mainly in the north. Unlike German communities in the United States or South America, these people had no intention of becoming local citizens and usually made an effort to keep informed about developments in the Reich. They were

thus ideal targets for political agitation. There was of course much interest in the NSDAP at this time so that there was no difficulty for the party to organize groups in every city with a sizable German community.

The purpose of this network was suggested in a memorandum found on Hitler's desk when the Brown House in Munich was raided after the SA and SS were dissolved in June 1932. This document speaks of establishing close political connections between the NSDAP and the PNF. One means would be the establishment of a political bureau in Rome to carry on educational work of every kind for the Nazi Party. The ultimate aim was to have the best relationship possible with the Fascist Party.⁴ It is also probable that another principal aim of the party groups in Italy was to organize the local German population living in Italy to work for better Nazi-Fascist relations. The knowledge which these highly educated and sophisticated people living abroad had of Italian language, culture, and local conditions could be very useful to the NSDAP in its efforts to improve relations with Mussolini's regime.

Of great importance during this period is the question of the attitude of the Italian authorities toward the German

party apparatus in Italy. Generally, the Italians revealed marked benevolence toward these groups, which was in line with their overall shift in policy after the Nazi victories that began in March 1932. As one might expect, the PNF took a much more friendly tone than the government. This was especially true of the Fascist militia, the MSVN.⁵ Italy was in fact one of the most hospitable countries to Nazi Landesgruppen. There is no evidence of a single direct hostile act of any consequence by the Italian Fascists against the Nazi cells. Indeed, there were numerous friendly acts, such as the provision of police protection at Nazi meetings.⁶ There is also evidence that the Italian government refrained from opening the mail sent to Ortsgruppen members in Italy.⁷ But relations between the NSDAP and the local government could not be described as intimate. The Rome government was anxious not to offend the Weimar government.

The friendly but restrained attitude of the Italians to the Ortsgruppen was reciprocated by the Nazis. The NSDAP policy was to avoid excessive fraternization which might lead to situations that could embarrass either Fascist Italy or their own movement. The participation of members of the Milan group in uniform at the funeral for Mussolini's brother Arnaldo caused an undesirable incident. Subsequent to the ceremony, the Nazis were summoned to police headquarters and informed that they would have to obtain permission before they could wear their brown shirts at

public functions in the future. The Italian Consul in Munich also made his displeasure known to Gregor Strasser. As a result, Nazi group members were forbidden to attend in uniform any public events unless they received direct permission from the Brown House in Munich.⁸

This avoidance of fraternization, however, did not extend to all areas of Italian life. The Landesgruppe members did make an effort to see to it that the Nazi Party had a positive image in Italy. They greatly encouraged favorable articles in the Italian press about their movement. In Milan party member Gleiser worked in the editorial offices of the Corriere della Sera and Il Popolo d'Italia, where he edited all articles on the Nazi Party. Supposedly the Italians permitted this in order to avoid inaccuracies, but surely they were aware that this activity insured articles biased in favor of the NSDAP.⁹ This effort in 1932 may help to explain some of the pro-Nazi articles in the Italian press during that year.

However, the relations between the Landesgruppe leadership and the Fascists was not always ideal. There were occasional signs of latent hostility. For example, the head of the Nazi Party foreign office, Dr. Hans Nieland, made some remarks to the Italian Consul in Hamburg which created a good deal of tension. He hinted that Germany might side with the Soviet Union against Fascist Italy. The Rome government was not pleased by such an

attitude.¹⁰ However, the chief area of discontent was the South Tyrol. Dr. Albert Krebs, editor of the National-Socialist Hamburger-Tageblatt, which was associated with the party's foreign office, expressed the view that the NSDAP had nothing to do with Fascist Italy.¹¹ Dr. Krebs openly supported the South Tyrolese against Rome. Strasser consented to a request from the Italian Consul in Hamburg that he instruct the Nazi paper in that city to avoid the question of Tyrol or treat it in accordance with the official party position. But Krebs was not alone in his insubordination on this issue.

Adolf Dresler was one of the officials in the Brown House in Munich who were responsible for relations with Fascist Italy. Outwardly Dresler conformed to Hitler's position on the South Tyrol, but he still had reservations. When in October 1932 Nazi groups in Bolzano, in the South Tyrol, took part in the tenth anniversary celebration of the Fascist March on Rome, Dresler could not restrain his anger. To him it was an outrage to allow Nazi participation in Fascist festivities in an area in which he believed the Italians were persecuting Germans. Such a spectacle would imply complete Nazi acquiescence in Italian domination of the region, which he could not accept. On November 2, 1932, in the Catholic Münchener Neueste Nachrichten, Dresler bitterly criticized this symbolic cooperation with Fascist activities in the South Tyrol. He denied that the party's administration had

anything to do with this "spontaneous" aggression against the German residents of the South Tyrol. Dresler believed that the order permitting Nazis to participate in a large celebration did not include the South Tyrol. On the same day the article appeared, Dresler wrote a letter to Dr. Glaser of the administrative department of the NSDAP, explaining his position. Dresler stated that he did not oppose party members appearing in the decennial celebrations in other Italian cities, but in Bolzano "such participation stirs immediately the noted accusation of treason against the South Tyrol."¹²

In general, however, there was an extreme effort made by the NSDAP groups in Italy to avoid any action which would suggest disagreement with Italian rule in the South Tyrol. Germans of the region could not be members of the Nazi cells then in Italy. It was also agreed that the seat of the Landesgruppe not be in the South Tyrol and that this office, with jurisdiction over all the party apparatus in Italy, not go to a German of the South Tyrol. The establishment of new groups in this sensitive province was also avoided.¹³

Of considerable interest in this period was the relationship between the Nazi groups and the Weimar representatives in Italy. It is clear that the German consular and diplomatic personnel held hostile attitudes toward the Nazis. In particular, they resented the official attitude of the NSDAP on the South Tyrol

question. The German diplomats supported those South Tyroleans who protested against the anti-irredentist activities of the Nazis. Baron von Neurath, a conservative who was Ambassador in Rome from 1922 to 1930, was not amenable to Nazi-Fascist contacts which he had opposed for many years. Neurath was succeeded in November 1930 by Carl von Schubert, a democrat who was even more open in his aversion to National Socialism. For their part, the NSDAP group members sometimes assumed a provocative attitude toward German diplomats. The Landesgruppe leadership was not happy with this and made a serious attempt to prevent the NSDAP rank and file from disrupting the activities of the Weimar representatives. Thus on August 7, 1932, Heinrich Brand, head of all the groups in Italy, sent out a circular instructing party members to remain absolutely aloof from but not to disrupt the festival of the Weimar Constitution being celebrated by German representatives abroad.¹⁴

A more important and embarrassing problem of the Landesgruppe in this period was dealing with numerous German emigrants who pretended to be Nazi exiles in order to exploit the organization. In some cases these men were common criminals, fleeing German warrants. Such individuals often portrayed themselves as Nazi political refugees and were given shelter by the local cells in Italy. In one case in November 1931, a traveling "Nazi" received help from the Ortsgruppen in Merano but soon

fled after stealing and swindling a considerable amount from the local members. On November 4, 1931, all groups in Italy were asked to refuse assistance to any unidentified person who claimed to be a political refugee, since he could be a criminal on the run.¹⁵ However, this did not end the problem, since it was difficult for the local groups to determine who was a legitimate political refugee.

However, most of the pseudo-Nazis were not criminals but simply working men seeking to escape the tremendous unemployment problem in their native land. They were not sympathizers of the NSDAP but beggars who found that wearing a brown shirt and swastika gave them a pretext to solicit food and lodging in Italy. Many believed Mussolini's propaganda which portrayed Italy as a land of order and full employment in a world plagued by a great depression. They came to Italy for work but were soon disillusioned.

The first mention of this problem in the documents (although it probably had existed for some time) was in June 1931.¹⁶ By the fall of that year, as the depression deepened, the problem became more severe. Dr. Willis of the Rome Ortsgruppe wrote to the NSDAP headquarters, "We ask . . . once again to do everything possible to limit a further influx of impoverished and job-seeking Party comrades into Italy."¹⁷ The Party leadership in Munich was very sensitive about the possibility of the roving bands of pseudo-Nazis causing difficulty for the Ortsgruppen

with the Italian authorities. One directive from Munich stated, "Our movement must not be discredited abroad, particularly in Italy, at this time."¹⁸

There was considerable cooperation between the Nazi groups and the Fascist government on the control of unwanted Germans coming to Italy. Mussolini's regime was obviously not happy about this migration. The Italian Consul in Munich told Strasser that the Italian government was concerned about the unemployed Nazis coming to Italy. The Fascist militia took care of these people but found that they often turned out to be thieves and beggars. The Rome authorities feared that some could be communist spies and requested stricter controls.¹⁹ According to the Nazi leadership a large part of the problem was the generosity of the local Italian authorities, especially the Fascist militia. The Ortsgruppen contended that the local Fascist commanders did not obey the directives of the supreme command of the Fascist militia which prohibited help being given to wandering Nazis.²⁰ Perhaps this reflected the Latin sense of hospitality along with a militia-man's pride in greeting comrades-in-arms from abroad. No doubt most of the German refugees were free with stories of imaginary battles against the Socialists and Communists who were hated by the Italian militiamen. Most important, however, is the indication of rank-and-file sympathy for Nazism by many Fascists. Obviously, there was considerable grass-roots support for the NSDAP on the part of militant Fascists.

Very strict measures were taken in 1932 to prevent unemployed Germans from passing themselves off as Nazi political refugees. On February 15, 1932 an ordinance was issued stating that the Nazis going to Italy must have a special visa for foreign travel and should not be granted any privileges without it.²¹ During that summer posts were created in the major cities of Italy to control the influx of Germans. Certain Ortsgruppen members were authorized to check documents and interview all those who claimed to be Nazis or who wore the brown shirt uniform. The control captains were instructed to especially look out for anyone who pretended to be a Nazi but who instead spread communist or anti-Fascist propaganda.

As time passed, the Nazis worked more and more closely with the Fascist officials on this question. On August 7, 1932, Brand, head of all the Nazi groups in Italy, reported to Strasser that the Minister of Interior in Rome had decreed that he take direct control of the vagrants. The Italian authorities promised maximum support but the problem of unwanted refugees trying to pass themselves off as Nazis persisted.²² Eventually a refugee camp was set up in Malcesine near Lake Gardo. Theodor Eicke was in charge of the camp. Eicke himself had fled to Italy after being convicted in Germany and given a two-year sentence. Himmler ordered him to come to Munich and then sent him back to

Italy on September 12, 1932, where he became director of the SS refugee camp. This camp surely received the approval of the Italian authorities since it was not kept secret.

But even this measure did not end the refugee problem. The Merano Ortsgruppe in particular was very irritated by the presence of a refugee whom they had to support. Because of this the group refused to pay its dues to the Central Office, which created a controversy.²³ Another source of irritation were authentic SS and SA members who came to Italy. They were referred to the local Nazi cells. In Bolzano and Merano 21 complaints were lodged against SA and SS men. Many of these men were guilty of illegal behavior. Also, they often ran up large bills which they expected the Ortsgruppen to pay.²⁴ In short, the Nazi cells in Italy were plagued by various types of parasites and undesirables.

In spite of these problems, the groups did attempt to serve as centers for genuine Nazis who wished to come to Italy to study Fascism. There is some evidence that under their auspices, Reichsführerschule members of the SA came to Italy to observe the methods and training of the Fascist militia. Nazi Party members were accommodated at the militia's barracks, and were reported by the Ambassador, Schubert, to have been wearing their uniforms in public. However, it is doubtful that they were allowed free access to Italian military bases.²⁵ There is

no evidence of any large-scale military training of SA or SS members in Italy. Such a program was not necessary, since the Nazi Party contained a high percentage of World War veterans who could administer such a program in Germany.

There is, however, evidence that some Nazi intellectuals came to Italy to study Fascist theory.²⁶ Very noticeable in this group was Hans Reupke, who was probably the most important Nazi intellectual to visit Italy. This political theorist had access to many of the top leaders of National Socialism. In all his writings he revealed a positive attitude toward Fascist Italy. He believed that Fascism could be imported to Germany mutatis mutandis. In his first book, written in 1930, he praised the elitist organization of the Fascist party, led by the iron will of a superior leader according to the axiomatic principles of discipline and authority.²⁷ Reupke sent a copy of this work to Hitler and was praised for it.

In 1931, Reupke visited Italy. This stay reinforced his previous opinions. He wrote a pamphlet on his return, which again reflected his admiration for Italy.²⁸ In a letter to SA chief Ernst Röhm at about this time, Reupke indicated that he was impressed by the Fascist militia and believed that a national-socialist government should also have a similar force (such as the SA) at its disposal.

Reupke made another visit to Italy in 1932. Most interesting

is a report he wrote after this trip, indicating what he believed the Nazis could learn from Fascist Italy. In the area of economics, he was unsure what Mussolini's regime could teach the NSDAP. Reupke believed that there should be more study of the Fascist methods of finance and labor organization. However, it was a sense of national renewal, more than specific economic doctrine, which Fascist Italy could teach National Socialism. Reupke believed that Fascism had been responsible for Italy's revival after the disappointing outcome of World War I. The Nazis could take heart from this success. He wrote that "it must be possible in Germany, too, to kindle a great national impetus in the masses and overcome the Marxist-liberal egoism."²⁹

There were, of course, other Nazi intellectuals who came to Italy in this period, but the Landesgruppen were not well enough organized to encourage many serious students of Fascism. The party apparatus in Italy was hamstrung by personal conflicts. There was much friction between Nieland, head of the party foreign office in Hamburg, and his superior, Gregor Strasser, head of the NSDAP administrative department with his office in Munich. From the very beginning, Strasser tended to overrule Nieland and run the overseas groups himself. As early as May 30, 1931, Strasser informed Nieland that he had set up a local group in Milan. This was a usurpation of the Hamburg office's jurisdiction only one month after it was set up. On February 3, 1932,

Strasser issued a bulletin announcing that for "practical organizational reasons" he would take over the direct administration of the groups in Italy and Switzerland. It was at this point that he named Heinrich Brand of Venice as head of all the Landesgruppen in Italy.³⁰ On February 15, 1932, in two letters, Nieland protested to Strasser about the appointment of Brand, which was made without his previous knowledge. Nieland complained that the appointment had been published in the Berliner Beobachter before the Nazi foreign office in Munich had been informed. Nieland used strong language against Brand, who he claimed was totally incompetent. Nieland also stated that the founding of a Landesgruppe organization to control all local groups in Italy was premature. He also wrote to Rudolph Hess, repeating these serious accusations against Brand.³¹ Such squabbles and intrigues were to plague the Nazi groups throughout this period. This was perhaps typical of the NSDAP as a whole, where various departments constantly fought over jurisdiction. In many ways National Socialism was far less unified than is commonly realized.

Besides personal conflicts, the Landesgruppe in Italy also suffered from poor administration. Nieland, in particular, showed a lack of leadership ability. He accused everyone around him of usurping his authority, and his visits to the Nazi groups in Italy were not successful. His banal oratory was resented by

sophisticated audience of Nazis living abroad.³² Heinrich Brand was also incompetent. When he was named to head the Nazi organization in Italy, the Ortsgruppe leader in Milan resigned his post in protest over the appointment. He accused Brand of being unreliable, particularly in financial matters.³³ In early 1933, Brand got into considerable difficulty because of his inability to maintain control of the local groups. He was bitterly resented, and his authority was challenged. He finally posed by an investigating commission: the reason given was his lack of leadership ability. Brand refused to accept this and in turn ordered the dissolution of the Merano group which had strongly opposed him. This caused a considerable uproar; members of the Bozen group threatened to kill him and complained directly to Munich. The result was chaos in the Italian Landesgruppe. Eventually the leadership structure of the NSDAP in Italy was dissolved. It is obvious that not only Brand and Nieland, but most of the local group leaders showed a lack of ability. The tendency of many Ortsgruppen to withhold their dues if they disliked a certain policy and their inability to handle the refugee situation reveal the limited discipline exercised by the group leadership.

Another problem of the Landesgruppe was that many of the most important leaders were basically anti-Italian. Nieland made a number of anti-Fascist remarks. After the expulsion of his

brother Otto in 1930, Gregor Strasser had supposedly resigned himself to Hitler's pro-Italian policy. But there is little evidence of any great enthusiasm by him for close Nazi-Fascist relations in his administration of the Landesgruppe in Italy. Adolf Dresler, who dealt with the Italian groups from the party headquarters at Munich, also showed that he had not entirely altered his view of Fascist Italy. It has been suggested that Hitler wanted Strasser and Dresler to work on the Italian Landesgruppe so that they would become more pro-Fascist.³⁴ But having this responsibility did not seem to make them any less anti-Italian. Thus, in view of the low caliber of their leadership and their hostile attitude toward Italy, it is no surprise that the NSDAP groups in Italy achieved very little.

During this period the main conduct of high level Nazi-Fascist relations was through Italian agents in Germany such as Major Renzetti and the Consul at Munich, Capasso Torre, and through Nazi emissaries to Italy like Hermann Goering. But the very existence of these NSDAP groups in Italy is significant. The fact that Mussolini allowed them to function is noteworthy in view of the Italian law which forbade foreign political organizations in the country. The Duce made an exception for the Nazi Party because he saw it as a potentially useful group that he dared not offend. There was some genuine sympathy and perhaps pride among certain rank-and-file Fascists at the sight of foreigners who appeared to emulate their movement. For their part,

the Nazis in Italy probably had some minor success in influencing Fascist opinion. Certain favorable articles in the Italian press might be attributable to them. But by and large, Landesgruppen in Italy cannot be considered the focal point of Nazi-Fascist relations in this period.

Notes

1. Speech by E.W. Bohle, August 31, 1933, NA: T-580 [no frame numbers in this series], roll 55; on the NSDAP foreign office before 1933, see Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, Nationalsozialistische Aussenpolitik 1933-1938 (Berlin, 1968), pp. 90-96.

2. Embassy in Rome to Foreign Office, October 9, 1930, Bonn: Abt. II, Pol. 29A, Stahlhelm. On the origins of the Nazi apparatus in Italy, see Guariglia, op. cit., p. 85; letter by K. Lange, November 4, 1931, NA: T-580, roll 58.

3. Report of February 3, 1932, Bonn: AHA/Chef AO-13 (Akten betr. Italien/Schriftwechsel betr. Landesgruppe Italien 1932); see also letter by Karl Decain, March 26, 1933, NA:T-580, roll 59; letter by Gauschatzmeister Leonhart, December 8, 1937, NA:T-580, roll 55. On November 24, 1931, an article appeared in the Münchener Telegrammzeitung on the Nazi groups being formed in Italy. The author was highly critical of the Nazis and spoke of the "deep consternation" among the German colony in Italy because for the first time a "German party found its own political group in disregard of the national bond that ties together all Germans living abroad." Besides Rome, groups were noted forming in Florence and Milan. The author asserts that a representative of Hitler approached the Vatican to induce German Bishops to support the Nazi Party. The Vatican was reported to have been cool to this initiative.

4. Memorandum of January 21, 1933, in Auslandsorganization (ab 1933), NA:T-580, roll 55; Hoepke, op. cit., pp. 327-28.
5. Strasser memorandum, January 16, 1932, NA:T-580, roll 58; see also Schubert to Wilhelmstrasse, October 21, 1932, Bonn: Abt II, Pol. 29/NF, vol. 10.
6. See outrage about this expressed by the Munchener Telegrammzeitung, December 9, 1931.
7. Letter to Dr. Willis, December 24, 1932, NA:T-580, roll 58.
8. Brand to Strasser, Jan. 11, 1932, Bonn: AHA/Chef AO-13; also letter to Nieland, Jan. 11, 1932, NA: T-580, roll 55; Memorandum to Ortsgruppe, Jan. 11, 1932, NA: T-50, roll 58.
9. Brand to Hess, July 2, 1932, Bonn: AHA/Chef AO-13.
10. Letter to Strasser, May 24, 1932, NA:T-580, roll 55.
11. Memo from Dezernat Italien in Hamburg, January 7, 1932, NA:T-580, roll 55.
12. Dresler to Glaser, November 2, 1932, Bonn: AHA/Chef AO-13.
13. Nieland to Strasser, November 17, 1931; Strasser to Nieland, November 25, 1931, NA:T-580, roll 58; see also Brand to Strasser Jan. 11, 1932, Bonn AHA/Chef AO-13.
14. Circular by Brand, August 7, 1932, Bonn: AHA/Chef AO-13.
15. Letter by Dezernat Italien, November 4, 1931, NA:T-580, roll 58.

16. Nieland to Munich, June 9, 1931, NA:T-580, roll 58.
17. Letter by Dr. Willis to Munich, September 25, 1931, NA:T-580, roll 58.
18. Dezernat Italien to Dr. Willis, October 13, 1931, NA:T-580, roll 58.
19. Memo on Strasser's meeting with Count Capasso Torre, January 16, 1932, NA:T-580, roll 58.
20. Brand to Strasser, Jan. 11, 1932, Bonn AHA/Chef AO-13; Report of Dezernat Italien, Jan. 27, 1932, NA: T-580, roll 58.
21. Nieland Ordinance, February 15, 1932, NA"T-580, roll 55.
22. Brand to Strasser, August 7, 1932, Bonn:AHA/Chef AO-13.
23. Letter to Brand, December 21, 1932, Munich to Ortsgruppe Merano, January 20, 1933, NA:T-580, roll 59.
24. Brand to Munich, January 9, 1933, NA:T-580, roll 58.
25. Report by Schubert, October 21, 1931, Bonn: Abt. II, Pol. 29/N.F. vol. 10.
26. In 1931, four young Nazis came to Italy in order to study Fascism. The group intended also to visit Italian controlled Tripoli. They apparently were well received in Italy but had difficulty with the Italian Foreign Ministry. As the German Embassy reported to Berlin:"This corresponds to our observation of long standing that the Foreign Ministry, in contrast to the Fascist Party and its subordinate offices, shows an extremely reserved attitude toward emissaries of the NSDAP." Bonn: Abt. II, Pol. 29/N.F. vol. 10.

27. Hans Reupke, Wirtschaftssystem des Fschismus, (Berlin, 1930), p. 17.

28. Hans Reupke, Unternehmer und Arbeiter in dem faschistischen Wirtschaftssystem, (Berlin, 1931)

29. Stanford: NSDAP/reel 35/Folder 673, p. 14. From this same period, see Reupke's article, "Die Faschistische Partei-- ihre Entwicklung und ihr gegenwärtiges Stand," in NSM: June 1932, pp. 496-99. Here again he praises Fascist Italy while giving a description of its growth and organization.

30. Bulletin by Strasser, February 3, 1932, NA:T-580, roll 55.

31. See two letters, Nieland to Strasser; also Nieland to Hess, February 15, 1932, NA:T-580, roll 58; Nieland to Strasser, March 5, 1932, NA:T-580, roll 55.

32. Dr. Willis to Strasser, December 17, 1931, NA:T-580, roll 58.

33. Letter to Strasser, February 11, 1932, Nieland to Strasser, February 18, 1932, NA:T-580, roll 58.

34. Meir Michaelis, "I nuclei nazisti in Italia e loro funzione nei rapporti tra Fascismo e Nazismo nel 1932," in Nuova Rivista Storica, 1973 (vol. 57), p. 436.

CHAPTER IX

HITLER'S RISE TO POWER

The year 1932 marked the culmination of the NSDAP's long struggle to take over the German Reich. The events of that fateful period are well known, but the role played by Fascist Italy in Hitler's assumption of power is less familiar. A review of the available evidence clearly indicates that Hitler did not lose his concern for Mussolini's regime, even during the crucial months when he was engaged in the all-important elections that would decide if he would rule Germany. The Duce, however, was less enthusiastic about having a close alliance with the NSDAP. His basic attitude toward the Nazis had changed little over the previous decade.

The rapprochement between the two movements after the electoral victory of September 1930 was very cautious and gradual. In February 1931, Schubert, the German Ambassador in Rome, reported that Mussolini's government was less than enthusiastic about cooperation with the NSDAP.¹ In April the Duce told Schubert that he could not work with the Nazis. In August Chancellor Heinrich Brüning and Foreign Minister Julius Curtius visited Rome. They met with Mussolini and his Foreign Minister, Dino Grandi. The Italian leaders made disparaging statements about the National Socialists, especially for their collaboration

with the Communists in the Prussian Landtag election then under way.² About this time the Weimar government took a number of actions in order to placate Mussolini and prevent him from supporting the NSDAP. Measures were initiated against Italian anti-Fascists in Germany. This, it was believed, would please the government in Rome. Mussolini's regime was discreetly informed that any favor shown to the Nazis would be viewed as an insult in Berlin. The Brüning government's hope that it could keep Mussolini from a firm commitment to Hitler were not baseless. During this period, the Duce did not appear anxious to make any definite alliance with the Nazis.

But because of Hitler's often stated admiration for Fascist Italy and its leader, the Duce realized that it would not be wise to break the tenuous relationship with the NSDAP. His policy in this period was to keep up the appearance of good relations with the Nazis without completely alienating the government in Berlin. Despite his lack of a solid commitment, Mussolini had hopes of exercising at least some indirect influence over Nazi policy. A key agent in this contact between the two movements at this time was Hermann Goering. After he was elected as a member of the Reichstag, Goering visited the Italian Embassy in Berlin almost daily. The German government had strong suspicions that he might be engaging in treasonous activity.³ It was feared that he might be informing the Italians of what was discussed at

meetings of the Foreign Committee of the Reichstag. Brüning, whose policy it was to use the Nazis as a means of pressure on the Western powers, did not think it wise to investigate Goering. In May 1931, the Nazi war hero made one of his numerous visits to Italy. His contacts in Rome this time were better than during his 1924-25 visit. He had made friends with Prince Philip of Hessen, who had married the Princess Mafalda, the daughter of the Italian King.⁴ This couple was to serve for many years as an important contact for Nazi-Fascist relations. Probably Goering's principal mission in Rome was to gain Vatican support for an agreement between the NSDAP and the German Catholic Church. This of course was a mission of great importance, especially since the Catholic Center Party held such an important position in the German Reichstag. Indications are, however, that Goering's negotiations with the Pope were not a success. The Nazi emissary also met with Mussolini and various other Fascists, but no details of these meetings are available. All that is known is that the future Reich Marshal returned to Germany with an autographed picture of the Duce inscribed to the Fuehrer.

On June 8, 1931, Mussolini received a picture of Hitler in return, along with a letter from the Nazi chief. This was probably the first direct communication between the two leaders.⁵ The tone of the letter is not surprising: only Hitler's phrase about "the spiritual relations which exist between the fundamental

canons and principles of Fascism and those of the movement led by me" is at all substantive. Obviously, the Fuehrer wished to impress on his counterpart the belief that the NSDAP was closely related to the PNF and thus deserved its support. There was at this time far from universal agreement on the question of how closely the Nazi Party resembled Mussolini's movement.

Several weeks later, Hitler had an interview with Count Capasso Torre, the Italian Consul-General in Munich. The Italian diplomat made a report of this meeting which apparently was addressed directly to Mussolini.⁶ This document is important because it shows Mussolini's interest in the NSDAP, especially his tendency to play teacher to the Nazi leader. It also reflects Hitler's attitude at a crucial phase of his career. Of great interest is the Fuehrer's expressed desire to come to power by legal means. He also indicates the unreliability of the army in case the NSDAP should attempt a forcible seizure of power, and clearly states that a coup would be confronted by both the army and police. Here he was expressing his awareness of the difference between the situation in Germany and that of Italy in 1922 during the March on Rome, when the army had failed to stop the Fascists. In 1923, Hitler had learned that in Germany the Reichswehr would not hesitate to fire on a Nazi uprising. More subtle tactics were necessary. The NSDAP was thus committed to a policy of legality and at least outwardly expected to follow such a course.

Although Count Capasso Torre had a number of meetings with Hitler, the chief intermediary between Fascist Italy and the Nazis during this period was Major Giuseppe Renzetti. President of the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Berlin, Renzetti was known in the 1920s by the German Foreign Office to be a confidant of Mussolini and a leading Fascist agent in Germany.⁷ He was active with both left- and right-wing groups. On several occasions, speaking for Mussolini, he attempted to elicit pro-Italian gestures from liberal members of various German Landtags. Married to a beautiful rich German-Jewish woman, Renzetti had many useful contacts, of various persuasion, in Berlin. Obviously a resourceful man, Renzetti was on friendly terms with Rosenberg and Goering while maintaining close ties to the Stahlhelm.⁸ He was on particularly intimate terms with the veterans group. In April 1930, Renzetti became exclusively responsible for relations with the right-wing groups in Germany. He greatly intensified these contacts, going beyond his instructions to an extreme degree. But the results of the September 1930 election, which indicated a right-wing trend, made his efforts appear worthwhile to the Italian Foreign Office. Renzetti's aim was agreement between the Stahlhelm, Hugenberg's German National Party and the NSDAP. This alliance, he believed, could take power in the near future, in view of the economic chaos in Germany. The attempt to forge such a union carried great risks since its failure could result in ill feeling by all political groups in Germany against Mussolini's regime.⁹

Renzetti claimed to have great influence among the right-wing forces in Germany. In his reports he portrayed himself as a key figure in the effort to bring the NSDAP, Stahlhelm, and the German National Party together. In one of his reports he quoted a letter from von Morozovitz, a Stahlhelm leader, praising him for his role as a liaison between the German right-wing parties. It stated, "Your precious activity and altruistic work have to be blessed by the National Opposition and will become for it more and more indispensable in the days to come."¹⁰ Renzetti also gave advice to the Nazi leaders, which he claims often affected their actions.¹¹ In his reports he obviously greatly exaggerated his importance and influence. It is highly improbable that Renzetti or any other foreign agent could have changed the attitude of Hitler or any other Nazi leader on key issues. But it is significant that Renzetti knew many right-wing leaders who to some degree trusted him. Renzetti's goal was a union in which Hugenberg's party would be absorbed into the NSDAP and the Stahlhelm would agitate for Hitler's party. After considerable effort, events started to move in this direction.

On October 11, 1931, at Harzburg, a little spa in the Hartz Mountains, a demonstration was held of the right-wing national opposition. Hugenberg represented the Nationalist Party, Franz Seldte and Theodor Dustenberg the Stahlhelm, while Hitler led the Nazi contingent. Also present were Prussian Junkers and representatives of the Rhineland industrial complex. Frick openly stated that the NSDAP only wished to use the other groups as a convenient ladder to office, just as Mussolini had begun with

a coalition and later rid himself of his allies. This union of the right-wing elements was in line with the Duce's policy as carried out by Renzetti, who was an important intermediary, especially between the Stahlhelm and the NSDAP. In November 1931, there was an important meeting of the right-wing parties at Renzetti's home in Berlin.¹²

However, in 1932, the Harzburg front fell apart when the Nationalists and the Stahlhelm announced they would put up their own candidate for President of the Reich. But this did not end Renzetti's efforts to bring the German right-wing groups together. Mussolini's agent played a role in the ultimate reconciliation of the NSDAP and other nationalist groups which brought Hitler to power. On January 10, 1933, members of the various groups met again at Renzetti's house, where the Italian emissary mediated between the various factions. Seldte, Goering, Schacht, and others thanked Renzetti warmly for his part in obtaining the decisive agreement.¹³ Such actions did not make Renzetti popular with Italian diplomats in Germany, since Mussolini often bypassed them in order to work through the resourceful Major.¹⁴ The question is, of course, whether Mussolini's policy could be considered a success. The answer must be negative since there is substantial evidence that the Duce never really intended Hitler to gain undisputed power in Germany.

Mussolini desired a coalition government between the NSDAP and the German National Party, or between the Nazis and the Catholic Center Party.¹⁵ But Hitler demonstrated throughout 1932 his sincere intention to

maintain close relations with Fascist Italy. Many of his actions during this period reveal his desire not to alienate a country which he believed would be an important ally of the coming Nazi state. On March 31, 1931, a confidential talk took place at the Brown House in Munich. Attending were Hitler, Rosenberg, Hans Frank, and a delegation from the South Tyrol led by E. Reut-Nicolussi and Count Bossi-Fedrigolti. The South Tyroleans demanded that Hitler not except the South Tyrol from the "fundamental national demands" of the NSDAP and that therefore the word South Tyrol be put back into the party platform. They also demanded the dissolution of the NSDAP local chapters in the South Tyrol so as to avoid fraternization between Nazis and Fascists in their area. On the propaganda front, they asked for greater exposure of the Tyrolean question in the Nazi press and support of the Nazis for the "Union of Germanhood in Foreign Countries" (Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland, or VDA). Hitler would yield to none of their demands; he characterized an understanding between Italy and Germany as a most pressing problem. His aim was an alliance system with Italy and England, which was the only way for Germany to regain international esteem. The South Tyrol was to become a bridge of understanding between the German and Italian people. Italy could solve the question of the South Tyrol simply by deporting the 250,000 Germans there and confiscating their property. Only an honest understanding

between Rome and Berlin could improve the situation. Not all border territory was of equal value. Poland, for example, was a different case from South Tyrol. Overall, Hitler claimed to support the goals of the VDA, and once he had power he would give it more support. But he would not endorse its goals officially and especially not in a region where they would bring him into conflict with his political goals. The Fuehrer stated that the question of Tyrol was inseparable from the question of Germany becoming strong and capable of forming alliances. The German-Italian alliance would only be of special value when Germany was in a position to cast 60-80 divisions into the scale and not its present force. Hitler tried to overcome his visitors' disappointment by stating prophetically that thirteen years had passed since the collapse of 1918, but if he had thirteen more years [i.e., until 1945], they would see what he could do.¹⁶

A few weeks after the meeting at the Brown House in Munich, one of the Tyrolean leaders published an article which bitterly denounced Hitler because of his policy on the South Tyrol question.¹⁷ E. Reut-Nicolussi refuted a statement Hitler made in the Voelkischer Beobachter that the Germans and Italians lived side by side in the Alto Adige. In reality, Reut-Nicolussi stated, there was a natural dividing line between the two nationalities in the area. The Tyrolean leader denied that there had ever been a plebiscite in the Alto Adige as claimed by the Nazi Fuehrer. Reut-Nicolussi complained that the Nazis had erased the South

Tyrol from its list of unrenounceable territories, a step he of course abhorred. On the basis of their platform the Nazis should have been the last ones to deny help to the Tyrolese. And, given their close relationship with Fascism, they should have at least attempted to obtain better treatment for the Germans of the Alto Adige. Reut-Nicolussi particularly resented Hitler's public statement of July 1931, which in effect closed the South Tyrol question for the indefinite future. This signified the expulsion of the Alto Adige Germans from a reunited Reich. Reut-Nicolussi turned to other Nazi and German Nationalist leaders but could receive no support on this issue. His article expressed the acute frustration of the South Tyrolese during this period when they had lost much support from the conservative groups in Germany. It also reveals Hitler's total abandonment of the Germans in the Alto Adige in order to obtain an agreement with Mussolini.

In order to consummate a really firm alliance with the Duce, Hitler had persistently tried throughout the 1920s to get an audience with the Italian leader. At his first meeting with a representative from Fascist Italy in 1922, the Fuehrer suggested that he have an audience with the Duce. In 1924-25, while Goering was in Italy, Hitler attempted to arrange a meeting with the Fascist leader. But the Duce was reluctant to meet with the head of such a small group. In 1928, Hitler again began to seek a

meeting with Mussolini. The Italian dictator was very cautious. Officially he answered that he was disposed to receive the Fuehrer, but thought it would be better to wait until after the May election so as not to embarrass the Nazis. He stated:

I am disposed to meet with Hitler at a time when things are stable . . . after the German election. A conversation before would be useful only to Hitler's adversaries.¹⁸

Of course, there were other reasons why Mussolini did not wish to meet with Hitler. As Anfuso recalled, "the Palazzo Venezia didn't find that the meeting was worth the risk of having difficulties with the Reich government."¹⁹ Also Mussolini probably wished to see the outcome of the election in order to judge the real strength of the Nazi Party. Since the Nazis won only twelve seats, there was little incentive for Mussolini to bother having the Fuehrer come to Rome. Thus Hitler had to settle for the meeting with Senator Tolomei to discuss the South Tyrol.

In 1929, there were rumors in Berlin that Hitler had again been invited to Italy. Dr. Robert Ley of the NSDAP told the Italian Ambassador in Berlin that the timing of the trip had to be changed because Hitler had to attend a meeting at Nuremberg. Dino Grandi of the Foreign Ministry investigated the reports and informed the Italian Embassy in Berlin that the story of

Hitler being invited to visit Mussolini were completely false. Grandi added that Hitler had formally expressed a desire to be received by the Duce but he had been told that the meeting did not appear opportune.²⁰ Whether the Nazi Fuehrer was responsible for these rumors is hard to say, but it does seem part of a continuous pattern of his attempts to get an invitation to visit Italy.

On October 15, 1931, shortly after the formation of the Harzburg front, Hitler approached Renzetti with a request for a meeting with Mussolini. He felt that his position was now strong enough for him to be received by the Duce. He reminded Renzetti of his recent talk with President Hindenburg, which made his position legal and secure. The Fuehrer stated that he wished to visit Rome out of sympathy for Italy and admiration for the Duce and to reaffirm his desire to achieve close German-Italian relations which would be supplemented at a later date by close ties between London and Berlin.²¹ At first Mussolini rejected the idea of a meeting with Hitler.²² But by mid-November concrete travel plans began to develop. The Fuehrer was to come to Rome on December 11, accompanied by Goering and Hess. Other Nazis, such as youth groups and parliamentarians, were to meet their Fascist counterparts.²³ Hitler was officially to be the guest of the PNF so as to avoid excessive criticism of Mussolini's government in Germany. There were also plans for the Prince of

Hessen to arrange an audience with King Victor Emmanuele if possible.

On December 9, 1931, Ambassador Schubert in Rome reported to Berlin on Hitler's planned trip to Italy. The German Ambassador included considerable details, such as the fact that the Fuehrer was to be the guest of the PNF. He knew that Hitler was expected to meet the King as well as the Duce. Schubert also indicated an order forbidding the Italian press from publicizing the plans for the visit. The Ambassador asked Berlin how to handle the situation, which could be embarrassing for the German government.²⁴ The Foreign Office, in its answer to Schubert, stressed that Hitler was the leader of a movement that had challenged the government in the sharpest manner, thus creating an extraordinary tension in the German domestic situation. If Hitler came to Rome, the Embassy was forbidden to make contact with him. If the Italians brought up the question of the visit, Schubert was instructed to make it clear that a reception of the Fuehrer by the Duce and the King would be regarded as an affront against the Reich government.²⁵ The reasons why this 1931 visit did not take place are not immediately evident. The plans appear to have been rather well developed. It is almost certain that, as with most of the proposed visits, the trip was cancelled by Mussolini rather than Hitler.

After the cancellation of Hitler's trip in 1931, discussion continued regarding a plan for the Fuehrer to make a visit to Italy in 1932. In January Renzetti reported that Hitler was not sure whether he could come, in view of the situation in Germany. The fascist agent suggested a trip by Goering instead.²⁶ But by June, plans were definitely underway again for a visit by Hitler. Renzetti made reservations at the Hotel Oriental for the Fuehrer and his party from July 1-15.²⁷ In some respects the plans were similar to the abortive trip of 1931: Hitler, along with Goering and Hess, was to be the guest of the PNF and would visit Florence, Rome, and Naples. Renzetti suggested that careful consideration be given to details such as the Fuehrer's vegetarian diet and his aversion to wine. The sharp-witted emissary urged a hearty reception, designed to play on the Nazi leader's sentimental nature, and Renzetti stressed the desirability of the Hitler visit. The Fuehrer himself had stated that the visit would have a beneficial effect on the German masses and would help him in the July Reichstag election. Though Hitler's assertions were doubtful, Renzetti argued that another cancellation would have an adverse effect on the Fascist influence over the Nazis. He believed that the NSDAP was capable of gaining power, and that this was the ideal moment, which should not be lost, for Mussolini to see Hitler and give him advice that would carry great weight with the Nazi leader.²⁸

On June 21, 1932 Mussolini informed Hitler that plans for the trip had been postponed due to the political situation in Germany and because of the disarmament conference in Laussane, Switzerland. The Duce added that for his part he would go only when Hitler was in command. The Fuehrer was disappointed, since he had definitely counted on making the visit. As a compensatory gesture, Renzetti was told to convey to Hitler a message of the Duce in which he expressed his congratulations for everything accomplished. According to Renzetti, Hitler received this declaration with great joy.²⁹

Mussolini's reluctance to see Hitler is perhaps just another indication of his uncertain attitude toward the Nazis during this period. He was probably not convinced that they would be victorious and did not yet wish to commit himself. Hitler's reasons for wanting to go to Italy in the middle of an extremely hectic and critical election campaign are more difficult to understand. His explanation that he believed the visit would help him in the election is hard to believe. Fascist Italy was not generally popular in Germany, and a visit to Mussolini would not bring much prestige to the Nazi leader. Rather it would make him appear as the Duce's puppet and play into the hands of his enemies, who would use this accusation against him. His principal motivation was probably his long-standing admiration for the Duce whom he could now meet as a figure of some importance in his own right.

It is perhaps correct to say that Hitler wished to use his mass political following to impress the Duce rather than to impress the masses with his visit to see Mussolini.

But there may have been another more tangible reason for him to see the Italian dictator at that time. There is a noticeable correlation between the economic situation of the NSDAP and Hitler's desire to visit Italy. Throughout 1931 the Nazis were very short of funds. In this period Hitler was anxious to visit Italy. But in early 1932, the economic situation of the NSDAP improved sharply. On February 8, 1932, Goebells wrote, "Money affairs improve daily. The financing of our [March] electoral campaign is assured."³⁰ During this period Hitler was receiving large sums from other sources and was not eager to go to Italy. Renzetti reported, the Fuehrer claimed that he was too busy in Germany to leave the country. But as the year progressed, the economic situation of the NSDAP worsened. The campaign for the Reichstag of July 1932 was the most hectic, elaborate and expensive in Nazi history.³¹ Hitler and all of the Nazi leaders had speaking itineraries that required them to criss-cross Germany by train, car and airplane every day. It is strange indeed that Hitler was willing to leave Germany from July 1-15, when every day of campaigning appeared important for the July 31 election. Certainly his presence was required in Germany even more now than it had been six months earlier, when he did not appear

interested in going to Italy. It is very possible that he chose that moment because he wished to make a personal appeal to Mussolini for financial aid. The Nazis believed they would make a tremendous showing in the Reichstag election, but they were spending every pfennig in the campaign. As it was, the electoral effort left the Party deeply in debt. As Goebbels wrote in October, "Money is extraordinarily difficult to obtain."³² Hitler may have hoped that the July visit could help alleviate the post-election debt which required the Nazis to send SA men out to beg in the street. Hitler may also have felt that he was in good bargaining position to get a loan since he could promise to repay after he came to power. His miscalculation lay in a failure to realize that Mussolini did not really believe that the Nazis would ever come to power except, perhaps, in a coalition government. Economic considerations were certainly not the only reason the Nazi leader wished to visit Italy; his main desire surely was to meet Mussolini at a time when he had an obvious mass following. Perhaps he believed that under the circumstances, Mussolini would have offered a loan on his own initiative. But the Duce proved to be less eager to receive him than Hitler hoped.

Besides the planned Italian visit there were numerous other indications in 1932 that Hitler seized every opportunity to demonstrate his desire for close ties with Mussolini. During the summer, when a play supposedly written by Mussolini was offered

at the Weimar Theatre, Hitler, along with Hess and his retinue, unexpectedly arrived to see it. At about the same time, when he began negotiations for his succession to the office of Chancellor, he told several Ministers that he wished a complete change in foreign policy. He demanded an understanding with Italy and a favorable policy toward France. Other examples could be cited, but there can be little doubt as to Hitler's preferences during this crucial period. 33

Whereas Hitler's attitude toward Italy in this period is of great importance, the reaction of the Fascist press toward him and his movement should also be mentioned. The victories of the NSDAP in the various elections of 1932 were naturally observed with great interest in Italy. An article in the Corriere della Sera on March 20, 1932 mentions a communiqué of the German Havas news agency which commented on the attitude of the Italian press. Havas stated that before the first Presidential election in Germany of March 13, 1932, the Fascist press was prudent and restrained. But immediately after the election, according to the German news agency, there were a series of diatribes by Italian journals against Hitler's opponents. These supposedly were in response to protests from the German Embassy in Rome. The Corriere did not appreciate the suggestion that the Italian press had been influenced by the German government. 34

The Havas report was partially correct. The Italian press was restrained before the election. It was also true that the

immediate response was enthusiastic. An article in Corriere Padano³⁵ several days after the election stated that the Nazis came out of the first round as the strongest party in Germany since Hitler had faced Hindenburg, who was backed by a large coalition, into a run-off. The Critica Fascista stated that the election made clear that "National Socialism is not a sporadic phenomenon of desperados but a vital movement with every intention of making a clean sweep of the actions and concessions [of the] . . . German Social Democrats."³⁶ Throughout April the Italian press continued to praise Hitler's victories in glowing tones. The Nazi success in the Prussian Landstag election was commented upon enthusiastically by Antieuropa. It was seen as a great victory over the Liberals and Social Democrats.³⁷ However, Hitler's victories were most appreciated as defeats for communism. On April 11, 1932, after the second presidential election, the Corriere della Sera joyfully proclaimed, "The ruin that was predicted for Hitler has instead happened to the Communists."³⁸ On June 1, the same newspaper stated that when Hitler came to power his major task "will be the suppression of communism, the true internal enemy of Germany . . . and of Europe."³⁹ Some articles tried to reassure their readers that National Socialism had nothing in common with Marxism. The Critica Fascista stressed that Nazi socialism had as its aim the end of the class struggle rather than its continuation.⁴⁰

Many other articles appeared in the Italian press during this period, which were favorable to the Hitler movement. Giuseppe Renzetti contributed numerous articles to Gerarchia explaining the

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situation in Germany from the point of view of the NSDAP. Most interesting was his defense of Nazi anti-Semitism. He stated that anti-Semitism in Germany was not racial. It was a reaction against the waves of recent emigrants from Eastern Europe. In particular it was motivated by fear of a powerful plutocracy, who were the paladins of communism and social democracy. The Nazis did not aim at inciting the masses to a program against the Jews. Once in power, he asserted, the Nazis would concern themselves with other

42
problems. Renzetti's articles were designed to calm any uneasiness in Italy over the possibility of a Nazi accession to power.

Although much of the Fascist press hailed the Nazi electoral successes, there were many indications that the usual reservations persisted. A memorandum by the Ministry of Interior in Rome on the NSDAP in November 1932 showed considerable apprehensions about the Nazi victories. 43 The report stressed the enormous differences between the NSDAP and the PNF. Despite the fact that there were some similarities between Nazi and Fascist theory, there were also certain parallels between the platform of the NSDAP and the left-wing groups. The Interior Ministry memorandum expressed doubt that the National Socialists were sincere friends of Italy. It predicted that Nazi race theories would lead to clashes with Fascism over the South Tyrol and Austria. Like other Germans, the memorandum said, the Nazis had not forgotten Italy's "betrayal" of 1914. Anti-Italian feeling was believed to be high in Nazi circles. The report also drew attention to other conflicts

between Nazi and Fascist aims in foreign policy.

Some of the uncertainty about the NSDAP gradually found its way into the Fascist press during 1932. One central question was whether Hitler was using the proper method to achieve power. Hitler's propaganda methods were investigated.⁴⁴ But the main issue concerned Hitler's obvious decision to come to power legally without a Fascist-style coup d'etat. Some Italians praised Hitler for avoiding violence and fighting the democrats with their own weapons.⁴⁵ However, many agreed with those Fascists who criticized Hitler's concept of legal revolution. Asvero Gravelli in particular engaged in severe attacks on Hitler because of his failure to imitate Mussolini's March on Rome. He believed that the difference between Mussolini and Hitler was that the Duce was a true revolutionary, while the Fuehrer had only a "platonic" love of power.⁴⁶ Gravelli was supported by F. G. Cabalzar in a letter published in Antieuropa.⁴⁷ Cabalzar asserted that Nazism and Fascism were not as similar as generally believed. He compared Hitler most unfavorably to Mussolini. The NSDAP lacked a coherent program. But the chief difference was that unlike Italy in 1922, Hitler in 1932 had not yet beaten the Socialist and Communist opposition. A Nazi march on Berlin was far off. The Fuehrer's insistence on legal tactics was preparing the way for a Hohenzollern restoration.

Another Fascist leader who was critical of Hitler's use of

legal tactics was Roberto Farinacci. In his newspaper he bitterly attacked the Fuehrer for being a reluctant revolutionary. Farinacci was greatly disappointed that a leader who had talked of revolution was now asking that power be given to him. He believed that the Nazi tactics were helping the Communists. Farinacci's newspaper stated, "National Socialism has already begun its declining trend." This was a common opinion in late 1932. There were serious doubts in Italy that Hitler would ever really come to power. The ambassador in Berlin, Luca Orisini Baroni, expressed the conviction in his reports that Schleicher was a better candidate for Fascist support than Hitler since the General represented the true conservative forces in Germany. Many in Italy believed that Hitler was going downhill and that he had lost his chance to take control.

Mussolini himself had his doubts about Hitler's chances of success. In July 1932 the Duce spoke to the British Ambassador, Sir Ronald Graham, who reported to London:

Signor Mussolini said that, in his opinion, the man of the moment was General von Schleicher, who had all the cards in his hand. He thought Hitler's star to be on the wane. Hitler had missed his opportunity. If he had meant to take violent action such as he, Signor Mussolini, had taken, he should have done so some time ago. It was now too late. Except in the unlikely event of Hitler obtaining a majority at the polls, he must inevitably decline

in power and prestige. The German people loved law, order and security, and if General von Schleicher could ensure these to them they would be grateful and follow him.⁴⁹

From the attitudes he expressed, it is obvious that the Duce considered that Fascism and Nazism had little in common. In 1932, when Mussolini was interviewed by Emil Ludwig, he was asked whether Fascism could be exported to Germany. He answered that it was a purely Italian phenomenon. The Duce added that ideas such as corporatism could be adapted to conditions in Germany. But the general tone of his remarks were not favorable to the Nazis.⁵⁰ It was obvious that he was hedging his bets on the Hitler movement. The NSDAP appeared unable to win a clear majority in an election and a coup d'etat seemed unlikely.

Mussolini realized that Germany was not Italy, a fact which Hitler had learned in Munich in 1923. In Germany, the Army would not stand idle under the threat of a revolution and Hitler could not be sure which way it would turn in case of an uprising. At no time could the chief of the SA dream of conquering even a single town in the Italian Fascist manner. In January 1932, Reichswehr Minister Groener said firmly during a private ministerial conference, "There will be no civil war. Anyone who rears his head will be crushed with the utmost brutality, no matter who he is."⁵¹ The Nazi revolution would have faced the united opposition of

Communists, Socialists and Conservatives, a far different situation from that of Italy in 1922.

On a number of occasions Hitler reiterated his perception of the differences between German and Italian conditions. In late 1932, the Fuehrer told an Italian journalist, "The conditions in Italy in 1922 and those in Germany of today are not the same."⁵² He indicated that violence had been necessary in Italy, but that it was not necessary in Germany. The Nazis had the moral and legal right to rule Germany. The day would soon come when he would rule not through a coup d'etat but thanks to the unanimous will of the people. In later years Hitler would regret that he had gained power so peacefully. He stated that he placed the civil war achievements of the Fascists above those of his own party.⁵³

Besides their differing methods of obtaining power, contemporaries noticed a number of other contrasts between Fascism and Nazism. In early 1932, the United States Embassy in Berlin drew up a memorandum on Hitler and his movement. It contained the statement that "The program of Fascist Italy has little in common with that of the Nazis in Germany."⁵⁴ Fascism was said to be based on the idea of corporatism, whereas Hitlerism was thought to be based on the old Hohenzollern idea of a strong centralized, imperialistic and expansive state. There were many observers who shared Mussolini's doubts as to whether Nazism in power would resemble Italian Fascism. There were a number of

movements in Germany (and Europe) which had some claim to being related to Italian Fascism. It was not clear if Nazism was the European movement closest to the PNF at that time.

In November 1932, Goering made his second visit of the year to Italy. His purpose was to attend the Volta Congress of the Italian Royal Academy to which many right-wing leaders were invited from all over Europe. What Goering accomplished in Rome is not clear. Goebbels states that the future Reich Marshal achieved great personal and political success in Italy.⁵⁵ But he gives no details. At a banquet of the Royal Academy, Goering heard of Papen's resignation and of a request that he return to Berlin, possibly to participate in the formation of a new Nazi government. Mussolini provided Goering with a plane with which to return to Germany. Mussolini's parting words to Goering were, "Take care that you don't miss the train this time."⁵⁶ Obviously the Duce realized that it was possible for the Nazis to come to power during that cabinet crisis.

The international congress of the Fascist Royal Academy was supposedly a gathering of academics and politicians to consider the future of Europe.⁵⁷ Italian representation was limited to the milder and more respectable elements of Fascism. Foreign representatives included Stefan Zweig of Austria, Daniel Halevy of France, and Werner Sombart and Hjalmar Schacht from Germany. The Italian speakers called for a united Europe against the dangers of the black race, communism, and American influence. The tone

of the conference was that Fascism was the wave of the future which would sweep all of Europe. This resembled a speech which Mussolini had recently made on October 24, 1932. He stated, "The twentieth century will be the century of Fascism Outside of our principles, there is no salvation neither for individuals nor even less for peoples. . . . In a decade Europe will be Fascist or Fascistized."⁵⁸ Of course, during this period the country which was most likely to get a Fascist-oriented government was Germany. There were many guests at the Congress from the radical and conservative right in Germany. Seldt of the Stahlhelm was a prominent delegate and the Duce spoke with him about the advantages of the Harzburg front. According to Renzetti, it was his discussions in Rome which helped ~~to~~ win Seldt over to the idea of the coalition government of January 30, 1933.⁵⁹ This is probably an exaggeration.

The German visitor who made the greatest impression at the Volta Congress was the Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg. Rosenberg's extreme racialism had aroused considerable resentment in Italy, perhaps because it was realized that it could be turned against Latins as easily as it was used against Jews and Slavs. His "Mythos" was roundly criticized. His speech at the Volta Congress, however, was rather restrained. It was titled "Krisis und Neugeburt Europas" [Crisis and Rebirth of Europe]. It stressed the importance of the four great nations--France, England, Germany, and Italy--which

should work together to defend the ancient and venerable continent of Europe. These countries must lead the way of the new manner of thought which must be anti-liberal and thus against all manifestations of the French Revolution.

The new thought must also be anti-Christian, he said, for the Church could not stand up to the Bolshevik onslaught. In a war against the enemies of civilization, each of the nations had its strength: Italy had its state; France had its soil; Germany had its race; and England had its society. The destruction of any one of these would not result in the unification of Europe but in chaos in which the other nations would also perish. Here was a grandiose scheme for a National Socialist reorganization of Europe which was an almost mythical division into realms. Rosenberg's comments about Italy were particularly generous since he referred to the Fascist state as the protector of the mighty and ancient Roman way. Rosenberg devoted an entire issue of his Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte to the Volta conference. This issue contained the text of Rosenberg's speech at the Volta Congress, plus a number of articles by leading Fascists. But most interesting is the foreword to the issue, written by Rosenberg. The Nazi philosopher praised a number of Italian speakers at the Volta Congress, but the theme of the article is his statement, "The notion that Fascism is a model for the rest of Europe is questionable."⁶⁰ His thesis is similar to the attitude he had held

in the 1920s which had brought him into conflict with Hitler. Rosenberg criticized the Fascist concept of hierarchy as unnecessary in a racially homogeneous nation like Germany. He also questioned the Latin emphasis on logic which is in conflict with Germanic mysticism. The Latin sense of logic comes from the urban character of Roman civilization. But Teutonic civilization was born in the forest and thus still has an association with a peasant culture. Rosenberg's concluding motif was that "Each country must recognize the right of the other to hearken back to its own origins and essence." ⁶¹

As late as the end of 1931, Mussolini's attitude toward the Nazis was still equivocal. In October 1931, Dino Grandi, who had been appointed Foreign Minister, visited Berlin and, in a meeting with Chancellor Brüning, stated that the position of the present German government seemed to him to be more desirable than the Nazis in power. ⁶² But by the summer of 1932, despite his statements to the contrary, Mussolini began to prepare for the possibility of a Hitler-ruled Germany. Grandi, who took a noticeably anti-Nazi position, was relieved as Foreign Minister and sent to London as Ambassador. There were advantages to a Nazi government in Berlin from the point of view of Italian foreign policy, which Mussolini intended to

exploit. Of particular note is that the first plans for the conquest of Ethiopia were made in the summer of 1932.⁶³ The Duce believed that if Hitler were to triumph in Germany, he would have to be more aggressive and expansionist not only in Africa but also in the Balkans and Danubian regions. Thus like most European leaders he followed with great interest the final moves in Hitler's rise to power.

In the last days of 1932, the Nazi leader was able to come to power in the legal manner he desired. Like Mussolini, he headed a government in which his party shared power with conservative and nationalist elements. But as with the Fascists in 1922, the Nazis held the key positions with real power, such as the Ministry of Interior. Hitler had asked for only such power as Mussolini had been given after the March on Rome; foolishly, the conservatives gave this to him. From this position the NSDAP was soon able to completely dominate the Reich government.

Notes

1. "The National Socialist movement is being treated in a cool and observant manner in leading circles here, according to my information. It is felt that they lack political initiative and a clear program, which alone would legitimize them as a factor to be taken seriously for the building of a new Germany, which for the time being is the subject of merely rhetorical preaching on the part of the party." Schubert to Foreign Office, February 18, 1931, NA: T-120/428/K123860.

2. Heinrich Brüning, Memoiren 1918-1934 (Stuttgart, 1970), pp. 354-57; Peterson, op. cit., p. 198.

3. Brüning, op. cit., pp. 272, 275.

4. Goering met Prince Philip in Berlin in 1930 through mutual friends. IfZ: ZS-918 frame 0015.

5. Appendix A

6. De Felice rapporti doc. 26

7. NA: T-120/3617/K003165-68; see also report of Berlin police chief, February 10, 1926, Bonn: Abt. II Pol. 29/NF vol. 3, German Embassy in Rome to Foreign Office, May 11, 1926 ibid. report of Munich police chief November 11, 1927, ibid. vol. 5.

8. Eugene Schaffer, Ein Leben für den Liberalismus (Berlin, 1951), p. 227; Bella Fromm, Blood and Banquets, A Berlin

Social Diary (New York, 1942), entries of March 17, 1933, January 16, 1934; CdS, February 14, 1968; letter from Schnickedanz to Rosenberg, January 13, 1931, NA: 1146-PS.

9. DDI(7) VIII, nos. 420, 478; de Felice, rapporti docs. 10, 11.

10. De Felice, rapporti doc. 29.

11. According to Renzetti, in December 1931, he talked Goering out of joining a moderate cabinet with Heinrich Brüning and General Kurt von Schleicher. This was obviously an effort to win Goering away from Hitler. De Felice, rapporti doc. 29. Renzetti also reported that because of his advice, Hitler was moderating the tone of his speeches. Ibid. doc. 24.

12. Renzetti report, November 20, 1931, NA: T-586/491/050254-5.

13. See Renzetti's reports to Mussolini of Jan. 23 and Jan. 31, 1933 NA: T-586/491/050269 -74

14. An official of the Italian Embassy in Berlin spoke to Undersecretary Aloisi in Rome about the inconvenience of Renzetti's presence. While admitting that he was a friend of Hitler and performing valuable services, the Embassy feared that he was neutralizing the action of the regular Italian Ambassador. Pompeo Aloisi, Journal: 25 Juillet 1932-14 Juin 1936 (Paris, 1957), entry of February 14, 1933, p. 63.

15. Giancarlo Giordano, "La Diplomazia Italiana e la Crisi Tedesca del 1932," Clio (1972), p. 373.

16. Der deutsche Imperialismus und der Zweite Weltkrieg (East Berlin, 1961), vol. II, p. 478.
17. de Felice, rapporti doc. 15.
18. DDI(7) VI, no. 105.
19. Anfuso, op. cit., p. 35.
20. DDI(7) VII, nos. 330, 355, 418.
21. Renzetti to Mussolini, October 15, 1931, NA: T-586/491/050253.
22. Memo by Chiavolini, NA: T-586/491/050252.
23. Renzetti to Mussolini, November 20, 1931, NA: T-586/491/050254-6.
24. Schubert to Berlin, December 9, 1931, Bonn: Geheimakten Italien Pol. 2 Politische Beziehungen zu Deutschland.
25. Bülow to Schubert, December 10, 1931, ibid.
26. Renzetti to Mussolini, January 12, 1932, NA: T-586/491/050259.
27. Renzetti to Hotel Oriental, June 9, 1932, NA: T-586/491/050261.
28. Renzetti to Mussolini, June 12, 1932, NA: T-586/491/050262.
29. Renzetti report, June 21, 1932, NA: T-586/491/050264-5.
30. Josef Goebbels, My Part in Germany's Fight (London, 1935), p. 39.
31. Ibid., p. 101.

32. Ibid., p. 172.
33. Bullock, op. cit. p. 187; Mack Smith op. cit. p. 48.
34. CdS, March 20, 1932.
35. "Molti contro uno," Corriere Padano, March 15, 1932.

The election in Germany was seen in Europe as being crucial to the survival of Mussolini's regime; see Appendix P.

36. Critica Fascista, April 1, 1932, p. 127.
37. Antieuropa (1932), p. 246.
38. CdS, April 11, 1932.
39. CdS, June 1, 1932.
40. Critica Fascista, July 15, 1932.
41. "Aspetti politica attuale della Germania," Gerarchia (1932), pp. 391-325; "Le fasi della rivoluzione Tedesco," ibid., pp. 481-87.
42. "Hindenburg e Hitler," Gerarchia (1932), pp. 236-37.
43. De Felice, rapporti doc. 33.
44. "Tecnica delle Propaganda di Hitler," Antieuropa (1932), pp. 482-505.
45. Critica Fascista, August 15, 1932, pp. 303-05.
46. "Hitler e l'amore platonico del potere," Antieuropa (1932), p. 469. See also Asvero Gravelli, Hitler, Mussolini und di Revision (Leipzig, 1933), p. 83.
47. Antieuropa (1932), pp. 570-76.
48. Il Regima Fascista, December 13, 1932.

49. Graham to Simon, July 28, 1932, PRO: C6633/2868/22 in F.O. 371/15986. On October 14, 1932, Graham reported Mussolini making a similar statement: "His Excellency then made some remarks about the situation in Germany, which he considered anything but reassuring. Hitler (and it was evident that this was a matter of regret to his Excellency) had played his cards badly. Hindenburg, von Papen and the militarists were now masters of the situation, and Signor Mussolini believed that within two years we should see a monarchist restoration in Germany. According to his information, Prince Oscar . . . was the most likely candidate. Signor Mussolini did not view such a prospect with apprehension, nor did he think that the French had reason to do so, as a monarchy in Germany would mean ten to twelve years of assured European peace. . . . There was a moment when the Fascist Government viewed with some measure of approval and pleasure the idea of drawing close to Herr Hitler and his followers, who represented in Germany a movement so similar to their own. This in spite of the fact that Signor Mussolini, even in August last, had begun to be doubtful as regards the probability of Hitler's success. His Excellency is evidently now even more doubtful on the subject. A German Government consisting of Junkers, barons and militarists is a far less pleasing proposition from the Italian point of view, and the

alternative for Germany appears to be an indefinite sequence of elections and political chaos." Graham to Simon, PRO: C8744/141/22 in F.O. 371/15977; see also BDFP(2), vol. IV, p. 83.

50. Emil Ludwig, Talks with Mussolini (London, 1932), pp. 160-61. For the negative reaction of the Nazis to this book, see de Felice, rapporti doc. 21. It is not surprising that the Nazis invariably referred to the author as Emil Ludwig Cohen.

51. Karl Dietrich Bracker, Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik (Villingen, 1960), p. 674. One Fascist journalist noted a significant difference between the German and Italian situations. Mussolini in 1922 had an army with no real tradition and weaklings such as Facta, Bonomi, and Nitti to face. Hitler, if he had wished to make a violent revolution, had to face a proud army probably led by Schleicher, von Papen, and even Hugenberg. Ciarlantini, op. cit., pp. 63-66.

52. Hitler, Speeches, vol. II, p. 1000.

53. Hitler, Table Talk, p. 437.

54. Foreign Relations of the United States, Department of State (Washington, 1950), 1932, vol. II, p. 279.

55. Josef Goebbels, Kampf um Berlin (Munich, 1934), p. 205.

56. Giorgio Pini, Duilio Susmel, op. cit., vol. III, p. 265.

57. Ledeen op. cit. pp. 82-4.
58. O. O. XXV pp. 147-8
59. Renzetti to Mussolini Jan. 31, 1933 NA: T-586/491/050272-4
60. NSM, December 1932 (vol. 3), p. 538 on Rosenberg at the Volta Congress; see also IMT,, vol. XI, p. 454; Alfred Rosenberg, Krisis und Neubau Europas (Berlin, 1934).
61. NSM Dec. 1932, p. 535
62. Bruning, op. cit., p. 434.
63. Aloisi, op. cit., p. 56; Guaraglia, op. cit., pp. 176-77.

CHAPTER X

FASCIST REACTION TO THE THIRD REICH

In the last days of 1932, events were set in motion which ultimately culminated in the Nazi ascension to power in Germany. Unlike the dramatic March on Rome, Hitler came to power without violence or even the threat of force. His ultimate triumph was a political arrangement between the Nazis and the conservative ruling classes. But though the outward form was different, this was the same type of agreement which had permitted the Fascists to gain power in Italy. In both countries the "establishment" believed that an upstart movement could be controlled, especially since it would have only a small minority of the cabinet positions. Eventually the Duce gained control over the government in Rome. The Nazi Fuehrer was also to make himself dominate over his country and in fact was to do it considerably more rapidly than the Italian Fascists. Within less than a year Hitler was to have as much power in Germany as Mussolini had collected in over ten years of rule.

Benito Mussolini had mixed feelings about the events of January 30, 1933. The advent of a regime ideologically similar to Fascism in a major European nation could not but be a source of pride to the Duce's proverbial vanity. The prospect of gaining

a powerful ally promised to strengthen Mussolini's hand. The new German state could also act as a distraction that would allow him to pursue his own ambitions more easily. A resurgent Germany would surely demand a revision of the Versailles settlement, which could work to Italy's benefit. But the Italian dictator was afraid of unlimited German rearmament, particularly because a strong Germany would be dangerous to Italian interests in Austria and in the South Tyrol. Also, Italy's ambitions in Southeast Europe (i.e., Hungary, Yugoslavia and Greece) could be endangered if Hitler should decide to expand his own influence in that direction. A contemporary source summarized the situation accurately when it stated: "The moment Herr Hitler established himself in the seat of power, it became clear that National Socialism in the wilderness was more agreeable to Signor Mussolini than German National Socialism in the saddle."¹ When the Nazis were simply a large opposition party in Germany, Mussolini could boast of the growing appeal of Fascist ideas while facing a weak paralyzed government in Berlin. After January 30, 1933, Mussolini had to deal with an assertive, expansive government in Germany whose ideological affinity with Fascism could not be relied upon to insure harmonious relations.

Publicly, however, the Fascist regime maintained a very favorable attitude to Hitler's ascension to power. There was considerable enthusiasm on the part of the Italian press, which was

probably genuine. In particular, Hitler's victory was hailed as a great defeat for the parliamentary democratic forces which had been so hostile to Mussolini's government. The Italian press in the first days after Hitler became Chancellor tended to stress the inspiration which Nazism had received from Fascism. On January 31, the Corriere della Sera "cordially saluted" the new regime which began under such "glorious auspices."² The extreme anti-Semitic paper Il Tevere was, as might be expected, even more enthusiastic. On February 10, 1933, it proclaimed, "In the name of the new order that Europe wants, we hail the advent to power of Hitler, loyal friend of Fascist Italy, admirer of Mussolini."³

Despite the headlines in the press and the optimistic reports of the Nazi Ortsgruppen leader,⁴ public opinion in Italy was much less unanimous in its jubilation over the Nazi victory. If we read the secret reports of the Fascist political police immediately after Hitler's ascension to power,⁵ we find a great divergence of opinions reflected by the Italian public. Many people expected an eventual Nazi victory but were surprised at its suddenness. There was considerable skepticism about whether Hitler's regime would last, since many Italians agreed with Mussolini that there was strong sentiment in Germany for a monarchical restoration. Not surprisingly, the triumph of the NSDAP was seen as a victory for Fascism which was welcomed by those Italians who supported their own government. Anti-Fascists

were obviously disheartened by the turn of events in Germany. Conservatives were gratified to see a regime in the center of Europe which was strongly anti-Communist. It is interesting to note that a report from Milan on February 1, 1933, mentions observations being made that Hitler owed his success to the financial support he received from his ally Mussolini. Quite probably many Italians had read accounts of the German trials on this question but did not believe their own government's denials of the accusations. In general Italian public opinion was somewhat skeptical about Hitler's victory. Opinions tended to differ with various groups and social classes. There was widespread apprehension about potential Nazi radicalism in both foreign affairs and domestic policy. Such reservations gradually appeared in the Fascist press after the initial jubilation had subsided.

Hitler was not indifferent to the attitude of Fascist Italy toward his ascension to power. The early months of the National Socialist government in Germany were a perilous period for the new regime. Most countries were profoundly alarmed by the advent of Hitler. During their struggle for power, the Nazis had made no secret of their desire to revise the Versailles settlement and to reestablish Germany to her pre-war position of power and international influence. Such intentions were particularly alarming to the French and Polish governments. Weak and disarmed, Hitler needed considerable foreign

support until he could consolidate his power at home and increase his military strength. There were few countries which could offer Germany any possible assistance. Soviet Russia had been on good terms with the Weimar Republic, but it was questionable that she would ally herself with the strongly anti-Communist Nazis. Hitler had long desired an agreement with Great Britain, but English opinion was not favorable to Nazism, and even in the most optimistic estimates it would be a long time before a London-Berlin detente could be possible. This left only Fascist Italy.

When he became Chancellor, Hitler had little doubt as to what policy he should follow toward Mussolini's government. For many years, despite very heavy opposition even within his own party, Hitler had strenuously advocated an alliance with Italy. After the Machtergreifung, most observers expected the Fuehrer to seek closer relations with his fellow dictator Benito Mussolini. On February 20, 1933, the American Ambassador in Berlin reported his view that Hitler would seek to ally himself with Italy as well as Hungary. André Francois-Poncet, the French Ambassador in Berlin, agreed with this analysis. In the same month he reported to his government: "Above all, Hitler's foreign policy is pro-Italian. . . . the accord with Rome seems to be the key point in Hitler's diplomatic edifice."⁶ Francois-Poncet noted that in the early months of 1933 the Italian Embassy in Berlin was the only foreign legation which the new Chancellor visited.

Somewhat later, in a dispatch to Paris, he spoke of the Italian Ambassador in Berlin as a sort of "Lord Protector" who was "treated as if he was himself a member of the Reichs-government." According to Francois-Poncet, Hitler and his entourage regarded Mussolini as their "tutor and teacher."⁷

There are many indications that in the first months of 1933, Hitler desired close relations with Fascist Italy. In an interview on February 3, 1933, speaking of Germany and Italy, the Nazi dictator stated: "The two nations find themselves on the same ground and strive for the same goals. . . . The German side will do all in its power to further such an understanding."⁸

One of the stumbling blocks to cooperation between the two regimes was the opposition of many conservative officials in the German Foreign Affairs Ministry to close relations with Fascist Italy. In a message which Hitler sent to Mussolini through Renzetti on January 31, 1933, he complained of the attitude of many of these Foreign Office officials, but stated that he did not have enough capable men of his own to run the Ministry in the manner he desired vis-a-vis Italy. In this same message, the Fuehrer indicated that he wished to visit the Duce for a private meeting. This request is not surprising since it had been repeatedly made by Hitler in the years before he came to power. He wrote: "I have without a doubt arrived at this point through Fascism. . . . If it is true that our ideas or systems are not exportable, it is also true that ideas on their own expand as waves and rays do."⁹

There were a number of other contacts between the two dictators in the first few weeks of Hitler's rule. A large part of these contacts consisted of Italian efforts to advise their Nazi friends on German internal policy, and of reciprocal pledges of support. On February 5, Major Renzetti reported that he had suggested to Hitler that he get rid of Hugenberg (the Nationalist leader) and not be unduly concerned about legalities. He saw good prospects for the Nazis in the March 5 election. He concluded his report with this statement: "The Nazis have affirmed and are affirming the necessity of following a decisive policy of friendship toward Italy."¹⁰ On February 6, the Duce spoke with Ulrich von Hassell, the German Ambassador in Rome. Mussolini told Hassell that he believed that the Nazis would meet much stronger opposition from the left in Germany than the Fascists had in Italy. The Duce also stated that "Once the newly formed coalition is solidified by the election in March . . . Germany and Italy, he is convinced, will be able to conduct a closely coordinated policy. . . . For their interests, he says, are closely related in regard to many major issues."¹¹

These messages of the first few weeks give the definite impression that both sides were maneuvering for position, each unsure of the other but feeling obliged to play a particular role. Mussolini and his agent Renzetti attempted to assert Fascist Italy's leadership as senior partner by continuing to give unsolicited advice to the Nazi regime. While there is no sign

that their suggestions ever altered Hitler's internal policy after he became Chancellor, he flattered them by receiving their advice without objection. The pledges of mutual support were rather pro forma. Though there was more sincerity on the part of Hitler, both dictators were anxious to use rather than support one another. Just how each would fit into the other's strategy, however, was not immediately clear in Rome or Berlin.

One important issue in February and March was the question of a proposed visit to Italy by Hitler. Besides a request sent through Renzetti, Hitler also appealed to Mussolini via Ambassador Cerruti, and concrete plans began to materialize at the end of February. Foreign Minister Neurath indicated that the trip was definite but that the date had not been set. Throughout the month of March there were constant rumors of a Hitler visit to Italy.¹² The Fuehrer toyed with the idea of going to Rome in his capacity as Party Leader, so as to play down the foreign-political importance of the trip. But by March 14th, Neurath told the British Ambassador that Hitler did not intend to go to Rome.¹³ Part of the opposition to the visit came from Mussolini, who carefully evaded Hitler's hints and requests. The Italian dictator was not anxious for a visit from Hitler because of the growing alarm in most countries over the rapid radicalization of the German internal situation. Considerable opposition also came from the Berlin Foreign Office, which did not want a German-Italian alliance so soon.¹⁴

The leader of this group was Foreign Minister Constantin von Neurath. He had been German Ambassador in Rome for a number of years, leaving that post in 1930. While in Italy Neurath had gained a rather unfavorable view of the country. He had a particularly low opinion of Italian strength and severely questioned her dependability. As ambassador, he had written, "a reliance on this country is never possible."¹⁵ Not a dedicated Nazi, he had no reason to blindly follow Hitler's rationale that agreement with Mussolini should be the cornerstone of German policy. Neurath's phlegmatic attitude toward Italy was supported by the Director of the Foreign Ministry's Department II, Gerhard Kopke, but he was opposed by Ulrich von Hassell, the current ambassador in Rome, who bombarded Berlin with dispatches urging closer cooperation between the two countries.

On February 20, Kopke sent Hassell a memorandum in which he pointed out Italy's military weakness and inability to cope with the French army if Germany should become involved in a conflict in the East. Besides, he suggested, Germany was in no position to offer Italy compensation for her diplomatic or military support. Kopke also stressed the points that separate Italy and Germany, namely the South Tyrol and Austria. On March 6, Hassell sent a typical message to Kopke in which he outlined his rationale for close relations with Italy. He argued against forming "too low an opinion of Italy's value to Germany."¹⁶ Hassell's argument

was not without merit, since there were many areas where the Fascist government in Rome could be of considerable aid to Hitler's regime. In his early months, the new Chancellor could use Mussolini as a counterweight against both France and Poland.

Although not as great a problem as the Foreign Office, there was some opposition to the alliance with Italy within Hitler's own Nazi movement. Since the early 1920s, the Fuehrer had experienced considerable difficulty in imposing party discipline on this issue. Gradually opposition on this question within the Party was silenced, but there did exist a noticeable undertow of resentment even in 1933. On March 30, an edict was issued by the Directorship of the Nazi Party's Political Organization:

The National Socialist movement is friendly to Fascism. The German people are glad that the two peoples are bound by the same foreign-political goals. However, a mutual fraternization is not desired, for each people and each idea have their idiosyncrasy and should maintain it.¹⁷

The tone taken in this edict was a common theme which was affirmed by a number of Nazi sources in early 1933. Many NSDAP leaders tended to stress that Fascism and Nazism, though similar and potential allies, did in fact have separate roots and had a number of differences of opinion on key issues. In March 1933,

the Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte published an issue devoted to Fascist Italy. The articles were by leading political writers and covered economic, cultural and other subjects related to domestic policy. In the preface to this edition, however, it was made clear that Fascist Italy was not a model for Nazi Germany to slavishly copy. The editor, Rudolph von Maltzahn, wrote, "We must not forget what deep soul differences there are between Germans and Italians. . . . Many misunderstandings in mutual evaluation have arisen from this."¹⁸

The German press at this time tended to follow the same line. Typical was an article written by Bruno Rentus for the Berliner Börsen-Zeitung, which stated, "The Italian idea of the corporation . . . does not have much to offer us. . . . [It] is in contradiction to the spirit of self-administration such as. . . has long been a component of German tradition."¹⁹ In addition, a number of Nazi publicists traced their movement back to Protestant and Prussian tradition. This would include the Reformation of the Church and its emancipation from Latin influence. Such a viewpoint could only be interpreted as a criticism of Italian Fascism and of its claim to predominance of all kindred movements. Efforts were made by Hitler to alleviate this friction. In 1933 there were a number of exchanges between the Nazi and Fascist movements. During the spring a steady stream of Germans traveled to Italy in order to

study Fascism.²⁰ In the summer a group of Italian party youth visited Germany and were received personally by the Fuehrer. Such efforts did not eliminate the problem of Nazi-Fascist misunderstanding, but they let it be known that Hitler personally stood behind the rapprochement. On balance, however, there was much less resentment against Fascist Italy in the National Socialist Party than in the Foreign Office.

South of the Alps, the Nazi victory in the election of March 5, 1933, made a very favorable impression. On March 9, the Fascist Grand Council voted a motion in which it recognized that Nazism was related to Fascism and that it was an offshoot of the Italian movement.²¹ An article published at this time by the Corriere della Sera took a similar line, stressing that Nazism had many tendencies that were similar to Fascism.²² After the March election it was clear to everyone in Italy that Mussolini's expectation of a monarchical restoration was no longer really viable. Hitler and his movement must now be accepted as the government of Germany for the foreseeable future.

On March 14, a British official in London spoke to the Italian Ambassador Dino Grandi, recently returned from Rome, who reported that "he found Mussolini completely infatuated with the idea of cooperation between the Fascist and Nazi regimes, contact being maintained not through the Foreign Office but through the Fascist and Nazi organizations."²³ But the British Ambassador in

Rome believed that despite outward appearances, there was considerable disapproval of the Nazi regime in Italy that was not being expressed so as not to lose influence in Berlin.²⁴ A book published in Italy at this time reflected the long-standing undertow of uneasiness which many Fascists felt about Nazism. In this work, Francesco S. Giovannucci expressed a great deal of anxiety about the new regime in Berlin, particularly on the question of the forcible revision of the Treaty of Versailles.²⁵ But foreign policy was not the only area in which the two dictatorships had dissimilar views. There were many clashes of interest and numerous points of disagreement between Nazis and Fascists which could not be covered up, and some of them spilled into the open in 1933.

One area of friction was the difference between the two regimes' approach toward the Jews. Officially in 1933 the Fuehrer's view that Fascism was basically anti-Semitic and would eventually openly attack the Jews was the Nazi Party line. But by 1933, Mussolini had not turned against the Jews as expected. Somewhat earlier, in his interview with Emil Ludwig, Mussolini had stated: ". . . Race! It is a feeling not a reality; ninety five per cent; at least is a feeling. Nothing will ever make me believe that biologically pure races can be shown to exist today. . . . No such doctrine will ever find wide acceptance here in Italy. . . . National pride has no need of the delirium of race."²⁶

But Mussolini was not above having racist attitudes even

though he was not ready to openly come out against the Jews. Mussolini was convinced of the existence of an international alliance of Jewish luminaries who were predisposed against Fascism. But he believed that it was best not to oppose such a powerful group. "I have no love for the Jews," he told Prince Starhernberg, "but they have great influence everywhere. It is better to leave them alone."²⁷ Somewhat later he told Ambassador Hassell that "if he were in Germany, he would presumably be an anti-Semite."²⁸

Despite his personal feelings, the Duce kept on good terms with Jewish community leaders and was not pleased by the Nazi attitude in this question. By the middle of March, Mussolini was making it very plain that he opposed any Nazi pogrom in Germany. On March 15, the British ambassador in Rome reported that Mussolini "had felt justified in sending Hitler a hint to avoid violence and go slow in his treatment of the Jews."²⁹ This statement was not without basis. Mussolini had sent a personal message to Hitler to dissuade him from undertaking a racial campaign against the Jews. He wrote: "I believe the problem is that the struggle against the Jews will not strengthen National Socialism internally but rather will increase the moral pressure and economic reprisals of world Jewry."³⁰ The Duce believed that Hitler's anti-Semitic policy would endanger the new regime and create enemies for Nazi Germany in many countries. He was also concerned over the possibility of cooperation between Jewish refugees and anti-Fascist exiles.³¹

On March 28 Mussolini warned Ambassador Hassell about the power of the Jews but urged against overreacting against their anti-German propaganda. He also pointed out British and French agitation in response to anti-Semitism in Germany. On the eve of an April 1 boycott of Jewish businesses in Germany, the Duce sent his Ambassador Vittorio Cerruti to see the Fuehrer and urge moderation of his anti-Semitic position. Cerruti had a Jewish wife and was very outspoken about Nazi racism. He delivered a personal message from Mussolini to Hitler. The Fuehrer was asked to issue a government statement to control the excesses of the Nazi Party. The Duce naively believed that Hitler was being pressured into the anti-Semitic action by extremists in his party. Both Neurath and Vice Chancellor von Papen encouraged Cerruti to take a firm stand with the Fuehrer. In his meeting with the Italian envoy, Hitler did not hide his displeasure at Mussolini's initiative. When Cerruti attempted to make his presentation, he was interrupted by Hitler and treated to a monologue on the dangers of Jewish Bolshevism. While stressing his admiration for the Duce, Hitler stated that his fellow dictator understood nothing of the Semitic menace, but that he himself did, and was determined to rid the world of these Jewish pests. During April, Mussolini revealed considerable displeasure at continued Nazi anti-Semitism. He was beseeched by Jews from all over the world to intervene on behalf of their co-religionists in Germany. The

Fascist government agreed to allow Jewish refugees to enter the country, provided that they did not engage in any anti-German activities. Mussolini desired to play his favorite role of mediator. But to those close to him he stated his belief that Hitler was making a big mistake, since he was building a power which would eventually cause him a great deal of trouble. Throughout the spring, Mussolini continued to be very critical of the Nazi regime's treatment of the Jews, but his protests had no noticeable effect. On April 30, the French Ambassador in Rome reported that "Mussolini has not showed himself satisfied with the manner in which his counsels of wisdom [on the Jewish question] were observed in Berlin."³²

In Italy there was some dissatisfaction with Nazi anti-Semitism even among Fascist circles. A report from Nazi sources in Florence indicated:

A noticeable tension was created by the carrying out of the measures against the Jews in the Reich. . . . it wasn't easy to move the Italians from their opinion that we are "turning back into Barbarians." These words were spoken by one of the most influential Fascists in Florence.³³

Gradually, however, Mussolini came to realize that there was no real hope of moderating Hitler's position on this issue. The Duce's protests to Berlin had not really been motivated by

any moral outrage but by a feeling that a program against such an important group in German life really served no useful purpose. His counsels of moderation to Hitler were given in the same way as the tactical advice he had offered on various other subjects. When he realized that Hitler would never relent, he avoided making the Jewish issue an insurmountable obstacle to close German-Italian relations. In fact, in June Mussolini told Ambassador Hassell that in the anti-Semitic campaign it was advisable

. . . not to weaken now and beat a retreat.

[He feels that] this is very dangerous, precisely with a power like the Jews; that certainly there was much clumsiness and excess in the beginning, but that in no circumstances must weakness be shown.³⁴

Such was the moral fiber of a man who many believed would serve as a moderating influence on Hitler.

Of greater interest to the Italian people was the Nazis' treatment of the Catholic Church. There had been considerable concern in Italy over Hitler's attitude on this subject for some time. But in a speech at Munich in 1929, Hitler had hailed Mussolini's Concordat with the Church with great enthusiasm. The Fuehrer expressed the belief that an accord between the Nazis and the Vatican would be possible. In December 1931, the Nazi leader told

Pietro Solari, an Italian journalist, that he did not wish to fight the Catholic Church but only opposed it because it supported the Center Party.³⁵ In a book published in 1933, another Italian writer notes a great difference between the Nazi and the Fascist movements in their attitudes toward Catholicism. According to this writer, "the swastika is the battle sign against the Cross of Christ."³⁶ The author points out the clash between National Socialism and Catholicism on such questions as eugenics, matrimony, and education. But Hitler did not persecute the Church in Germany. He realized that the best policy was to make concessions and thus undermine the support of the Center Party. A tolerant attitude would also help the Nazis win the support of the Fascist government.³⁷

When negotiations began between the new German regime and the Catholic Church for a Concordat, Mussolini did all he could to further an agreement. Vice Chancellor von Papen, who participated in the talks, records that the Duce's Ambassador impressed Hitler with the urgency of the matter.³⁸ After the Concordat was signed, Hitler continually violated its provisions. Unlike anti-Semitism, however, the Nazi position on this issue was not accepted by Mussolini. With an eye to opinion in Italy, the Duce was eventually obligated to raise this point with the German dictator.³⁹ Hitler was careful not to carry his suppression of the Church to an extreme.

In part, this may have been out of concern for the Italian dictator, who would have had a great deal of difficulty explaining in Italy his friendship for a country that persecuted the Catholic Church.

Another problem which stood in the way of a good Nazi-Fascist relationship was Austria. Many considered it only a matter of time before Hitler, who was born in Austria, would attempt to unite this small country with the Reich. The Nazis in Austria were subordinated to the German movement. Hitler as Fuehrer in Germany was leader of the NSDAP in Austria. Thus the Anschluss was regarded as an accomplished fact on the level of Party organization. But no Italian government could possibly desire the absorption of Austria by Germany. Mussolini had cultivated extensive influence in the Danubian Basin. Italy's pretension to Great Power status depended to a large measure on her influence in this region. The thought of Nazi troops stationed on the Brenner Pass bordering on South Tyrol with its large German population was a development which no one in Rome could accept without enormous apprehension. During early 1933, the Italian government made it very plain to Hitler that it would not tolerate the annexation or Nazification of Austria. On March 27, Cerruti, in a conversation with Neurath, again declared what he had already told the Chancellor, that "Italy could not concede the annexation of Austria to Germany."⁴⁰ Cerruti told Köpke that

Hitler had assured him that the Anschluss question was not an actual problem at that time.⁴¹

In April there were reports in Berlin of joint military and diplomatic talks between France and Italy for the purpose of coordinating their efforts to prevent an Anschluss.⁴² For the most part, however, the French worked more closely with the British on the Austrian situation. The Western powers were unable to form a common front with Italy. Mussolini chose to work alone, since he believed that he could exert more pressure on Hitler if he remained aloof from the West and approached the Nazi regime on the Austrian question as a potential ally rather than as a member of a hostile coalition. In July, when the British and French prepared a common note on the Austrian situation, the Italians leaked its contents to Berlin. This action was typical of the Italian attitude on the Austrian question. Mussolini made it clear he would not hesitate to send troops to prevent a Nazi take-over in Austria,⁴³ but he still wished to remain a quasi-ally of Hitler. Ultimately, in 1934, the two dictators were to clash over Austria. In 1933, however, the Austrian issue did not disrupt relations between the Nazis and Fascists.

The union of Italy and Germany even in an informal manner was an event which was greatly feared in London and Paris during this period. Mussolini's government played a key role; in a sense, he was the arbitrator of Europe. If he lined up with

Britain and France to form a solid anti-Nazi bloc, Hitler would have been isolated. But if the two dictators worked together, they could offset the alliance of the Western Powers. The French in particular were very concerned over the possibility of a Nazi-Fascist coalition. As the German Ambassador in Paris reported, "the thought of a prompt deterrence by force of the allegedly threatening danger of an Italian-German bloc is gaining favor [here]. . . ."44 In early 1933, Western opinion was alarmed at the prospect of a German-Italian alliance but did not give up all hope of preventing it. At a meeting of British and French Ministers in Paris on March 10, M. Paul-Boncour said that if "Mussolini had to choose between Germany on the one hand and France, Great Britain and America on the other, he would not think twice."45

Of course, there were many who believed that Mussolini could serve as a moderating influence on Hitler. Such a view of the Italian dictator was to be a standard theme of the 1930s. There were even those who claimed to prefer a German-Italian alliance, since liaisons with Mussolini would force Hitler to accommodate his plans to the less aggressive and expansive Italian policy. This sort of unrealistic analysis, however, was not the predominant attitude, since most responsible Western leaders realized that the two dictators were

more likely to cause problems united than separately. For their part, the Italians were unwilling to commit themselves unswervingly to the idea of an alliance with Hitler, and kept the door open to the West.⁴⁶ During this period there were negotiations for a Franco-Italian detente which were strongly pushed by Paris after Hitler's accession to power. One reason Mussolini wanted negotiations with France was to avoid the possibility of Hitler making arrangements with the West at Italy's expense. These Franco-Italian negotiations, for which a special Ambassador, Henri de Jouvenel, was sent to Rome, were nearly aborted in January and February due to a vicious press campaign in both France and Italy. In March, the talks got underway but soon merged with the negotiations for Mussolini's Four Power Pact.

This proposed alliance of England, France, Italy and Germany represented Mussolini's chief diplomatic effort of 1933. There were a number of reasons for the Duce's proposal, not the least of which was his desire to gain prestige for his country and regime. Another interpretation offered is that Mussolini wished to avoid a war which might result from a policy of uncontrolled revisionism.⁴⁷ But the main reason why the Italian dictator desired an agreement between the Four Powers was to distract Hitler's attention from Austria and the South Tyrol and other possible areas of expansion in Western Europe, so that he would move against Eastern Europe instead.

As early as the fall of 1931, the Germans had explained to the Italians that they would use the first opportunity to deal with Poland and with the question of their Eastern frontier.⁴⁸ It was Mussolini's hope that a war between Germany and the Western Powers could be avoided since Italy would eventually be involved. The Duce was probably sincere when he mentioned the Pact to the French as an opportunity to "hold Germany reined in" and "to limit and control the military power of a dangerous neighbor."⁴⁹

In presenting the Pact in Berlin, the Italians used a somewhat different approach. The first hint of a Four Power Pact was made by Renzetti to Hitler on January 31. He explained it as an effort to get an understanding between Italy, Germany and England so as to constrain France. This, he explained, was preferable to a series of bilateral agreements by each of the three powers and Paris.⁵⁰ The Germans were the first to know about the Pact but Mussolini tried to give the impression that they were notified at the same time as the other Powers.⁵¹ The formal proposal came on March 14, when Cerruti, the Italian Ambassador, paid a visit to the Foreign Minister, Neurath. Cerruti spoke of the strength of French and Polish armaments and the danger of a preventive war against both Germany and Italy. He also hinted that the Pact would eventually expedite a revision of the Polish-German frontier. The Germans replied to Cerruti's initiative

by approving the general outline of the Pact with minor reservations. However, there was a deep division of opinion in Berlin concerning the agreement. It was opposed by Neurath and the Foreign Office and supported by Hitler, Goering, and Ambassador Hassell in Rome. Neurath distrusted the idea of a consultive pact, which he believed would not increase Germany's freedom of action. Eventually he acquiesced in the agreement because he believed that it might lead to a relaxation of the international atmosphere, but not without first expending considerable effort to block its consummation.⁵² Hassell favored the Pact because he believed it would lead to revision in Germany's favor. Goering, who was a key figure in Italian-German relations in 1933, was probably the most outspoken advocate of the Four Power agreement. In 1933 he was to make three trips to Italy trying to promote the Four Power pact and perhaps certain other agreements.

During the course of the negotiations, Hitler was to show some hesitation, which angered Mussolini. But Hitler's first public reaction to the proposal on March 23 was an unqualified endorsement.⁵³ The degree of Mussolini's influence on Hitler during this period has

not been absolutely established, but there can be little doubt that desire to please Mussolini accounts for a large part of the Fuehrer's support of the Pact. During the negotiations, German enthusiasm turned to misgivings, but Hitler never pulled out of the discussions out of fear of offending his fellow dictator, whose support he believed he needed in the early months of his regime. At this time, there was considerable direct contact between the two dictators, by letter, special messages sent by emissaries, and possibly by direct telephone conversations. As noted above, the Western Powers counted very heavily on Mussolini's ability to influence Hitler. This was one of the main reasons for Prime Minister McDonald and Foreign Secretary Simon to visit Rome on March 18. Another, not necessarily contradictory reason suggested was the desire to prevent the development of a solid Nazi-Fascist coalition. Dino Grandi, the anglophile Italian Ambassador in London, urged a visit by McDonald and Simon to Rome for this purpose.⁵⁴ When the British leaders arrived in Rome, Mussolini presented to them an outline of the Four Power Pact. It called for gradual treaty revision

through the League of Nations and a pledge of cooperation between the Four Powers.

One of the countries most seriously affected by Mussolini's Pact was Poland, which was grievously offended by its exclusion from the select group of Great Powers. Hassell's opinion was that Poland was acting like a "madman" over the Four Power Pact, as was shown by the resignation of her newly appointed Ambassador in Rome. The Polish were also fearful that the Four Powers would agree on a revision of Germany's eastern frontier. It has been suggested that the Warsaw government precipitated the Westerplatte incident over Danzig in March 1933 in part to answer Mussolini's revisionist schemes at Poland's expense.⁵⁵ Without access to the Polish archives it is difficult to examine the Italian connection to the Westerplatte incident. However, we do know that in January Count Szembeck, a Polish diplomat, visited Rome in order to ascertain Italy's attitude on the Danzig question. Mussolini's expressions of revisionist sentiment to the Polish envoy on this occasion may have convinced the Warsaw government of the need for a show of force when the Duce proposed his Four Power agreement.⁵⁶ According to numerous reports, Mussolini proposed a revision of the Polish frontier during the visit of McDonald and Simon but his suggestion was rejected by his British visitors.⁵⁷ Since the Poles were aware that the Corridor question was being discussed in Rome, this greatly increased their belligerency.

Against Poland many Germans believed they needed more help from Italy than just diplomatic support. In April, Neurath wrote that it would take Germany five years just to equal Poland militarily. Although this proved to be an excessively conservative estimate, Germany in early 1933 was in no condition to face a Polish attack. Germany's need for Italian military aid may help explain the three visits of Herman Goering to Italy in 1933. Goering played an important role in the early Nazi regime. After Hitler, he ranked as the most important figure in the Third Reich at this time. Besides considering himself an expert on Italy, he also took a great interest in military affairs, particularly aviation, which was prohibited under the Versailles Treaty. He constantly tried to gain control of the Defense Ministry and was well acquainted with its aviation bureau. A recent student of German-Italian relations indicates that no reason can be found for Goering's first trip to Italy in 1933.⁵⁸ But using some evidence not available to this author, we can see that Goering's visit may have been an attempt by the Nazi government to win the military support of Fascist Italy against the danger of a preventive war by Poland.

On March 28, Ambassador Hassell had an interview with Mussolini. The Italian dictator indicated his awareness of German military weakness and stated that Italy was gaining strength rapidly. Significantly, the Duce mentioned the

possibility of cooperation between the German and the Italian Air Forces.⁵⁹ At about this time, Goering was secretly preparing his first trip to Italy. Hassell reported on March 31 that the Italian government desired a postponement of the visit. However, Cerruti in Berlin indicated that the initiative for the delay had come from Hassell. Two days later Neurath ordered Hassell not to make any further efforts to delay Goering's trip. The German Foreign Office meanwhile was trying to gain any information possible about the secret mission. Goering was traveling with the head of the "Air Defense Office." When an aide of Goering was questioned, he claimed not to know any details of his Minister's intentions. He tried to answer evasively, suggesting that Goering might perhaps fly in a private capacity just as the Italian Air Minister Balbo had made private visits to Germany.⁶⁰ It is significant that Goering's aide compared the mission of his chief, who was a World War fighter ace, to the visits of Marshall Balbo, an Italian air hero. In doing this, he may have given away more information than he intended.

In Rome, Goering had two meetings with the Duce along with ceremonial visits to the Pope and the Italian King. He also had frequent contacts with Marshall Balbo. Almost every source indicates that Goering's visit was a total fiasco. The French Ambassador in Rome reported the visit as a glaring example of the strained relations between Hitler's Nazi clique

and the German Foreign Office. Goering made a particularly bad impression on Mussolini. The British Ambassador in Berlin reported that Goering's visit was contributing to a French victory in the race between Berlin and Paris to gain favor with the Duce. Rumbold wrote that the "Germans may shortly be faced by a situation [with regard to Italy] comparable to the loss of a second battle on the Marne."⁶¹ Mussolini called Goering part of a "dangerous element" in the Nazi regime.⁶² The question, of course, is what did Goering propose to Mussolini and Balbo that made them believe that he was such a dangerous man. One explanation for this is offered by a memorandum sent to the Foreign Secretary by a British source in Paris. This report indicates that the purpose of Goering's visit to Rome was to undertake

preliminary negotiations of a secret military convention between Italy and Germany. The Germans protested that they were threatened by a preventive war with Poland. As Germany's military preparedness, especially in respect to aviation, is far from being complete, the German government proposed that Italy should guarantee the integrity of the German territory from the Polish invasion. The German representatives also pointed out that the Polish military aviation, thanks to the French assistance, is now a very formidable force. They insist that Italy, where the development of military aviation has reached a high state of efficiency, should lend her Air Force for defending Germany from Polish Air attack.⁶³

In addition, the report goes on to indicate that Mussolini turned down this suggestion, giving as a reason the excesses of the Nazis and in particular their treatment of Communists. Mussolini is then supposed to have suggested that Germany restore her friendly relations with the Soviet Union. This part of the British memorandum can be verified, since we know from other sources that the Duce repeatedly suggested that Hitler's government initiate a rapprochement with Soviet Russia.⁶⁴ The British intelligence report predicts an effort by Hitler to improve his relations with the Russians. This did happen, for a month later, Hitler signed an agreement with the Soviets in Berlin. All of this gives an added note of reliability to the British source.

Of Goring's second trip in May we know that he carried on negotiations for the Four Power Pact in collaboration with the German Foreign Office. Whether he engaged in any other activity we do not know. On his third trip in November, Goring again visited Marshall Balbo and delivered a personal message from Hitler to Mussolini. The Duce received him very coolly and issued a communiqué which was very negative about the future of German-Italian relations. Putting all the facts together, we can speculate that Hitler, in secret opposition to the Wilhelmstrasse, sent Goring to Rome in order to negotiate an air pact with the Italians to protect Germany against Poland. In case of a war over Danzig, air power

would have been the only way for Italy to help Germany. Since Germany lacked an air force, there is no question about her need for help from Italy, which boasted one of the largest and most modern air forces at that time. The fact that Mussolini was so offended by Göring might indicate that Mussolini was not ready for any arrangement of this type, or that the plan was presented to him in a manner which was too aggressive. After being turned down by Italy, it is logical that Hitler would seek to improve his relations with Russia as a method of putting a restraint on Poland. Of course more research into Göring's visits is needed, but it is probable that on his first trip at least, the future Reichs-Marshall came for more than a social visit. For Mussolini's part, it is understandable that he would not agree to a military pact. In the spring of 1933, the Duce's efforts were focused on the Four Power Pact, which he believed would solve many of Europe's problems without a resort to war. A bilateral German-Italian military alliance would have completely scuttled any hope of negotiating a Four Power agreement.

Mussolini stressed to the Germans the idea that a Four Power agreement would be the best method of avoiding a preventive war by Poland and/or France. In attempting to sell the Pact to Hassell, Mussolini stated that it would alleviate "the threatening situation which had arisen through the violent reaction of the entire world to the new German regime."⁶⁵ But

this did not prevent the Germans from driving a hard bargain. Berlin wanted as much recognition as possible for the concept of treaty revision, especially in regard to territorial questions. The Germans also wanted provisions that would allow as much rearmament as possible. In April, strong German objections brought the negotiations to the brink of collapse. Vice Chancellor von Papen, who happened to be in Rome at about the same time as Goering, was unable to make any progress in direct negotiations with Mussolini. On April 20, a German counter-proposal was made. However, because of the negative attitude of Neurath and the Wilhelmstrasse, negotiations proceeded in Rome between French, British and Italian representatives without German delegates being present.

In early May the diplomatic atmosphere of Europe was gloomy because of the lack of progress in both the Four Power talks in Rome and disarmament negotiations being held in Geneva. On May 17, Hitler delivered a very conciliatory speech which signalled his willingness to compromise in international negotiations. Two days later Goering left on his second trip to Rome. Before leaving he had a heated debate with Neurath over Italian policy. According to what Goering told the Italian ambassador, Neurath reproached him for his

excessive trust in the Fascist government. Goering reacted energetically against this and once again expressed his complete confidence in Italy's friendship. The Foreign Minister asserted his exclusive right in foreign policy questions, in which Goering as Prussian Premier had no jurisdiction. In his secret conversation with Cerruti, Goering indicated that he was very upset over Neurath's attitude toward Italy.⁶⁶ We know that on his visit to Italy the Nazi leader participated in negotiations for the Four Power Pact. On his return to Germany, Goering visited Neurath and discussed the negotiations with him. The Foreign Minister made objections to some aspects of a proposed draft, having to do with armaments. Neurath asserted that the proposed draft contained clauses that could prove to be dangerous for Germany in the future. Goering stressed that Mussolini's personal support would make up for any deficiencies in the final Treaty. Neurath remained dubious.⁶⁷ On May 24, there was a conference on the Pact between Hitler, Goering, Neurath, and Defense Minister Blomberg. Neurath succeeded in maneuvering a postponement of a decision on the Pact. On May 27, the Italian Ambassador in an interview with Neurath pressed for German acceptance of the agreement. On the 29th, Cerruti met with Hitler, Goering, Neurath and

Blomberg to discuss the status of the negotiations, but the meeting was inconclusive.

In order to ensure German approval of the Pact, Mussolini sent a personal message to Hitler. The Duce stressed that acceptance would improve Germany's position. There was no chance Germany would face a solid coalition and be outvoted three to one. Mussolini appealed to Hitler by reminding him of the expressions of sympathy he received for his regime from Italy over the last few months. Failure of the Pact would increase the danger of preventive war and further the isolation of Germany. On May 30th, after Hitler received Mussolini's letter, he attended a conference with Neurath and Blomberg at which a final decision was to be made. Blomberg argued in favor of the Pact, stating that its ratification would not oblige Germany to do anything but could provide a breathing space for rearmament. In view of this and other arguments, Hitler agreed to initial the Pact. However, the Fuehrer reconsidered his approval, and for a time it appeared as if Germany would not consent. The German Foreign Office tried every delaying tactic possible to prevent Hitler from

ratifying the proposal. The dispatches of the French Ambassador reflect the sharp disagreement in Berlin over the Four Power Pact. On June 4, Francois-Poncet wrote:

One notes . . . a marked divergence between the opinion of the diplomats of the Office of Foreign Relations and that of Hitler and his counsellors. This explains the apparent contradiction in German politics. . . . the Wilhelmstrasse does not enjoy Mussolini's confidence and vice versa. Hitler and his entourage on the other hand wish above all to follow the direction of Mussolini, whom they regard as their tutor and master. They want to tighten, not relax, the ties that bind them to him.⁶⁸

The American Ambassador in Rome reported that during the negotiations for the Four Power Pact, Hitler often spoke directly with Mussolini by phone, bypassing the Wilhelmstrasse and the German Embassy in Rome.⁶⁹ The fact that no trace of these talks has been found does not disprove the report, since it is unlikely that recordings of the private calls between the two dictators would have been deposited in any archives. In view of the hostility between Hitler and the Foreign Office, this report is very believable. We do know that when the Four Power Pact was initialed, Hitler sent a glowing telegram of congratulations to the Duce, in which he spoke of the treaty as a "beacon of light in the life of the peoples of Europe."⁷⁰ On July 15, the treaty was formally signed, but it never really came into operation. There were

no substantial results of the agreement, but indirectly, Germany profited a great deal from Mussolini's pact. First, Hitler gained precious time to complete the Nazi revolution. The negotiations distracted European attention away from German domestic affairs and channeled some of the British and French concern into diplomatic talks. The Nazi regime also gained respectability and decreased its isolation. Another indirect benefit resulted from Poland's resentment which made that nation more willing to negotiate with Hitler for the non-aggression pact of 1934, which was one of the major events of pre-World War II diplomacy.

In the disarmament talks at Geneva, Italy lent Germany only halfhearted support in 1933. The Italians were not overly anxious for Germany to be rearmed, chiefly because of the danger a resurgent Reich posed for Austria.⁷¹ When in the fall of 1933 the United States, Great Britain, France and Italy reached a broad agreement, the Germans protested. As a result of this impasse, Hitler took Germany out of both the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations, which made Mussolini furious.⁷² In particular, the Duce was insulted because he was not notified in advance, and because Hitler paid no attention to the Four Power agreement. Perhaps the main reason why Hitler treated Mussolini so cavalierly in this matter was that the Nazi regime had become so strong that it did not need Italian support as much as it had in the early months.

By the middle of 1933, totalitarian one-party rule had become a reality in Germany. Hitler was complete master of the government.⁷³ There was much less danger of a preventive war with Poland. Although Hitler had no desire to alienate Mussolini and still held out hopes for an eventual alliance, he now wished to signify that the period of tutelage was over. He no longer was willing to play the role of junior partner to his fellow dictator. Thus an important era of Nazi-Fascist relations was ended, and it was followed by a period of uneasiness which culminated in the confrontation over Austria in July 1934.

But during the first months of his regime, Hitler did place an enormous importance on the friendship of Fascist Italy. Despite great opposition from the Foreign Office, the bureaucracy, and even some elements of his own party, Hitler persisted in his plans for closer relations with Mussolini. As we have seen, he may even have proposed a military agreement. These early efforts give us some idea of the persistence of Hitler's plan for an alliance with Italy, a plan which came to fruition after the dispute over Austria was settled.

Notes

1. Survey of International Affairs 1933, ed. Arnold Toynbee (London, 1934), p. 198.
2. CdS January 31, 1933
3. Il Tevere (Rome), February 10, 1933.
4. See Brandt to Hess, January 31, 1933, Brandt to Munich, February 3, 1933, NA: T-580, roll 58 [no frame numbers].
5. De Felice rapporti, docs. 42A, B, C, D.
6. Documents Diplomatiques Francais 1932-1939, (Paris, 1970), Series 1, vol. II, no. 275, p. 583 (hereafter cited as DDF). See also FRUS 1933, vol. II, p. 191.
7. DDF (1), vol. II, doc. 312, p. 644, vol. III, no. 359, p. 647; André Francois-Poncet, op. cit., p. 239.
8. Hitler: Reden und Proklamationen 1932-1945, ed. Max Domarus (Munich, 1962), vol. I, p. 199.
9. Renzetti to Mussolini, January 31, 1933, NA: T-586/491/050276.
10. Renzetti to Mussolini, February 5, 1933, NA: T-586/419/009470-71.
11. GD (C), vol. I, no. 12, p. 25.
12. DDF (1), vol. II, no. 424, GD (C), vol. I, no. 64, pp. 128-29; BDFP (2), vol. V, no. 37; Sarget to Simon, March 13, 1933, PRO: C 2409/2287/22 in F.O. 371/16808/04471.

13. Rumbold to Simon, March 14, 1933, PRO: C 2400/1249/22 in F.O. 371/16808/04471.

14. GD (C), vol. I, no. 60, pp. 136-37, DDF (1), vol. II, nos. 413, 424. Hitler did not give up hope for a visit to Italy. In April the Nazi Party newspaper published a report of the Fuehrer's expected trip but the hint remained unanswered by the Italians. VB, April 11, 1933.

15. NA: T-120/4151/K150450.

16. GD (C), vol. I, no. 51, p. 107; see also NA: T-120/2811/E420901-06.

17. March 30, 1933 Schmeer to Orstgruppen in Italy. T-580 roll 58 [no frame number].

18. NSM, March 1933, p. 98.

19. Trade supplement to Berliner Börsen-Zeitung, July 7, 1933.

20. See Il Mattino (Naples), May 2, 1933, for report on a visit to Italy of Nazi automobile club members who were the guests of a young Fascist motorcycle group.

21. O. O. XXV, p. 200.

22. Cds March 7, 1933.

23. Minute by Sargent, March 14, 1933, PRO: C2320/1249/22 in F.O. 371/16808. On April 21, Francois-Poncet talked with a Polish diplomat who had been in Italy. He was "astonished by the place the Germans occupy in the Italian capital, by the

systematic curiosity with which the Hitler movement is received there and by the abundance of books and objects on display that are related to the national socialist movement" DDF (1), vol. III, no. 155, p. 279.

24. Graham to Simon, May 17, 1933, PRO: C4445/319/18 in F.O. 371/16724.

25. Francesco S. Giovannucci, La Germania di Hitler e L'Italia (Rome, 1933), pp. 53-56.

26. Ludwig, op. cit., p. 69.

27. Ernst von Starhemberg, Between Hitler and Mussolini (New York, 1942), p. 93.

28. Report of von Hassell in Rome, January 27, 1933, Handakten Neurath, ZSG-133, vol. 24, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz (hereafter cited as Koblenz).

29. PRO: C2406/1249/22 in F.O. 371/16808. A few days later the French Ambassador in Rome reported that Mussolini had asked Hitler to "moderate the excesses of his partisans and put an end to attacks on the lives of the Jews." DDF (1), vol. II, no. 427, p. 847; see also DBPF (2), vol. V, no. 52, p. 105; DDF (1), vol. II, no. 424, p. 844.

30. Antonio Spinoza, "Le persecuzioni razziali in Italia I," Il ponte (8), July 1952, p. 971.

31. Bulow to Neurath, June 13, 1933, Koblenz: ZSG-133, vol. 12, nos. 540189-92.

32. DDF (1), vol. III, no. 222, p. 386. In May, Jouvenal, the French Ambassador in Rome, noted: "Between Mussolini and Hitler a very curious master-disciple relationship has developed. The former councils the latter and when the latter is unable to follow Rome's suggestions, he excuses himself. That is what took place in connection with the persecution of the Jews which was considered a monstrous stupidity [by the Italians] who flattered themselves with the belief that they could do something to make it stop. They did not succeed in this." Ibid., no. 312, p. 555. See also Renzo De Felice, Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il Fascismo (Turin, 1961), pp. 128-50.

33. Report of Ortsgruppe Florence, May 9, 1933, NA: T-580 roll 58 [no frame numbers].

34. GD (C), vol. I, no. 301, p. 552.

35. Solari, op. cit., pp. 103-04; see also VB, February 22, 1929.

36. Franco Ciarlantini, Hitler e il Fascismo (Florence, 1933), p. 46.

37. Probably speaking for Mussolini, Cerruti told a French diplomat that Hitler was "too Catholic in his makeup to ever become an enemy of the Church." DDF (1), vol. III, no. 434, p. 793.

38. Papen, op. cit., p. 280. Hassell in Rome noted that Mussolini stated "it would be an immense moral victory to persuade

the Vatican to conclude a Concordat." He ended by saying, "I adjure you not to take off until the Concordat is in the harbor." GD (C), vol. I, no. 352, p. 636.

39. At their first meeting in Venice in June 1934, the issue of the Catholic Church in Germany caused a rather sharp exchange between the two dictators. See Mussolini to DeVecchi, June 22, 1934, NA: T-586/491/050279-80.

40. NA: T-120/2832/E450629. See also GD (C), vol. I, no. 83, p. 162; Allianz Hitler-Horthy-Mussolini: Dokumente zur ungarischen Aussenpolitik 1933-1944, Lajos Kerekes, ed. (Budapest, 1966), doc. 2, p. 108.

41. NA: T-120/2832/E450623. At Nuremberg, Goering testified about the situation in early 1933: "The assurances which Hitler gave at that time regarding the sovereignty of Austria were no deception, they were meant seriously . . . he believed, however, that he had first of all to take Italy into consideration." IMT, vol. IX, p. 293.

42. NA: T-120/3391/E605162.

43. On August 11, the Italian Ambassador visited the German Foreign Office with a telegram from Mussolini stating that if the Nazi agitation in Austria did not stop and Germany did not keep her promise to prevent incidents, the situation would require Italy's taking action. Koblenz: ZSG-133, vol. 12, nos. 616822-4. For Italian military plans in 1933 to intervene

in Austria in case of necessity, see NA: T-861 [Italian military records captured after World War II], roll 368.

44. GD (C), vol. I, no. 70, p. 137. The British Ambassador in Rome spoke to the French Ambassador after he returned from Paris and reported, "M. de Jouvenel emphasized to me the difficult atmosphere, almost amounting to a war atmosphere, which he found in Paris owing to the advent of Hitler to power in Germany and deep suspicion with regard to some Italo-German plot to the detriment of France." DBFP (2), vol. V, no. 79, pp. 143-44. See also FRUS 1932, vol. II, p. 281.

45. DBFP (2), vol. IV, no. 290, p. 503. "There is therefore nothing inevitable and predestined in the present coming together of Italy and Germany." Memo by Sargent, March 31, 1933, PRO: C2409/2287/22 in F.O. 371/16811/04471.

46. In a conversation with British leaders at Geneva, "Baron Aloisi said that Italy had kept her hands perfectly free and was not bound by any agreement . . . there was a certain similarity between her position and that of Germany. If Germany had lost the war, Italy might be said to have lost the peace and the interests of Germany and Italy were therefore in some respects similar." DBFP (2), vol. IV, no. 293, p. 512.

47. Donosti, op. cit., pp. 32-33.

48. Guariglia, op. cit., p. 135.

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47. Donosti, op. cit., pp. 32-33.

48. Guariglia, op. cit., p. 135.

49. Hubert Lagardelle, Mission à Rome: Mussolini (Paris, 1955), p. 41.

50. Renzetti to Mussolini, January 31, 1933, NA: T-586/491/050277.

51. In his book on the Four Power Pact, Jarausch states that the Western Powers were fooled by Mussolini's efforts to pretend that the Germans were not informed in advance about his proposal. But evidence not available to this author reveals that the French were aware of the deception. See DDF (1), vol. III, no. 70, p. 120. Konrad H. Jarausch, The Four Power Pact 1933 (New York, 1965), p. 53.

52. GD (C), vol. I, no. 83, pp. 160-63; Neurath to Hassell, May 5, 1933, NA: T-120/1605/D676185-87.

53. Verhandlungen des Reichstags (Berlin, 1933), vol. 457, p. 30. See also DDF (1), vol. III, no. 33, p. 65.

54. Minute by Sargent, March 14, 1933, PRO: C2320/1249/22 in F.O. 371/16808/04471.

55. Gerhard L. Weinberg, The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany (Chicago, 1970), p. 51. We know that Mussolini supported the German view on Danzig; see GD (C), vol. I, nos. 68, 83; DDF (1), vol. II, no. 368; Lagardelle, op. cit., p. 25; PRO: C2409/2287/22 in F.O. 371/16811/04471.

56. NA: T-120/3404/E614069-75; Lagardelle, op. cit., pp. 24-25.

57. DBFP (2), vol. V, nos. 37, 43, 44; DDF (1), vol. II, no. 391; GD (C), vol. I, nos. 68, 83; FRUS 1933, vol. I, p. 396.

See also NA: U.S. 740.0011, Four Power Pact/5; Josef Lipski, Diplomat in Berlin (New York, 1968), p. 64.

58. Peterson, op. cit., p. 166.

59. GD (C), no. 122, pp. 227-29.

60. NA: T-120/1388/D540159. For Hassell's efforts to stop the trip and other details, see ibid., frames D540156-60.

61. PRO: C3935/3935/22 in F.O. 371/16812/04471. Goering did not make himself any more popular by speaking at a reunion of the German colony in Rome of the "necessity of a policy of blood." DDG (1), vol. III, no. 222, p. 386.

62. DBFP (2), vol. V, no. 144, p. 238. In Rome, Hassell spoke with Italian Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs Fulvio Luvich. They discussed an article by Mussolini which was a thinly disguised attack on Goering who was criticized by the Duce for having too much independent power. Luvich mentioned Goering's statement while in Rome that he was the most powerful man in Germany and had German-Italian relations as his own special field of competence. Hassell to Neurath, October 4, 1933. Koblenz: ZSG-133, vol. 24. Marshall Balbo also showed annoyance with Goering. DDF (1), vol. III, no. 150, p. 270.

63. PRO: C4626/3935/22 in F.O. 371/16812.

64. NA: T-120/2700/HO28639-40.

65. GD (C), vol. I, no. 164, p. 300.

66. This information is contained in a German translation of a dispatch by the Italian Ambassador Cerruti which is found in the Neurath Handakten. This document was obviously obtained by Neurath surreptitiously, possibly in order to gain material to embarrass Goering and block a Nazi-Fascist alliance. Cerruti to Rome, May 19, 1933. Koblenz: ZSG-133, vol. 27.

67. Neurath memorandum, May 22, 1933. Koblenz: ZSG-133, vol. 24.

68. DDF (1), vol. III, no. 359, p. 647. On June 7, Francois-Poncet wrote, "The Wilhelmstrasse raised objections, complaints, modifications and formulated all sorts of reservations [to the Four Power Pact] . . . this morning in revenge, Hitler and Goering showed themselves partisans of signing so as to respond to M. Mussolini's wishes and to give him a token of their attachment. In the end they imposed their will." Ibid., no. 364, p. 658.

69. FRUS 1933, vol. I, p. 423.

70. Hitler Reden, vol. I, p. 290.

71. NA: T-120/1558/D669074.

72. Aloisi, Journal, October 14, 1933, p. 154; DBFP (2), vol. V, no. 457, pp. 684-85; Lagardelle, op. cit., pp. 58-63.

73. Karl Dietrich Bracher The German Dictatorship (New York: 1970) p. 191; Bullock, op. cit., p. 277.

Conclusion

The relationship between Hitler and Mussolini before 1933 is an important part of the story of the early NSDAP. The present work has had as its principal aim to show that there was a continuous contact between the NSDAP and Mussolini's regime which dates from before the March on Rome to the Machtergreifung. This liaison was maintained by representatives of both the Nazi Party and Mussolini's regime. They included Hermann Goering and Kurt Ludecke from the NSDAP and Giuseppe Renzetti and certain lesser figures on the Italian side. These contacts tended to avoid regular diplomatic channels right on up to Hitler's seizure of power. This suggests that Mussolini tried to keep Nazi-Fascist contact a party matter separate from the Italian government structure. Partly this is due to the Duce's distrust of his predominantly non-Fascist bureaucracy and diplomatic corps. He might also have thought that it would be easier to maintain an ascendancy over Hitler if he approached the Fuehrer as the leader of a kindred and admired movement, rather than merely as the head of the Italian government.

During this period, Mussolini was definitely cultivating the role of senior partner to fascist parties all over Europe. As early as 1921, the Duce was promoting a fascist type of group in Rumania.¹ Somewhat later he attempted to forge an alliance with General Miguel Primo de Rivera, who headed an authoritarian government in Spain. In 1924, Mussolini's efforts to make an accord with Spain failed, despite the apparent ideological similarity² between the two regimes. Clearly, then, an alliance between the

PNF and other, ideologically kindred groups could not be forged as a matter of course.

This was especially true in the case of the NSDAP. There existed deep and widespread mutual hostility between the Nazis and the Fascists on a wide variety of issues, and this friction found frequent expression in the party press of both movements. Among the most recurrent sources of conflict between Nazis and Fascists were their differing views of Austria and the corporate state. The most troublesome issues of all were the controversies over the South Tyrol and anti-Semitism. In almost every report by Hitler's and Mussolini's emissaries, the question of the South Tyrol emerged again and again as a point of dispute. In the majority of articles dealing with Nazi-Fascist relations in the party press of both countries, this subject surfaced as a point of contention.

The disagreement over the South Tyrol was symptomatic of a more fundamental source of conflict between the two movements. Both the NSDAP and the PNF had an arrogant attitude toward other national groups. It was natural to expect that the Nazis, who believed in Nordic racism, would be intolerant of the Latin fascists. The members of the PNF, on the other hand, saw themselves as descendants of the all-conquering Caesars, forgetting the respect which their ancestors often showed for other cultures. It was inevitable that an issue such as that of the South Tyrol, in which national pride was involved on both sides, would lead to conflict between the PNF and the NSDAP.

Thus, it was their similarities as much as their differences that led the Nazis and Fascists into conflict with one another. Mussolini hearkened back to the imperial myth of ancient Rome. Although he admired the Germans in some respects, he had an instinctive fear and distrust of them. The ancient Germans had been the despoilers of Roman civilization. The thought of descendants of these Germanic barbarians living on sacred Italian soil in the South Tyrol seemed abhorrent. It was no coincidence that the nationalistic Fascists had begun their rise to power by agitating over the South Tyrol question. After coming to power, Mussolini retained his antipathy against the foreign occupiers of what he considered to be sacred Italian soil.

The Nazis believed in the myth of Aryan supremacy. To Hitler, every drop of Germanic blood was sacred. His ultimate goal was the union of all Teutonic people in a Germanic Reich. How could the Nazis tolerate their co-nationals living under alien Italian rule? Hitler was willing to overlook this inconsistency in his program, but it was frequently pointed out to him by his critics both within and without the Nazi movement. Most rank and file members of the NSDAP, as well as most Fascists, felt that compromise on this issue would be a great embarrassment to their respective causes. In effect, the fact that both the INF and the NSDAP were hyper-nationalistic made conflict inevitable.

As for the question of anti-Semitism, it was not abhorrence

of racism that moved the Italian Fascists to oppose the Nazis on this issue. Mussolini was always rather ambivalent on the Jewish question. When it suited his interests, he could be a philo-Semite. On other occasions, Mussolini could use anti-Semitic rhetoric and did indeed occasionally support a number of notorious Fascist anti-Semites. In general, however, he regarded the persecution of the Jews as poor strategy that could backfire against those who used it. It was on these grounds that he criticized Nazi anti-Semitism. Mussolini also realized that Nazi racism could eventually be turned against Mediterranean peoples, including the Italians. Thus anti-Semitism became a chief cause of conflict between these two ethnically diverse but at the same time extremely chauvinistic groups.

But despite these irreconcilable differences, Hitler never wavered in his desire for an alliance with Fascist Italy. This was one of the issues in which the Nazi leader tended towards obsessive behavior. Though perhaps not as extreme as his anti-Semitism or his hatred of Communism, Hitler displayed an obvious monomania with regard to the question of the desirability of an alliance with Italy.

Mussolini's ambivalence with regard to an alliance with the NSDAP is not so difficult to interpret. Unlike the Fuehrer's admirers, the Duce never really accepted Hitler as the German Mussolini. During the Weimar Republic he desired a more conservative government in Berlin. It is evident that at certain points

one gets the impression that he would have preferred any right-wing group such as the army, the monarchy, or the Nationalist Party to the Nazis. Like the members of his party, Mussolini disliked Hitler's extremism, for it would make him a difficult element to predict. At no point did Mussolini vary from this basic distrust of Hitler. It was he who prevented Nazi-Fascist relations from being anything more than an "uncertain alliance."

Notes

1. Michaelis, "Avento," p. 570.
2. Cassels, op. cit., pp. 210-215.
3. Mack-Smith, op. cit., p. 45.

Appendix A

Goering to Mussolini

Rome, September 1924

Excellency,

On the basis of the talks that I, as plenipotentiary representative of the leader of the National Socialist German Workers Party (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei) Adolf Hitler, had with the Hon. Giuseppe Bastianini through Mr. Leo Negrelli, I take the liberty to submit to Your Excellency the following information on the views of the NSCAP represented by me:

In case my party under the leadership of Adolf Hitler succeeds in seizing power in Germany or at least in becoming a decisive factor in German political life, both as a party and possibly as the government it commits itself:

1. to make it appear unmistakably that it does not recognize any Alto-Adige question (Südtiroler Frage) and that it recognizes absolutely and without second thoughts the status quo of the Italian possession. Equally we will take care on our part to put out of the question any German irredentism regarding Alto Adige (Südtirol) so that the good relations between Italy and Germany, which we want by all means to put on the right road or to strengthen, cannot be

upset by anything. For this reason the NSDAP starting from now will do everything through proper oral and written activity, to deter the German people from the thought of irredentism regarding Alto Adige.

2. to addopt [sic] with regard to the problem of reparations the point of view that the obligations, as they result from the treaty of Versailles, be surely recognized and fulfilled in front of [sic] Italy.

3. to begin from now using all its available press in a campaign for the Italo-German rapprochement and to develop first of all the most extensive propaganda among the German people in favor of Fascism in order to achieve through these means that the great majority of Germany [sic] takes an attitude of friendship towards Italy.

As a result of such assurances on the part of the NSDAP I will allow myself to foster the hope that Your Excellency as the head of the Italian government and the Duce of Fascism will come to help the German National Socialist Party in the following way:

1. In case the NSDAP should attain power in Germany through legal or illegal means the Italian government will neither make use of any military or diplomatic pressure upon the new German government nor share in a move of this kind if it should be undertaken by other powers. On the contrary

the Italian government will do its best to support the new German government and will recognize it right away. In particular the PNF will give help to the NSDAP promptly by all means (press, speeches by representatives to the Parliament, loans, etc.).

2. With regard to the guarantees and the provisions of the treaty of Versailles in relation to other States (especially in relation to France) the Italian government will addopt [sic] the attitude of a benevolent neutrality towards the new German government. The Italian government will conform to the same attitude in case of conflicts which may arise in the matter of reparations with other states. In one word Italy shall not set herself up as advocate and defender for the requests and the claims of other states towards the new German government.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX B

Hitler's Letter to Mussolini

June 8, 1931

Excellency

Your Excellency had the kindness to send me through Captain Göring one of your photographs with a dedication. I consider this a great honor for me. The expression of goodwill which your Excellency reveals in the dedication for the National Socialist Party is felt by me and has been particularly strong for the Fascism created by your Excellency. The spiritual relations which exist between the fundamental canons and principles of Fascism and those of the movement led by me cause me keenly to hope that after the victory of National Socialism in Germany, a victory in which I blindly believe, it will be possible to secure also between Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany the formation of the same relationships for the good of the two great nations.

I add my gratitude and respectful good wishes for the person of your Excellency and for Fascist Italy, which your Excellency so expertly guides. At the same time I permit myself to send you my portrait with the wish that you will

want to accept it cordially.

With the assurance of my highest esteem and expressions
of my sincerest admiration,

I remain

Devotedly yours

Adolf Hitler

Source: Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut.

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