

MUSSOLINI AND INTELLECTUALS IN THE REPUBLIC OF SALÒ,
1943 - 1945

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

Mussolini and Intellectuals in the Republic of Salò, 1943-1945

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This dissertation examines relationships between various intellectual figures and the government of the Italian Social Republic during the German military occupation of northern and central Italy (July 1943 to April 1945). Historians have traditionally depicted this final twenty-month period as Fascism's most extreme phase, since several government ministers were close to the Nazi occupational authorities and because the Holocaust was extended to Italy. Other historians, however, have begun recently to point to the considerable tension within the ranks of the leadership in order to show that the Salò Republic cannot be seen in such monolithic terms.

My research addresses the role of intellectuals with longstanding personal relationships with Mussolini, most of them newspaper editors, who took the initiative in the press to redefine Fascism in highly individual terms, entirely contradicting the extremist images of Fascism promoted by the official Fascist leadership. This campaign in the press, known as the "politica dei ponti," was clandestinely controlled by Mussolini himself. My research aims to demonstrate that Mussolini's enlistment of intellectuals was analogous to his efforts to reorganize the Italian economy along socialistic lines, in that the ultimate goal of both endeavors was to gain a measure of political autonomy from his German-backed ministers in Salò. Winning popularity with the Italian working

classes was the key to securing this autonomy, because whoever controlled labor controlled the only thing of value that Italy still had in the eyes of the occupying Germans. Thus Mussolini sought not only to socialize the economy, but also to put a more humane, even democratic face, onto the new republican Fascism.

My research is based mostly on archival materials found in the Archivio Centrale dello Stato in Rome. I have also made use of newspaper sources scattered throughout libraries in Italy and at the Fondazione Micheletti in Brescia, as well as several biographies and autobiographies.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines the relationships of various intellectual figures to the Fascist government of the Italian Social Republic (*Repubblica socialista italiana*, or RSI) during the German occupation of northern and central Italy from September 1943 to April 1945. It is meant to shed light on the professional activities of certain individuals with longstanding personal relationships with Mussolini who rallied to the Duce and his German-backed “republic” headquartered in Salò in northern Italy, and attempts to explain what significance they had in Mussolini’s efforts to reposition himself within the power structure at the core of the new government.

This final twenty-month period of Italian Fascism, known more commonly as the Republic of Salò, has traditionally been depicted by historians as Fascism’s most extreme phase. The reasons for this at first glance seem quite convincing: the Nazis, whose troops behaved with characteristic brutality, exercised ultimate power; the new Italian government at Salò, composed of some of the most extremist and pro-Nazi members of Mussolini’s earlier regime, remained silent in the face of German massacres of Italian civilians; and most importantly, the Holocaust was extended to Italy, resulting in the annihilation of approximately one fifth of Italy’s Jewish population. These outrages soon prompted an armed resistance movement, which grew in size and ferocity until Italy was engulfed by civil war.

Pointing to the considerable tension among various members of Salò's political leadership, some historians have recently begun to insist that the period cannot be depicted in such monolithic terms.¹ The core of this leadership consisted of a nucleus of figures that had fled to Hitler's headquarters on first hearing the news of the regime's collapse. Here, with eventual German help, they intended to create a new Fascist government and re-establish control of Italy. First to arrive were Roberto Farinacci and Giovanni Preziosi, the most Nazi-friendly of the Fascist leaders. Farinacci (1892-1945), the most notorious *ras* of Fascist Italy and former Fascist Party secretary (January 1925-March 1926), ran the most Fascist of newspapers, *Il Regime Fascista*.² He also had personal ties to Heinrich Himmler, head of the German S.S. Preziosi (1881-1945), Italy's most infamous anti-Semite and editor of its most anti-Semitic journal, *La Vita Italiana*, was close to Nazi Party ideologue Alfred Rosenberg and well known to Hitler. These two were soon joined by Mussolini's son, Vittorio. Other prominent Fascists arrived soon after, including Alessandro Pavolini and Renato Ricci. Pavolini (1903-1945) had a reputation as a fanatical Fascist. As a protégé of former foreign minister and Mussolini's son-in-law, Count Galeazzo Ciano (1903-1944), he had, until the previous February, served as Minister of Popular Culture. Ricci (1896-1956), an early squadrist notorious for his violence, had recently served as Minister of Corporations. Guido Buffarini Guidi (1895-1945),

¹ This tendency began with the publication of Silvio Bertoldi's book on Salò (see Chapter 1, "The Historiography of the Salò Republic").

² "*Ras*," an Ethiopian word meaning "chieftain," entered Italian slang at the end of the nineteenth century, in the wake of Italy's first colonial ventures in Africa.

a German informant and recently undersecretary of the Interior Ministry and member of the Grand Council, soon joined his fellow intransigents in Germany. Also to arrive were Ciano and his wife, Edda Mussolini. Once in Germany, Ciano was placed under house arrest for his alleged part in the coup that had unseated Mussolini.

On September 9, as the Allies disembarked at Salerno and the Germans invaded Italy from the north, the intransigents broadcast an appeal from Germany to rally their fellow Italians on behalf of Fascism and the German alliance. Three days later, Mussolini's whereabouts were finally discovered and he was rescued by an S.S. brigade and flown to Germany, where he faced a *fait accompli* in the form of a government not of his own choosing, whose members enjoyed close personal ties to several important Nazis, including Hitler. Two days of conferences between the dictators ensued. From the first, Hitler was evasive towards the Duce's suggestion that the Italian armed forces be reconstituted to fight alongside the Germans. Such a scenario might have afforded Mussolini a decisive measure of autonomy from the Germans, which Hitler was never to grant him.

Mussolini made his own radio broadcast to Italy on September 18 from Munich, declaring the king deposed and the new Fascist government a republic. In an attempt to sharply distinguish the new republic from the previous regime, he announced, too, that Fascism was to be re-established on the basis of the Italian working classes. "The State which we wish to set up will be national and social in the highest sense of the word: that is, it will be Fascist, thus going back to our

origins,” he declared. “Our postulates are the following: to take up arms again alongside Germany, Japan and the other allies; only blood can cancel such a shameful page from the history of the fatherland; ... to eliminate the traitors ... in the ranks of the Party who have gone over to the ranks of the enemy; to annihilate the parasitic plutocracies and at last make labor the theme of our economy and the indestructible basis of the State.”³

This, his first public utterance since before the July coup, discloses his thinking during captivity: a reappraisal of the historical experience of Fascism. While hard-line Fascists such as Pavolini and Farinacci were determined to punish individuals involved in the coup, Mussolini thought more in terms of the larger “forces,” such as the bourgeoisie, that had turned against Fascism. Announcing labor as the new social base of the Party would provide a way of punishing and excluding the bourgeoisie, while at the same time winning popular consensus for the new political arrangements.

Everything north of the battle front was henceforth occupied by the Germans, and nominally administered by the Italian Social Republic, headquartered in several small resort towns on the banks of Lake Garda in the north. The Ministry of Popular Culture, Fascism’s propaganda ministry, was located in the town of Salò, hence the name Republic of Salò. The intransigents

³ Quoted in F.W. Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler, and the Fall of Italian Fascism* (New York/Evanston, 1962) 565.

came to occupy all key ministerial positions in the new government, with Pavolini as Secretary of the new *Partito fascista repubblicano*.⁴

My research addresses the role of about a dozen intellectuals who Mussolini very quickly placed in important positions (mostly as newspaper editors). Once established in their new posts, many began to publicly air views critical about the failings of the former Fascist regime. Such boldness enraged the intransigents, who were quick to go on the counterattack in their own newspapers. Yet none of these editors was arrested or even dismissed. Their discussions and debates continued to evolve from approximately November 1943 until the following May (when some of them finally were dismissed). Mussolini understood that whether Italians accepted or rejected him at this moment depended on how successful he was at provoking a reconsideration in the public's mind of the meaning of Fascism. I find that the help he sought of intellectuals at this moment was intended to subvert the images of Fascism projected by his own ministers, whose propaganda emphasized vengeance against the "July traitors," death in battle as confirmation of patriotism, and intolerance of anything approaching national conciliation between Fascists and their opponents..

Most historians acknowledge Mussolini's attempt to "socialize" the economy as part of a larger effort to win a popular base. As the British historian F.W. Deakin explained,

⁴ This was a very powerful position, even in comparison to Mussolini's role as Duce. See Pierre Milza, *Mussolini* (Paris, 1999) 843: "Pavolini held the rank of minister and wielded an exceptional prerogative: in order to enter into force, governmental decrees had to, in effect, receive his prior approval. Which is to say that the essence of power lay in his hands."

Behind the heady debate on the significance and possibilities of the new Socialization lay the brutal reality that the only real asset of the republican regime was its labour force, the ultimate control of which was the only source of political power. Should this be controlled by a civilian bureaucracy, by the machinery of the Party, by the new Republican Army or Militia (and therefore under another guise by the Party), or by the Germans themselves? This was the central issue in the history of Salò.⁵

A leader popular among the working class would hold the keys to power, and thus to political autonomy from the Germans. While it is no doubt true Mussolini's anger at bourgeois treachery influenced this impulse to "go back to his roots" in socialism, I find he was truly convinced of socialism's popularity with ordinary Italians. Reflecting aloud on what might lay in store for Italy at the end of the war, he confided to his secretary, Giovanni Dolfín, in early 1944, "between becoming an English dominion, a German province or a Soviet federal republic . . . 95 percent of Italians would opt for Stalin."⁶

If Mussolini's objective in trying to restructure the economy along socialistic lines, and in reconstituting the Italian armed forces, was intended to win a popular base which would secure his autonomy, there was a third part to this effort: I would like to demonstrate that the way he enlisted certain intellectuals to construct a redefinition of Fascism was intended to publicly distinguish his own views from those of the Republican Fascist Party leadership. As soon as he arrived back on Italian soil, he picked new editors for all leading newspapers. These were, in every case, men with long personal association with

⁵ Deakin, 667.

⁶ Giovanni Dolfín, *Con Mussolini nella tragedia. Diario del capo della segreteria particolare del Duce, 1943-1944* (Cernusco sul Naviglio, 1949) 236.

the Duce, whose capacities and views were well known to him. Immediately, these editors set about creating the illusion they enjoyed an unprecedented freedom of the press, and began pressing for a more politically pluralistic Fascism. Italians were meant to realize that this new Fascism would not only embrace its socialist origins, it would also tolerate popular dissent, become self-reforming, even shed its authoritarian bent. I want to stress the illusory quality of this endeavor. In truth, the attempt to present Fascism as more tolerant, liberal or humane than it really was took place *only among figures chosen personally by Mussolini*. In other words, it was a tightly controlled propaganda ploy; no real freedom of discussion ever emerged in the Italian Social Republic. If Mussolini had truly been interested in granting freedom of the press, such debates would have involved far more people and been far more extensive.

Scholars have taken note of this press episode – the “*politica dei ponti*” – as it played out during the first half of 1944, explaining it as an attempt to bridge political divides in order to mitigate, or even arrest, a developing civil war. This is undoubtedly true – as far as it goes – but I am suggesting it explains only part of the picture, and should be examined in light of Mussolini’s tense relations with the German-backed intransigent elements within his government. Building popularity among Italians in order to present himself as the key to a successful German exploitation of Italy was vastly more important to Mussolini than building bridges between political opponents.

The first chapter is devoted to the historiography of the Salò Republic and shows how the topic, until fairly recently, has been so politicized that

comparatively little research has been done on it (compared, that is, to the vast amount of research continuously being done on practically every other aspect of Mussolini's Italy).

Chapter Two, "Fascist Culture and the Italian Intellectual," broadly sketches Fascism's interaction with Italian culture, how historians have studied cultural issues during the Fascist regime, and how Mussolini and his followers instrumentalized Italian cultural life to work on behalf of national goals. Cultural life in Italy – official culture, that is, what was sanctioned and patronized by Fascism – was very much on the wane from the beginning of the war onwards; by the time of the collapse in the summer of 1943, little in the way of cultural production or consumption was going on. What we see in Salò is propaganda in the guise of culture. Moreover, there was never a widespread rally of intellectuals, not even Fascist intellectuals, to the Salò Republic. Most tried to find ways of staying in the shadows, not attracting any attention, in the hope that the war would pass over them. If anything, Salò confirms how thin and shallow was the adherence of the Italian intellectual community to Fascism and Mussolini.

Chapter Three, "Cultural Institutions of Salò," discusses the role of three Fascist cultural institutions that were reborn in the Italian Social Republic: the first two, the Accademia d'Italia and the Ministry of National Education, were headed by men appointed by Mussolini, Giovanni Gentile and his protégé, Carlo Alberto Biggini. In the face of intransigent hostility, Gentile's effort to unite all Italians on the basis of a consciousness of a shared cultural heritage continued until he was silenced by assassination. And while Biggini's tenure lasted until the

end of the war, he found himself continuously in trouble with the Germans and the intransigents. The third, the Ministry of Popular Culture, represents a sharp contrast with the other two institutions. Headed by one of the most ardent intransigents, a fanatic in the Pavolini mold, Fernando Mezzasoma impeded whenever possible any effort to present even an illusion of freedom of the press.

In Chapter Four, “The Salò Press,” I examine the importance of the press at this darkest moment of modern Italian history, when the only kind of culture that mattered was what could serve as war propaganda. I also examine in more depth the *politica dei ponti*, and briefly take note of the last phase of Fascist rhetoric (a spontaneous cultural development in its own right), and the kind of images of Fascism the intransigents wished to instill in Italians.

The fifth chapter surveys anti-Semitism and Italian complicity in the Holocaust, and how one “intellectual” was quietly restrained from contributing to the harm being done to Italian Jews by the Germans and the Fascist police. It begins with tracing the history of the Fascist adoption of anti-Semitism as official policy and why this came about in a society known for being relatively free of it. It then focuses on the role of the odious Giovanni Preziosi, the most notorious anti-Semite in Italy and of the intransigents, the closest to Hitler. Due to the nature of his power at Salò, Mussolini was essentially blackmailed into creating a special ministry for him, the Inspectorate of Race. I endeavor to show why this ministry had less impact on events than it might have had – another struggle that exemplifies the barely suppressed conflict at the heart of the Salò Republic.

Finally, the sixth chapter, “Socialization,” begins with an analysis of the highly peculiar nature of Mussolini’s understanding of socialism and includes a summary of the reflections he shared with his German doctor as evidence of his views about it during the Salò Republic. Next, I look at the socialist-inspired economic restructuring measures put into place for the Italian economy, and discuss whether intransigent hostility or German hostility (and even bourgeois hostility) may explain why it never really got underway. Finally, I examine the role two “heretic” socialist intellectuals played in Mussolini’s socialization project and the use he made of them as quite characteristic of how he traditionally used intellectuals to serve his own political goals.

A word about style: the word Fascism, when it refers to the Italian variety, is always capitalized, unless quoted from another source. I try to keep italics to a minimum. The Italian Resistance was comprised of several individual units, each known as a CLN (*Comitato della liberazione nazionale* – committee of national liberation). The CLNAI (*Comitato della liberazione nazionale di alta Italia* – the committee of national liberation of upper Italy) was formed in early 1944 as a supreme authority governing the individual CLNs. GAP refers to *Gruppi di Azione Patriottica* (Patriotic Action Groups). Communists formed the largest number of partisan units, followed by the Party of Action. Most of the partisan units were affiliated with political parties, although not controlled by them.

CHAPTER ONE: THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE SALÒ REPUBLIC

In the words of historian Renzo De Felice, the historiography of the Italian Social Republic resembles “a forest in which the light, filtering through the branches, illuminates only a few trees, while leaving the others in darkness, deforming the images of some, and never managing to penetrate the thickness of the underbrush.”¹ Besides receiving far less attention from historians than has the Fascist *ventennio*, the literature on the Republic of Salò is so divided along ideological lines that, until quite recently, a true dialogue between historians has not existed; each side has so demonized the other that each version of its history is neither scrutinized nor criticized by the other, but ignored.² This is due in part to the highly charged passions aroused by what one historian has termed the “Italian civil war.”³ The political climate that prevailed in Italy from the end of World War II until the end of the Cold War essentially determined how generations of post-war Italians would view Salò. The predominantly communist partisans claimed to be the element of Italian society which fought and sacrificed to bring an end to the Mussolini regime; it remains a heated argument today in Italy

¹ Renzo DeFelice, *Mussolini l'alleato: la guerra civile, 1943-1945* (Turin, 1997) 343.

² Fabio Andriola, *Uomini e scelte della RSI: I protagonisti della Repubblica di Mussolini* (Foggia, 2000) 13-18. Andriola's book is a compilation of portraits of various Salò figures. His introduction emphasizes the political gulf that has prevented Italian historians from engaging with each other on the topic of Salò. See also Giovanni De Luna, “Giornali e giornalisti nella RSI” in *Annali della Fondazione Luigi Micheletti*, ed. Pier Paolo Poggio (Brescia, 1986) (a collection of essays presented at a conference sponsored by the Fondazione Michelletti in October 1985) 113-121, and Andrea Rossi (the most up-to-date historiographical essay on the topic), “Un percorso tortuoso. La RSI nella storiografia del periodo 1943-45.” *Nuova storia contemporanea*, V: 5, Sept-Oct 2001, 129-137.

³ Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile: saggi storici sulla moralità nella Repubblica sociale italiana* (Turin, 1997).

whether they should be allowed to claim sole moral and material credit for the Italian Resistance. Because of their leadership of the Resistance, the communists were able to exercise what some believe was a hegemony over Italian culture for the next four decades.⁴ This political polarization gave rise to significant distortions in the historical interpretation of Fascism. Nowhere is this more evident than in the historiography of the Salò Republic, divided sharply between its detractors on the Left, who see the period not as the history of a regime but of the Resistance, and memorialists on the Right, who represent Salò as the moment when the best elements of the Italian population rose to the surface. Moreover, the Italian Resistance, the Italian Social Republic, and the Kingdom of Italy in Allied-occupied southern Italy have in general been studied as discrete subjects, usually with very little overlap – and with the RSI studied the least.⁵

The widespread unwillingness on the part of historians to treat Salò as worthy of interest meant that no substantial body of historiography started to

⁴ For a brief discussion of the political context of Italian historiography in the post-war years, see Borden W. Painter, Jr., “Renzo De Felice and the Historiography of Italian Fascism.” *American Historical Review* 95:2 (April 1990) 391-405, and Renzo De Felice (ed. Michael A. Ledeen), *Intervista sul fascismo* (Roma-Bari, 1975) (published in English as *Fascism: An Informal Introduction to its Theory and Practice. Renzo De Felice, An interview with Michael A. Ledeen* (New Brunswick, 1976), especially Ledeen’s introduction, 7-20. De Felice’s *Rosso e nero* (ed. Pasquale Chessa) (Milan, 1995), a collection of essays based upon newspaper interviews with De Felice, in which the historian endorsed the still controversial “apologetic thesis of the patriotism of Mussolini and other collaborators” (See Enzo Collotti, *L’Europa Nazista. Il progetto di un Nuovo ordine europeo (1939-1945)* (Florence, 2002) 437, n.2), refers to the antifascist version of the 1943-1945 period as a “vulgate” and discusses the relationship of history writing to the “politically-based orthodoxy” prevalent in post-war Italy.

⁵ Rossi 2001, 130.

emerge until long after the war.⁶ Until the late 1970s, when a few monographs began to appear, historical studies on Salò were basically limited to two significant works published in the early 1960s. The first of these, F.W. Deakin's *The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler, and the Fall of Italian Fascism*, was a comprehensive and detailed military and political history of the period 1940-1945.⁷ The following year, the first major scholarly study of the period published in Italian was Enzo Collotti's *L'amministrazione tedesca dell'Italia occupata, 1943-45*. [The German Administration of Occupied Italy, 1943-45]⁸ Rather than centering on Salò, both focus principally on German-Italian relations during the war and tend to uphold a rather generalized conception about Salò: that it was a "puppet regime" overwhelmingly influenced by Nazi German dominance, and

⁶ Collotti 2002, 407, comments, for example, on the "prejudice of historians who tended to minimize the existence of the RSI, or worse still, to not consider it worthy of study." Actually, the earliest general account of Salò that can be considered scholarly is a book by Giacomo Perticone, who lived through the period and wrote *La Repubblica di Salò* (Rome, 1947). This work seems to be all but ignored even in the modern historiography.

⁷ Historians still regard Deakin's study as among the most important contributions to the topic, often describing it as "classic" or "essential." See, e.g., the contemporary German scholar, Lutz Klinkhammer, *L'occupazione tedesca in Italia, 1943-1945* (Turin, 1993) 20; Collotti 2002, 437; and A. James Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals: Fascist Social and Political Thought* (Princeton, 2005) 226. Jonathan Steinberg in *All or Nothing: The Axis and the Holocaust 1941-43* (London and New York, 1990) 5-6, observes that Deakin "caught the spirit of the Axis but missed its most extraordinary episode, the Italian determination to have no part in the German 'final solution'."

⁸ Enzo Collotti, *L'amministrazione tedesca nell'Italia occupata, 1943-45* (Milan, 1963). For assessments of the significance of Collotti's work, see De Luna, 113; Rossi, 129; and Klinkhammer, 17. Klinkhammer praises Collotti's work as "fundamental" and as the "guiding interpretation" of Italian historiography on Salò. Collotti advanced the view that the German occupation pursued an extremely efficient politics of exploitation and repression, but Klinkhammer observes this thesis is supported only by the archives of the Oberkommando des Heeres (OKH), which, although they reveal much about the points of view of the German supreme command, cannot illuminate those of German functionaries in Italy, whose intentions thus must remain a matter of conjecture.

that its socialist propaganda was a hollow façade masquerading as a renewal of Fascism’s early “revolutionary” thrust.

Contributing to historians’ distaste for the topic of Salò was the large (and still growing) body of literature published by Salò’s adherents. The aim of these “memorialistic” works was to legitimize Salò – and rehabilitate Fascism.⁹ In a recent article, Andrea Rossi observes that “for years, the topic has remained confined to the cultural milieu of Salò veterans.”¹⁰ Very few of these books make use of archival material or even offer bibliographies.¹¹ Most, such as *Io, fascista* (I, fascist), by Giorgio Pisanò, memorialize their authors’ personal experiences during the war as a way of taking issue with the “myth of the Resistance . . . the myth that has the right to say what happened.”¹² While such books may sometimes prove useful in plumbing the mentalities of individuals who were Fascists, they can hardly be considered historical research.

Memoirs of Salò participants began appearing very soon after the war, starting with *Storia della Repubblica sociale italiana* [History of the Italian Social Republic], by Edmondo Cione, a scholar of philosophy and protégé of Benedetto Croce, who saw himself as an advocate of “conciliation” during the last days of the war, and Achille Tamaro’s *Due anni di storia* [Two Years of History], a

⁹ For a comprehensive list of such works, see *Bibliografia sulla Repubblica sociale italiana* (ed. A. Conti) (Bologna, 1996), dedicated to “those fallen for the cause of the RSI, civilian and military.”

¹⁰ Rossi, 131.

¹¹ Id., 130-131. Rossi observes that even books produced by Salò apologists (“with pretensions to scientific accuracy”) as works of reference are often filled with errors and do not carefully cite sources.

¹² Giorgio Pisanò, *Io, fascista 1945-1946. La testimonianza di un superstite* (Milan, 1997) 7.

detailed chronicle of Salò from a fascist slant.¹³ Other such works include Filippo Anfuso's *Roma Berlino Salò*, by the only senior member of the fascist diplomatic corps who did not abandon Mussolini in July 1943, and *Con Mussolini nella tragedia* [With Mussolini in the Tragedy], by Giovanni Dolfín, who headed Mussolini's secretariat at Salò until March 1944.¹⁴

Many of the key memorialistic works about Salò were written by the journalists of the day whom Mussolini selected to edit major newspapers. One example of these is by Giorgio Pini, editor Mussolini's official newspaper *Il Popolo d'Italia*, from 1936 until 1943, whose autobiographical *Itinerario tragico* [Tragic Itinerary] recounts the author's personal experiences from the time of Mussolini's arrest in 1943 to his departure for the Swiss border the day before his execution. Pini's participation with Salò began in September 1943, when Mussolini appointed him editor-in-chief of Bologna's *Il Resto del Carlino*. Explaining that he wrote *Itinerario tragico* to counter the libels and falsity of the world press, Pini presents his Salò compatriots as having risked everything to redeem the honor of Italy in the eyes of their German allies from the shame of the armistice and the king's betrayal.¹⁵ This indeed is a central theme of most memorialistic works; Ermanno Amicucci, who edited Milan's *Corriere della Sera* during Salò, claimed in *I 600 giorni di Mussolini* [Mussolini's Six Hundred Days]

¹³ Edmondo Cione, *Storia della Repubblica sociale italiana* (Caserta, 1948). Achille Tamaro, *Due anni di storia, 1943-1945* (Rome, 1948).

¹⁴ Filippo Anfuso, *Roma Berlino Salò 1936-1945* (Milan, 1950). I cite Dolfín occasionally (as have other scholars) for his observations on Mussolini's behavior and attitudes, and because he was an eye-witness to many of the comings and goings at Villa Feltrinelli.

¹⁵ Giorgio Pini, *Itinerario tragico* (Milan, 1950).

much the same position as Pini.¹⁶ So too did Bruno Spampanato of Rome's *Il Messaggero*, Ugo Manunta of Milan's *La Sera*, and Concetto Pettinato, who headed Turin's *La Stampa*.¹⁷ Besides the pervasive honor discourse, the issue of personal loyalty to the dictator also played a large part in the unrepentant resolution of these men to "go down with the ship." Written expressly to justify such commitment, these books never voice regrets for having staked everything on the Axis cause. The Holocaust, as well as the many German massacres of Italian civilians, go unmentioned.¹⁸ For their openly Fascist sympathies, they should be dealt with cautiously, although I have made some use of Pini's and Amicucci's recollections of events.

A change of attitude towards the topic of Salò began to emerge in the mid-1970s, when journalists produced a few fairly balanced general, but not entirely scholarly, works on the Salò Republic. These occasionally drew upon some of the memorialistic literature of Salò veterans and participants, at the same time making use of the limited number of archival sources recently made available. And, of course, they present no apologia for Fascism.¹⁹ The first was Silvio

¹⁶Ermanno Amicucci, *I 600 giorni di Mussolini* (Rome, 1948).

¹⁷Bruno Spampanato, *Contromemorale* (Milan, 1951); Ugo Manunta, *La caduta degli angeli: storia intima della Repubblica sociale italiana* (Rome, 1947); Concetto Pettinato, *Tutto da rifare* (Milan, 1966).

¹⁸No doubt part of the reason for this lies in the fact that some of these journalists contributed to the intensified anti-Semitic propaganda that was so much a feature of the Salò press. Pini, for example, although a "moderate" Fascist, discussed the coup against Mussolini as a Jewish conspiracy. See "Oltre il cavaliere." *Il Resto del Carlino*, April 9, 1944.

¹⁹Access to Fascist-era sources has in general been governed by the "50-year law" which allows their release to public examination in the Italian state archives only after such period has elapsed. Klinkhammer (22), though, noted in 1993 the continuing inaccessibility of the Archivio

Bertoldi's *Salò. Vita e morte della Repubblica sociale italiana* [Salò. Life and Death of the Italian Social Republic].²⁰ Referring to scholars' tendency to view the period as either the history of the Italian Resistance or the German occupation, rather than as Mussolini's republic, Bertoldi undertook to write what he claimed was the first narrative of Salò from "the inside." His research, based largely on personal interviews with participants he personally conducted during the 1960s, included some of their published memoirs and made some use of documents in the Italian state archives. (He also admits to having extensively consulted Giorgio Pini's personal archive.) This approach produced a straightforward narrative for the general reader; Bertoldi's many references to the corruption and opportunism rampant in Salò, the atrocities committed against civilians by Fascist brigades and German soldiers, as well as Salò's complicity in the Holocaust, place him squarely in the moral camp opposite the memorialists. Yet his portrait of Salò, wherein he discloses a series of conflicts between moderate Fascists and extremists, is the first to depart from the rather monolithic "official" image of unbridled "Nazi-fascist" extremism current among historians until the late 1970s.²¹

The matter Bertoldi highlights – moderate fascists versus extremists – is treated rather skeptically, however, by another journalist who published his own

dell'ufficio storico dello Stato maggiore dell'Esercito (the archive of the historical office of the Army supreme command).

²⁰ Silvio Bertoldi, *Salò. Vita e morte della Repubblica sociale italiana* (Milan, 1976).

²¹ Id., especially 284-343.

history of Salò a year later. Giorgio Bocca's *La Repubblica di Mussolini* is more grounded on archival evidence than Bertoldi's study, but draws less upon written testimonies of participants than Bertoldi did.²² In view of having written, a decade earlier, a history of the Resistance, Bocca admits that his readers may find it "almost blasphemous" that a partisan commander such as himself would deign to even speak of the "*repubblichini*."²³ But by the late 1970s, he argues, it was high time for someone on the left to formulate a response to "the basic question that antifascism in those days [during the war] refused to face: why hated, reactionary, liberticidal fascism had still found, in the Republic of Salò, hundreds of thousands of Italians who had gone over to Mussolini, having everything to lose and nothing to gain."²⁴ For this question to be answered, the whole story, not just one part of it, had to emerge. Yet Bocca's book fails to tell the whole story, as he had promised, and so we are no closer to understanding the motivations of Salò adherents than before. He instead concentrates on disclosing the connections between Fascism and capitalism, concluding that the value of understanding

²² Giorgio Bocca, *La repubblica di Mussolini* (Milan, 1977). Bocca is still a highly respected journalist.

²³ Giorgio Bocca, *Storia dell'Italia partigiana* (Bari, 1965).

²⁴ Bocca, 1977, viii – ix. Throughout his book Bocca emphasizes connections between the Fascism of Salò and the "bourgeois system" that survived the war. See especially 171-190. He also reminds his readers that a wholesale purge of Fascists in the Italian government and bureaucracy never took place. Collotti, too, from the time he began writing on Salò, stressed the continuities between the RSI and the post-war Italian republic; see, for example, his comments in his most recent book, *L'Europa Nazista* (Collotti 2002, 407-437).

Fascism “even in its twilight hour” lies in helping us recognize the ways in which it still functions in the “bourgeois system.”²⁵

Both Bertoldi and Bocca steered clear of the increasingly strident historiographical debates about Fascism taking place in Italy in the mid-1970s.²⁶ The height of this clamor coincided with the publication of the third installment of Renzo De Felice’s multi-volume biography of Mussolini. De Felice seemed to go out of his way to bring this historiographical debate among scholars to the attention of the general public, provoking further polemics by appearing on television to defend his views, and granting an interview to American scholar Michael Ledeen (which was subsequently published in 1975 as the bestseller *Intervista sul fascismo* [Interview on fascism]).²⁷ The shock to Italy’s historians and political establishment came from De Felice offering an interpretation of Fascism that owed little to Marxist methodology. Instead, he presented what has since been called “the first ‘modern’ study of Fascism to be based on archival documents,”²⁸ thus challenging what one historian later referred to as the “antifascist consensus that had emerged from World War II and the Resistance ... a politically based orthodoxy antithetical to the historian’s task of patiently

²⁵ Bocca entirely ignores the anti-bourgeois tenor of Salò propaganda and of Mussolini’s personal ruminations during this final phase of his career.

²⁶ Bocca mentions De Felice once, only to dismiss the controversial historian’s distinction between Fascism and Nazism, for, he observes, their end result was essentially the same, “the suffocation of freedom.” 84.

²⁷ Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il duce. Gli anni del consenso, 1929-1936* (Turin, 1974); See also Ledeen, 1976.

²⁸ Philip V. Cannistraro, “Jacobinism, Marxism, and Fascism: The Historiographical Trajectory of Renzo De Felice.” *Italian Quarterly*, XXXVI, 141-142, Summer – Fall 1999, 29.

seeking to understand a subject through empirical study based on documented evidence.”²⁹ Marxist historians, who largely held sway over the intelligentsia of post-war Italy, traditionally defined Fascism as a class-based instrument of repression wielded by Italy’s landowners, financiers and industrialists in reaction to revolutionary forces unleashed in the aftermath of World War I. They claimed the shock troops of the Fascist take-over came from the lower middle classes, a group long intoxicated by nationalist ideology and now threatened by loss of bourgeois identity. This scenario allowed Marxist historians to make the larger point that the vast majority of Italians lived unhappily under Fascist manipulation and repression and never ceased being antifascist at heart.³⁰ De Felice challenged this interpretation by studying Fascism, as he put it, “from within;” that is, by studying Fascist-era documentation. He was subsequently vilified by many left-wing sympathizers in the Italian press, not just for having set aside Marxist interpretations, but for having made several other claims about the nature of Fascism and the Mussolini dictatorship which, he argued, his research – the most thorough appraisal yet undertaken of Fascist documents – enabled him to make. The principal issues his critics objected to were (1) calling Mussolini a

²⁹ Borden W. Painter, “Renzo De Felice and the Historian’s Task.” *Italian Quarterly* XXXVI, 141-142, Summer-Fall 1999, 33.

³⁰ Painter, 1990, 395. For a negative assessment of De Felice’s impact on the historiography of Fascism, and a summary of his opponents’ criticisms, see R.J.B. Bosworth, *The Italian Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of Mussolini and Fascism* (New York, 1998) 180-204.

“revolutionary” and locating Fascism’s roots on the left;³¹ (2) making a distinction between Fascism as a movement and as a regime, with the movement defined as one of an emerging middle class, and the regime it lived tensely alongside for twenty years the result of compromises with reactionary forces such as the monarchy, the Church, and big business; (3) insisting on fundamental differences between Fascism and Nazism; (4) privileging Fascist sources at the expense of non-Fascist sources; and (5) identifying a period of superficial “consensus” during which (1929 to 1936) most Italians did not find living under Fascism terribly difficult or unpleasant.³² The Marxist historian Nicola Tranfaglia even went so far as to accuse De Felice of trying to “rehabilitate fascism.”³³

By the beginning of the 1980s, many of De Felice’s controversial assertions had been absorbed into the mainstream – especially his claims regarding consensus – and with some senior Marxist historians weighing in on his

³¹ De Felice had already articulated this thesis during the previous decade in his first volume, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario. 1883-1920* (Turin, 1965).

³² In addition to Painter 1990, see also Emilio Gentile, “Renzo De Felice: A Tribute” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 32:2 (April 1997); Spencer M. Di Scala, “Renzo De Felice’s Heritage: The Renewed Respectability of Debate”; Charles F. Delzell, “Renzo De Felice: An Overview.”; Philip V. Cannistraro, “Jacobinism, Marxism, and Fascism: The Historiographical Trajectory of Renzo De Felice”; Borden W. Painter, Jr., “Renzo De Felice and the Historian’s Task.” (especially his discussion of Tranfaglia’s criticisms); Roland Sarti, “De Felice’s Mussolini and the Historiography of Fascism”; and Emilio Gentile, “Paths to an Interpretation: Renzo De Felice”, all published in *Italian Quarterly* XXXVI, 141-142, Summer – Fall 1999. For a more recent appraisal, see Alessio Pedio, “Renzo De Felice e i suoi interpreti.” *Passato e presente*, XXIII: 65, May – August 2005, 123-135.

³³ Painter 1999, 39: “Often forgotten is the fact that an avowedly Fascist and pro-Mussolini historiography has coexisted since World War II, but De Felice has not been a part of it.” See also R.J.B. Bosworth’s series of denunciations of De Felice’s limitations in his *The Italian Dictatorship: Problems and perspectives in the interpretation of Mussolini and Fascism* (London/New York, 1998) 17-21; 200-202.

side, calling for a new examination of Fascism, much of the clamor subsided.³⁴ De Felice died in 1996, while his projected last volume of the Mussolini biography (which would have covered the Salò Republic) was still being written (it stops at the spring of 1944).³⁵ Some of his observations on events in Salò, which might have been developed in his projected last volume of the Mussolini biography, can be found in the collection of essays, *Rosso e nero* [Red and Black], another interview in which he rather intemperately took issue with the “Resistance myth” that he felt had for so long impeded truly scientific scholarship.³⁶

Partly due to the effect of De Felice’s studies on Fascism, the intellectual climate in Italy had so altered by the 1980s that it became less common for scholars to fear being labeled Fascist or even tolerant of Fascism if they “adopted

³⁴ Borden 1999, 36: “The general affirmation of De Felice by the 1980s and 1990s appears most obviously in the use made of his work by other historians. In practice, anyone actively engaged in the subject of Italian Fascism turns to the biography of Mussolini.” For a recent discussion of how much De Felice’s tentative assertion of the existence of a consensus has been distorted by both politicians and historians, see Paul Corner, “Italian Fascism: Whatever Happened to Dictatorship?” *Journal of Modern History* 74 (June 2002), 325-351. The most anti-De Felice historian (it seems) writing in English today, R.J.B. Bosworth, also made use of De Felice’s research in his recent *Mussolini* (Oxford/New York, 2002). Bosworth admits his hostility to the legacy of De Felice, an historian “who acted as a magnet for surviving Fascists who regularly gave him access to their papers and diaries ... As an interpreter of Mussolini, De Felice needs to be read with greater caution.” Id. 2-3.

³⁵ Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini l’alleato. La guerra civile, 1943-1945* (Turin, 1997). This was prepared for publication after De Felice’s death by Emilio Gentile, Luigi Goglia and Mario Missori (see Cannistaro 1999, 32). For a sharply critical assessment of De Felice’s unwillingness to make use of other historians’ work on Salò, including that of non-Italian historians, see Giorgio Rochat, “L’ultimo Mussolini secondo De Felice.” *Italia contemporanea*, 182, March 1991, 111-119.

³⁶ Pasquale Chessa, ed., *Rosso e nero* (Milan, 1995).

views of Fascism different from the unofficial “official” views.”³⁷ With Salò now somewhat less politicized, scholarly work on a topic hitherto considered all but untouchable began to fill what the historian Andrea Rossi calls “the decades-long lacuna.”³⁸ As part of a larger trend that was beginning to study Fascist culture, some of the earliest of these works focused on the role of journalism. Among the first was a rather broad, general account of the Salò press, published in 1979 by Ugoberto Alfassio-Grimaldi. A few years later, Alfassio-Grimaldi’s findings were surpassed by much more comprehensive studies of Vittorio Paolucci.³⁹ During the same period, Giovanni De Luna devoted an important book and an article to the topic of the Salò press: *La stampa italiana dalla Resistenza agli anni '60: I 45 giorni e la Repubblica di Salò* [The Italian Press from the Resistance to the 1960s: The 45 Days and the Salò Republic] and “Giornali e giornalisti nella RSI.” This latter was but one of several articles published by the Fondazione Luigi Micheletti, under whose auspices a groundbreaking conference

³⁷Di Scala 1990, 7. See also, Rossi, 2001, 134, who notes a change of attitude among scholars who formerly had felt that “to discuss problematic aspects of the 1943-45 period equaled, in substance, calling into question the entire Resistance experience.”

³⁸Rossi 2001, 129.

³⁹Ugoberto Alfassio-Grimaldi, *La stampa di Salò* (Milan, 1979); Vittorio Paolucci, *La stampa periodica della Repubblica sociale* (Urbino, 1982), and *I quotidiani della Repubblica sociale italiana (9 settembre 1943 – 25 aprile 1945)* (Urbino, 1987). Paolucci’s books provide valuable discussions of the impact of the periodical and newspaper press. They also reproduce documents from the period stored in the Italian archives and catalog each publication, along with vital statistics about editors, dates of operation, numbers of issues printed, and where surviving copies can be located.

was held in October 1985 on the Italian Social Republic.⁴⁰ The topic of the Salò press has continued to attract scholarly attention through the present.⁴¹

Other studies during the 1980s and early 1990s have produced biographical accounts of key participants. The so-called “philosopher of Fascism” Giovanni Gentile, the most prestigious name in Italian culture to have rallied to Mussolini’s side in 1943, has been the subject of several recent biographies.⁴² In the early 1980s, Luciano Garibaldi published a biography of Gentile’s protégé, the Minister of National Education, Carlo Alberto Biggini, which reproduces Biggini’s diary during the Salò period.⁴³ Other recent works include biographical studies of Nicola Bombacci and Carlo Silvestri, the two

⁴⁰ Giovanni De Luna, *La stampa italiana dalla Resistenza agli anni '60: I 45 giorni e la Repubblica di Salò* (Bari, 1980); “Giornali e giornalista nella RSI.” *Annali della Fondazione Luigi Micheletti*, ed. Pier Paolo Poggio (atti del convegno Brescia, 4-5 ottobre 1985) (Brescia, 1986).

⁴¹ See, e.g., Guglielmo Salotti, “Un ‘mistero’ storico-giornalistico: ‘Il giramondo’.” *Storia contemporanea* XVII: 5, October 1986, 875-888; Francesco Germinario, “‘Italia e Civiltà’: cattofascismo, tradimento degli intellettuali e totalitarismo imperfetto nei dibattiti di una rivista di cultura della RSI.” *Il presente e la storia*, 51, June 1997, 65-98; Simonetta Bertolini, “La breve avventura di ‘Italia e Civiltà. Una rivista teorica di intellettuali toscani nella RSI.” *Nuova storia contemporanea*, IV: 5, Sept. – Oct. 2000, 85-112; Luisa Quartermaine, *Mussolini’s Last Republic: Propaganda and Politics in the Italian Social Republic (R.S.I.) 1943-45* (Exeter, 2000); Ennio Bozzetti and Giovanni Sabbatucci, ed., *Un progetto di conciliazione nella Repubblica sociale. Scritti di Giramondo (Carlo Silvestri) raccolti da Renzo De Felice*, (Florence, 2001). On the Giramondo affair, see also Carlo Borsani Jr., *Carlo Borsani. Una vita per un sogno (1917-1945)* (Milan, 1995), a biography by the subject’s son that borders on hagiography. Also useful is Jonathan Dunnage, “Making better Italians: issues of national identity in the Italian Social Republic and the Resistance” from Gino Bedani and Bruce Haddock, ed., *The Politics of Italian National Identity* (Cardiff, 2000) 191-213, which examines themes in the Salò press and the various Resistance newspapers to demonstrate how the propaganda of both sides often made use of the same nationalist imagery.

⁴² See, e.g., Sergio Romano, *Giovanni Gentile. Un filosofo al potere negli anni del regime* (Milan 1984); Gabriele Turi, *Giovanni Gentile. Una biografia* (Florence, 1995), A. James Gregor, *Giovanni Gentile: Philosopher of Fascism* (New Brunswick and London, 2001); Alessandro Campi, *Giovanni Gentile e la RSI. Morte “necessaria” di un filosofo* (Milan, 2001).

⁴³ Luciano Garibaldi, *Mussolini e il professore. Vita e diari di Carlo Alberto Biggini* (Milan, 1983).

“socialists” who became Mussolini’s close confidants during Salò.⁴⁴ Gathered into a volume entitled *Uomini e scelte della RSI* [Men and Choices of the RSI] is a compendium of biographical essays of many of the principal figures of the Salò Republic. These originated as papers presented at a conference in Milan in 1998.⁴⁵ One feature that strikingly emerges from these essays, and from the biographical monographs mentioned above, is the great range of motivating factors that determined why certain individuals chose to adhere to Salò. Among these works we find a more complex and multi-faceted explanation of the motives and choices than had been afforded by the traditional monolithic view of Salò as a mere appendage of the Nazi dictatorship prevalent from the end of the war until the 1980s. Quite often, it seems, ideological commitment to Fascism played a role subordinate to a misguided sense of patriotism, or honor, or personal loyalty to the Duce.

Recent developments in the historiography of the Resistance have bearing on attitudes towards the study of the Salò Republic. Claudio Pavone’s *Una guerra civile* [A Civil War] provoked much controversy when it appeared in 1991 for challenging the “orthodox” view of the Resistance purveyed by its political heirs, who expressed outrage that their struggle should be called a civil war.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Guglielmo Salotti, *Nicola Bombacci da Mosca a Salò* (Rome, 1986), and Gloria Gabriele, *Carlo Silvestri, socialista, antifascista, mussoliniano* (Milan, 1992).

⁴⁵ Andriola 2000. For a brief assessment of Andriola’s book, see Alessandra Argenio, “Tutti (o quasi) gli uomini dell’ultimo duce.” *Nuova storia contemporanea*, IV: 5, March-April 2003, 167-169.

⁴⁶ The first scholarly articulation of this is Roberto Battaglia, *Storia della Resistenza italiana* (Turin, 1953). Klinkhammer (440, n. 41-43) notes that this was not the first time a non-Fascist historian

While being fought, it was not uncommon for both sides to refer to it as a civil war, although after the war, only Fascists continued to describe it as such. The partisan winners, in the interest of basing their legitimacy on a national cult, sought to portray the conflict as a war of national liberation of the whole Italian people rising up against Nazis and a few Fascists, thus conflating national unity with victory over Fascism. Pavone, instead, presents the Resistance as three simultaneous and overlapping conflicts: a patriotic war (against the German oppressors), a civil war (against Fascism) and a class war (against former class relationships).⁴⁷ Pavone's approach emphasizes a broad range of motives and choices of individuals and to what degree these shaped political commitment. The historians Michele Battini and Paolo Pezzino comment on the impact of Pavone's work in their study of the German occupation of Tuscany, observing how, thanks to Pavone, the Resistance has been "restored to the complexity of choices ... of various and multiple identities of social subjects involved in it." Moreover, Pavone's affirmation of the three-conflict thesis has "liberated the

called the conflict a civil war, and cites Indro Montanelli and Mario Cervi, *L'Italia della guerra civile* (Milan, 1983).

⁴⁷ Pavone, 1991. For assessments of the impact of Pavone's book on the historiography of the Resistance, see Adrian Lyttleton, "Line of Resistance." *Times Literary Supplement*, September 25, 1992, 28-29; Giorgio Vaccarino, "La 'guerra civile' di Claudio Pavone." *Italia contemporanea* 189, December 1992, 769-773 (Vaccarino praises Pavone for violating a "tabu" but observes that members of the Resistance quite rightly objected to calling the conflict a civil war because doing so dignified their adversaries by putting them on the same moral level); Nicola Gallerano, "Discussioni – Una guerra civile." *Passato e presente* X: 27 March-April 1991, 17-31 (this article encompasses comments by Umberto Allegretti, Adrian Lyttleton, Mario Isnenghi, and Guido Crainz). Massimo Legnani, "A proposito di storia, stampa e pubblico. Le accoglienze alla 'guerra civile' di Claudio Pavone." *Italia contemporanea*, 1992, 119-124, considers calling the conflict a civil war unacceptable. See also Bosworth 1998, 202, who notes Pavone's distance from the "De Felice school."

memory of those years, in that it has recognized the necessity of studying the motivations of the losers of the civil war.”⁴⁸

Two highly comprehensive contributions to the study of Salò that have appeared in recent years are Lutz Klinkhammer’s *L’occupazione tedesca in Italia, 1943-1945*, and Luigi Ganapini’s *La Repubblica delle camicie nere* [The Black Shirt Republic]. Klinkhammer’s book is the most up-to-date study of the German occupation of Italy, and can be regarded as a rethinking of Collotti’s view from his *L’amministrazione tedesca in Italia occupata*, which served as the standard work on the topic since the early 1960s. Klinkhammer finds that Collotti’s thesis of a German administration bent on a program of maximum exploitation and repression must be modified in the light of his own study of the power structure of the German occupation forces, an arrangement he finds to have been much more complicated than previously thought. His book also contributes to a renewal of the “intentionalist-functionalist” debate that has taken place in Germany during the last decades, in which historians have argued over whether it was Hitler’s program, or the decisions taken by rival administrative or military organs in competition with each other, that had the greater influence on Nazi rule, both in Germany and in the territories it conquered. Klinkhammer’s research supports a *policratic* view of the German occupation of Italy, a term he defines as “permanent competing centers of power.”

⁴⁸ Michele Battini and Paolo Pezzino, *Guerra ai civili. Occupazione tedesca e politica del massacro. Toscana 1944* (Venice, 1997) xi-xxiv. Cfr. xi for their observations on the Resistance as a “classic example of the public use of history.”

Klinkhammer's policratic approach has considerable bearing on the issue of Salò as a German puppet. The author asserts that one of the primary reasons for the survival of the pervasive monolithic view of the *Nazi-fascista* in Italian historiography is that Italians have paid scant attention to the German debate on policracy. Until now, stereotypical views of Salò have served to hide the "real responsibility of certain people or groups, concealing the complicated internal structure of the occupying power and the Italian collaboration system."⁴⁹

Klinkhammer revises Collotti's view of the nature of the relations of Italians with their "ally-occupiers" by placing the Italian experience of German occupation within the intentionalist-functionalist debate. In light of the fact that Italy was neither at war with Germany, nor considered an enemy nation at the moment of its occupation, it stood in a separate category of its own, that of an "occupied ally." Because of this, it enjoyed "a partial possibility of autonomous action that absolutely did not exist in other countries in which the occupying powers directly assumed administration."⁵⁰ A clearer picture of the German position in Italy emerges with Klinkhammer's discovery that Hitler's ambassador (and plenipotentiary) Rudolf von Rahn managed a kind of "minimum consensus" in which he carefully orchestrated the competing claims of the German military, the S.S, the German economic authorities, and the pretensions of Mussolini's

⁴⁹Klinkhammer, 15.

⁵⁰Id., 16.

government, against an Italian population that was forced to continuously define its own position toward the fascist regime.⁵¹

A non-Italian might read Luigi Ganapini's exhaustively researched *La repubblica delle camicie nere* with only the smallest awareness of the bitter polemics traditionally surrounding the historiography of the topic.⁵² Ganapini never explicitly engages with one side or the other of the political divide; instead he simply depicts the last twenty months of Fascism with more attention to detail than anyone has ever done before. Yet views of other historians do not go unacknowledged; he concedes the truth of Klinkhammer's policratic system of occupation, and adopts Pavone's view of the Resistance as a three-tiered conflict. Moreover, in a work of nearly 500 pages, in which he draws heavily upon newspapers and periodicals, memoirs, and the documentary evidence available in Italian archives, he continuously draws the reader's attention back to the complex motivational factors behind the decision to adhere to the Salò regime. From a glance at the body of his professional work, Ganapini's sympathies are obviously with the left; indeed it seems it is especially to the Italian left that he speaks when he insists historians must not allow the history of the Italian Social Republic to remain unknown, if for no other reason than because those responsible for Salò have been allowed to remain shrouded in a kind of historical darkness: "let us

⁵¹ Id., 21; see also 420-421.

⁵² Luigi Ganapini, *La Repubblica delle camicie nere. I combattenti, i politici, gli amministratori, i socializzatori* (Milan, 1999).

bring them out of the darkness to which they have conveniently kept, where they could avoid looking at us directly in the face.”⁵³

A year after the publication of *La Repubblica delle camicie nere*, Ganapini devoted an essay to clarifying where he stood regarding the polemics of the historiography of Salò. Referring to some recent works attempting to rehabilitate the RSI, he writes “Salò must be examined if for no other reason than to lay to rest the myth of its return to socialist origins.” He suggests, too, that historians are confronted with another myth that calls for careful examination and before its final dismissal: that of the *repubblica necessaria*, the “necessary republic,” the notion that Mussolini’s involvement with Salò resulted from his attempt to save Italy from the kind of dire fate suffered by Poland. For this myth helped create the rationale, he observes ruefully, for the stance taken by those who occupied the “middle ground” in Italy during those terrible months, “those who, alien to every extreme, conceded to republican fascism their silent support in the name of the salvation of the country.”⁵⁴

With Klinkhammer’s and Ganapini’s works, we may have reached the moment Andrea Rossi hoped for, when “the bitterest polemics seem largely to

⁵³ Id., 17.

⁵⁴ Luigi Ganapini, “La Rsi e l’ultimo fascismo. Una rilettura critica della storiografia.” *L’impegno*, XX, n. 3, December 2000 (Istituto per la storia della Resistenza e della società contemporanea delle provincie di Biella e Vercelli)
<<http://www.storia900bivc.it/pagine/editoria/ganapini300.html>>

have come to an end ... and we have to wonder why it ever took the speculations of journalists to provoke rigorous and scientific scholarship to come into play.”⁵⁵

⁵⁵Rossi, 137.

CHAPTER TWO: FASCIST CULTURE AND THE ITALIAN INTELLECTUAL

Historians of Fascist culture rarely carry their investigations beyond the summer of 1943. Fascist culture – itself a fraught topic, for there are historians who today deny its significance – has been studied for the most part in the context of the *ventennio*.¹ Historians have so far offered no generalizations of the relationship of republican Fascism to the world of culture during the short life span of the Italian Social Republic. Yet despite its brevity and its “air of unreality” – a phrase historians often apply to Salò – and despite the fact that most intellectuals dropped out of sight after Badoglio’s surrender or even joined the Italian Resistance, a small measure of cultural life continued to exist. This raises questions: what kind of culture do we see in Salò, and where do we see it? Who were its producers, and who were its consumers? What was its function? What continuities were there between the cultural life of the twenty years of the Fascist regime and the Salò Republic? And might looking at the world of culture shed light on our understanding of the Salò period and Fascism itself? As a preliminary to answering such questions, it may be useful to briefly review some

¹ See, for example, Bosworth 1998, 20-29 and 154-179 for an emphatic dismissal of some recent historians’ attempts to advance theories on the distinct characteristics and impact of Fascist culture. Bosworth attacks the scholarship of historians such as George Mosse, Walter Adamson, and Emilio Gentile in particular, scholars in the forefront of the examination of Fascist cultural issues, insisting their work has given rise to an “anti-anti-Fascism” which “has not provided a sufficiently articulated account of the Fascist experience.” Bosworth resents the political use that can easily be made of studies of Fascist culture by the neo-Fascist Italian Right, insisting that anti-Fascism in the contemporary world needs to be defended: “Anti-Fascism was once committed to a thesis of ‘never again’; it was emphatic that the record of Fascism had been scoured by brutality, death and defeat; it urged that, from 1919 to 1945, too many rich and powerful Italians had at a minimum fellow-travelled with dictatorship and tyranny. Now, anti-anti-Fascism became a weapon in the hands of those in the 1990s who were anxious to blot out this interpretation” (29).

of the main trends in the historiography of the relationship between Fascism and culture.

I. Early Fascism and the Italian Modernist Avant-Garde

As Robert Paxton has recently observed, “first-stage fascism is the domain of the intellectual historian, for the process to be studied here is the emergence of new ways of looking at the world and diagnosing its ills.”² Much of the historiography of what Paxton calls first-stage fascism, especially the Italian variety, has taken into account the impact of World War I and the emergence of *squadristi* violence. But it has also sought some of the origins of “new ways of looking at the world” in the intellectual and artistic climate in Italy in the two decades straddling the turn of the twentieth century.³ Scholarly exploration has revealed that much of what were later identified as Fascist attitudes and values had their roots in certain modernist avant-garde movements that arose at the beginning of the twentieth century – movements that, along with the nationalist

² Robert Paxton, “Five Stages of Fascism,” *The Journal of Modern History* 70 (March 1998) 1-23. Yet Paxton also warns against overestimating the contribution of intellectuals. “Looking mainly at early fascism starts us down several false trails. It puts intellectuals at the center of an enterprise whose major decisions were made by power-seeking men of action. The intellectual fellow travelers had a diminishing influence in the rooting and regime stages of the fascist cycle, although certain ideas reasserted themselves in the radicalization stage.” *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York, 2004) 53.

³ A good discussion of the impact of the “party of intellectuals” on pre-World War I Italy can be found in John A. Thayer, *Italy and the Great War: Politics and Culture, 1870-1925* (Madison, 1964). For a general discussion of avant-garde artistic movements and how they related to the beginnings of Fascist ideology, see also the first two chapters of Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (Madison, 1995) and Emilio Gentile, *La Grande Italia. Ascesa e declino del mito della nazione nel ventesimo secolo* (Milan, 1997) 91-103.

press, generated a vision of a new political culture and a “new man.”⁴ Much of modernism’s initial impulse began during the so-called “revolt against positivism” at the end of the nineteenth century, when some intellectuals reacted against the legacy of the Enlightenment and the kind of civilization reflected in the nineteenth century democratic bourgeois order, with its confidence in reason, progress and science (although for the sake of accurately depicting the historical context of the revolt against positivism, it must be acknowledged that it cannot be equated with Fascism or even right-wing movements in general).⁵ Certain avant-garde modernists sought a way to define reality in entirely different terms than science does – as intuition, primal feeling, and instinct – insisting that rational apprehension of the world furnished by science was inherently limiting, that science could only skim the surface of reality, whereas art could reach its inner truth and yield up its essence.⁶

Developments in philosophy paralleled and supported this trend by seeming to rehabilitate and valorize the irrational. German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) was celebrated for proclaiming the death of God and rejecting Christian ethical norms as the morality of slaves, and for inspiring the

⁴ See Emilio Gentile, *Fascismo. Storia e interpretazione* (Rome, 2002) 235-264, and *The Origins of the Fascist Ideology, 1918-1925* (New York, 2005) (trans. from *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista* (Bologna, 1996)) 1-38, who traces the origins of the myth of the Fascist “new man” from the writings of Nietzsche to the radicalized consciousness of Italian veterans returning from the trenches of World War I.

⁵ See H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890-1930* (New York, revised, 1977).

⁶ See Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York, 1981) xviii-xxx; and Mattei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity* (Durham NC, 1987) 41-46.

cult of the Superman, the hero beyond good and evil. At the same time, many modernists embraced École Normale professor Henri Bergson (1859-1941) for advocating intuition, rather than logical analysis, as the more reliable route to truth. And French syndicalist Georges Sorel (1847-1922) theorized that the mobilizing force of myth must replace class conflict as the agency of proletarian revolution. He also endorsed violence, advancing the view that a society's health can be gauged by its capacity for "heroic combat."

Italy produced two important avant-garde movements which have been credited with popularizing many of the values and attitudes upon which the Fascist movement was to build: the Florentine *La Voce* circle, and the Milan-based Futurists. Both groups attempted to construct new values by affirming, through art, the validity of the intuitive, instinctive and irrational forces that they felt were repressed by modern life – a repression, they argued, that had warped Italian cultural life and retarded the emergence of an authentic nation. Such values evolved against a background of growing middle-class disgust with cynical parliamentary maneuverings and clientelism represented in Giovanni Giolitti's premiership (approximately 1901-1914), a period in which Italian intellectuals (and even much of the new middle classes) became increasingly receptive to cultural values deeply antithetical to the reigning Liberal ideology. The Giolittian period can be seen as an era of dramatically clashing trends: on the one hand, optimistic developments, such as the recent renewal of democratic values in the Chamber of Deputies (1898-1899), the vastly extended suffrage (1912) and the dramatic surge in industrial and economic activity at the beginning of the century;

on the other, a cultural and political mood increasingly unsympathetic to democratic and humanitarian values: the war with Turkey and conquest of Libya (1911) and its associated bellicose nationalism; Gabriele D'Annunzio's novels glamorizing ruthlessness, violence and cruelty, which won a large readership among Italy's new middle classes; and a continuous elaboration of nationalist values and attitudes in the newspaper press that presented images of Italians as a conquering, imperialistic people.⁷ In other European contexts, the modernist avant-garde, bent on rejecting the bourgeois world, identified with left-wing values; in the Italian context, in which intellectuals had been overwhelmingly excluded from any sort of political participation, the avant-garde associated parliamentarianism and democratic values with the bourgeoisie, and so rejected both in favor of elitism and anti-democratic politics.

Futurism, led by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, deserves to be viewed as an important ideological precursor to Fascism both because its members violently repudiated Liberal Italy's prevailing rationalist, materialist, and democratic culture, and because it briefly became a political movement allied to the Fascists.⁸

⁷ D'Annunzio, whose fictional heroes were often meant to embody the Nietzschean Superman, was the writer who first introduced Nietzsche to the Italian reading public. For a good discussion of the cultural values of Italian nationalism as "a combination of Spencerian positivism (struggle for existence, natural selection, survival of the fittest) and of German statism ... fused in the doctrinal mold of the French nationalism of Daudet and Maurras," see Luigi Salvatorelli, *The Risorgimento: Thought and Action*, trans. by Mario Domadi (New York, 1970) 184-185.

⁸ Indeed, Marinetti explicitly took credit for Fascism when he said "The coming to power of Fascism constitutes the realization of the minimum Futurist programme." See James Joll, *Three Intellectuals in Politics* (New York, 1960) 176. The historiography on Futurism continues to grow each year. For discussions on the relationship between Futurism and Italian Fascism, see Gunter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction, 1909-1944* (Providence/Oxford, 1996); George L. Mosse, "The Political Culture of Italian Futurism: A General Perspective." *Journal of Contemporary History* 25 (1990) 253-268 (originally published

Marinetti, for whom “war was the sole hygiene of the world,” consistently argued that violence should be considered a creative act; only through death could the world be transformed into something better. Marinetti’s extravagant contempt of democratic values and Christian morality set Futurism apart from other avant-garde movements, along with a sharp rejection of history: Marinetti called for the wholesale destruction of every vestige of the past – the burning down of libraries, museums, universities and churches – because, he claimed, the future could only be built on the ruins of the past.

Both Futurism and the *La Voce* circle shared the aim of “cultural intervention in politics.”⁹ The *La Voce* circle refers to three intellectuals who published the weekly journal *La Voce* in Florence from 1908 to 1914, as well as its predecessor *Leonardo* (1903 to 1907) and Futurist offshoot *Lacerba* (1913 to 1915): Giovanni Papini (1881–1956), Giuseppe Prezzolini (1882–1982) and Ardengo Soffici (1879–1964).¹⁰ The historian Walter Adamson has suggested

in Italian in Renzo De Felice, ed., *Futurismo, cultura e politica* (Turin, 1988); Emilio Gentile, “La politica di Marinetti,” in *Il mito dello stato nuovo dall’antigiolittismo al fascismo* (Bari, 1982) (this is a reprint from *Storia contemporanea* 7, n. 3, 1974); Cinzia Sartini Blum, *The Other Modernism: F. T. Marinetti’s Futurist Fiction of Power* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1996); Claudia Salaris, *Marinetti editore* (Bologna, 1990), *Artecrazia: L’avanguardia futurista negli anni del fascismo* (Scandicci, 1992), and *Marinetti. Arte e vita futurista* (Rome, 1997); and Andrew Hewitt, *Fascist Modernism: Aesthetics, Politics and the Avant-Garde* (Stanford, 1993).

⁹ Now almost a cliché, “cultural intervention in politics” is a phrase coined by John Thayer to describe the ambitions of Italian modernists who, denied access to the political arena, aimed to change Italy through a project of cultural renovation. The phrase recurs throughout his *Italy and the Great War*.

¹⁰ Walter Adamson is the great *doyen* of *vocianti* studies in the English-speaking world. See his *Avant-Garde Florence: From Modernism to Fascism* (Cambridge, MA, 1993). See also his “Modernism and Fascism: The Politics of Culture in Italy, 1903-1922.” *American Historical Review* 95 (April 1990) 359-390; “Fascism and Culture: Avant-Gardes and Secular Religion in the Italian Case.” *Journal of Contemporary History* 24 (1989) 411-435, and “The Language of Opposition in Early Twentieth-Century Italy: Rhetorical Continuities between Prewar Florentine

that “Fascism might be characterized in important respects as the politicization of Italian modernism.”¹¹ Writing on behalf of Italian cultural renewal, the *vocianti* ceaselessly inveighed against Italy’s parliamentary democracy and the materialism of its bourgeois ethos (as well as that of its burgeoning socialist movement). Like syndicalist philosopher Georges Sorel and Marinetti’s Futurists, the *voiciani* praised violence as the restorer of a society’s health and vigor, a “moral cure, an exercise that strengthens, a categorical imperative for all those who love themselves.”¹² With the phrase “a warm bath of blood” Papini suggested the kind of violent experience his countrymen needed to undergo in order to shed the corruption of the present and emerge as a “regenerated” society. Such rhetoric came to play a significant part in the interventionist campaign of 1914 – 1915, many of whose participants later became enthusiastic Fascists.

There was, according to the historian Fritz Stern, “a longing in Europe for fascism before the name was ever invented. There was a longing for a new authoritarianism with some kind of religious orientation and above all a greater communal belongingness.”¹³ The focus on avant-garde movements in Italy, where “culture and politics were being confused,”¹⁴ helps explain the atmosphere

Avant-gardism and Mussolini’s Fascism.” *Journal of Modern History* 64 (March 1992) 22-51. For an earlier appraisal, see Emilio Gentile, *Mussolini e “La Voce”* (Florence, 1976).

¹¹ Adamson, 1998, 360.

¹² Adamson 1993, 88.

¹³ *New York Times*, January 6, 2005. “Warning from a Student of Democracy’s Collapse”. See also Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: a Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1961).

¹⁴ Thayer 1964, 53.

in which Fascist rhetoric and values coalesced during the formative years of many intellectuals who were later drawn to nationalism and the early Fascist movement. Yet it is important to understand that histories of intellectual involvement in “first-stage fascism” prove of limited use for exploring the Salò Republic. The “official” culture of Salò that emanated from the directives of the Ministry of Popular Culture made no use of such phrases as “a warm bath of blood,” or “spiritual unity” or “national regeneration;” in Salò, such appeals would have seemed to belong to another era, along with the rhetorical trope of the Fascist new man, also unheard of. Many of the most celebrated cultural figures and intellectuals who were among Mussolini’s ardent supporters during the first stage of Fascism seemed to have grown silent or disappeared by 1943. Marinetti returned from the Russian front a sick and broken man and, while publicly adhering to the Italian Social Republic, he did little more than lend it the prestige of his name before dying in December 1944. His Futurist followers either lay low or learned to steer clear of political involvement well before the summer of 1943.¹⁵ Of the *voiciani*, Papini published nothing until after the war ended, and Prezzolini had long since moved to America before the war began. Only Soffici publicly adhered to Salò, publishing several articles in Fascist journals, and remaining faithful to the memory of Mussolini until the end of his life.¹⁶

¹⁵ Futurist painter Mario Sironi, who always identified himself as an ardent Fascist, adhered to Salò. See Emily Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism. Art and Politics under Fascism* (Cambridge, 2000) 205.

¹⁶ For the kind of support Soffici gave to Mussolini in the Italian press in 1943 and 1944, see Chapter Four.

The Ministry of Popular Culture in 1943 may have failed to revive the earliest stage of Fascist rhetoric, but the history of the Salò Republic demonstrates its absorption and radicalization by many among Fascism's intransigent and pro-Nazi wing.¹⁷ The voice that reasserted itself in small local newspapers and periodicals – a voice nearly fallen silent in recent years – burst forth anew at the time of Badoglio's surrender, with calls for "faith" in final victory, and for embracing death to redeem the dishonored *patria*. This voice echoed Fascism's earliest acclamations of violence, and although it represents a dimension of "culture" that lies outside the parameters of a study of intellectual figures and their impact on Mussolini's republican government, nevertheless its existence must be taken into account as part of the general atmosphere of Salò. Moreover, it is important to recognize how its spontaneous re-emergence among the Fascist faithful shows obvious continuities with the kind of values that have been most thoroughly explored in Emilio Gentile's *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*.

Gentile's book is an important contribution to understanding Fascism as a secular religion. It chronicles the emergence within Fascist rhetoric of a conception of the nation as a sacred entity, a notion whose roots went back to the Risorgimento and later drew upon both avant-garde rhetoric of the turn of the century and the radicalized consciousness of veterans returning from the trenches of World War I. Gentile explores attitudes and behaviors toward the nation that

¹⁷For specific examples of the kind of rhetoric favored by Minculpop, see Chapter Four, "The Last Phase of Fascist Rhetoric."

seem less akin to patriotism than to fanatical religious faith, with its insistence on unquestioning obedience to authority, demonization and punishment of the unfaithful, rites, liturgy, symbols and sacraments which tapped into energies and emotions traditionally seen as religious, in order to transplant the notion of religious faith to the political realm. “In the sacralization of the totalitarian state as the supreme authority in politics, spiritual life, and morals, as the ultimate and only educator of the collectivity, one sees the major outline of the highest ideal of Fascist culture and what its vision of politics really was” according to Gentile.¹⁸ Religious modes of thought, stripped of religious content, were intended to replace the nineteenth-century bourgeois, parliamentary conception of politics. If religious faith in the national myth was the objective, “Fascism’s attitude to death [was] the most valid evidence of its religious base.”¹⁹ In small-circulation newspapers of the Italian Social Republic, particularly those aimed at Fascist militia members and *ex-squadristi*, we would expect to find an exaltation of violence and brutality, but the “embrace of death” – the deliberate throwing away of one’s life in the face of defeat – now represents a proof of Fascist faith and honor. The intransigent wing in Mussolini’s republican Fascist government (as well as the Nazi occupiers) must have looked sympathetically on such appeals for martyrdom against inexorable Allied military power. But while the embrace of death motif may have dominated much of the provincial press, it never appeared

¹⁸Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (trans. by Keith Botsford) (Cambridge MA, 1996) 60.

¹⁹Id., 26.

in any of the cultural forums in which the dictator showed any interest, such as the Accademia d'Italia and the major daily newspapers.²⁰ Press directives from the Ministry of Popular Culture encouraging its deployment cannot be found. It seems, though, to have been an authentic, spontaneous expression of the final, most extreme phase of the *squadristi* mentality. It would be reassuring to conclude that this violent and fanatical element played itself out in Salò, or at least found itself utterly discredited by war's end, but unfortunately much of it survives in the huge body of memorialistic writings still being published in Italy by Salò veterans and their admirers.

One area of scholarship that has more bearing on culture and politics in the Salò Republic is the regimentation of Italian intellectuals and the instrumentalization of Italian culture that began in 1925.

II. The Fascist Regime's Control of Culture and the Intellectual

Shortly after the passing of the legislation establishing the dictatorship in January 1925, the nature of the relationship between the intellectual and the Italian state shifted, according to the historian Gabriele Turi, from "autonomy" during the Liberal period, to "service" under the new Fascist regime.²¹ Yet there has been much recent scholarship that demands Turi's statement be qualified. The intellectual community under Italian Fascism did not live under the kind of control exercised by Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union – regimes which

²⁰ Paolucci 1979, 15-16, identifies the most violently Fascist of these minor newspapers as *L'artigiano* (Lucca), *Il Fascio* (Milan), *Repubblica* (Florence), *Il Popolo d'Alessandria*, and *Libro e moschetto* (the newspaper directed at Italian university students).

²¹ Gabriele Turi, *Lo Stato educatore: Politica e intellettuali nell'Italia fascista* (Bari, 2002) 9.

criminalized any deviation from norms laid down by the state. Fascism's relationship to intellectuals might be more accurately characterized as "a complex patronage structure that was designed to contain dissent and draw creative individuals into collaborative relationships with the state."²² Rather than dismissing Fascism as inherently incompatible with intellectual activity, as most historians had done in the immediate aftermath of the war, recent research has demonstrated that the majority of writers and intellectuals were in some measure involved. Turi's remark remains basically correct, however. Even though the broad majority of intellectuals willingly collaborated in a system that helped foster consensus through creating the illusion of artistic freedom, they never enjoyed any real freedom of expression vis-à-vis the Fascist regime, and no real autonomy. Open dissent was always silenced.

During the early years of the regime's consolidation, Mussolini had paid scant attention to matters of culture. This attitude began to change somewhat two months after the proclamation of the dictatorship, largely in response to

²²Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities. Italy, 1922 – 1945* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 2001) 9. This is but one of several important studies of Fascist culture that have been published in recent years. Besides Turi, above, see also Giovanni Belardelli, *Il Ventennio degli intellettuali. Cultura, politica, ideologia nell'Italia fascista* (Rome/Bari, 2005), Emily Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism. Art and Politics Under Fascism* (Cambridge, 2000), Marla Stone, *The Patron State: Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton, 1998), Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1997), and Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis, 1996). Less recent, but no less important works delineating the relationship between intellectuals and Fascism, are Cannistraro's *La fabbrica del consenso*, Mario Biondi and Alessandro Borsotti, eds., *Cultura e fascismo. Letteratura arti e spettacolo di un Ventennio* (Florence, 1990), and Michel Ostenc, *Intellectuels italiens et fascisme (1915-1929)* (Paris, 1983).

accusations that Fascism was fundamentally anti-intellectual and anti-cultural.²³ The Fascistization of Italy's culture began when neo-idealist philosopher Giovanni Gentile presided over a conference in Bologna in March 1925, the Congress of Fascist Intellectuals. Over 250 cultural figures signed or sent messages supporting Gentile's "Manifesto of the Fascist Intellectual" the following month. "The important result of the Bologna meeting was that Fascism announced its rejection of nineteenth-century liberalism and set as its goal the creation of a new culture of its own," according to Cannistraro.²⁴ In June there followed both the announcement of the launching of the *Enciclopedia Italiana* and the creation of the *Istituto Nazionale di Cultura Fascista*. Both of these undertakings proceeded under Gentile's personal direction, and were intended to show the regime enjoyed the support of the most prestigious intellectuals in the country.²⁵ The latter institution, which aimed to implement "a systematic plan of action in the field of culture aiming at the formation of ... a new Italian," was among the first institutional arrangements meant to put into effect Mussolini's

²³ According to Turi, Mussolini was provoked by an article written by Giorgio Amendola ("Il fascismo e la cultura" *Il Mondo*, March 6, 1925), which claimed Fascism had failed to attract anyone from the intellectual classes – criticism that was echoed by intellectuals abroad. See Turi 2002, 57-58, and Turi 1995, 354-356. Belardelli suggests the conference was at least partly the result of Mussolini's perception that most intellectuals had seemed to side with Fascism's opponents during the Matteotti crisis. See Belardelli, 9-10.

²⁴ Philip V. Cannistraro, "Mussolini's Cultural Revolution: Fascist or Nationalist?" *Journal of Contemporary History*, 7: 1972, 121.

²⁵ Belardelli, 22. Gentile's conference provoked a counter-manifesto soon after, sponsored by philosopher Benedetto Croce and signed by almost as many intellectuals as had supported Gentile's "Manifesto." This episode was to be the only time Italian intellectuals voiced an open, organized opposition to the regime's efforts to control culture.

view that culture must be “disciplined” and function as an instrument of rule.²⁶ This view stayed with him throughout his life, and was to characterize his attitude toward cultural activity in the Salò Republic as well. There must exist, he argued at the opening of the first Novecento exhibit in February 1926, a “hierarchy between politics and art,” with art clearly subordinated to political needs. Artists bore an “ethical obligation to employ their talents in support of the political order.”²⁷ In his point of view, it was a great triumph and vindication of his early cultural policies that most intellectuals chose to stay in Italy after the proclamation of the dictatorship; they very soon proved their usefulness in lending prestige and authority to the regime and in staffing a wide variety of cultural institutions. The success of his policies was revealed by the fact that when university professors in October 1931 were required to swear an oath of allegiance to Fascism, only fourteen out of more than 1,100 refused to do so.²⁸ Mussolini recognized that intellectuals and artists could not be simply coerced, that to serve him, they had to be accorded a modicum of what De Felice has termed zones of “space” in order to function as intellectuals.

²⁶Cannistraro 1975, 22, 122. See also, Belardelli 24, who observes Mussolini conceived of culture as being “instrumental.” It has been posited also that under Fascism, “culture was envisioned as an integrative device” (Ben-Ghiat, 7). Both support the view that Mussolini saw the value of culture in its usefulness as a political tool.

²⁷Id., 40-42. See also 33-34: “According to the regime, the artist or intellectual who attended to his work independently of society or government was an outmoded anachronism, a residue of nineteenth-century liberalism which had no legitimate place in the fascist state.”

²⁸De Felice, 1974, 109. In February 1929, elementary teachers had been obligated to take a similar oath. See also Cannistraro 1975, 52-53.

While some scholars have seen this as a symptom of a larger failure of Italian Fascism to become totalitarian, others more recently regard it as having been highly successful in binding intellectuals to the regime.²⁹ The historian Marla Stone has conceptualized the relationship between the regime and cultural figures as “hegemonic pluralism,” defined as “the acceptance, appropriation, and mobilization of a variety of aesthetic languages in the pursuit of consent and legitimization and in the search for a representational language evocative of the Fascist new era.”³⁰ This is supported by Braun, who observes that the relationship between intellectuals and the regime served Mussolini by means of “two distinct strategies: one aimed at controlling the populace through the mass media and organized leisure, and the other directed toward garnering the prestige and support of the cultural elite.”³¹ Thus throughout the *ventennio*, Mussolini, reluctant to have Fascism appear to favor any one particular artistic movement, or support any one stylistic tendency such as classicism, futurism, novecento, or strapaese as an official state art, opted instead to balance competing aesthetic languages.³² In the plastic arts in particular, this policy enabled a free discussion

²⁹Renzo De Felice, “Fascismo e cultura in Italia. Linee per uno studio avanzato,” in Francesco Perfetti, ed., *Fascismo, antifascismo, nazione* (Rome, 1996) 257-264. He also raises the question of whether Mussolini’s policy was nothing more than an attempt to neutralize intellectuals.” The argument about a “failed totalitarianism” has been posited by Alexander De Grand in *Italian Fascism: its Origins and Development* (Lincoln/London, 2000) 169-170.

³⁰Stone, 65.

³¹Braun 2000, 4.

³²Id., 1-5. Strapaese, or “supercountry” refers to the style promoted by Ardengo Soffici and Arturo Tosi, artists who located the most authentic voice of Italian culture in its rural culture. On Mussolini’s reluctance to enshrine a particular stylistic tendency as Fascist, see also Philip V.

to evolve among critics; unlike in Soviet Russia or Nazi Germany, Mussolini made no attempt to censor the modernist versus anti-modernist polemics in Italy that were also playing out in the rest of Europe and America.³³

The historian Ruth Ben-Ghiat goes so far as to claim that “fascism found support among the majority of Italian intellectuals because it addressed both the hopes and fears of the modern world.”³⁴ The depth of this support, however, may be at least partly gauged by the sharply diminished level of commitment intellectuals exhibited towards the regime after Italy signed the Pact of Steel with Germany (May 1939) and its entry into the war a year later. Up to this moment, the vast majority of intellectuals reacted to Fascism in a variety of ways that allowed them to co-exist or even prosper. Four general reactions have been posited: (1) those who sought state commissions or employment in cultural bureaucracies, who were either enthusiastic or paid lip service to the regime; (2) those who were hostile to Fascism, but either kept silent or subtly criticized it, as did Croce and the novelist Alberto Moravia; (3) the smaller number of the overtly antifascist, such as Piero Gobetti, Gaetano Salvemini, the Rosselli brothers, or Arturo Toscanini, who were either imprisoned, killed, or went into exile; and (4) disillusioned former supporters who were allowed to criticize the regime, but

Cannistraro, “Fascism and Culture in Italy, 1919-1945.” in Emily Braun, ed., *Italian Art in the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture, 1900-1988* (Munich/London, 1989) 150-151.

³³ Emily Braun, “The visual arts: modernism and Fascism.” in Adrian Lyttleton, ed., *Liberal and Fascist Italy, 1900-1945* (Oxford/New York, 2002) 199.

³⁴ Ben-Ghiat, 8.

whose reputations for loyalty protected them.³⁵ It is important to distinguish between intellectuals who were genuine Fascists, and those who merely accommodated themselves to the regime.³⁶ Many cultural figures were intimately linked to the founding of the Fascist movement, such as the *vocianti* and Marinetti, the art critic Ugo Ojetti, the historian Gioacchino Volpe, and the artist Mario Sironi. Later, the regime succeeded in bringing other cultural figures into the fold, such as the playwright Luigi Pirandello and the novelist Massimo Bontempelli.

The dictator's attitude towards cultural figures remained consistent from the late 1920s on, when the mechanisms for controlling them were largely in place. The regimentation of intellectuals began with the creation of Fascist unions. In order to practice their professions, all cultural figures were obligated to belong to one of these many unions (where political views could be kept under surveillance and anti-Fascist sentiments held in check by the threat of unemployment). "The principal objective of the unions was no longer that of protecting [the artists'] interests, but of controlling their professional behavior. A long-term goal was to create a class of artists dependent on the state."³⁷ Most importantly, Fascism supplied an incentive to cooperate: along with these

³⁵ Ostenc 1983, 208-234, 315-327.

³⁶ It can be difficult to distinguish between the two groups, and unfortunately attempting to do so inevitably depends on individual conceptions of the meaning of Fascism. As I believe my research demonstrates, some intellectuals who considered themselves ardent and deeply committed Fascists (such as Gentile and Biggini) were often regarded by intransigent Fascists as not Fascist at all.

³⁷ Cannistraro 1975, 34-37.

controls, a system of rewards was established in the form of special titles, medals, exhibitions, and financial subsidies. Among the most prestigious of these was membership in the Accademia d'Italia, inaugurated in 1929 as the elite of Fascist intellectuals.³⁸ For artists, especially young artist, prestige came from having their work selected for inclusion in one of the many state-sponsored exhibitions, especially the Venice Biennale, or winning an official commission from the government.

The radicalization spawned by the Ethiopian war, Italian participation in the Spanish civil war, and the closer ties with Nazi Germany inaugurated a new phase of state patronage. Until the mid-1930s, Fascist patronage maintained a cultural compromise between several different aesthetic styles, ranging from a revival of the classicism of ancient Rome to the most up-to-date modernism. Stone has discerned a “Battle of Culture” that began within the Fascist hierarchy in the late 1930s between those who favored a free discussion and evaluation of modernism (pluralists) on the one hand, and hardliners who hated modernism and favored a rhetorical, bombastic art more immediately useful for propaganda purposes (antipluralists), on the other. What gave rise to this conflict was the hardliners’ growing insistence on an official aesthetic that could be taken for unmistakably Fascist art. This argument was only ostensibly about art. “The ‘Fascist culture war’,” observes Stone, “was a symptom of unresolved competing

³⁸Emiliana P. Noether, “Italian Intellectuals under Fascism.” *Journal of Modern History* 43 (December 1971) 630-648.

visions of Fascism and of disputes over the functioning of the regime.”³⁹ The battle was waged between hardliner Roberto Farinacci, one-time Fascist party secretary (1925-1926) and *ras* of Cremona, pitted against Minister of National Education Giuseppe Bottai (1895-1959). Bottai led the opposition to the intransigents’ campaign in the late 1930s from the pages of the reviews he founded, *Primato* and *Le arte*, arguing consistently for a kind of Fascism that should include debate about its true meaning and a struggle to realize that meaning. Underneath the heated interchange, an unspoken, coded debate was also taking place which was just as much about the meaning of Fascism, about how restrictive or coercive it ought to be, and about the value of a free interchange of ideas, as it was about art. Neither Bottai nor Farinacci were prepared to allow the other side to define an official Fascist culture. Still unresolved, the discussion was overtaken by the events of the summer of 1943. It is interesting that Mussolini never gave official approval or disapproval to either side in this struggle, instead giving token support to both. This seems surprising in a dictatorship bent on totalitarianism.

III. “Culture” in the Republic of Salò

With the collapse of the regime just before the Allied invasion, Italian culture lost its main patron, which explains why the historiography of Fascist culture abruptly ends in July 1943, rather than in April 1945.⁴⁰ Fascism’s

³⁹ Stone, 179. The discussion that follows relies upon Stone, pages 185 to 215.

⁴⁰ Ben-Ghiat devotes a few pages to the 1943-1945 period, but mostly discusses the Resistance and the aftermath of the war. Neither Stone nor Falasca-Zamponi engage with cultural matters in Salò.

“official culture,” Stone observes of years 1940-43, “in its last moments played to an empty house.”⁴¹ She notes a sharp diminution of art sales starting in 1938, with attendance dropping dramatically at major exhibitions. In 1940 and 1942, for example, the Venice Biennale proved unsuccessful in drawing as large an audience as it had in the early 1930s.⁴² “Thus,” she finds, “in all its elements, from prizes to competitions to purchases, state support of the fine arts after 1936 mirrored both Fascism’s changed attitude towards art and the *disintegration of cultural life*” (my italics).⁴³ This disintegration was to reach its most advanced state between the summer of 1943 and the spring of 1945.

Thus, to look at cultural life the same way historians have studied the *ventennio* yields little. Instead, to understand how culture functioned in Salò, it is necessary to search out the few places where it interacted with the republican regime and found a role to play. What we think of as “high culture” had all but vanished. During the 1920s and 1930s, the fine arts, as Stone observes, “represented a ‘glue’ between the regime and elites, functioning similarly as mass culture did between the dictatorship and other segments of the population.”⁴⁴ It is not surprising, then, that with the almost complete disappearance of elite support

One study of Fascist culture that does discuss Salò in depth is Philip Cannistraro’s *La fabbrica del consenso*.

⁴¹ Stone, 220.

⁴² Id., 215. This was no doubt partly due to war-theme competitions promoted by the regime celebrating the Axis military effort. The public may have stayed away, but Party purchases at the 1942 Biennale “reached unprecedented levels,” especially of German and Hungarian artists.

⁴³ Id., 216.

⁴⁴ Id., 69.

in Salò, the fine arts virtually ceased to matter. Reflecting bitterly upon all he had undergone, from the coup in the Grand Council, his arrest by the king, to his secret confinement, Mussolini felt deeply betrayed by the moneyed elites which had most profited from the dictatorship. In the first months of the new republican regime, he became absorbed in a reappraisal of Fascism's history, from which he concluded that his compromises with Italian finance and industry in the early 1920s were ultimately responsible for Fascism's failures. Those elites were now to be vilified, and their culture increasingly held up to ridicule; in Salò only mass culture mattered.

Thus culture found its most powerful role in the newspaper and periodical press. As for the vast bureaucratic maze whose many institutes had been founded by Fascists in order to "discipline" culture, it was largely shut down for the rest of the war, surviving only in the form of the briefly resurrected Accademia d'Italia. Yet the Ministry of National Education warrants an examination in this period too, since Fascism continued to represent itself as the "educator state." And the initiatives of the Ministry of Popular Culture, the principal manufacturer of Salò propaganda, tangentially referred to cultural issues.

One element of continuity with the earlier regime is immediately recognizable: Mussolini's impulse to enlist the talents of intellectuals on behalf of Fascist self-presentation. As in the 1920s and 1930s, intellectuals were enlisted to help legitimize Mussolini's new political position. Italy – and the world – would now come to learn how exactly Salò was to differ from its predecessor regime thanks mainly to intellectuals, whose writings in the popular press would,

it was hoped, rally Italians to a revived and purified Fascism that would have at its core a renewed commitment to the laboring masses and to the so-called socialism of its origins. But what advantages might these figures have gained from adhering to Salò?⁴⁵ Fascist patronage had been a two-way street, offering obvious advantages to both the intellectual and the dictator. That relationship no longer seems so clear in Salò.

An interesting feature about Salò emerges when its relationship to the world of culture is examined: Even as the Ministry of Popular Culture was being restructured into a more efficient propaganda machine, Mussolini quickly gathered around himself a handful of intellectual figures whom he had known personally for years, placed them in key positions in journalism and the ministries, and continued to maintain close relations with them until the last days of the war. At once, we find a continuation of the former struggle waged in the press between this group, obviously identifiable as the heirs of Bottai and now known as “*i conciliatori*,” [the conciliators] and Farinacci’s hardliner supporters. The discussion that evolved in the pages of leading newspapers during the last months of 1943, ostensibly about why Fascism had failed, soon turned into one about the meaning of Fascism, and about whether a more pluralistic approach in the form of allowing a voice to other political parties ought to be tolerated. Significantly, not only did Mussolini initiate this debate, but on one occasion he

⁴⁵ De Felice, has remarked, “The true and decisive lacuna [in the history of the RSI] is the lack of a general motivational understanding of the events of 1943-45 in which to situate the Resistance and the RSI.” Chessa, ed., 21.

even took an indirect role in it himself. When free to make his own choices in appointing someone to a “cultural” position (rather than placating the Germans), such as an editor of a newspaper, or of a ministry, or the Accademia d’Italia, Mussolini invariably chose figures whose views on Fascism he knew would subvert those of the intransigents. On several occasions he protected these figures from the growing hostility of the intransigents, which included the most powerful members of his government – Party Secretary Pavolini, and Minister of Popular Culture Mezzasoma, and from the self-appointed leader of the intransigent wing, Farinacci. It could be argued that such choices might have been made solely on the basis of professional capacity or personal loyalty, nevertheless he must have had some awareness he was re-establishing the same conflict that had divided his hierarchy in the late 1930s. To have done so at a time when, it seems, he could least afford tension and discord within his government, calls for an explanation that a closer inspection of the world of culture might help to answer.

After the fall of the regime in 1943, most intellectuals chose to wait out the war and not associate themselves with Mussolini’s new republican government.⁴⁶ Even as many disappeared, sometimes going into hiding or even joining the partisans, others, perhaps too compromised by their earlier involvement with Fascism, gave token support or lip service, but little else. Emily Braun has shown that during the years of the regime, artists and intellectuals were “free to create, but obliged to serve,” a formulation that accurately sums up the

⁴⁶ See Danilo Veneruso, *L’Italia fascista 1922-1945* (Rome, 1996) 435, who notes “the almost complete isolation of the RSI on the intellectual front.”

cooperative relationship many of them enjoyed until the war, but it cannot explain the choice to serve the Salò government.⁴⁷ There was little advantage in doing so, and great risk. Those who adhered to Fascism in its final hour did so for a myriad of individual reasons – some from ideological affinity, others from a sense of personal loyalty, or honor, or patriotism, or financial security, or even blindness – almost there would appear to be a different reason for each individual.

To return to the questions posed at the beginning: what kind of culture do we see in Salò, and where do we see it? The most distinctive feature of cultural life at this period is its widespread abandonment by those members of Italian society most likely to pursue it, and a virtual shutting down of the patronage system that had sustained “official” cultural life during the years of the regime. Cultural production that could not be channeled to serve mass propaganda entered a period resembling a state of suspended animation. Nevertheless it is still worthwhile to examine what little cultural activity continued to exist at Salò, less for what it reveals about ordinary Italians who lived through the period, than for how it discloses tensions within the political leadership to an extent that almost amounts to a power struggle. Practically all that remained of “official” culture – culture sanctioned and influenced by the state – was reduced to the newspaper and periodical press, which was now to be even more instrumentalized than during the regime. But this period shows, too, that Mussolini made perhaps more direct use of this culture than he had made at earlier stages in his career, for such was the

⁴⁷Braun 2002, 197.

limited nature of his personal power as figurehead of a puppet regime, that expressing his will through cultural issues – that is, silently endorsing images of Fascism that subverted those presented by the intransigents, was among the few routes left to him to re-establish political autonomy.

CHAPTER THREE: CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS OF SALÒ

By the summer of 1943, the war had produced a decidedly inhospitable climate for cultural life. After Badoglio's surrender and the consequent German occupation, living conditions steadily worsened, inflation soared, and cultural life atrophied even further.¹ With paper scarce – its allocation in the hands of Nazi authorities – and with printing machinery often sequestered or shipped to Germany, few books or periodicals were published, and these only in small editions. Films continued to be shown sporadically, quite often German ones, and some theatre and opera production continued in the larger cities. When Mussolini's new republican government established itself in October on the banks of Lake Garda, most of the vast institutional framework set up during the previous two decades to organize and supervise culture was either shut down completely, or became more narrowly involved with the production and distribution of war propaganda.

The three cultural bureaucracies whose continuing function Mussolini considered crucial during the Salò Republic were the Accademia d'Italia, the Ministry of Popular Culture, and the Ministry of National Education. Of the three, the Accademia d'Italia was to survive only until the following spring. Once its leader, Giovanni Gentile, fell to a partisan assassination, it came to an end. Yet, because it provided a public forum for the founding member of the

¹ See Ganapini, 296-297, for a brief discussion of the issue of hunger and harsh living conditions in both the cities and the Italian countryside during the last years of the war.

conciliatori, its impact on events was not as negligible as its brief life-span would suggest. The Ministry of Popular Culture underwent a bureaucratic restructuring with the aim of making it produce, rather than merely orchestrate, propaganda, but it was led by a party bureaucrat, Fernando Mezzasoma, with little real interest in cultural matters. The Ministry of National Education merits a fuller analysis than the other two, both because of its traditional mission in fostering Fascist values (even as Mussolini was re-evaluating those values in light of Fascism's perceived "failures") and because of the kind of initiatives taken by its new education minister, Carlo Alberto Biggini. In the figure of Biggini, we find a committed Fascist and a close associate of Mussolini, in the midst of what commonly has been regarded as Fascism's most extreme phase, articulating and propagating his own individualized vision of Fascism – a vision that often appears strikingly humane and democratic, thus significantly at odds with the intransigent wing of Fascism that dominated the party's leadership.

I. The Accademia d'Italia

While the Verona congress was still in session in mid-November 1943, Mussolini held a private two-hour conference with the neo-idealist philosopher Giovanni Gentile, whose long-time protégé, Carlo Alberto Biggini, had just appointed him president of the newly refounded Accademia d'Italia.² Within

² The most comprehensive explanation of Gentile's philosophy in English can be found in *The Social Philosophy of Giovanni Gentile*, by H.S. Harris (Urbana/London, 1966). For a less exhaustive, yet clear and succinct introduction to Gentile, see Gregor, 2001). As Mussolini's first Minister of Education, Gentile had presided over the first comprehensive reform of public instruction in Italy since 1859, inaugurated the Istituto nazionale fascista di cultura, launched the *Enciclopedia italiana*, served as professor of philosophy at the University of Rome, director of the

days, Biggini redoubled this honor by naming Gentile as director of the *Nuova Antologia*, the most prestigious review of art, science and literature in Italy since the early nineteenth century. Afterwards, Gentile wrote to thank Mussolini for having endorsed the two appointments and, referring to their recent conversation, concluded, “I am sure that you wish to proceed openly and use the authority you have to launch the Republic in good, stable order and toward the pacification of souls.”³ This summary description is worth noting, as it seems to indicate that the topic of “pacification of souls” had formed an important part of their private discussion, and he felt it safe to conclude Mussolini approved of this approach to the current crisis of a divided Italy.

The formalities of relaunching the Accademia took place the next spring, when it was officially reconstituted by the government of the Italian Social Republic on March 30, 1944 with a reformed charter and by-laws.⁴ Its first public event had taken place shortly before that, on March 19, when Gentile opened a commemoration of the two-hundred-year anniversary of the death of the Giovanni Battista Vico, the Neapolitan philosopher and historian.⁵ Its next, ironically, was

Scuola Normale di Pisa, and Senator of the Realm. Gentile was deeply involved in one of the central concerns of the Fascist project – the creation of a new culture. According to Gentile, a core philosophical difference separating Fascism from liberal democracy was the belief that the state lay not outside the individual, but within, and that the state was the “living root of man’s very personality,” its “ethical substance” (Gregor, 52). As will be demonstrated in the following pages, Gentile, from the summer of 1943 onwards, increasingly defined Fascism so broadly as to imply it meant little more than Italian patriotism.

³ ACS SPD CO, RSI, b. 23, f. 972, Gentile to Mussolini, November 26, 1943.

⁴ ACS SPD CO RSI b. 23, f. 972, “Regolamento dell’ Accademia d’Italia.”

⁵ Benedetto Gentile, ed., *Giovanni Gentile. La vita e il pensiero. Dal Discorso agli Italiani alla morte* (Florence, 1951) 105.

Gentile's state funeral in Florence a month later. The Accademia's final public activity was the state funeral of futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in Milan in December 1944.⁶

"Pacification of souls," was an expression Gentile's *Discorso* had popularized in the press, while "conciliators" came to mean anyone sympathetic to Gentile's efforts to bridge the political divide. Gentile attempted to clarify what he meant by "pacification of souls" in an exchange of letters to Mezzasoma regarding his new duties at the *Nuova Antologia*:

The *Nuova Antologia* "ought to have a highly national function, to pacify and reorganize Italian culture; laying aside political discussion which unfortunately today separates Italians, dividing them while exciting their spirits, so as to return to being a 'review of science, letters and arts'. But on this point I need your prior explicit consent; it would imply authorizing my also making use of the collaboration of non-Fascists, although sincerely and loyally Italian."⁷

As he had done during the 1930s, when he edited the *Enciclopedia italiana* and was allowed to publish articles by known anti-Fascists, Gentile sought to enlist the talents of Mussolini's opponents on behalf of the Accademia.⁸ Mindful of the hostility his pacification campaign was expected to provoke among Salò intransigents, Gentile proceeded cautiously. In the eyes of many Fascists, he had for some time been considered a controversial figure; his

⁶ The royal government in the south formally abolished the Accademia as a "source of moral corruption" on September 28, 1944. Turi 2002, 119.

⁷ Gabriele Turi, *Giovanni Gentile. Una biografia* (Florence, 1995), 510: Turi cites an exchange of letters between Gentile and Mezzasoma on November 29 and December 7, 1943. Turi's biography is the most exhaustively researched study of Gentile available in Italian. See also Gabriele Turi, "Giovanni Gentile: Oblivion, Remembrance and Criticism." *Journal of Modern History* 70, December 1998, 913-933.

⁸ Gregor, 68.

reputation as the most prestigious Fascist intellectual and long-time supporter of Mussolini had not kept him from being regarded with suspicion by the intransigents. In recent years he had shown an obvious and growing detachment from the regime – particularly since 1938, when the racial laws were promulgated, Bottai presided over the dismantling of the educational system Gentile himself had created in 1923, and Mussolini brought Italy into the war. These events Gentile had greeted with silence, rather than support – a silence many interpreted as lack of sympathy.⁹ During the Badoglio period, despite having been excoriated in the *Giornale d'Italia* (August 4, 1943) as one who had “never hesitated to put himself at the service of tyranny,”¹⁰ he had run dangerously afoul of the extremists gathering in Munich when a newspaper article disclosed that he had forwarded some official correspondence with the Education Ministry to Badoglio, and thus communicated with the enemy. From Radio Munich, Pavolini pointed him out as one of the “traitors,” and Farninacci called him a “cheap opportunist.”¹¹

Gentile’s campaign had started earlier than this, in fact had begun on his own initiative during the final weeks of the regime, several months before his interview with Mussolini at the Verona congress in November. It had first been undertaken the previous June, when he delivered his famous radio address to the

⁹ Turi 1995, 482-490.

¹⁰ Sergio Romano, *Giovanni Gentile. Un filosofo al potere negli anni del regime*, (Milan, 2004) 409. According to Romano (414), such public attacks on Gentile by the intrasigents continued until the Verona congress in November 1943. See also Turi 1995, 502-503.

¹¹ Turi 1995, 507-508.

nation, the *Discorso agli italiani*, a full month before the coup. Considering Mussolini's obvious prior knowledge at the time of the Verona congress of Gentile's stance regarding "pacification of souls," it is fair to conclude the Accademia d'Italia and the *Nuova Antologia* were reconstituted with the aim of providing an institutional basis for pacification to continue, and that appointing Gentile to lead both institutions represented Mussolini's explicit endorsement of this campaign.¹²

During the month before Mussolini's ouster, British and American forces, having just defeated the Axis in North Africa, were preparing to invade Sicily (July 9). In anticipation of this event, the Fascist Party secretary, Carlo Sforza, invited Gentile to speak on the "historic, moral and legal reasons for our war." The result was Gentile's *Discorso agli italiani*, the first elaboration of political and cultural themes that were to recur in all his subsequent writings, which he gave by radio broadcast from Rome's Campidoglio on June 24, 1943. An impassioned call for unity in the face of an impending national emergency, the *Discorso* reveals Gentile's strategy of uniting Italians by means of erecting a myth of the national community as something on a higher plane than politics. Gentile insisted that what currently divided Italians politically can never annul what bound them culturally. Gentile's strategy depended on his own highly reductive definition of Fascism. The way around the intense divisiveness provoked by Fascism was to simplify it almost out of recognition, first, by conflating it with

¹²Turi, 1995, 510-512.

patriotism, and second, by associating it with the one thing that bound its listeners together – Italian culture: “I have always felt, with or without party membership, we all can be Italians, agreeing with each other over the essentials, while still not agreeing over this or that political discipline: Italians all, and therefore virtually all fascists, because sincerely zealous of an Italy that counts for something in the world, *that is worthy of its past*” (italics mine).¹³ Discussing Fascism as politics would have included the disadvantage of forcing his listeners to choose sides, whereas simplifying it and stripping it of its imperialist project, contempt for humane and democratic values, violent repression of dissent, and recent racism, enabled Gentile to insert it within a larger sense of collective identity.

Gentile devotes most of the speech to associating Fascism with Italian cultural prestige, insisting throughout that it must be seen as an expression of Italian culture: “I do not know how to see fascism as anything but the development of this our Italy: the Italy of Dante and of Machiavelli, of Cuoco and Mazzini.”¹⁴ This forced association was an attempt to make Fascism acceptable to the broadest possible audience. Such imagery was useful in suppressing a view of Italy as divided over Fascism (which threatened to pit Italians against each other) while at the same time it suggested Italians were linked indissolubly to Fascism, on one side, against a common barbaric foe, on the other.

¹³ Gentile 1951, 67.

¹⁴ Id., 1951, 72.

Gentile's approach builds upon a version of Italy's past that he has aestheticized. As David Carroll observes, in *French Literary Fascism*, a characteristic of Frenchmen sympathetic to fascist movements in France was "an aestheticized, collective past that is postulated as an organic unity." In the career of Maurice Barrès Carroll locates an example of a writer for whom "culture is conceived as a collective subject whose voice manifests itself in philosophy, art and literature, and is echoed in and supported by the voices of model ancestors."¹⁵ For Mussolini, ancient Romans were model ancestors. Fascist rhetoric, even before 1922, had seized upon one aspect of the ancient Romans – their image as a virile, martial, conquering people – as an example to be emulated. Mussolini and his followers never ceased exhorting Italians to rediscover their authentic roots among these remote ancestors and realize that the same qualities lay dormant within them. Yet Gentile broadens the discussion of Italy's relationship to antiquity to valorize not only the warlike qualities of the ancient Romans, but this time the whole of Italy's cultural heritage:

What is this Italy? Rome, although not the Rome suffocated by barbarians, but rather the teacher of barbarians, here and beyond the Alps ... and the Church, worthy propagator of the gospel, the most radical as well as the most fertile and vital reform ever made in the spiritual life of man ... and the Renaissance, the most powerful explosion history records of human genius and creative power.¹⁶

Part of what was supposed to make Gentile's imagery appealing to Italians was a view of themselves as being special and superior to other Europeans:

¹⁵David Carroll, *French Literary Fascism: Nationalism, Anti-Semitism, and the Ideology of Culture* (Princeton, 1995) 21.

¹⁶Gentile 1951 72-73.

“there is no country in the world whose origins and formation can boast of such glory ... an Italy before which strangers have always bowed ... the very arches and walls that have stood for millennia testify to the majesty of Rome and the barbarity of its enemies.”¹⁷ Taking such an image of Italy to heart, it would seem that Italians fighting and killing each other over politics would be doing the enemy’s work. In peroration he enjoined his countrymen to “be faithful to the ancient mother; disciplined, harmonious, holding to the responsibility that comes from the honor of being Italian.”¹⁸ By the end of his speech, what divided Italians politically had been suppressed beneath a glorious vision of *Italianità* [Italianness]. The coming invasion would be a struggle between “civilized” Italians against the barbarian “Other.” In facing the approaching enemy, be worthy of your past, his speech suggests, be mindful that the political differences dividing you from your domestic adversaries amounts to nothing compared with what unites you both against the Anglo-Saxon barbarian.

This is not a rhetorical strategy spawned in one of the Fascist ministries, but conjured in the mind of one individual, working independently of Fascist propaganda directives. Since it was presented five months before Gentile’s conference with the Duce in Verona, Mussolini must already have had a clear understanding of Gentile’s “pacification.” Indeed, the *Discorso* may explain why Mussolini reached out to the philosopher in the first place. To confirm this, it is

¹⁷Id., 79-80.

¹⁸Id., 81.

only necessary to point out that after the Verona congress, everything Gentile published in Salò continued to echo the imagery of the *Discorso*, without complaint from Mussolini. In a short address given in Florence on the occasion of the Accademia's first convocation, nine months after the broadcast of the *Discorso*, he again presents Italy's history as a sacred ideal, employing imagery evocating the glories of ancient Rome and the Renaissance, to describe Italian history as “twenty-five centuries that shine with genius, virtue, hard work and bravery”, a nation whose “battered and destroyed monuments, distinguished by their artistry and religious significance ... have been venerated for centuries by cultivated people from every part of the world.”¹⁹ His conclusion praises Mussolini, whose rescue and restoration to power (aided by Hitler, whom Gentile terms the “*Condottiero della grande Germania*”), ensured that Italians would rediscover their “faith, strength, and daring.”²⁰

“The essential function of culture,” Gentile observed in an article entitled “Ricostruire,” published in the *Corriere della Sera* on December 28, 1943, “is a profound consciousness of tradition,” which requires a “fundamental, common unity, a concord of spirits, a setting aside all that can divide us.”²¹ This statement

¹⁹Id., 101-102.

²⁰Id., 102. For a far less charitable view of Germany from Gentile, see SPD CO RSI b. 23 f. 972, Gentile to G. Dolfin, January 11, 1944, enclosing an anonymous letter (signed *Donne di Biella*) which Gentile begs Giovanni Dolfin, the chief of Mussolini's secretariat in Salò, to show Mussolini. The authors of this document recount several examples of German atrocities committed against Italian civilians in Piedmont. See also SPD CO RSI b. 39 f. 2381, from Mussolini to Gentile, March 27, 1944, in which Mussolini updated Gentile on his attempts to have Gentile's son Federico, then serving as a soldier in the Italian army, released from a German concentration camp.

²¹Id., 86.

summarizes what his philosophical writings throughout his lifetime expressed regarding the function of culture in forming a national consciousness. By conducting his campaign to pacify souls, Gentile in his person demonstrated his conception of the proper role of the philosopher as the unifier of “thought and action.”²² The historian Alessandro Campi interprets Gentile’s campaign as implicit admission that in 1943 he felt the war was already lost, and no amount of “unity” among Italians was going to alter the military situation. He observes that Gentile anticipated and feared, even at the time he gave the *Discorso*, the opening of “unbridgeable gulfs of hate” between Italians that would lead to consequences worse than what the war had already caused.²³ Irrespective of Gentile’s efforts, the civil war continued its bloody course until the arrival of the Allies and liberation of the Po Valley in April 1945.

The significance of Gentile’s campaign lies in how it was linked to the person of Mussolini. At first glance we seem to see Mussolini here in the same role he played during the *ventennio* with regard to cultural matters, as the orchestrator of contending views, balancing oppositional forces in equilibrium. It must be borne in mind that Mussolini in this case was the person who introduced Gentile onto the scene in Salò, endowing him with what was easily considered the most prestigious cultural position from which to influence the Italian public. This time, however, an intellectual (and his patron) were contending not with versions

²²Turi 1998, 919-922.

²³Alessandro Campi, “Giovanni Gentile”, in Andriola, ed., 37-38.

of Fascism sponsored by other intellectuals and artists, but with that of the most powerful members of the government. Pavolini and Farinacci in particular loathed what Gentile represented.

On the afternoon of April 15, 1944, Gentile returned by car to his villa outside Florence. As his driver opened the gate, a group of three young people carrying books approached the car window and asked if he were the famous professor. Several pistol shots were suddenly fired at him, and he died while being driven to the hospital where one of his sons worked as a doctor. His killers fled by bicycle. Mussolini accorded him a state funeral with full honors in the church of Santa Croce in Florence. In mid-July the Fascist police captured two of his alleged assassins, Bruno Fanciullacci and Elio Gianese, local partisans belonging to the Communist Party. Their dead bodies were found dumped on a Florence sidewalk a week after their capture.²⁴

The circumstances of his assassination at once became the subject of speculation and rumor, with some blaming partisans, others believing he was killed by assassins in the pay of the British, and still others insisting his death would have pleased Fascist extremists and so could probably be attributed to them. On the very day of his assassination, an angry Gentile had gone in person to remonstrate with the local police, accusing the provincial government of having ordered the recent raid of a village near Florence, where a family friend had been summarily executed by a group of looting German soldiers. He then spoke of his

²⁴Romano, 425-427.

intention of going over the heads of the provincial government to appeal to Mussolini personally over the lack of any guaranty to the life and property of the citizenry. It was noted by the Florence police a few days after his death that Gentile had been notoriously at odds with the intransigent wing of Fascism, that only his close friendship with Mussolini precluded his removal from the presidency of the Accademia, and that his moderate views were feared to have had an influence on the Duce.²⁵

Testimony from one of the planners of Gentile's assassination has been recently published in the *Corriere della Sera*, revealing that the decision to kill him was taken by a small band of communists angered by the recent killing of one of their own, and not by the national leadership of the Italian Communist Party. Teresa Mattei, a partisan fighter and Communist Party deputy to the constituent assembly after the war, claimed that the man who decided to kill Gentile was Bruno Sanguinetti, who became her husband after the war. Sanguinetti was prompted to assassinate Gentile after Teresa Mattei's brother, Gianfranco, a brilliant chemist and right-hand man of future Nobel laureate Giulio Natta, died while in German captivity. Gianfranco had been accused of making explosives for the partisans, was captured by the S.S. and tortured until he finally hung himself in his cell in February 1944. According to Mattei's account, Sanguinetti came to her after her brother's death and said "the Nazisti caused the death of a brilliant intellectual and we, eye for an eye, will kill Gentile." Sanguinetti

²⁵ ACS MI Pubblica Sicurezza RSI b. 10, f. Giovanni Gentile, "Pro Memoria." April 19, 1944.

squared his decision beforehand with the local Communist Party chief in Florence, but not with its national leadership. The Cln (*Comitato della liberazione nazionale*) [Committee of National Liberation] in Tuscany condemned the killing, with the abstention of its Communist Party members, and the Action Party disassociated itself from it. Gentile's murder provoked shock and sorrow at both ends of the political spectrum, with many people, including Benedetto Croce, condemning the killing of so esteemed an intellectual.²⁶

All Gentile's official initiatives with the Accademia to pacify Italians abruptly ceased after his assassination, and were never renewed by his successor. Shortly after the assassination the eminent geographer Giotto Dainelli, *podestà* [appointed mayor] of Florence, replaced Gentile as president of the Accademia.²⁷ Dainelli had authored several books, organized the *Atlante fisico economico d'Italia* published by the Touring Club Italiano in 1940, and served as professor of geography at the University of Florence and leader of several expeditions to the Himalayas, Turkestan and east Africa. Only recently had he been elected to the Accademia, in March 1944.²⁸ His autobiographical account of the Salò period emphasizes his overwhelming reluctance to assume the duties conferred upon him. Writing only two years after the end of the war, and obviously reluctant to

²⁶ *Corriere della Sera*, "Sanguinetti venne a dirmi che Gentile doveva morire," August 6, 2004.

²⁷ Marinella Ferrarotto, *L'accademia d'Italia. Intellettuali e potere durante il fascismo* (Naples, 1977) 101. According to this author, Dainelli assumed office in November 1944. However, Dainelli's own account describes in considerable detail his assumption of the office of president of the Accademia d'Italia in the first ten days of June, 1944. See Giotto Dainelli, *La mia amministrazione dell'Accademia d'Italia nel 1944-1945* (Rome, 1947) 7-8.

²⁸ Ferrarotto, 120.

discuss his political commitment, his account never mentions his political sympathies, national honor, or any particular vision he may have had for the Accademia, or even the subject of personal loyalty to Mussolini: “Thus, only in the interests of high culture, against all my natural desire and inclination, did I decide to fulfill, for so long as it was unavoidable, those duties connected to an office I did not even wish to accept,” he later remarked.²⁹ In any event, the Accademia was slowing to a halt and soon little would be heard from it at all. In the immediate aftermath of Gentile’s assassination, two prestigious prizes were due to be awarded by the Accademia – the Premio Novaro, for literature, and the Premio Mussolini (co-sponsored by the *Corriere della Sera*) for scientific or mathematical achievement. Leonida Tonelli, a mathematics professor at the University of Pisa, was awarded the Premio Mussolini. The panel awarding the Premio Novaro, which consisted of the art critics Ugo Ojetti and Ardengo Soffici, the writer Guelfo Civinini and Dainelli himself, selected Vittorio G. Rossi as the recipient. A few days later it was learned from a radio broadcast that Mussolini had annulled their choices, and the award was instead bestowed on the anti-Fascist novelist Marino Moretti (1885-1979),³⁰ which indicates that Mussolini was the one really in charge at the Accademia.

In early July 1944, when it appeared the Allies would soon capture Florence, Dainelli arranged for the packing and shipping of the Accademia’s

²⁹Dainelli, 10.

³⁰Id., 10-12. See also Garibaldi, 129, for Ugo Ojetti’s surprised comments on Mussolini’s selection of Moretti, “whom he [Mussolini] hated.”

archives north to Lombardy. The new residence chosen was the Villa Carlotta, an eighteenth-century palazzo on the banks of Lake Como. Whatever other activities might have been on the Accademia's agenda were thenceforth suspended for the remainder of the war, while Dainelli's function became purely administrative.³¹ In this capacity, he concerned himself principally with securing the large bequest left in 1942 to the Accademia in the will of the industrialist Antonio Feltrinelli, whose legacy of almost one billion lire was due to be formally transferred into the Accademia's possession only after the testamentary executors had drawn up a constitution for the Fondazione Feltrinelli (according to the terms of the will). Dainelli considered his only significant task during his tenure of office to be that of transporting to safety the documentation relevant to fulfilling the terms of Feltrinelli's will.³²

II. The Ministry of National Education

Carlo Alberto Biggini, who succeeded Bottai as Minister of National Education in February 1943, was the only government minister from the earlier regime to have been re-appointed by Mussolini after the founding of the Italian Social Republic. With degrees in law and political science, Biggini had made a brilliant start on an academic career, serving as professor of constitutional law at the University of Sassari (1932-1938) and later as president of the University of Pisa (1938-1941). Although somewhat democratic in outlook, and widely

³¹Id., 11.

³²Id., 34-40.

recognized for his generosity and humanitarian principles – Biggini often had his Fascist sympathies questioned by extremists – he had been drawn to Fascism from an early fascination with corporatism, which he saw as the synthesis of the two visions of society – capitalist and communist – at war with each other in the modern world.³³ Forty-one years old when made Education Minister, when he was simultaneously inducted into the Fascist Grand Council, he voted against Grandi's petition on the night of July 25, drafted a memorandum on its unconstitutionality, and was the only *gerarca* to seek an audience with the king on Mussolini's behalf. When the Badoglio government collapsed on September 8, he initially turned down Pavolini's invitation to join the new republican government, but after a personal appeal from Mussolini he reluctantly took up the duties of his old office.³⁴

With Biggini at the helm during the first months of the Salò regime, schooling underwent a profound change of tone. No longer were students compelled to wear the Fascist uniform or greet their teachers with the Fascist

³³ Biggini was also known among Italian partisans as being sympathetic to the Jews, as well as someone who regularly intervened with Mussolini on behalf of their lives when any one of them had fallen into German hands. Partisans were under orders to refrain from firing on trains running between Padua, where his ministry was located, and Lake Garda, if Biggini was known to be on it. Andriola, ed, 199, and Garibaldi, 189.

Corporativism can be defined, briefly, as “a system of institutional arrangements by which capital and labor are integrated into obligatory, hierarchical, and functional units (corporations) recognized by the state, which become organs of self-government for issues relating to the specific category as well as the basis for participation with other corporatively organized interests in policy decisions affecting the whole society.” Corporativism was seen by Fascists as a way of surmounting the class conflict inherent in capitalist economic arrangements, although many at the time (and today still) derided it as a smokescreen to conceal government promotion of the interests of capital. Cannistraro 1982, 138.

³⁴ Cannistraro 1982, 75. See also, Andriola, ed., 200-201.

salute. University professors were no longer bound by oath of loyalty to Mussolini. The curriculum from primary through secondary school was reformed to emphasize “humanistic culture” at the expense of Fascist rhetoric, and to this end the study of Latin was heavily reemphasized, as well as the reading of Italian literature, especially Mazzini. It might seem strange to encounter the name Mazzini, the apostle of Italian liberty and independence during the Risorgimento, as must-reading for young Fascist students. However, Biggini’s mentor, Gentile, had elaborated in 1919 (and published in 1923) a reinterpretation of Mazzini’s thought that claimed him as a forerunner of anti-democratic and totalitarian attitudes, emphasizing that for Mazzini, politics was a faith and life a mission, with the nation conceived as embodying a moral unity.³⁵

In surveying the scope of these measures it is hard not to wonder whether Mussolini’s last Education Minister might have been attempting a gradual retreat from Fascism. But Biggini thought of himself as a highly dedicated Fascist and showed a fierce loyalty to Mussolini, with whom he enjoyed a close personal relationship. It was largely thanks to this relationship that he enjoyed such freedom of maneuver as Education Minister. His ideas for educational reform sprang mostly from his long adherence to the philosophy of Giovanni Gentile. A substantial measure of Gentile’s impact on Salò might be found as much in the

³⁵ Gentile’s work on Mazzini was called *I profeti del Risorgimento Italiano* and was dedicated to Mussolini. See also Emilio Gentile, *Le origini dell’ideologia fascista* (Bologna, 1996) 302-303, and Turi, 2002, 194, who refers to Gentile’s antidemocratic interpretation of Mazzini published in 1919 in the Nationalist journal *Politica*. See also Giuseppe Parlato, *La sinistra fascista. Storia di un progetto mancato* (Bologna, 2000), 61, who discusses how Gentile’s and Biggini’s vision of Mazzini’s legacy was somewhat troubling to some republican Fascists, who found it too closely linked to “the old liberal formulation.”

educational reform measures adopted by one of his most devoted disciples, as in his efforts to refashion in personal terms an image of Fascism.

But why did Biggini feel now was the time to launch a major reform of Italian education? The diary he began during the Badoglio period and which he maintained until a few days before the German surrender in 1945 affords a partial answer. In these pages, mostly a series of extended reflections on Fascism, praise of Mussolini, and comparisons of his own troubled times to other epochs in history, Biggini broods on two topics which in his mind could not be separated: Italian history and the essential meaning of Fascism. The nature of the connection between the two shows why his ideas for a reform of national education took the shape they did.

In the immediate aftermath of Mussolini's ouster, an atmosphere of violent hostility to Fascism took hold in the Italian press, in which several prominent journalists aired their pent-up hostility towards Fascism. Disgust at what he regarded as slanderous distortion, along with deep shock at Mussolini's arrest, prompted in Biggini an extensive series of reflections on how Fascism should be defined. In several long entries during August and September, Biggini ruminated on its essential characteristics, while never directly contradicting the charges of political tyranny the anti-Fascists had made in the press. Nor does he ever make more than scant mention of corporatism, although it was this that had initially won him over to Fascism. Among the many overlapping themes at the movement's core, Biggini's singled out one as preeminent – that of Fascism as a “spiritual” movement. Biggini regarded Fascism as essentially a faith, a higher

conception of reality, superior to the utilitarian views of Italy's enemies: "Fascism is the denial of every materialistic concept of this our terrestrial passage."³⁶ And like any faith, Fascism demanded personal sacrifice: "powerful he who conquers himself and subordinates himself to the highest values; powerful will be the Italian people if they conquer themselves with sacrifice and heroism ... if they subordinate themselves to the supreme eternal virtues of the Fatherland."³⁷ In the entry of August 12, 1943, he resumes his description of Fascism as a "process of a spiritual kind, a transformation of national life, not so much exterior, as inward and comprehensive ... fascism, like the Risorgimento, is a spiritual creation."³⁸ Biggini's repeated emphasis on spirituality securely links Fascism to the Risorgimento. Fascism, he argued, was a political and cultural movement which continued the Risorgimento. It attempted to complete the Risorgimento's aims and achieve what Italy had been prevented from achieving by decades of "liberalism's parliamentary degeneration," which was principally the making of Italians, but even more: "bringing this Italy into Africa, making her mistress of her own seas and ports, making her truly independent Is it even possible to deny the fundamental nucleus common to both the Risorgimento and fascism?"³⁹

³⁶Garibaldi, 231. Biggini's diary was kept sporadically between July 30, 1943 and March 1944, then resumed from May 1, 1944 to June 30, 1944, and again from January 29, 1945 to April 25, 1945. It is surmised by the editor of his diaries that Biggini might have overstated his feelings as a kind of "cover" in case the intransigents were ever to launch an investigation of his political commitment. Garibaldi, 236.

³⁷Id., 210.

³⁸Id., 212.

³⁹Id., 211-212. Evidently these imperialist ambitions did not prompt Biggini to reflect that Fascism was not an entirely "spiritual" movement.

Over the course of several months he continued to elaborate a personal definition of Fascism as the response to the Risorgimento's uncompleted project of making Italians. Fascism's aim, he argued, was bringing about the participation of the people in the life of the nation; for Mussolini, just as for Mazzini before him, the Italian nation was intended to have a mission: to be the leader of Europe.⁴⁰ The Allied capture of Rome (June 4) and the Normandy invasion (June 6) must have been foremost in his mind while he was putting the finishing touches on his school reform measures, for his diary reveals his sinking spirits at the Axis military predicament, but these events only sharpened and renewed his focus on what was fundamentally lacking in Italians as citizens, their "moral misery ... weakness, lack of perseverance"; he saw the nation as having "less energy, less passion" than should be expected of it when confronted with grave danger.⁴¹

Such was the diagnosis, as Biggini saw it. The cure was to forge an Italian identity founded on a deepened knowledge of Italian history and culture. "When our people will have a memory of the past and a clear idea of the future, it will be the first people of the earth," he wrote on May 5, 1944.⁴² Just as Gentile had conceived of culture as a unifying instrument, so too did Biggini regard it as a tool to implant the essentials of a Fascist mentality. Fascism was a question of the right values, and those values came from studying and identifying with ancient Rome. As a protégé of Gentile, he had probably always been under the influence

⁴⁰Id., 216-221.

⁴¹Id., 240-243; 257.

⁴²Id., 243.

of the heroic construct of Italian history preferred by Fascists. The events he was living through, and the responsibilities of the office he held, combined to quicken a sense of urgency about getting on with the task of making Italians.

It was during this period – May and June 1944 – that he wrote and circulated a series of memoranda throughout the Ministry of Education that lay down the essential principles behind his educational reform for the coming school year.⁴³ The most important vital influence from his university days onwards had been Gentile, and it is Gentile’s school reforms of 1923, never fully implemented and largely circumvented during the 1930s, especially during Bottai’s ministry in the late 1930s, that Biggini sought to revive. But before examining the particulars of Biggini’s reforms, it would be useful to review what Mussolini called “the most fascist of reforms” – Gentile’s school reform of 1923.

As the first Fascist Minister of National Education in 1923, Gentile had completely reorganized the framework of secondary education. His principal intent was to limit the sudden and rapid expansion in number of students entering the universities, since the country was lately becoming flooded with far more university graduates than could be employed. These highly educated unemployable were often regarded as potential subversives, whose numbers must therefore be limited. Gentile’s reforms replaced the Casati Law of 1859, which had served as the basis of the Italian educational system throughout the Liberal era. While he introduced limits on enrollments and a series of qualifying

⁴³ Id., 256, 274. On May 24 Biggini met with Mussolini to discuss education problems. On June 15 he presided over a meeting with all school superintendents to discuss his new reform measures.

examinations meant to filter out less successful students, it was his reform of the curriculum, greatly influenced by his actualist philosophy, which aroused controversy and opposition from many quarters. It was especially Italy's new middle classes that resented what they perceived as an elitist conception of education that would cut off one of the few routes open to social advancement.⁴⁴ Gentile's new curriculum re-emphasized a long and close study of Latin and Greek, even for students enrolled in the *liceo scientifico*.⁴⁵ This represented Gentile's effort to reassert the humanistic tradition which formed the core of the curriculum during the Liberal period and which, he believed, had been weakened in recent years by allowing the school system to function as an avenue of social promotion. Although Gentile's conception of humanism was of a decidedly authoritarian coloring: while he made the study of philosophy mandatory in the *licei*, he also introduced the teaching of Roman Catholic dogma in the primary schools (six years before Mussolini's Lateran accords).

Gentile resigned from the office of Education Minister after barely a year's tenure. His reforms remained technically in force until 1939, but his

⁴⁴Marzio Barbagli, *Educating for Unemployment: Politics, Labor Markets, and the School System – Italy, 1859-1973*, trans. by Robert H. Ross (New York, 1982),128-141. According to this author, during the Liberal era schooling, in the absence of a vigorous commercial and industrial climate in Italy, was recognized by the lower middle classes as the *only* route to social advancement. Barbagli's supports his contentions with an abundant use of tables and figures to show that in periods of relative economic expansion, enrollment in the higher reaches of secondary school actually decreased.

⁴⁵Id., 59-62. The Casati Laws divided Italy's secondary school system into the prestigious *liceo classico* and *liceo scientifico*, or the less prestigious *istituto tecnico* (the latter was free of charge). Tracking began after four years of elementary instruction, at which time students were advanced into the *ginnasio* or the *scuola tecnica*, both of which permitted access to the three aforementioned higher levels.

successors, over a period of several years, began gradually chipping away at them. The real process of finally getting rid of them got underway with the appointment in 1934 of Cesare Maria de Vecchi as Education Minister. De Vecchi, an early *squadrista* and *quadrumvir* (one of the four men appointed by Mussolini in 1922 to lead the March on Rome), “incarnated the conservative clerico-monarchical tendency” of Fascism. After embarrassing Mussolini with a series of political gaffes and being relegated to distant Somalia as governor until 1928, he won back Mussolini’s favor, which secured him a post as minister to the Holy See and then as Minister of National Education.⁴⁶ It was de Vecchi who began the process of fascistization of Italian education in earnest, not only introducing a heavy dose of Fascist propaganda in primary reading school material, but also attacking the autonomy of the universities. Finally, in 1939, Gentile’s 1923 reforms were almost entirely supplanted by Giuseppe Bottai’s *Carta della Scuola*. This new legislation provided for specialized institutes that would enable students to bypass the classical curriculum on their way to the universities, and defined national education as but “one instrument for the formation of the ‘new Fascist man’.”⁴⁷

Without openly disavowing the *Carta della Scuola* and antagonizing the intransigents even further, it was Biggini’s intention to restore the vision of education which Gentile’s successors had attempted to corrode and circumvent.

⁴⁶Cannistraro 1982, 167-168.

⁴⁷Id., 491.

His reforms did away with the institutes that had been created alongside the *ginnasio – liceo* system, which had allowed students access to the universities without having to undergo the kind of intellectual and cultural formation envisioned by Gentile’s reforms.⁴⁸ Biggini’s 20-page memorandum entitled “Valori Tradizionali nella Scuola Italiana” [Traditional Values in the Italian School, undated, but very likely the one presented to school superintendents on June 15, 1944], ranks as the most important of his circulars because it serves as a veritable manifesto setting out Biggini’s rationale for reform. Ostensibly a reaffirmation of the study of classical literature and history, he argues (as he had chronicled in his diary) that the current crisis Italy was facing was intimately connected to deficiencies that Italians demonstrated in their capacity as citizens.

Biggini’s “Valori tradizionali”⁴⁹ demonstrates the relationship between his understanding of the role of culture and his reform initiatives. First, he explicitly diagnosed the current “spiritual and political disorientation” as revealing the “incomprehension, superficiality, inertia, thoughtlessness ... the absence of what constitutes character” in Italians, who seem to want events to pass over them and not take a direct part in their own destiny. The schools must therefore claim the “right and responsibility to defend and care for the spiritual integrity of the country.” As a consequence of Italians having lost their sense of connection to what made them great in the past, “there is only one way out of this present

⁴⁸ ACS SPD CR RSI, b. 76 f. 646, “Disposizioni relative all’ordinamento e al Funzionamento delle Scuole degli Ordini Medio e Superiori nell’anno Scolastico 1944-45.” June 18, 1944.

⁴⁹ Id., sf. 8, “Valori tradizionali nella scuola italiana.”

disorientation for us Italians: a return to the centuries-old traditions of our culture, linked by an intimate affinity to classical antiquity.” The current crisis, he insisted, reflected deficiencies in the educational system, which had neglected for several years its most important task, that of instilling a consciousness of modern Italy’s Roman inheritance, “the foundation and substance of our culture.” Studying ancient history, literature and philosophy, modern Italians would benefit from “formative virtues, molding the conscience and character: one gets that *humanitas* that is rectitude in private life, religion in the soul, unconditional love for the fatherland, disinterest and a spirit of sacrifice and solidarity.” Encountering the classical past “causes to be born in the soul of our youth the force that strengthens their consciousness as citizens and their pride in being Italian.” With the study of their own history the Italian people will possess, he adds, “the instrument of its own rebirth, the fortress of its own liberty and spiritual integrity.” He concludes with a call for students to devote themselves to intense study of classical texts and to the values they inevitably inspire, for it is only by means of such an education that “our people will live not by sensation and state of mind, but by principles, not by instinct, but by moral strength, and by a deep and intimate political morality.”

Just as we find in Gentile’s rhetoric, there can be discerned in Biggini’s ideas for reform an aestheticized Italian past, an idealized image of the nation’s cultural achievement, with images of ancient Rome presented as “the most authentic elements of its own community identity,” which he then attempts to

inculcate in order to mobilize national sentiment.⁵⁰ Political commitment on behalf of the embattled nation, in Biggini's eyes, flowed inevitably from a particular sense of self inculcated through the study of antiquity, and knowledge of the way in which the self relates to the community, both in its present incarnation and in its history. Interestingly, we find nothing that resembles the usual themes found in Salò propaganda – no valorization of the German ally, no calls for revenge against the July traitors, no demonization of the Anglo-Americans or the Italian bourgeoisie, and no mention of Jews. How different Biggini's views must have seemed from those of the intransigents, whose rhetoric so often turned back to the same language of national honor and avenging the betrayed fatherland. The two approaches to galvanizing Italians to brace themselves for the national struggle seem never to have moved closer together, never to have influenced each other, but remained isolated and apart.

Gentile's educational reforms of twenty years earlier formed the ideological foundation on which Biggini's reforms were based in Salò. While he never openly rejected Bottai's *Carta della scuola*, his reform ideas were essentially intended to subvert it. In the late 1930s, Bottai had aimed for a more explicit connection between school and politics; Biggini, as a disciple of Gentile, saw this connection in a different light, which explains his approach to school reform as hearkening back to Gentile's emphasis on a traditional, "liberal" curriculum in which the right political values would inevitably result from

⁵⁰The quotation is from Paxton 1998, 3, in reference to generic fascist movements.

opening the student to spiritual development within.⁵¹ The present political scene he held as basically contingent and variable; he believed schooling had objectives more permanently valuable than political indoctrination, indeed, he felt the chief function of education was to shape minds which would outlast the present political moment:

It is rather anti-historical and thus anti-educational to impose circumstantial and formalistic ideals on education, which work themselves out in narrow ritualistic formulae ... politics is not just circumstantial, the resolution of particular problems, the application of procedures inspired by practical circumstances, it is not only present, but future The political ideal of the school is not just a contingent political ideal, but an educational ideal, a historical ideal, and as such, will always survive political contingencies.⁵²

It was especially at the elementary level of education that the responsibility of the school to nurture a love of learning superseded political aims of any sort. Writing about the kind of overt propaganda that had come to characterize elementary reading texts since Bottai, he observed:

Since the best instructors justly complain of the anti-educational character of such books adopted up to now for their insolent [*sfacciato*] declamatory tone and forced rhetoric, the example is offered of the great writers of children's books, both Italian and foreign, from Collodi to De Amicis, from the Brothers Grimm to Anderson, as what should be held constantly present. Such examples teach us that the reading text is alive and effective only when it evokes a world of fantasy and sentiment.⁵³

⁵¹ Teresa Maria Mazzatosta, "Educazione e scuola nella RSI." *Storia contemporanea*, February 1978, 82: "[Biggini] considered the Gentile reform 'the first systemization that really resolved the problems of the school in their essence, therefore the basis on which these latest reforms are developed'.

⁵² Carlo Alberto Biggini, *Agli educatori italiani* (Milan, 1945) 177. This is a compilation of several of Biggini's memoranda during Salò, published the year of his death.

⁵³ Id., sf. 1, "Direzione generale dell'ordine elementare"

Biggini insisted that all the new elementary reading texts be reprinted and distributed under his own personal supervision. Furthermore, he ordered the use of one single reading text for both rural and urban students instead of using different ones, as well as a single reading text for all social classes, but with the provision that it be “a work of art, that has in its construction and form that evocative force that acts instructively on the spirit of the child.”⁵⁴ These measures caught the hostile notice of Pavolini, who sent several examples extracted from a recently published text along with a note to Biggini, complaining they were so “egregiously expurgated” of the “smallest, most innocent [political] reference” that they might have been culled from the time of Bonomi’s ministry (i.e., pre-Fascist, June 1921 – February 1922).⁵⁵

Apart from his reform endeavors, Biggini proved resourceful in meeting the challenges imposed by German occupation and Allied bombardment. These included keeping students enrolled in school regardless of damage to school facilities, lack of textbooks and supplies, absenteeism and low morale of teachers, especially university professors, many of whom abandoned their posts and fled south to “await the English.”⁵⁶ He was especially concerned that the “rhythm of discipline” not be broken in Italian schools due to the disruptions of wartime; damage to school buildings and an acute lack of books were not allowed to

⁵⁴Id.

⁵⁵Id., sf. 4, Letter from Alessandro Pavolini to Biggini, January 3, 1945. Bonomi was also loathed by the Fascists for his political leadership of a six-party government of Allied-occupied southern Italy from June 10, 1944 until November 26, 1944. See Cannistraro 1982, 81-82.

⁵⁶Id., f. 646, sf. 9, “Appunto per l’eccellenza Biggini.” Memo by Giovanni Dolfin to Biggini, January 2, 1944.

interfere with the regular school calendar, nor were air raid alarms permitted to be used as an excuse for skipping lessons. Shortage of classroom space as a result of aerial bombardment, especially in the northern industrial cities, was to be made up for by scheduling classes during evening hours.⁵⁷

Among Biggini's more serious difficulties was trying to prevent or at least limit the amount of arbitrary requisitioning by the Germans. In one of his several memoranda to Mussolini on the topic, attached to a list of materials belonging to Italian schools that had been confiscated or destroyed by the Germans, he notes that, although some of the "sackings" came about through the initiative of single German military units, several others had to be regarded as a more systematic plundering to replace materials or equipment destroyed in Germany. Complaints to the German ambassador or to the German foreign office rarely received any sort of reply that was not either evasive or negative.⁵⁸ One example of such attempt at intervention with the German authorities may be found in his letter to Ambassador Rudolf von Rahn, in which he complains about the removal of equipment necessary for the teaching of aeronautics from the Istituto di Istruzione Tecnica Industriale of Pisa. Biggini begged to have the equipment returned as it belonged to one of only two such schools in the country, and added that its removal would impede the rebuilding of Italian civil and military aviation. He

⁵⁷Id., sf. 7, "Ai provveditori agli studi" s.d., by Biggini.

⁵⁸Id., f. 646, sf. 12, "Premessa" (s.d., but "1945" in manuscript).

further pointed out that such confiscations had had an unfortunate precedent in the removal of vital equipment from other Italian institutes.⁵⁹

As the war progressed, the increasing damage to Italian towns and cities by the Allied policy of indiscriminate area bombing quickened one of Biggini's principal concerns – the salvation of Italy's artistic patrimony. While Italy did not suffer from bombing nearly as badly as Germany or England, and the Allies largely refrained from bombing such towns as Rome, Florence and Venice, nevertheless the bombing of many other Italian towns destroyed a number of significant works of art and architecture, with the destruction of the sixth-century Benedictine abbey of Montecassino the most infamous example. In contrast to Allied policy toward the Germans of attempting to wear down civilian morale with the bombing of residential areas, in Italy the Allies mostly targeted railroad and industrial centers. In August 1943, however, during the Badoglio period, the three key industrial cities of Milan, Turin and Genoa suffered massive damage from aerial bombardment. By the end of the war, Mantua, Ferrara, Padua and especially Bologna had all suffered from Allied bombing, in spite of the artistic treasures they held.

Safeguarding works of art did not fall within the purview of Biggini's ministerial duties. And yet entirely on his own initiative he took advantage of the prestige and power of his ministry and his influence with Mussolini to mitigate as

⁵⁹Id., f. 646, sf. 12, "All'Eccellenza von Rahn, Ambasciatore di Germania." March 8, 1944.

much as he could the damage he saw being done around him.⁶⁰ But he also recognized that the threat to Italy's artistic patrimony came not just from Allied bombers, but also from acquisitive German authorities, as some of his memoranda to Mussolini attest. The problem with Italian works of art entrusted to the "care" of the German authorities was that, once placed in German hands or removed from Italian territory, they were treated as no longer belonging to Italy.⁶¹ In one instance during the summer of 1944 he complained to Mussolini of the "grave diminution of Italy's artistic patrimony" represented by a recent series of exhibitions traveling throughout Italian cities of the Goering museum. The Goering museum contained several Italian works that had been acquired by the Germans at an outrageous bargain due to the highly unfair exchange rate imposed by the Germans between the mark and the lira.⁶² Another example of Biggini's intervention came while the Germans were abandoning Florence without finishing the task of evacuating several works of art from its museums. On this occasion, he made available the few trucks allotted to his ministry to complete their removal, then had them driven north to Piedmont to be safely stored on the

⁶⁰ Id., sf. 11 "Appunto per il Ministro"s.d., reports personally on an inspection of bomb damage to the city of Mantua and the reinforcements of the Gonzaga palace and protection of its contents. See also, ACS, SPD CR RSI, B76 F646, sf 1 "Appunto per il Duce" (undated) requesting that the area of central Bologna already cordoned off from German artillery emplacements (and thus untargeted by Allied bombardment) also include the building housing Bologna's Academy of Fine Arts.

⁶¹ Id. "Premessa".

⁶² Id., sf. 11, "Appunto per il Duce—Mostre dei Musei Goering in città d'Italia." July 3, 1944.

Borromeo islands of Lago Maggiore.⁶³ In the autumn of 1944 Biggini informed Mussolini that the Direzione Generale delle Arti had prevailed with the German general Kesselring to remove German artillery emplacements from the immediate vicinity of Palladio's Villa Valmarana (which housed a cycle of eighteenth-century frescoes by Tiepolo) and the more famous Villa Rotonda. Without his decisive intervention, both of these buildings might easily have been destroyed in an artillery barrage.⁶⁴

Biggini did not join the automobile convoy headed towards the Swiss border in the final days of the war, and so survived the partisan execution of Mussolini and his republican *gerarchi* at Dongo on April 28. The partisans continued hunting him for several months, but thanks to the protection afforded him by the brethren of the Basilica of Sant'Antonio in Padua, he also escaped the anti-Fascist bloodbath at war's end. He entered a hospital in Padua in August 1945 under a false name, where he died of cancer on November 19, 1945.⁶⁵

The modern observer must wonder why Gentile and Biggini were put in the positions they occupied and then permitted such wide freedom of maneuver, in the midst of what was surely the most desperate phase of the war for the Axis, if their views were so irksome to the republican government. Both enjoyed reputations as moderates even before 1943, in fact both had already earned the

⁶³Id., "Appunto per il Duce – Soprintendenza alla gallerie Firenze." June 19, 1944. Biggini boasted that they had "done what German military authorities said was impossible."

⁶⁴Id., sf .1, "Appunto per il Duce." October 20, 1944.

⁶⁵Garibaldi, 187-193.

antagonism of the intransigents even before Salò. Before the Allied invasion, Gentile was already presenting a milder, defanged, almost unrecognizable version of Fascism. Biggini, as Education Minister before the coup and close associate of both Gentile and Mussolini, had always been known (and distrusted for) his moderate views. Both men were placed in positions of great influence, indeed each was provided a platform from which to broadcast their individualized visions of Fascism. Neither took part in any of the rhetorical campaigns in the Italian press – as *conciliatori*, they could never have called for the blood of the “traitors,” nor did they participate in the anti-bourgeois campaign that was so great a feature of the Salò press. And both continued until the last moment to enjoy the protection of the Duce and indeed to have unlimited personal access to him. Gentile was even honored after death with a state funeral. This situation raises the obvious question about Mussolini’s motives, for it was he and no one else who created this highly peculiar state of affairs whereby two intellectuals, significantly at odds with the “party line” of republican Fascism, were able to propagate a vision of Fascism that was idiosyncratic at best, subversive at worst, and was elaborated in the face of a party leadership that made no secret of its antagonism.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Biggini was especially hated by Pavolini for having intervened to save the lives of several professors of the University of Genoa who had signed an anti-Fascist proclamation during the Badoglio period. See Garibaldi, 129-131, who cites the diary of the Marchese Calcagnini-Estense.

III. The Ministry of Popular Culture

The Ministry of Popular Culture – unlike the Accademia d'Italia and the Ministry of National Education – was not led by an intellectual, so comparing its leader to Biggini and Gentile may seem unfair. Its minister, Fernando Mezzasoma, was purely a product of Fascist bureaucracy, in which he had served his entire adult life (he was 37 in 1943; he had joined the Fascist movement at the age of 14). After studying economics Mezzasoma had begun his career as secretary of GUF di Perugia from 1932 to 1935,⁶⁷ moving up to general vice-secretary and then secretary of GUF (1935-1937). During the mid-1930s he became a protégé of Fascist Party secretary (1931-1939) Achille Starace, an early *squadrista* known for his fanatic loyalty to the Duce (as well as for his efforts to inject military symbolism in daily life). From 1939 Mezzasoma served as general vice-secretary of the Fascist Party until 1942, and after that as general director of the Italian press within the Ministry Popular Culture. Earlier he had also served as director of the Fascist youth publications *L'Assalto* [Assault] (Perugia, 1934-35) and co-director of *Libro e moschetto* [Book and Musket] (1937-1938).⁶⁸ In mid-September, Party Secretary Pavolini traveled to Rome with the German ambassador, Rudolf von Rahn, where he induced Mezzasoma, who had recently

⁶⁷ GUF: Gruppi universitari fascisti. This was an organization whose aim was to control and direct the activities of university students, disseminate Fascist propaganda, and ultimately create a Fascist ruling class. By 1928 it had absorbed all pre-existing university organizations except the Catholic Fuci (Federazione universitaria cattolica italiana). See Alberto De Bernardi and Scipione Guarracino, eds., *Dizionario del fascismo* (Milan, 1998) 335. See also Benedetta Garzarelli, “Un Aspetto della politica totalitaria del PNF: i gruppi universitari fascisti.” *Studi Storici*, October-December 1997, 1121-1161.

⁶⁸ A. De Bernardi and S. Guarracino, 384. See also Cannistraro 1982, 337. Mezzasoma was among those executed along with Mussolini by partisans at Dongo, on April 28, 1945.

offered his services to the occupying Nazis, to join the new republican government as the head of the Ministry of Popular Culture.⁶⁹

On January 12, 1944, Mezzasoma began his first meeting with Italy's leading newspaper editors, addressing them in these words:

I want to tell you right away, in order to dispel any possible expectation of some of our colleagues who may still harbor a strange weakness for that most utopian of freedoms, the freedom of discussion, that it is my intention to bring about an ever more severe control over the organs of information.... It is my firm conviction that the mission of journalism consists in creating in the masses of its readers an atmosphere of faith towards the events that directly concern them.⁷⁰

This warning about freedom of discussion came about in the context of a recent relaxation of preventive censorship, and was also due in part to how editors interpreted the clause in the Verona Manifesto stipulating the right of citizens to “responsible criticism of the public administration.” During the previous month, Mussolini had felt it necessary to rein in the subsequent outpouring of “criticism” in a memo to the same editors Mezzasoma now had before him (See Chapter Four). It is important, also, to take note of this authoritarian bureaucrat's contemptuous dismissal of freedom of discussion as utopian, as indicative of the mentality of the intransigents on the subject. Although fanatically loyal to the dictator, Mezzasoma never had close personal ties to Mussolini, as did Gentile and Biggini.⁷¹ The Accademia d'Italia and the Ministry of National Education

⁶⁹Deakin, 566.

⁷⁰ACS, SPD CR RSI b. 67 f. 640, sf. 12, “Direttive generali per la propaganda.” January 12, 1944.

⁷¹Cannistraro 1975, 326. The author quotes Edmondo Cione, who observed that Mezzasoma subscribed to the “culto dell'infalibilità” surrounding Mussolini, and concluded that his influence on events was “really sinister, perhaps even worse than Pavolini's.”

gave Mussolini a forum to present the public what he thought it might want to hear; the Ministry of Popular Culture, or “Minculpop,” remained a bastion of intransigent Fascism that told the public what to believe.

During the *ventennio*, Minculpop had evolved from a small government press agency into a vast government ministry with nominal control over all Italian cultural policies. By 1930, this press office, the *Direzione generale per la stampa italiana* [General Management of the Italian Press], was able to manipulate journalism through a system of subsidies. In 1933, Mussolini appointed his son-in-law (and later foreign minister) Galeazzo Ciano as its director. Hitler’s example influenced the way Ciano expanded the press office into a formidable bureaucratic network exercising authority over Italy’s mass media, so that it came to play an important role in maintaining the “consensus” Fascism enjoyed during the mid-1930s.⁷² By 1935, now renamed the Ministry of Press and Propaganda, it could sequester and suppress newspapers, and in 1937, under the direction of Dino Alfieri, it was renamed the Ministry of Popular Culture and charged with the task of controlling all cultural production in Italy.⁷³ By the summer of 1943, as Axis defeats mounted, and as Minculpop propaganda continued forecasting

⁷²The matter of consensus is still a highly contentious debate. For a recent discussion that incorporates much of the latest historiography on the topic, see Paul Corner, “Whatever Happened to Dictatorship?” *The Journal of Modern History* 74 (June 2002) 325-351.

⁷³W. Vincent Arnold, *The Illusion of Victory: Fascist Propaganda and the Second World War* (New York, 1998) 15-32

victory just around the corner, most of the Italian public had lost faith in anything Minculpop propagandists claimed.⁷⁴

Yet this was lost on the new leadership of the Italian Social Republic, whose only answer to the ineffectiveness of its propaganda was to exercise tighter control over the flow of information. Minculpop's archives were transferred north from Rome to Salò shortly after Mussolini's return from Germany, along with the ministry's press office, radio office, and the official news service, Agenzia Stefani, to be within easy reach of Mussolini's headquarters. Other Minculpop departments, such as theatre and cinema, were moved to nearby Venice.

In the wake of the Verona congress of November 1943, Minculpop was subjected to a vast reorganization with the aim of exerting more efficient and centralized control over all cultural activity, eventually even absorbing many institutions that in the past had been autonomous.⁷⁵ Mezzasoma first replaced all lower directors, then by ministerial decree the press bureau and radio bureau were combined and then divided into two departments, Internal press and radio (for domestic consumption) and External press and radio (for news disseminated abroad). Additionally, cinema and theatre were combined into one single "Entertainment" [*Spettacolo*] bureau, while two new administrative sections were created, one for cultural exchange [*Scambi culturali*], which included the "Race

⁷⁴Id., 237. "Among themselves, some Fascists admitted that the rhetoric and the sheer implausibility of newspapers, radio bulletins, and film newsreels had reached a saturation point, where they were no longer persuasive."

⁷⁵Cannistraro 1975, 327.

Office”], and one for Tourism and Sport. (See chapter on Press for a more comprehensive outline of the reorganization of Minculpop).⁷⁶ Three innovations intended to assure Minculpop more centralized control were (1) the establishment of the *Comitato consultivo per la propaganda* [Advisory Committee for Propaganda], composed of five journalists from outside the ministerial bureaucracy, each of whom was to study and report on the efficiency of a particular aspect of the propaganda production and devise propaganda initiatives; (2) a “Nucleo di propaganda” [Propaganda Group] was created, with Giorgio Almirante at its head, to perfect and coordinate propaganda campaigns between Minculpop and the various provincial prefects, and (3) the appointment of press attachés [*addetti stampa*] whose authority over censorship and the dissemination of printed matter replaced that which hitherto had been exercised by provincial prefects.⁷⁷ Even though censorship had supposedly been eliminated at the Verona congress in November 1943, in January 1944 a special commission was created to review the content of all periodicals. Finally, at the end of May 1944, in the wake of a series of articles written by Mussolini’s appointed editors demonstrating their

⁷⁶ ACS, Minculpop Reports (1922-1944), b. 44 f. 141, “Relazione per il Consiglio dei Ministri del giorno 24 novembre 1943 sul nuovo ordinamento del Ministero della Cultura Popolare, e sulla nomina di tre Direttore Generali ed un Regente.”

⁷⁷ ACS, SPD CR RSI b. 67 f. 640, sf. 12, “Al Duce” (dated “12/6”). Evidently this measure was not implemented until the approach of summer 1944 (around the time of the Borsani-Farinacci feud in the press), as attested by a memo from Mezzasoma to the Duce explaining the recent (May 22-23, 1944) meetings whose purpose was to spell out the precise functions of the *addetti stampa*.

open conflict with the intransigents, Mezzasoma reintroduced preventive censorship over all printed matter.⁷⁸

In spite of its organizational expansion, Minculpop's real function was reduced to being a propaganda machine for the war effort, becoming more narrowly focused on the press to the exclusion of virtually everything else; cultural activity without obvious propaganda value ceased. Subsidies once automatically granted to theatrical producers friendly to Fascism were replaced by "productivity prizes" [*Premi di rendimento*] awarded to those who could demonstrate the usefulness of their work to the state.⁷⁹ Mezzasoma remained largely indifferent to the propaganda potential of the cinema, mostly ignoring it during his tenure of office, apart from a crackdown on "infiltrators," when he revoked licenses of distributors who were deemed unfriendly. In December 1943 censorship of film was made far more rigorous, and by the end of 1944, film production and distribution, except for war documentaries produced by Istituto Luce, had virtually ceased.⁸⁰

One of the principal tasks of the newspaper press was to win Italians over to the socialization initiatives (See Chapter Six), while radio was considered the most efficient means of countering Allied propaganda.⁸¹ Given the ever lower circulation rates of newspapers (due mostly to grave distribution problems

⁷⁸Cannistraro 1975, 336.

⁷⁹ACS, SPD CR RSI b. 67 f. 640, sf. 12, "Relazione sulle attività propagandistiche nella settimana dal 6 al 13 agosto."

⁸⁰Cannistraro 1975, 348-349.

⁸¹Id., 334-336.

stemming from a damaged transportation network and the widespread paper shortage), the fact that most Allied propaganda came by way of radio, and Italy's uneven literacy rate, obviously Minculpop regarded radio broadcasts as a vitally important weapon in the propaganda war. Indeed, the political content reached two-thirds of broadcast time during the Salò period, compared with approximately one third before September 8. "Corrispondenza repubblica" [Republic Mail] most of which was written and edited by Mussolini himself, was broadcast several times a week.⁸² However, radio's effectiveness depended on the cooperation of the German occupational authorities, who often showed complete indifference to Italian propaganda needs. By the end of 1944 Mezzasoma had reason to complain to the German ambassador that Salò's radio transmissions did not even reach central and southern Italy because Italian radio transmitters were in the hands of the Germans, who were using them for their own purposes.⁸³

Thus, the newspaper press continued to be the medium most usefully exploited for propaganda purposes. Besides its promotion of socialist reforms (See Chapter Six), Salò propaganda campaigns centered on a narrow range of recurrent themes: vilification of the *traditori* [traitors], especially the monarchy

⁸² For Mussolini's level of input on Corrispondenza repubblicana, see Cannistraro 1975, 344-346. and Alfassio-Grimaldi, 15-16.

⁸³ ACS, SPD CR RSI b. 67 f. 640 sf. 12, Letter to "Eccellenza Rodolfo Rahn, Ambasciatore di Germania" [late 1944?]: Addressing his complaints to the German ambassador, Mezzasoma refers to the recent broadcast (December 16, 1944) of Mussolini's speech which could be heard throughout Europe because the Germans finally allowed the Italians to use their own radio transmitters.

and those loyal to it, the hidden Jewish involvement in the Allied war effort,⁸⁴ the depredations of the *banditi* (as the partisan movement was called), rich nations versus poor nations, the duty of youth in the war effort, and the heroism and sacrifice of the German army.⁸⁵

Minculpop never succeeded in accomplishing the first aim of its propaganda, which was to raise Italian morale. This was partly due to its failure to create an environment that was completely isolated from other news sources, on which success in such an undertaking depended.⁸⁶ Yet if Minculpop had succeeded in creating such a closed environment, it is doubtful its propaganda would have won over Italians. Although it may be unfair to compare a career bureaucrat like Mezzasoma with intellectuals like Gentile and Biggini, what seems signally lacking in Mezzasoma is a vision of the press as anything but an instrument to inculcate the same blind faith at the center of his own adherence to Fascism. We have to wonder if he ever dared to analyze the meaning of Fascism even to himself. It was this blind faith he sought to instill in the editors he

⁸⁴On press guidelines pertaining to Anti-Semitism, see, e.g., ACS, SPD CR RSI, b. 67 f. 640, sf. 3, “Avvertenza”: “This war is their [the Jews’] work, it is to their benefit. And yet they continue to be the people nobody wants, even there [among the United Nations]. The wonderful plans for a Jewish Palestine have been made public (an excellent way to masquerade exile) but the Arabs protest and demonstrate from Cairo to Baghdad. Nobody wants them, even if there are those who submit to them through necessity or cowardice or complacency. God’s vendetta is still, implacably, on their heads; they are the people destined to have neither peace nor land; infamous as the serpent, and like the serpent, despised, like the serpent, dangerous. People, even pastors of the Church, can forget, or pretend to have forgotten; but God does not forget and does not pardon.” See Chapter Five on Anti-Semitism.

⁸⁵See a series of “Avvertenze” (press guidelines) spanning February 11 to May 5, 1944 advocating these topics in ACS, SPD CR RSI b. 67, f. 640, sf. 3.

⁸⁶Arnold, 11. The author cites several reasons for this failure, including a long series of Axis defeats, but among the most important of which was a lack of a comprehensive plan for wartime propaganda.

addressed in January 1944 (quoted earlier). Gentile's and Biggini's adherence to Fascism involved, in complete contrast, a personal re-elaboration of its meaning. This enabled them to present it to the public in a new light, as less tied to authoritarianism than in the past, as more linked to Italian culture. Their personal visions of Fascism valorized the Italian people and its past, and promised a renewal of the community. They sought to inspire, which is something Mezzasoma, bereft of any vision, could never do. Never once did this obedient bureaucrat articulate a personal understanding of Fascism; his attitudes represent a continuation of the simplistic Fascist totalitarianism of Starace, the bleak, barren mentality summed up in the Fascist motto, "Believe, Obey, Fight." It is hard to imagine how Mezzasoma propaganda could have succeeded in inspiring the sacrifice he sought from Italians, or galvanizing effort, or "swaying the multitudes" in any way. And it is hard to imagine the "*attendisti*" [loosely translated as "fence sitters"] not dismissing Salò propaganda as all too similar to what they heard in the past. No positive reasons for continuing the war, apart from vindicating national honor, ever emerged from Mezzasoma's directives, because no larger sense of what it meant to be Italian – or a Fascist – is ever presented. Yet it cannot be shown, either, that Gentile's and Biggini's initiatives were any more successful than Minculpop's were.

It seems that cultural institutions functioned in Salò in a way that discloses tension between the intellectual non-conformity of Mussolini's appointees, and the bureaucratic intransigence of the party leadership, yet it is hard to understand why, given that the Salò Republic was in every respect a dictatorship, the more

powerful bureaucrats did not simply silence the intellectuals. It seems reasonable to conclude they were prevented from doing so; that when certain writers aired their views about Fascism's mistakes, or initiated propaganda that owed nothing to the directives laid down by Minculpop, it was because Mussolini wanted them to.

The way cultural institutions functioned also indicates the constraints on Mussolini's power. Mezzasoma tried to instill blind faith, but since this effort seems to have failed, we have to wonder why on one ever held him to account for failing. This was because he owed his position to Pavolini, thus was in little danger of being removed. Practically everything Mussolini initiated in the way of propaganda ran counter to Mezzasoma's carefully articulated directives; during the first half of 1944, he even seemed to hold out to the Italian public the illusion they enjoyed some freedom of expression (discussed in Chapter Four). Mezzasoma refused to condone this, but was he not removed from his post. Clearly, the intransigents were people Mussolini was basically forced to live with.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE SALÒ PRESS

From the very beginnings of the modern Italian state there has existed a close association between intellectuals and the founding and editing of newspapers. The journalistic collaboration of Papini, Prezzolini, and Soffici in the decade before the First World War, which spawned the avant-garde Florentine journals *La Voce*, *Leonardo* and *Lacerba*, represents the best known example of a tradition that includes Enrico Corradini's *Il Regno*, Benedetto Croce's *La Critica*, and Filippo Turati's *La Critica Sociale* – all journals published by intellectuals who believed passionately in the power of the press to shape values. Journalism was, moreover, from the turn of the twentieth century onwards, so intimately connected to Italian political life that a career in journalism often proved a stepping-stone to a career in politics.¹ During the twenty years of Fascist rule, many prominent Fascists such as Giuseppe Bottai, Roberto Farinacci, and Giovanni Preziosi, as editors respectively of *Critica Fascista*, *Il Regime Fascista* and *La Vita Italiana*, followed the well trodden path of politicians who had built their careers on journalism. The most famous exemplar of this tradition, of course, was Mussolini himself, who edited a local weekly, *La Lotta di Classe*, in 1910-12 and then the Socialist Party's daily *Avanti!* for two years before leaving during the intervention crisis in November 1914 to start his own newspaper, *Il*

¹ Martin Clark, *Modern Italy, 1871-1982* (London/New York, 1982) 173: "The leading journalists and editors were politicians, for all practical purposes, and indeed success in journalism was becoming almost a necessary prerequisite for a political career. Sturzo, Meda, Serrati, Gramsci, Nenni, above all Mussolini: they all built their political careers on journalism."

Popolo d'Italia.² Moreover, a startling number of early Fascists had been professional journalists, and in some ways one could say that Mussolini's dictatorship was a "regime of journalists." Mussolini himself read dozens of newspapers daily, and spent the last days of his life clipping articles.³

The dramatic events of July 1943 set in motion several new influences that continuously transformed the Italian press until the last days of the war. These included the reorganization of the Ministry of Popular Culture, an effort which aimed to increase the subordination of editors to Minculpop's propaganda directives and censorship apparatus; an acute shortage of paper, whose allocation was in the hands of the German occupational authorities, which reduced all newspapers to less than four, and often only two, sheets daily;⁴ the founding of several new newspapers in all areas of northern and central Italy; and a series of partisan assassinations of various editors of some of the most widely circulating dailies. But the most significant way this period differed from the Fascist regime was in its tolerance for a measure of public debate. For the first time in twenty years of dictatorial rule, Mussolini seemed willing to allow a small group of journalists to give voice to public dissent, to directly criticize Fascism, and to

² Renzo De Felice, ed., *Mussolini giornalista* (Milan, 2001) v: "Few now deny that Mussolini was a great journalist, one of the greatest of his day, endowed with an unmistakable style marked by clarity, immediacy and aggressive incisiveness – a journalist, moreover, who nurtured the same deep passion for journalism he had for politics. To Mussolini, of the many things we call miracles of civilization, the place of honor belonged to the press, which alone could exercise the function of cultural 'formation' and homogenization of the masses."

³ Alfassio-Grimaldi, 16-17, citing an article by Karl Wolff in *La Domenica del Corriere*, March 21, 1972.

⁴ Paolucci 1987, 5.

engage in heated polemical debates with some of the most powerful intransigents.⁵ This sudden emergence of criticism of Fascism was bitterly challenged by extremists of the Fascist old guard and unfolded in an atmosphere overshadowed by German censorship, something Italian editors experienced for the first time.

I. September to November 1943: Fascist Return to Power

Despite the widespread enthusiastic public acclamation that greeted the first news of Mussolini's downfall, the Badoglio government's remained in charge of the Ministry of Popular Culture, which treated the event as an ordinary transfer of power. In his broadcast to the nation on July 26, Badoglio assured Italians that the government would continue the war effort at the side of their German ally. Forty-five days later, the news of Badoglio's unconditional surrender, the Anglo-American landings at Salerno the following day, and additional German armored divisions pouring into Italy from the north prompted a dramatic change in the political atmosphere in favor of a Fascist return to power. Even before Mussolini's rescue from imprisonment on Gran Sasso on September 12, a Fascist comeback began coalescing around local press organs, reacting to the news of the surrender terms and betrayal of the Germans. Just as during the early years of the Fascist movement, each newspaper became a center of power

⁵ Notwithstanding the debates in *Primato*, March – June 1941 cited by Ben-Ghiat 180-201, I am unaware of appraisals as critical of Fascism as those that appeared in the newspapers of northern Italy, November 1943 to June 1944. Ben-Ghiat shows that there began to emerge a more elastic definition of Fascism in the pages of youth journals and fiction by the early 1940s; nevertheless, these do not appear to have been as directly critical or as challenging as those in *Salò*, or to consist of heated polemical exchanges with extremists.

for local leaders and a staging ground from which the surrounding administrative area came under Fascist control. The areas that saw the first and most violent phase of early Fascism in the early 1920s were the very places where the reborn movement was most successfully and spontaneously launched in the autumn of 1943 – Bologna, Lucca, Trieste, Verona, and Padua.⁶ As this movement developed, it was accompanied by a welter of new periodicals and newspapers: *L'artigiano* (Lucca) on September 9, *Repubblica* (Florence) on September 26, *Il Popolo d'Alessandria* on October 2. *Il Fascio* was founded by the newly constituted “Squadra d'Azione Ettore Muti,” in Milan on September 25.⁷ The history of the press during the Italian Social Republic continued to be marked by the founding of newspapers right up until the end of the war, with Carlo Borsani's *La Repubblica Fascista* (January 1944), and Edmondo Cione's *L'Italia del Popolo* (March 1945) being the most significant.

After Badoglio and the royal family deserted Rome, many Italian newspapers suspended publication for several days or even weeks, only gradually republishing after the Germans established Mussolini and his new ministries on

⁶ Alfassio-Grimaldi, 6-9.

⁷ Paolucci 1982, 15-19. Circulation figures of most newspapers cannot be ascertained with any degree of certainty, as the amount of newspapers sold and distributed throughout German-occupied Italy diminished continuously until the end of the war. However, it is possible, based on letters Mezzasoma addressed to ambassador Rahn, to come to an approximate estimation for some of the more important ones. Milan's *Corriere della Sera* sold about 900,000 copies on average in January 1944, and was reduced to 350,000 by January 1945. In Turin, *La Stampa* sold around 350,000 daily, and *La Gazzetta del Popolo* 230,000. Bologna's *Il Resto del Carlino* sold 200,000 on average during the same period. Klinkhammer 116, n. 56, reports that maximum circulation figures were set by the Germans in October 1943 as follows: *Corriere della Sera*, 800,000, *La Stampa*, 500,000, *La Gazzetta del Popolo*, 250,000, *Il Resto del Carlino*, 230,000, *La Nazione* (Florence), 150,000, *Il Gazzettino* (Venice), 180,000. See also Cannistraro 1975, 335.

the shores of Lake Garda. On September 28, 1943, the day after convening his first council of ministers, Mussolini purged all of the editors of the major metropolitan newspapers to replace them with new ones. The procedure of assigning editors to newspapers had not been the standard practice during the twenty previous years of Fascist rule, when many newspapers had been “left in the hands of people of uncertain faith.”⁸ Ermanno Amicucci was chosen to head the most important and most widely circulating daily in Italy, Milan’s *Corriere della Sera*. Mirko Giobbe was chosen to lead *La Nazione* of Florence; Giorgio Pini, former editor-in-chief of Mussolini’s *Il Popolo d’Italia* from 1936 to 1943, was assigned Bologna’s *Il Resto del Carlino*; Bruno Spampanato became editor of Rome’s *Il Messaggero*; and in December Concetto Pettinato, who had hitherto spent the war years in Switzerland, returned to Italy to replace Angelo Appiotti on Turin’s *La Stampa*.⁹ Farinacci, the main voice of the intransigent Fascists, returned to Cremona to continue editing his own newspaper, *Il Regime Fascista*.¹⁰ The principal publications supporting the intransigent line were *L’Assalto*, *La Vita Italiana*, *Il Popolo d’Alessandria*, and the GUF organ *Libro e Moschetto*. The Italian S.S. published the weekly *Avanguardia*, and some of the private militias under German control also published propaganda; the Decima Mas, for example, published *L’Orrizonte*. *Il Popolo d’Italia* ceased publication for good in July

⁸ Bertoldi, 1976), 292. According to Alfassio-Gramaldi, the purge was hardly necessary, since the vast majority of newspaper writers and editors wanted nothing to do with the new Salò regime. Many went into hiding or fled to Switzerland, or else were tracked down and arrested. See Alfassio-Gramaldi, 9-11, and Amicucci, 115.

⁹ Alfassio-Grimaldi, 18.

¹⁰ Roberto Farinacci, “Eccomi di ritorno.” *Il Regime Fascista*, September 28, 1943.

1943; as its founder and proprietor, the Duce refused to submit to German censorship, instead opting to close it and not re-open it until after the war ended.¹¹

On the same day he chose new editors, Mussolini drafted the first notes of a series of articles that soon came to be known as “Corrispondenza Repubblicana.” An almost totally personal news column which seemed to function like a news agency and remained under his own direction until the end of the war, Corrispondenza Repubblicana consisted of short articles, bulletins and announcements distributed by the Ministry of Popular Culture to each newspaper in northern and central Italy. Eventually they were to number 99 in total, 50 of which were written by Mussolini himself but left unsigned. This became the most important source for political commentary in the Salò press.¹²

II. Censorship: the Reorganization of the Ministry of Popular Culture and German Occupation

The abolition of censorship and the right of citizens to “responsible criticism of public administration” was formally conceded as one of the Eighteen Points promulgated at the Verona congress on November 14, 1943.¹³ To many writers and editors this explicitly meant freedom of the press and thus the right to evaluate and criticize the current political arrangements: an interpretation that soon placed them dangerously at odds with the intransigent Fascists, who predictably sought to silence public discussion of any sort. From November until

¹¹ Id., 13.

¹² Id., 15-16.

¹³ De Felice 1997, 610: “The Republican Constitution must guarantee the citizen – soldier, worker, contributor – the right of control and of responsible criticism over the acts of the public administration.”

the following summer, an increasingly contentious struggle was waged between the newspaper editors recently selected by Mussolini and Fascism's pro-Nazi intransigent wing. Mussolini seemed to have publicly sided with the intransigents, when, only three weeks after the Verona congress, he distributed a telegram to all provincial prefects in which he sought to rein in what he considered the irresponsibly open discussion of the errors of Fascism and any criticism of the aims and direction of the present regime, and threatened to close down any newspapers demonstrating such a "badogliesco" character.¹⁴ Nevertheless, several months were to pass before any editor (all of whom were appointed by the Duce and met with him on a regular basis) was removed.

In spite of the decree establishing the "right of responsible criticism," the new government in Salò envisioned stricter ministerial control over the content of the press than had been formerly exercised. Once Mussolini's hand-picked editors were installed, the Ministry of Popular Culture was reorganized. One key difference this reorganization made in the ministry's functioning was that from November 1943 onwards it was gradually turned into a propaganda machine.¹⁵ At Pavolini's instigation, Fernando Mezzasoma was appointed its head, with whom Mussolini was to meet nearly every day throughout the Salò period (although this frequency of access should not be taken to imply the two had close personal relations, as was the case with all of his appointed editors). At the same

¹⁴ ACS SPD CR RSI b. 22, f. 147, December 6, 1943, "A tutti I capi delle provincie."

¹⁵ Alfassio-Grimaldi, 5: "Not being able to govern, the Republican ruling classes wrote and proclaimed; the puppet government needed the press ... in order to present an image of itself and not lose its own identity, to convince its readers that it did exist and that it did practice politics."

time virtually all lower directors were replaced.¹⁶ Mezzasoma reduced the limited degree of press freedom granted at the Verona congress when, on March 28, 1944, he reestablished preventive censorship on military matters, and in the wake of a public feud waged in the press between Farinacci and one of Mussolini's appointed editors (see below), on May 31, 1944, over all printed matter.¹⁷

Central to Minculpop's restructuring was the creation of the Comitato consultivo per la propaganda which, for the first time, enabled Fascist authorities to take an active part in the production of propaganda, rather than merely limiting themselves to its diffusion and control, as during the *ventennio*.¹⁸ This entity consisted of a committee of five leading journalists charged with supervising the production of propaganda through the various media: Umberto Guglielmotti for radio and press, Telesio Interlandi for radio and press in "occupied" (southern) Italy, Francesco Scardaoni for radio broadcasts aimed abroad, Ridolfo Mazzucconi for books, fliers, pamphlets and postcards, and Ferdinando Camuncoli for oral propaganda.¹⁹ In March 1944 Minculpop acquired Agenzia Stefani, the Italian news agency (whose chief had committed suicide in July on hearing of Mussolini's arrest), thereby acquiring even greater means to control the press. Journalist Luigi Barzini eventually was appointed as its head.²⁰

¹⁶Cannistraro 1975, 326.

¹⁷Id., 32.

¹⁸Id., 328.

¹⁹Alfassio-Grimaldi, 14.

²⁰ACS SPD CR RSI b. 15 f. 72R, sf. 4, Agenzia Stefani press release no. 25, March 12, 1944.

Throughout the years of the Fascist regime and up to November 1943, the power to censor the press in Fascist Italy had rested in the hands of local Fascist prefects. As a result of Minculpop's restructuring, each prefecture now acquired a censorship office manned by an *Addetto stampa* [press attaché] who was appointed by the Ministry. This was essentially a transfer to a Minculpop representative of all the powers over the press that had been exercised earlier by the Fascist prefects, which was meant to translate into greater ministerial control for Minculpop. Each *Addetto stampa* reported in person twice weekly at a meeting held at the Ministry's offices in Salò. Also present at these biweekly meetings were representatives of the German censorship office, Propaganda Staffel. Created by order of Feldmarshal Rommel to control the Italian press, Propaganda Staffel's task was to censor news considered relevant to the military situation. Unfortunately for Italian journalists, Propaganda Staffel determined which news items had such relevance. In practice, it wielded considerable power: demanding the publication of articles, imposing general directives, threatening the confiscation of printing machinery and, perhaps most important, controlling the supply of paper.²¹

In addition to Propaganda Staffel, there existed a parallel censorship system set up by the German ambassador Rudolf von Rahn, who created a system of German control behind an Italian Fascist screen. Rahn, with Ribbentrop's concurrence, endeavored to take censorship as much as possible out of the hands

²¹ Alfassio Grimaldi, 33-34.

of the German military and place it instead under his own control, through managing a network of cultural attachés charged with the task of observing and reporting on the attitudes of the Italian population with a view toward advancing various propaganda initiatives. These cultural attachés were enlisted from employees of the German-Italian cultural institutes found in every major Italian city. Rahn believed more success could be achieved by encouraging cooperation and collaboration than from the inflexible and heavy-handed censorship conducted by the German military elsewhere in occupied Europe. Furthermore, by encouraging their own kind of “pacification” the Germans believed they were opening a modicum of “space” for friendly collaboration. Rahn himself helped to persuade Mezzasoma to relax preventive censorship between November 1943 and May 31, 1944. German influence on propaganda in Italy sought to accomplish two main objectives: obtaining the peaceful surrender of the partisans and bringing industrial strikes to an end.²²

German and Fascist censorship represented only part of the stricter governmental control in Salò; journalism was now fundamentally redefined as a propaganda tool for the government. During a meeting with leading editors held on January 12, 1944 (also discussed in Chapter Three), Mezzasoma spelled out precisely what was to be expected of journalists working under the new arrangements. Seeking to disabuse editors and journalists of the delusion of

²² Klinkhammer, 113-117. Klinkhammer’s observations on this matter derive from his exhaustive research in German archives. I have found no Italian (or other) source that confirms the existence of such a system.

enjoying an unlimited freedom of the press, “that most utopian of freedoms, the freedom of discussion,” he insisted republican journalists had a duty to generate blind faith in the government:

from the internal point of view it is necessary that newspapers finally and definitively disengage themselves from that mentality which predominated in the first months of the Republic, leading them all towards a series of exaggerated criticisms ... of excesses and, even when take the kindest view of their efforts, useless recriminations towards a past which must constitute our most supreme claim to pride.... Today the fundamental duty of the press is precisely that of seriously and objectively presenting the situation to citizens, urging them to have faith in the extremely difficult actions undertaken by the government of the Republic, and in collaborating with the government by offering the contribution of their highest efforts.

In the same directive Mezzasoma called upon all editors to remain intransigently Fascist by turning a deaf ear to calls for political pluralism, insisting

from a strictly political point of view, the newspapers of the Republic – without missing the opportunity of pointing out how the cause of Fascism coincides with the cause of Italy, and collaboration with Fascism is the best – indeed the only – way of being truly Italian – must attain that level of revolutionary intransigence demanded not only by honesty and consistency, but also by the thousands of martyrs who have shed and continue to shed their blood in the name of our faith.²³

Overall, both German and neo-Fascist propaganda had very limited success among Italians, according to Klinkhammer. The German administration itself was convinced that Italians believed nothing of Axis propaganda, and ascribed such a state of affairs to their listening (in the face of the penalty of

²³ ACS SPD CR, RSI b. 67, f.640, sf. 12, “Direttive generali per la propaganda.” January 12, 1944.

death) to Allied radio broadcasts. The idea of confiscating every single radio apparatus in German-occupied Italy was briefly considered, but later dropped.²⁴

III. The Last Phase of Fascist Rhetoric

When Mussolini spoke from Radio Munich on the evening of September 18, 1943 to announce the formation of the Italian Social Republic, he gave utterance to many themes that would come to characterize the last phase of Fascist rhetoric. “The State which we wish to set up will be national and social in the highest sense of the word,” he said. “That is, it will be Fascist, thus going back to our origins. Our postulates are the following: to take up arms again alongside Germany, Japan and other allies; only blood can cancel such a shameful page from the history of the fatherland ...; to eliminate the traitors ... in the ranks of the Party who have gone over to the ranks of the enemy; to annihilate the parasitic plutocracies and at last make labor the theme of our economy and the indestructible basis of the State.”²⁵ As the first words spoken in public since before the coup in July, his remarks here disclose what had likely been preoccupying him while in captivity: a rethinking of the historical experience of Fascism. The two dominant themes taken up by Salò propaganda would be revenge against all traitors, including “parasitic plutocracies,” and socialization of the Italian economy. Hardliners such as Pavolini and Farinacci immediately set out to punish individuals involved in the coup, while Mussolini thought more in

²⁴ Klinkhammer, 117-118.

²⁵ Quoted in Deakin, 565.

terms of the larger “forces,” like the bourgeoisie, that had turned against Fascism. Along with the royal family, this element of the Italian population Mussolini now singled out as the chief historical enemy of Fascism, responsible for all that had gone wrong in the regime and in the war. Propaganda at Salò would sharply distinguish the new republican regime from its predecessor as a purified return to the roots of Fascism. Announcing labor as the new social base of the Party was a way of punishing and excluding the bourgeoisie, while at the same time winning popular consensus for the new political arrangements. In embracing socialism, Mussolini was playing his last card; as he divulged to Interior Minister Buffarini Guidi, “I admit that the ‘system from on top’ has failed; because the men have failed, not Fascism. A system ‘from below’: we are considering the unknown; what if the masses also fail?”²⁶ There had been earlier anti-bourgeois campaigns in the Italian press in the late 1930s, depicting bourgeois values and attitudes as incompatible with Fascism; indeed Party Secretary Achille Starace inaugurated an Anti-Bourgeois Exhibit in November 1938 comprised of drawings ridiculing bourgeois manners and attitudes.²⁷ Salò represented an intensification of this campaign, which designated the Italian bourgeoisie as virtual State enemies.²⁸

Thus, while the most recurrent targets in the intransigent press included the leaders of the coup against Mussolini and the royal family, increasingly, the

²⁶Deakin, 564.

²⁷Falasca-Zamponi, 105.

²⁸See Belardelli, 52, for a discussion of the launching of the anti-bourgeois campaign in the 1930s. See also Ben-Ghiat, 112-115, and 180-187.

intransigent press aimed its most savage invective at the bourgeoisie. A language of moral outrage soon evolved into a network of images and associations that powerfully linked the Italian bourgeoisie to Italy's enemies in the field. This new system of representation starkly framed the continuing military struggle by juxtaposing Fascist honor with bourgeois or "plutocratic" betrayal, Fascist morality with plutocratic immorality, and Fascist civilization with plutocratic barbarism. The threat posed by recent Soviet military successes against the Wehrmacht, as well as the mounting violence of Italian partisans against the German occupational forces, both receded into the background, as extremist elements in the Italian press increasingly applied the same repertoire of abuse to both the Italian bourgeoisie and the Anglo-Americans, in effect, conflating the two into one single enemy – the plutocrat.

The kind of language employed demonstrates continuities with pre-war Fascist rhetoric. Naturally, a derogatory image of the plutocrat flourished on the left long before the emergence of Fascism; as a socialist newspaper editor before World War I, Mussolini had frequently resorted to baiting the Italian bourgeoisie. It was briefly taken up by Fascism in the early years of the movement, but virtually disappeared by 1922. It then re-emerged forcefully in Fascist media during the second half of the 1930s when, during the Ethiopian crisis, Britain led the League of Nations in a campaign of economic sanctions against Italian aggression. It was at this moment that Fascist rhetoric began associating

plutocracy with international opposition.²⁹ Especially in the late 1930s the Italian press and Fascist culture in general grew increasingly apt to ridicule bourgeois culture for its pacificism and humanitarianism, deride its faith in progress and rationality, and condemn its morality as self-interest and calculation – traits it would compare unfavorably to the more vigorous Fascist virtues of discipline, loyalty and obedience: the bourgeois merchant versus the Fascist hero.³⁰ One part of this caricature, however, came into much greater prominence after the Italian surrender on September 8: an incapacity for honor.

An article by Goffredo Coppola, “Esame di coscienza” [Examination of Conscience], exemplifies the kind of rhetoric that came into full flower in the Salò Republic. As rector of Bologna University, he relaunched the Fascist party organ *Civiltà Fascista* in April 1944 and remained its editor until its last issue in early 1945. He enjoyed frequent contact with Mussolini, and was to be executed along with the other Fascist leaders on the banks of Lake Como in late April 1945.³¹ His essay, ostensibly a call to arms addressed to the Fascist faithful, depends upon a dichotomous construction of opposing images of Fascists and liberals. The

²⁹Denis Mack Smith, *Mussolini: a Biography* (New York, 1983) 181. “In the years after 1934, Mussolini revived all his old enmity against the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois mentality, which he defined as unheroic, skeptical and humanitarian... Against this bourgeois enemy he eventually planned to let loose a ‘third wave’ of violence and concentration camps. His outbursts against the rich became more common and were reminiscent of his early socialist writings.” See also Falasca-Zamponi, 171-182.

³⁰For a discussion of the anti-bourgeois thrust of Fascist propaganda in the late 1930s, see Alessandra Argenio, “Mussolini, il fascismo e la polemica antiborghese.” *Nuova storia contemporanea*, Anno V, No. 4 (July – August, 2001) 55-72. The author cites most of her sources from articles which appeared in GUF-sponsored publications aimed at Italian youth.

³¹ACS SPD RSI b. 30, f. 1577. Several letters to Mussolini found in this folder attest to Coppola’s disclosing the contents of each issue to Mussolini before publication.

current crisis was the result, he argues, of Italians failing to recognize soon enough that the country was saddled with a fat bourgeoisie incapable of considering political problems in any other way than as a narrow calculation of interests; where Fascism strove to inculcate a new ideal and a new vision of reality, the plutocrat was simply interested in staying rich, regardless of the cost to the nation.

Coppola constructs a derogatory caricature of the plutocrat in which every element stands in stark contrast to the ideal image of the Fascist hero:

The Italy of the panting Mama and the pompous Papa, the over-rouged sister and the overeager fiancé, the Italy of the university graduate who presumes to understand politics after submitting a badly written dissertation, of the yearning ladies' man who thinks he can melt the entire female sex with a single glance; the Italy that memorizes Carducci's "Hymn to Satan" and "Ode to Queen Margherita"; the Italy that quivers passionately while listening to the "Hymn to Garibaldi" and the "Royal March" in the public square, that recites prayers in church and traffics in bodily and spiritual filth at home: that Italy is finished.

His dismissive reference to Carducci and to patriotic anthems of the Liberal era associates bourgeois cultural values with the royal family – now, the very symbol of treason. Later, he makes an irrelevant reference to Benedetto Croce, only to dismiss the philosopher who "in the name of liberty sacrificed the dignity of the *patria*." Plutocrats, bourgeois, liberals ... and the Allies – all represent the same enemy, are of the same essence, because they fear the Fascist ethic, which "requires in the hour of danger that you believe, obey, and fight, and that individual rights are annulled before the supreme law of the *patria*."

Along with the motifs of hero versus merchant, and moral versus immoral, Coppola adds a third: civilization versus barbarism. Barbarism inevitably results

from a lack of Fascist discipline, as is characteristic, once again, of the bourgeoisie. Yet Fascism he depicts as synonymous with civilization; he sees it as “a continuous vigilance and armed struggle against the ever-present possibility of falling back into the world of barbarism;” the only way for Italians to hold onto their civilization was to “strictly follow the road of national duty rather than wandering into the obscure paths of universalism.” The present conflict “menaces thirty centuries of European civilization ... ours is the doctrine of life, the only one that lets us gather the bloodied relics of the past and carry them forward into a fertile future.”³²

Coppola’s article appeared in the spring of 1944, while the debates in the press about Fascism’s errors were reaching their height. His article exemplifies the kind of propaganda Minculpop produced for a literate, educated readership. There existed, alongside such writings, a handful of smaller and local news publications (many of which were aimed at Militia members and the Italian S.S.), that comprised a kind of subculture whose rhetorical vocabulary was more extremist than Coppola’s. This subculture centered on a preoccupation with military valor and bloody sacrifice, and called for fighting an apocalyptic battle to the death against an overwhelmingly strong enemy; “death of the fascist soldier and his military defeat were translated into a moral victory, the right to live into

³² Goffredo Coppola, “Esame di coscienza.” *Civiltà Fascista*, Anno XI, Fasc. 1-4, April 1944. See also classical historian Luigi Pareti’s article of June 1944 in the same publication, “Era possibile per l’Italia Rimaner Neutrale?” which speciously argues that the plutocratic nations – Britain and the United States – contrived the outbreak of the war in order to prevent the “proletarian” nations – Italy, Germany and Japan – from becoming too powerful. This theme, which often yoked together the Allies with “international Jewry” as secret instigators of the war, recurred constantly in the Salò press.

the right to die.”³³ The historian Luigi Micheletti recalls from his adolescence the effect of this “propaganda of death, of struggle to the last drop of blood ... as the Fascist chiefs, without any prospect of success, tried to push into a battle the young and very young who deluded themselves into thinking they were fighting for the country’s honor.” As an adult he came to realize after the war that “the republicans lived in a spiritual climate of catastrophe; the principle of hope no longer operated within them. At the very least it was a question of selling their own skins dear, of bringing about the maximum damage to the enemy, knowing in the end that the enemy would prevail.”³⁴ More important than the outcome of the war was, of course, the redemption of Italian honor that would accrue from fighting to the death. Glorification of death and sacrifice at the side of the German ally, rather than specific war aims, such as the Fascist purification of society we saw in Coppola’s article, saturated this sub-culture of the intransigent press: “Funerary symbols, the exaltation of death, the almost obsessive call to sacrificing life is an almost ritual suggestion in Fascist imagery in the last two years of the war,” observes Ganapini.³⁵ A quotation from the front page of a soldier’s weekly news magazine, *Folgore*, sums up this “embrace of death”

³³ Quartermaine, 2000, 129.

³⁴ Luigi Micheletti, ed., *1943-1945: L'immagine della Repubblica Sociale Italiana nella propaganda* (exhibition catalog) (Milan, 1985) 8.

³⁵ Ganapini, 118. His discussion of such newspapers, which he points out were aimed at members of the armed forces, is the most complete I have found. See 116-125. “In place of the ‘western art of war,’ in place of frontal combat in an open field that concludes a conflict with a defeat and a victory, there was substituted a war without end, which never ends ... because the way of fighting allows for neither truce nor agreement, nor reciprocal recognition nor even the acceptance of the most atrocious fact: that this is a fratricidal war.”¹¹⁷.

subculture: “Only the war, nothing but war, war again, war forever, war must be the objective of all of our thoughts and activities.”³⁶ War for the sake of war, death for the sake of death, but not for the sake of a particular cause, it seems. Frenzied, fanatic struggle, regardless of the likely outcome, was held up as the duty of all republican citizens in a fight that was often depicted as a holy war. Real Italians were those who “knew how to die for an idea,” according to Pavolini.³⁷

Unfortunately, the connection between these smaller newspapers and the Ministry of Popular Culture is not entirely clear, although Paolucci identifies certain newspapers as the voice of the intransigents. Obviously they were aimed at a *squadristi* readership. Press directives determined much of what was published, which was in turn supervised by various *addetti stampa*, but this kind of language never featured prominently in any of the major dailies, although it was not entirely absent either, so obviously it must have been in some measure condoned by Minculpop. As an answer to the question of what kind of cultural life existed in Salò, this rhetoric deserves to be considered an authentic voice of Fascism for its resemblance to the *squadristi* rhetoric of the 1920s.³⁸

The production of posters, fliers and postcards – all of which was controlled by the Comitato consultivo per la propaganda and widely disseminated

³⁶Folgore. *Settimanali dei combattenti*, July 11/12, 1944.

³⁷Mario Isnenghi, “Autorappresentazioni dell’ultimo fascismo nella riflessione e nella propaganda.” *Annali della Fondazione Luigi Micheletti*, ed. Pier Paolo Poggio (atti del convegno Brescia, 4-5 ottobre 1985) (Brescia, 1986) 99-111. The quotation is from p. 100.

³⁸Of course, it is hard to label any one kind of rhetoric as *the* authentic voice of Fascism since the movement never lost its composite character.

among the populace – offers examples of how Salò’s propaganda occasionally depicted the enemy in racist imagery. Illustrations of American and English figures abound, whereas the Soviets and Stalin appear infrequently. Within the repertoire of images that circulated about Anglo-Americans, the most commonly encountered were those of the rich, selfish plutocrat. Yet still others, through the use of racist caricature, linked Americans to barbarism. Appearing as crude stereotypes, American soldiers were often presented in the guise of African-Americans engaged in acts of vandalism, often juxtaposed against images of Italian cultural monuments. One such drawing presents a gigantic soldier striding through an Italian town, with a caption beneath that reads, “The negro destroys everything.” Stereotypes of the British – just as frequent – tended to portray them as obese plutocrats. One illustration presents a John Bull figure picking the pockets of several corpses hanging from a gibbet, each identified ethnically in small print as subjects of the British Empire – Irish, Indian, etc. The caption reads, “For Great Britain, all races and all peoples are equal.” Posters and postcards presented Italians in postures subservient to American and British figures, as if to warn of what kind of future awaits the country if the enemy wins the war, while Russians were often shown as a menace to the Church, as in an illustration showing a giant hammer and sickle dripping blood onto the dome of St. Peter’s Basilica, with the caption, “The Anti-Christ in the Eternal City.”³⁹ The visual racist imagery produced by Minculpop’s Advisory Committee in posters

³⁹ Micheletti, 32-116 (illustrations from an exhibition catalog).

and fliers seems to have been deployed inconsistently, for it does not appear to have been replicated in written descriptions of Americans. Newspapers overwhelmingly tended to stick to an anti-plutocratic line when describing them.

IV. “La Politica dei Ponti”⁴⁰

Before Mussolini’s ouster, as the Allied military threat in North Africa began to loom large, some figures in the press had already started to take positions in what would soon, under the Salò Republic, become an increasingly bitter debate on the subject of conciliation between Fascists and non-Fascists. The most prestigious name to advance the cause of reconciliation between the two parties was the neo-idealist philosopher Giovanni Gentile, who gave a radio broadcast on June 24 to the nation exhorting both Fascist and non-Fascist to come together as one people on the basis of a common culture. Culture, elevated to a level above adherence to any political party, was at the heart of Gentile’s vision of Fascism as a way of bridging the ideological divide. Gentile redefined Fascism in a way that identified it with Roman antiquity, insisting its virtues of discipline, concord, resolution in combat, and honor were the qualities Italians must now find within themselves in order to win the current struggle. This tendency to redefine Fascism in personal terms characterized all of the writers who took part in the *Politica dei Ponti*.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Summaries of the *Politica dei Ponti* can be found in Amicucci, 105-138; Bertoldi, 284-310; Bocca, 211-224; Ganapini, 177-194, who discusses the tensions between the Party leadership and the *conciliatori*. Paolucci 1987 mentions the *Politica dei Ponti* (or conflict between its main protagonists and the intransigents) on 10-14; 44-45; 268-269; 275-278.

⁴¹ The term “*Politica dei Ponti*” can be roughly translated as the “politics of bridges,” or of building bridges between political divides.

A month after Gentile's broadcast, with Badoglio now at the helm, Mussolini sequestered, and Fascism seemingly gone for good, many voices in the press gave full vent to their true feelings about Fascism and their great relief in the Duce's departure. Such voices, of course, fell silent after the Fascist comeback and German occupation in mid-September, a turn of events that forced many writers and editors to disappear from view entirely for the remainder of the war. Yet once newspapers and periodicals began to republish under the watchful eye of the Minculpop and German authorities, a remarkably (and seemingly) free debate began to take shape – remarkable, given the historical circumstances of a totalitarian government bent on taking revenge. The questions were: how much freedom of press was to be tolerated? How far were writers permitted to go in discussing the flaws of Fascism, of Mussolini, or the aims of the war? It goes without saying that no discussion of this kind ever took place in the other totalitarian societies of Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union and went well beyond the cultural debate that had taken place in various periodicals in the 1930s.⁴² It seems to have been Mussolini's deliberate intention to let this debate run its course. Mussolini evidently was playing both sides of the game; while “officially” he barely condoned discussion of any sort, it was he who selected the editors of the various newspapers, and it was he who refused to rein them in when

⁴² Ben-Ghiat, 116-120, discusses how certain young novelists expressed a radicalization of youth culture in the mid-1930s, a generation that felt it had “missed all the action” of the early 1920s with its “unlimited liberties.” This nostalgia for political radicalism, accompanied by strident anti-bourgeois rhetoric, may be seen as a critique of the stifling bureaucratic Fascism of the 1930s. Ben-Ghiat also notes a response to such criticism in the “intensified action of patronage and policing” aimed at editors of youth journals.

they stepped over the line.⁴³ Furthermore, Mussolini himself advanced various lines of thought in the debate and, under cover of a pseudonym, contributed to the discussion. Many of the intellectuals who had influence and status in the Salò press were directly involved with Mussolini in this “conspiracy in open daylight.”

This attempt to understand the causes of the Fascist collapse in July 1943 prompted a discussion, beginning in late 1943 and continuing until the end of May 1944, which became polarized between conciliators, who did not scruple to look for the causes within Fascism, and the intransigents. The intransigents reacted with outrage that anyone should be allowed to criticize what they held as virtually sacred. Their ideal for the future of Fascism was Nazi Germany, and they blamed the collapse on a conspiracy of corrupt *gerarchi* and the monarchy; Fascism they held blameless.⁴⁴ The intransigents sought rather to purify Fascism of unreliable elements and political compromises to render it even more absolutist and extreme.⁴⁵ The editors Mussolini had selected to head the major dailies comprised the nucleus of the *conciliatori*. In opposition to the calls for vengeance against the *traditori* and the continuing sacralization of Fascism, some of the

⁴³ See, e.g., Mussolini’s directive of December 6, 1943, “A Tutti i capi delle provincie,” ACS SPD CR RSI b 22, f 147.

⁴⁴ For a recent discussion of this attitude, see Ganapini, 170-181.

⁴⁵ See, e.g., “Badoglio e i suoi generali.” *Il Regime Fascista*, October 1, 1943, in which the author (most likely Farinacci) discusses the army’s lack of preparation as a deliberate plot by the generals of the High Command and the undersecretary of war, Alberto Pariani, “a Jew;” “La guerra continua” (unsigned), *Il Regime Fascista*, October 15, 1943; “Radio cronaca” (unsigned), *Il Regime Fascista*, November 27, 1943 (in response to Radio London referring to Farinacci as “Herr Farinacci”: “that we are blindly with Germany is a sacred truth.” Farinacci laid out his attitudes towards German-Italian friendship in “Precedenti Culturali e Politici dell’Asse,” *Civiltà Fascista*, May 1944, 33-45. See also Fornari, 1971, 167-169.

conciliators called for dialogue with the partisans. They furthermore believed Fascism must try to shed its absolutist tendencies, not remain a dictatorship, and that it was to a certain extent improvable, but only through an open, honest airing of stored-up grievances. Occasionally, they even went as far as suggesting the possibility of political pluralism.

The intransigent wing of Fascism, backed by the German occupational authorities and staffing the Ministry of Popular Culture, were in a position to silence and punish their opposition. Mussolini's return to the political stage, along with his appointment of these editors (on September 28), was immediately followed by published objections to the atmosphere of vengeance and extremism that had taken hold.⁴⁶ These voices, led at first by Gentile, again took up the campaign for pacification or conciliation between rival political camps that might, they believed, lead to greater unity in the Italian population and perhaps a slimming of the ranks of the partisans. One of the first negative reactions to conciliation came on October 5, 1943, when Party Secretary Pavolini "instructed the Party federations to take a stand against "pacification" and when ten days later Mezzasoma published a directive objecting to any further appeals that called for "pacification of souls, concord of spirits, the brotherhood of Italians," but urged the press instead to exhort its readers to struggle and sacrifice at the side of the

⁴⁶ Amicucci, 109-110. "Many readers saw with satisfaction their objections and their points of view published in contrast to that of the newspaper. 'We must salute with joy – wrote one reader – the possibility given back to us to make manifest our own thoughts. In the long run, no one wins by suffocating the instinct of the people, who sooner or later must be able to express themselves either with a normal return to the freedom to write, or with a violent revolutionary outbreak. Your articles are therefore most welcome.'" Amicucci quotes from a letter he received in November 1943.

German ally.⁴⁷ On November 5, Pavolini went further, issuing orders that “moral instigators” of partisan violence – by which he meant voices in the press calling for conciliation and discussion with partisan activists – would be arrested each time a Fascist party official was killed.⁴⁸

The conciliators, however, stayed the course, appealing directly to the Italian public, to which the intransigents would each time respond with violent denunciations and calls for the silencing of all dissent. The tension between the two sides is vividly depicted in the memoirs of Ermanno Amicucci, editor of Milan’s *Corriere della Sera*. Amicucci was one of the first editors to avail himself of the opportunity to publish opinions not sanctioned by hard-line Fascist policy. He published four articles in late November 1943 exploring the causes of the collapse during the previous summer, doing so by summarizing the arguments of various readers who had written to express their own opinions on the subject. He also polemicized with Candidus, the Italian-speaking persona who broadcast from Radio London on Italian affairs.⁴⁹ The anger this undoubtedly provoked among the intransigents was likely the reason behind Mussolini’s “clarification” on the subject of freedom of the press, which in his view had been taken too much to heart by people too irresponsible to care about its consequences.⁵⁰ Yet

⁴⁷Deakin, 582-583, who cites Tamaro, *Due Anni di Storia* II, 215.

⁴⁸Amicucci, 123.

⁴⁹Id., 109.

⁵⁰ACS SPD RSI CR b. 22 f. 147, “A Tutti i capi delle provincie.” December 6, 1943.

Amicucci, among the editors working closely with Mussolini, was neither arrested nor removed from his post.⁵¹

One such periodical that returned, week after week, to investigating the collapse was the newly founded weekly *Italia e civiltà*. Barna Occhini, son-in-law of Giovanni Papini, published it in Florence between January 8 and June 17, 1944.⁵² An essay by Gentile appeared in its first issue, urging for the sake of the nation that there be established “a discipline that rules and governs with justice solely in the interest of the country; these internal struggles, persecutions and cursed recriminations which confuse and divide the souls of men, must cease.”⁵³ It is evident which side of the political spectrum he was addressing. The artist and critic Ardengo Soffici, a committed Fascist who enjoyed a rather privileged position as an old friend of Mussolini, inaugurated a discussion of the regime’s failures that continued for several articles, the first of which criticized the atmosphere of political conformism prevalent during the regime.⁵⁴ Soffici published an article in this journal nearly every week, while at the same time

⁵¹ Amicucci relates that at the end of 1943 and beginning of 1944, there emerged a movement from within the higher ranks of the Party for Pavolini’s removal, supposedly led by the undersecretary to the Consiglio, Francesco Barracu, the *federale* of Brescia, Fulvio Balisti, and Carlo Borsani. Borsani evidently launched the attack at the convention of newspaper editors (which Amicucci attended) in January 1944 in front of Mezzasoma, and Pavolini was shortly thereafter informed of Mussolini’s decision to substitute him with Balisti. Two days later, however, Mussolini relented (on the basis of information furnished by Buffarini-Guidi) that the Germans would be pleased to see both Buffarini-Guidi and Pavolini removed. Amicucci concluded that Mussolini did not want to have his independence vis-à-vis the German command compromised in the eyes of Italians by seemingly giving in to German wishes. 124. This is also analyzed in De Felice 1997, 539-544. Giorgio Pini tells of having heard of the situation two months after the event. Pini, 85-86.

⁵² Carlo Frankovich, in *La Resistenza a Firenze* (Florence, 1975) 366, raises the possibility (which he concedes is so far unproven) that Giovanni Papini collaborated with Occhini pseudonymously.

⁵³ Giovanni Gentile, “Questione morale.” *Italia e civiltà*, January 8, 1944.

⁵⁴ Ardengo Soffici, “La Verità.” *Italia e civiltà*, January 8, 1944.

contributing frequently to other publications, especially *Corriere della Sera*. One of these recounted an incident that had taken place several years earlier, when a party secretary tried to scare him into thinking Mussolini was displeased by something he wrote. He related this story to endorse the view that “observations and fertile criticism [are as] necessary as bread to the good, healthy, sane and pure development of our political life.”⁵⁵ One of the editors who would (in August 1944) become a member of the Comitato consultivo per la propaganda, Ridolfo Mazzuconi, frequently contributed to *Italia e civiltà*.

Soffici’s critical stance emboldened and legitimized other contributors to probe for the causes of the regime’s collapse in the failure during the 1930s to provide an adequate indoctrination program in the educational system. The young, argued one Silvano Tosi, absorbed uncritically the liberalistic and positivistic attitudes of their teachers, whose political indifference or even outright anti-Fascism had gone unchecked for years. The collapse should be seen, he suggested, as the inevitable consequence of the lack of a true fascistization program aimed at developing a second generation Fascist ruling class.⁵⁶ The young Giovanni Spadolini (1925-1994, a frequent contributor, likely due to the friendship between his father and Soffici; Spadolini would go on to serve as Prime Minister of Italy under the Italian Republican Party from June 1981 to December 1982) suggested the regime’s crisis first became apparent as a

⁵⁵ Ardengo Soffici, “Libertà di critica.” *Italia e civiltà*, April 29, 1944.

⁵⁶ Silvano Tosi, “Scuola Educativa.” *Italia e civiltà*, February 5, 1944 and M. Cicognani, “Nuova Scuola.” *Italia e civiltà*, April 15, 1944.

degeneration of the ruling class during the mid-1930s. After the Ethiopian conquest, he wrote, profiteers and opportunists swarmed into the higher ranks of the Party, causing the regime to lose its revolutionary dynamism, precisely at the same time that remnants of the Masonic orders and the liberals began to re-emerge. The Fascists before 1936, he observed, may have been less competent, but were more honest and more ardently Fascist than their successors. One consequence of this degeneration was a diminution of consensus in favor of the regime at the very time it was urgently required – in June 1940, with the start of Italian participation in the war. The degeneration of the ruling Fascist elite, he concluded, was accompanied by the re-emergence of the influence of the royal family and the higher ranks of the armed forces – Fascism’s “hidden enemies.”⁵⁷

It should not be concluded from these few articles, however, that *Italia e civiltà* was in the vanguard of criticizing Fascism, or that Occhini necessarily favored the kind of political pluralism Pini, Pettinato and others had begun to forcefully advocate. According to Frankovich, the Florence weekly did little more than “assure the support of irrational intellectualism to Nazi politics, feeding contempt of democratic life, expressing its own adherence to racial politics.” This seems an accurate summation. The only common denominator among the “confused babel” of its authors’ voices, Frankovich observes, was its

⁵⁷“Il Problema dei Giovani,” *Italia e civiltà*,” February 26, 1944. See also Francesco Germinario, “‘Italia e civiltà’: cattofascismo, tradimento degli intellettuali e totalitarismo imperfetto nei dibattiti di una rivista di cultura della RSI.” *Il presente e la storia*, n. 51, June 1997, 89-98.

‘pseudopatriotism, anti-Semitism, and the heroic cult of war.’⁵⁸ Their criticisms of a lack of *libertà di critica* did not imply a willingness to renounce Fascism’s totalitarian goal; paradoxically, they felt that the regime’s suffocation of honest and necessary criticism had proved directly instrumental in undermining the goal of totalitarianism, because it produced a personal management of the state which favored the rise of corrupt *gerarchi*, and permitted the survival of sectors of society (such as the bourgeoisie, monarchy, and army officer corps) resistant to Fascism.⁵⁹

Since Mussolini had decided to shut down *Il Popolo d’Italia* for the rest of the war, he soon began to feel the lack of the kind of personal forum he had formerly enjoyed, and so began to look around for a newspaper that, according to Amicucci, “spoke his own language,” one which could give voice to a moderate form of Fascism.⁶⁰ On January 23, 1944 he decided to start a new newspaper in Milan, *La Repubblica Fascista*, and appointed as its chief editor the young Carlo Borsani (1917-1945). Borsani seems a strange choice, since he had never been a newspaper journalist; blinded during the Greek campaign in 1940, president of the *Associazione dei Mutilati di guerra* [Association of War Wounded], he had recently won wide popularity as a poet whose idealistic verses celebrating love of country had found an increasingly receptive radio audience by the end of 1943. Borsani’s eloquent broadcasts on behalf of national conciliation won him

⁵⁸ Frankovich, 115-116.

⁵⁹ Germinario, 94-98.

⁶⁰ Amicucci, 112.

immediate national prominence in the polemical battle raging in the first half of 1944, which pitted the intransigents, led by Farinacci, along with Pavolini, Mezzasoma and Guido Buffarini Guidi, against the exponents of national conciliation and the “pacification of souls,” led first by Gentile, then Amicucci, Giorgio Pini of *Il Resto del Carlino*, and finally, Concetto Pettinato of *La Stampa*. Significantly, while the ministries of Popular Culture and Interior (as well as the Republican Fascist Party) tried to stifle this discussion with abuse and threats, Mussolini, who had appointed each of these editors and could have sacked them at any time, allowed it to continue. The outcome of the struggle was the reinstatement of preventive censorship on May 31, 1944, and Borsani’s dismissal from *La Repubblica Fascista* two months later.

Yet any efforts on behalf of national conciliation began to seem increasingly unavailing in the face of stepped-up partisan violence during the spring of 1944. Pitted against the conciliators were not only the intransigents in the press, but the partisans as well. Partisans became especially intent on singling out for assassination those figures among the Italian intelligentsia known for making efforts on behalf of national conciliation. In February, Pericle Ducati, a professor at Bologna University, was shot by a partisan squad (he died several months later of his wounds); on March 31, Ather Capelli, editor-in-chief of Turin’s *Gazzetta del Popolo*, was shot and killed on his doorstep; and on April 15 came the most notorious partisan assassination of the war, when the philosopher Giovanni Gentile was gunned down at the gate of his villa outside Florence

(although this last event may have sprung not so much from partisan policy as from personal revenge; see Chapter Three).⁶¹

These assassinations only confirmed to the intransigents the futility of any dialogue with Fascism's enemies; it was only due to Borsani's known close relationship with Mussolini that Mezzasoma restrained himself from acting decisively against him. But Borsani's relationship to the dictator did not prevent an enraged Farinacci from attacking him. On February 17, Borsani published an article by an ex-socialist, Riccardo Reda who, while praising Mussolini's recently announced socialization program, added that he himself had never been a member of the Fascist party and had never been interested in joining.⁶² It was just this approach – allowing non-Fascists to express political opinions – which earned Borsani notoriety among the intransigents, but sympathy from those Italians interested in practicing the *Politica dei Ponti*. Farinacci's response to *La Repubblica Fascista* was to accuse the newly founded paper of “connivance with anti-Fascism” and to launch a series of violent personal attacks against Borsani,⁶³ who, in turn, declared his paper open to the voices of those “above the barricades.” It was during these early months of 1944 that Borsani became associated with Carlo Silvestri, an old and estranged socialist comrade of Mussolini's, who maintained close personal contacts with a number of Italians sympathetic to conciliation, and who had recently come back into Mussolini's

⁶¹ Amicucci, 114-115.

⁶² Carlo Borsani jr., *Carlo Borsani: una vita per un sogno (1917-1945)* (Milan, 1995) 82.

⁶³ Id., 109.

good graces and enjoyed frequent personal contact with him. Borsani and Silvestri were soon to work together, in secret, alongside Mussolini.

The climax of an increasingly vituperative conflict between Borsani and Farinacci came in the last part of May 1944, with the Miglioli affair. Guido Miglioli was an old enemy of Farinacci, an ex-parliamentary deputy who had spent several years in exile in Paris. Arrested by the Gestapo in 1941, he was brought back to Italy where he lived unobtrusively with relatives in Milan and Cremona. Soon after Farinacci's return to Cremona, he learned that Miglioli was attempting to re-establish syndicalist contacts. This prompted a violent public denunciation of him in *Il Regime Fascista*, which included an accusation that Miglioli had attacked his reputation during the Badoglio period.⁶⁴ On April 21, 1944 Miglioli was kidnapped in Milan by agents loyal to Farinacci and brought to Cremona to face his old adversary in person. Farinacci then had Miglioli placed under house arrest in Cremona.

At this juncture, Carlo Silvestri intervened by writing a letter in late May to *La Stampa*, which Pettinato declined to publish, and provided a copy of the same to Borsani, who ran it on the front page of *La Repubblica Fascista*.⁶⁵ Silvestri related the entire story of Farinacci's harassment and kidnapping of Miglioli to the Italian public and demanded to know why the *ras* of Cremona was allowed to proceed as though he were not subject to the same laws as any other

⁶⁴“L'ultima farsa – il caso Miglioli.” *Il Regime Fascista*, October 5, 1943.

⁶⁵Carlo Silvestri, “La verità sul caso Miglioli.” *Repubblica Fascista*, May 25, 1944.

citizen of the Italian Social Republic. This in turn prompted Farninacci to publish a series of vicious personal insults against Silvestri and Borsani. Over the next few days, the back-and-forth insults escalated into a public feud, with the supporters of both *La Repubblica Fascista* and *Il Regime Fascista* in Cremona becoming increasingly agitated and ready to do battle in the streets. Farninacci then ordered the Republican National Guard to remove all copies of Borsani's *La Repubblica Fascista* from the newsstands of Cremona. Hearing of this, some of Borsani's supporters drove a truck loaded with the latest edition of his paper the next day to Cremona, and distributed them to enthusiastic crowds in that city.⁶⁶ The Republican National Guard did not prevent the distribution of Borsani's paper, but a few days later Mezzasoma intervened against the conciliators and on behalf of the intransigents when, on May 31, 1944, citing the public clamor that had arisen from the Borsani–Farinacci feud, he succeeded in demanding the reinstatement of preventive censorship. Except for the later Pettinato affair (June 21 onwards), no further “freedom of discussion” continued in the press.

The backdrop to these events was the episode that came to be known as the “Giramondo” affair. Between March 12 and May 23, Milan's *Corriere della Sera* ran 15 articles on its front page by an anonymous journalist who signed himself “Il Giramondo.”⁶⁷ Appearing in the most widely distributed newspaper in

⁶⁶ Borsani jr., 110.

⁶⁷ *Corriere della Sera*, March 12, 16, 19, 22, 26, 29, 31, April 2, 5, 7, 9, 13, and May 16, 18, and 23. See also Ennio Bozzetti and Giovanni Sabbatucci, ed., *Un Progetto di Conciliazione nella Repubblica Sociale: Scritti di Giramondo (Carlo Silvestri) raccolti da Renzo De Felice* (Florence, 2001), which indicates De Felice's interpretation was that the articles represented an effort to

Italy, the articles provoked an enormous amount of interest, anger, and speculation as to the identity of their author. Pavolini and Farinacci considered their contents incompatible with the Fascist party line, while the Germans found it “inconceivable” that something so “subversive” could be published at all.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, they arrived regularly on Amicucci’s desk from the Ministry of Popular Culture, with no further information as to their source, but with explicit orders that each be published.⁶⁹ Recent scholars have narrowed down the likely writers to Carlo Borsani, Carlo Silvestri and Mussolini himself; the most persuasive argument suggests Carlo Silvestri wrote them, with Mussolini editing and approving each draft.⁷⁰

The Giramondo articles have been regarded as Mussolini’s attempt to woo the moderates within the partisan movement away from their communist leadership.⁷¹ His most likely collaborator, the socialist journalist Carlo Silvestri, an old enemy from the early days of Fascism (and a recent convert to anti-communism; see Chapter Six), had been rescued by Mussolini from a Gestapo execution in November 1943. Over several personal interviews, Mussolini

isolate the Resistance from the Communist leadership as a way of ending the Resistance; see Sabbatucci’s introduction, VIII-IX; see also De Felice 1997, 541.

⁶⁸ Borsani jr., 89.

⁶⁹ Amicucci makes only one brief mention of the Giramondo affair in his memoirs (169). Borsani’s biographer reproduces a letter from Amicucci to the Capo della Provincia, Piero Pisenti, in which he describes his reluctant involvement. Borsani jr., 148-150.

⁷⁰ Guglielmo Salotti, “Un ‘mistero’ storico-giornalistico: ‘Il giramondo.’” *Storia contemporanea*, XVII, 5 (October 1986) 875. On the basis of a stylistic analysis and the survival of drafts in Silvestri’s hand, Gloria Gabriele, author of a biography of Carlo Silvestri, believed the articles were written by Silvestri. See Gabriele, 251.

⁷¹ Besides De Felice 1997, 541, Salotti 1986 also held this view, supported by Gabriele, 288.

convinced Silvestri of his plans to transform the Fascist Party – once the war had been won – into something akin to a social democratic party. Unbeknownst to all but a handful of Mussolini's closest associates, they met together 55 times until the end of the war, agreeing to work together to limit the excesses of both sides in the political struggle.⁷²

The articles began by demonstrating the good faith of Giramondo's intentions by dropping hints of the authors' knowledge of the identities and whereabouts of various partisan leaders, letting them know that, while they could be captured at any time, Giramondo preferred to deal with them as political adversaries, rather than as enemies involved in fratricidal conflict. Giramondo also flattered the partisans, paying tribute to the rank and file members of the Resistance for their courage, tenacity, good faith and honesty; but denouncing their political naiveté in allowing themselves to be led by the Communists. The thrust of the articles was a broad condemnation of what Giramondo regarded as the Communist as a deliberate strategy of provoking the Germans into reprisals against Italian citizens. Giramondo, for example, claimed the recent strikes in Turin were really nothing more than an attempt to provoke German violence against Italian workers. "It is only necessary to compare the virulence of the attacks against the [Anglo-American] Allies, to the cautious, almost benevolent references to the Soviet Union, to uncover Giromondo's maneuvers. They sought, thus, to reassure those who had faith in socialist ideals," concludes the

⁷²Borsani, jr., 93. See also Gabriele, 251.

historian Gloria Gabriele. The Giramondo articles never had any discernible effect on the members of the Resistance or the Italian working classes. Articles in the clandestine *Avanti!* published between June 10 and July 30 analyzed and rebutted each argument advanced by Giramondo.⁷³

At the heart of what troubled two of the editors who, after Gentile, were the most important conciliators was the extraordinary sense of alienation felt by the mass of Italians toward the Salò regime. The boldness of Giorgio Pini, of Bologna's *Il Resto del Carlino*, and Concetto Pettinato, of Turin's *La Stampa*, earned the greatest notoriety for the *Politica dei Ponti*. Pini wrote a series of articles starting in December 1943 which culminated the following April 2 in "Scongellare: Rapporto a Pavolini" [Thawing: Report to Pavolini], in which he insisted Pavolini must recognize that the attitudes of the Fascist rank and file were favorable to vast internal reforms. Pettinato's "Se ci sei, batti un colpo" [If You're There, Give a Knock], appeared June 21 on the front page of *La Stampa*, and came the closest of anything ever published in the Salò press to denouncing the government for the puppet regime it was. It also resulted in serious legal consequences for its author.

In December 1943, shortly after Amicucci first began probing the causes of the Fascist collapse in the pages of the *Corriere della Sera*, and a month before the Verona trials got underway, Pini began running a series of articles in *Il Resto del Carlino* suggesting that the monarchic betrayal could only have happened

⁷³ Bozzetti and Sabbatucci, 89-95.

because of the kind of atmosphere created by the errors of Fascism. On December 5 (significantly, the evening before Mussolini's circular denouncing editorial irresponsibility), he named what he considered its biggest flaw: "The deviation [i.e., the collapse] could only have occurred through lack of public criticism."⁷⁴ His intent was to persuade the Fascist leadership of the necessity of establishing a system of accountability to the public, going so far as to argue that Italy should even cease being a one-party state. In his autobiographical summary of the unfolding debates he wrote after the war, he claimed he was aiming at a fundamental political reorientation: removing authoritarian tendencies from Fascism, so that "action no longer be derived from the commands of superiors, but from a kind of 'collective vibration'" – from something akin to public opinion uncontrolled from above, whose legitimacy the Fascist party had never accepted. Pini considered himself a true Fascist, an Italian patriot, and a loyal supporter of Mussolini, but was questioning the very essence of the Fascist ethos – what about "believe, obey, fight"? Were good Fascists even supposed to offer their opinions, question authority, proffer advice? The good Fascist Pini, who spoke personally to Mussolini every week for several years, was in conflict with some of the foundational principles of Fascism, boldly and openly re-evaluating them in the pages of a major national newspaper: "too many things," he wrote, months before "Scongellare," on December 11, just after hearing Mussolini's circular to the prefects, "have had to be accomplished by force, too many people are considered

⁷⁴ Giorgio Pini, "Impostazione." *Il Resto del Carlino*, December 5, 1943.

untouchable, and from too many places prohibitions and orders rain down on us,” as he relates in his post-war memoir.⁷⁵ Persisting with this line, on January 10, 1944 (immediately after the Verona trials) he declared “absolute authoritarianism, with its relative psychological separation between those who command and those who obey, along with the cold dogmatism that prevents circulation of ideas, constitute errors we cannot allow ourselves to fall back into.”⁷⁶ This time he had crossed the limit, and was summoned to Minculpop headquarters in Salò for his first official reprimand.

After heedlessly shrugging off Mezzasoma’s warning, he returned to Bologna with renewed resolution: “in full freedom of conscience I had already fixed on my course ... and that was what I intended to follow, rejecting orders and intimidation.”⁷⁷ Regardless of the personal risk, Pini felt unable to retreat from his stance, for he was “obsessed with worry that these errors would repeat themselves”.⁷⁸ As paradoxical as it may seem to the modern observer, for whom authoritarianism lies at the very heart of Fascism and cannot be divorced from it, Pini was urging his compatriots to envision Fascism without it. His increasingly urgent tone came to a climax on April 2, 1944 when he published “Scongellare: Rapporto a Pavolini.” Its title derived from a recent conversation with Mussolini,

⁷⁵Pini, 48-50. Ganapini refers to Pini’s autobiography as “self-eulogizing” (Ganapini 181, n102). See also Giorgio Pini, “Il metodo.” *Il Resto del Carlino*, December 11, 1943.

⁷⁶Id., 54. See also Giorgio Pini, “La terza strada.” *Il Resto del Carlino*, January 10, 1944.

⁷⁷Id., 55.

⁷⁸Id, 48.

in which the Duce observed that a general “thawing” or unfreezing of political postures was “an urgent political and psychological need of the moment.”⁷⁹

“Scongelare” begins by describing a rally held in Bologna on behalf of the recently assassinated *federale* [Fascist militia chief], Eugenio Facchini. Pini relates how he watched his peers celebrate Facchini as a different kind of Fascist, one with a critical spirit, a nonconformist, a man who urged a belief in the young. He thought to himself ironically that the *federale*’s successor would not be chosen by the rank and file gathered in front of him, but by the authorities, men altogether indifferent to Facchini’s special qualities. The crowd’s tumultuous and combative behavior attested to their spontaneous and sincere adherence to Fascism, one would think, yet such convocations could be called only by the *gerarchi*; such freedom of assembly was never allowed ordinary Fascist party members. Thus Pini urgently wanted Pavolini (and others) to understand that this rally was itself a demonstration of how valuable it was to Fascism to permit an honest and open exchange of ideas. That it was conducted in utter disorder prompted the reflection that party members were too used to taking orders, too used to not being listened to, and their boisterous conduct and incapacity to express themselves persuasively were due to their utter inexperience with spontaneous gatherings of that sort.

One matter, he argued, united the crowd more than anything else: the need for changing the methods of Fascism. Discontent with authoritarian rule

⁷⁹Id., 71.

was palpable: “We do not understand or approve the method of deliberating on important issues without critical examination ... One presents a plan for examination, one does not make a decision among a few, drums beating, without letting it be heard.” An example of this was the new republican constitution, to be written without any prior discussion, which represented the tendency of Fascist leaders to “issue fundamental rules without any discussion from interested parties.”

Such condemnation of rule from above begs the question: what, after all, did Pini think Fascism really was, he who had enjoyed virtual daily contact with Mussolini since 1936? “Real Fascists,” he asserted, “are those who are lively, capable of fighting, persevering – it is this dynamism which must prevail over a deadly and stultifying bureaucracy.” He reduces Fascism to a vague, personal description, as “men who always do their duty as Italians, who live and struggle for the common good, for a free and powerful homeland, for an ideal of civilization and social justice.” Defined in such broad terms; we find no mention here of Fascism’s identification with Italian culture, ancient Roman virtue, the “ethical state”, or superiority to liberal democracy or socialism – all characteristics celebrated in Gentile’s recent writings and current among fellow *concilatori*. Nor do we find any of the blood-soaked imagery favored by the intransigents, whose repeated calls for revenge against the traitors and endless war against the foreign plutocratic oppressor formed the *leitmotif* of Salò propaganda. Pini’s words could describe anyone’s ideal of good government – even perhaps a democratic one. “Scongellare” concludes with its author re-emphasizing that, for

consent and spontaneous adherence to emerge, the *methods* of Fascism must be separated from its *substance* [italics mine]; that the only way for Fascism's substance to survive, is for Fascists to abandon the old methods and acquire new ones. It was authoritarianism that was responsible for the corruption of Fascism, the betrayal of the old *gerarchi*, and the alienation of the masses; its continuing survival depended on freedom of discussion and democratic methods. But these he left unnamed.⁸⁰

Pini's outspokenness provoked strong public reaction, which came in the form of hundreds of letters sent to him anonymously. Most readers supported his views, only a few disagreed.⁸¹ In the press he was attacked in *L'assalto* (the Bologna Fascist party weekly) and in Farinacci's *Il Regime Fascista*, but won praise from Concetto Pettinato and Barna Occhini, as well as from Mario Rivoire of *Secolo XIX* (Genoa), Ezio Maria Gray of *Gazzetta del Popolo*, Castelletti of Verona's *L'Arena* and Mirko Giobbe of Florence's *La Nazione*. In fact, the polemic that erupted between Farinacci and these last two editors contributed to both being sacked by Mezzasoma shortly thereafter. Party secretary Pavolini responded publicly by ridiculing Pini's "mania for discussion" in a Fascist party meeting held in Como.⁸²

Pini's resoluteness in writing "Scongellare" earned him his second official admonishment from Mezzasoma, who followed up by distributing a circular

⁸⁰ Giorgio Pini, "Scongellare." *Il Resto del Carlino*, April 2, 1944.

⁸¹ Pini, 76.

⁸² Amicucci, 117.

addressed to all newspaper editors,⁸³ which was read aloud to Pini at Minculpop headquarters in Salò.⁸⁴ But before preventative censorship was reinstated at the end of May 1944, Pini published one more attack on authoritarianism in late April in which he reminded his fellow Italians that “to obey and fight one must first believe ... the automatism that omits individual consent has emptied the party of its original searing dynamism.”⁸⁵ Pini was finally removed from directorship of *Il Resto del Carlino* in October 1944 and made undersecretary of the Interior, reporting, however, not to the intransigent Interior Minister Buffarini Guidi, but directly to Mussolini.⁸⁶ Along with Amicucci and Pettinato, he was among the few Fascist newspaper editors to survive the war’s bloody, vengeful aftermath.

The *Politica dei Ponti* campaign had already come to an end by May 31, before Concetto Pettinato published on the front page of *La Stampa* “Se ci sei, batti un colpo” [If you’re there, give a knock]. Nothing published during the existence of the Italian Social Republic provoked as much excited enthusiasm in the Italian reading public, and as much alarm in Fascist and Nazi authorities, as Pettinato’s article did on June 21, 1944. But it went well beyond the *Politica dei Ponti* campaign, which involved a discussion of the merits of freedom of the press and political pluralism. Pettinato’s article did no such thing; rather than simply calling for freedom of the press, it exercised it, boldly and confidently. It spoke

⁸³ Amicucci, 125-127. Amicucci quotes the entire memorandum.

⁸⁴ Pini, 77-81.

⁸⁵ Giorgio Pini, “Idee repubblicane.” *Il Resto del Carlino*, April 28, 1944.

⁸⁶ Pini, 120.

obvious truths, asserting what the public already knew, and what everybody was too afraid to openly admit.⁸⁷

Pettinato had returned from Switzerland in December 1943, where he had lived since the beginning of the war. His engagement with Salò followed a trajectory similar to Pini's: assigned as the leading editor of Turin's *La Stampa*, he at once began to argue that for Italians to rally to Salò's purified Fascism, a new attitude toward freedom of discussion and criticism first had to be permitted.⁸⁸ After Mezzasoma hinted that such remarks were unwelcome, he held his peace for several months, turning his attention to writing several articles extolling Mussolini's socialist measures.⁸⁹ In early April, in the wake of Pini's "Scongellare," he returned to the topic of political freedom, insisting upon "a regular and constant contact, a cordial collaboration between authority and public."⁹⁰ Two weeks later he elaborated on the same theme in two separate articles: what was required today, he pointed out, was "intense political life, a real commitment, inspired by a clear vision ... not blind obedience. To change this, it is necessary to change the reigning atmosphere within the party, with its

⁸⁷ See Eugenio Arcidiacono, "Concetto Pettinato Direttore della *Stampa* di Torino durante la RSI." *Studi Storici*, Anno 43 (April – June 2002) 573-597, for a comprehensive account of Pettinato's involvement in Salò journalism. The author seems reluctant to offer any sort of interpretation.

⁸⁸ Concetto Pettinato, "Libertà e responsabilità." *La Stampa*, December 31, 1943.

⁸⁹ Pettinato, 1966 292-293. See also, by Pettinato in *La Stampa*, "La Repubblica e i lavoratori." January 4, 1944; "Lo Stato assume la gestione delle aziende." January 14, 1944; "Il lavoro associate ai destini delle aziende." January 15, 1944; and "Appunti sull'individuo. Lo Stato e la libertà." January 23, 1944.

⁹⁰ Pettinato, "Incontrarci." *La Stampa*, April 7, 1944.

aversion to all criticism.”⁹¹ When he finally published “Se ci sei, batti un colpo,” a few weeks after the capture of Rome and the Normandy landings, with the fortunes of the Axis looking decidedly bleaker, it expressed the barely contained sense of exasperation that many felt.

“Se ci sei, batti un colpo” was a direct challenge to both the government and to Mussolini himself. It addressed the central weakness of the Salò Republic: the alienation of its citizens. It did so by presenting an evaluation of Salò as brutally honest as anything found in the clandestine press of the Resistance or broadcast on Radio London. The alienation of the citizens, he claimed, was not hard to explain: the Salò government presented no tangible reality. It offered no security against growing partisan violence. The socialization program was an obvious fraud (this, after he had signed several articles praising it in January), a sop thrown to the people. And with Rome now in Allied hands, could the government tell them why their army was still not engaging the enemy? All these issues betrayed such fundamental weakness that he questioned whether any Italian government really existed; was anything behind the façade? “If you’re there, give a knock.” People like himself, loyal supporters of Mussolini, longed to believe in Salò, but the government had given them nothing, he argued, although it never ceased demanding from them a willingness to throw their lives away for the honor of Italy. It was just this “propaganda of death,” as Luigi Micheletti had recalled from his adolescence, this knowledge that the enemy would eventually prevail,

⁹¹ Pettinato, “Critica e collaborazione,” *La Stampa*, April 21, 1944. Quotation from “Patria e popolo.” April 23, 1944.

yet Italians nevertheless should “sell their skins dear,” that Pettinato was insisting be replaced with something that would give people hope. Before any government can demand the ultimate sacrifice of its people, it had first to show that it actually exists, he said. Given the present circumstances, this façade of a government had no right to claim blind obedience from anyone.⁹²

Pettinato’s article passed the German censor (Ludwig Alwens, former Italian correspondent for the official Nazi Party newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter*, who was immediately fired). Nor had the Italian *addetto stampa* raised any objections. Its publication provoked an avalanche of support from the general public, and much consternation from Fascist authorities.⁹³ The paper was confiscated the day it appeared, but not before it almost entirely sold out.⁹⁴ In Turin, on the morning it appeared, hundreds gathered at the steps of the building where *La Stampa* was headquartered to show their support. Pettinato, who received several hundred letters from readers congratulating him on telling the honest truth, was also advised repeatedly to go into hiding before he was arrested. Interestingly, he refused to even consider this: “They never touched a hair on my head. I always had, I don’t know why, complete faith in Mussolini’s sentiments towards me.”⁹⁵ A report sent to Mussolini from Genoa commented on the extraordinary clamor raised by the article’s publication, referring to the

⁹² Pettinato, “Se ci sei, batti un colpo.” *La Stampa*, June 21, 1944.

⁹³ Pettinato, 315-318.

⁹⁴ Many found they could actually sell a copy on the black market for as much as a thousand lire, at a time when a meal in a restaurant went for less than fifty lire. Pettinato, 317.

⁹⁵ Pettinato, 318.

“disastrous and demoralizing” effect it had on republican Fascists, as well as the “exultant” one it had on non-Fascists.⁹⁶ A report from Milan was even more alarming:

Such article expresses the unanimous opinion of fascists (excepting a few elements who see things differently) and constitutes, in certain ways, an accusation, not so much against the government whose head is still Mussolini, but against the totality of the men who surround Mussolini who have not yet realized that as a tragic situation looms, sending telegrams of approval, the foolish chronicle of present enthusiastic manifestations toward the Regime and other idiocies provokes aversion in fascists, laughter in adversaries and bruises the nerves of the whole people.... The people consider Fascism, or better yet, the huge majority of gerarchi, to be responsible for the catastrophe pulling Italy down.⁹⁷

Radio London also commented on the article in its broadcast of June 28, and then a few days later another broadcast returned to it, followed by one more from Radio New York.⁹⁸ No official reprimand came to him from Minculpop (or the Germans), as Pini had twice suffered. When the new German censor decided to make a nasty scene over a triviality, Pettinato immediately tendered his resignation, but was answered two hours later by an *addetto stampa* sent expressly from Minculpop to apologize. He was, however, forbidden to publish editorials for several months in *La Stampa*.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ ACS SPD CR RSI b 23, f 161, “Appunto per il Duce – Genova” July 1, 1944.

⁹⁷ Id., “Appunto per il Duce – Milano” July 3, 1944.

⁹⁸ Id., Transcript of Bulletin, “I tedeschi sarebbero nell’impossibilità di combattere i banditi italiani – Il governo Fascista non avrebbe alcuna autorità.” June 28, 1944, “Commento di Candidus” (Radio London broadcast transcript), “Ore 20:30: il recente articolo di Pettinato travisato da un tal Quirino Romani al Radio Nuova York.” (s.d., but alludes to the article’s appearance “a few days ago”).

⁹⁹ See Pettinato, 315- 336. For public reaction, see ACS SPD CR RSI b. 23, b. 161, two “Appunti per il Duce,” both headed “Milano, 3 Luglio, 1944,” both discussing the public clamor raised by Pettinato. See also a letter, in the same folder, unaddressed, July 7, 1944, discussing the political

Mezzasoma's only reaction was to write a letter accusing him of scoring a cheap personal victory for the sake of popularity.¹⁰⁰ Pettinato continued to edit *La Stampa* almost until the end of the war. On February 20, 1945 he wrote an article holding Italians partly to blame for the catastrophe they were facing.¹⁰¹ He was finally relieved of his directorship on March 2, 1945, replaced by Francesco Scardaoni.¹⁰² The day before, Pini wrote to Mussolini to support Pettinato, expressing his "immense sadness ... before this new manifestation of *gerarchica* intolerance."¹⁰³ This time, Pavolini brought charges against him on the disciplinary counsel of the Partito fascista repubblicana, in which he was to be asked to explain how one can proclaim oneself above political parties, and still be a member of the Fascist party.¹⁰⁴

Unlike other participants of the *Politica dei Ponti*, Pettinato's other articles represent less a sustained effort to unite his readers around a renewed version of Fascism, than it seems a muted campaign on behalf of freedom of the press – certainly compared to Pini and Borsani, until June that is, when it finally

situation in Turin with regard to Pettinato's article, and "Appunto per il Duce – Genova, July 1, 1944" describing demoralization of Fascists in reaction to "Se ci sei ..." and corresponding exultation of non-Fascists. This busta also contains a transcript of a broadcast from Radio London (s.d., but likely June 30, 1944), inaccurately reporting that Pettinato had been arrested.

¹⁰⁰Pettinato, 325.

¹⁰¹"L'assente." *La Stampa*, February 20, 1945.

¹⁰²Pettinato, 394-403. See also, Amicucci, 134-137.

¹⁰³Bertoldi, 302.

¹⁰⁴ACS SPD CR RSI b. 23, f. 161, Letter addressed to Dott. Pino Romualdi, Presidente della Commissione di Disciplina del P.F.R., February 21, 1945. In a ten-page memo, Pavolini never listed any particular charges he wanted brought against Pettinato, but throughout inveighed against this particular article as having done much to undermine the morale of Fascist Party members and soldiers fighting the partisans.

culminated in a frustrated outburst. His writings from the previous autumn had dwelt on freedom of discussion, but not on a renewal of Fascism. Bertoldi related the “Se ci sei...” incident in his history of the RSI in the 1970s, but endowed it with no special significance, except to say that it caused a scandal. Similarly, the journalist Giorgio Bocca a year later credited Pettinato, along with Amiccuci, with having polemicized against the extremists, but only mentioned “Se ci sei, batti un colpo” in passing, and drew no conclusions from it.¹⁰⁵ Cannistraro quotes a report from the summer of 1944 that the tone of the press had assumed “a gray and uniform aspect” in the aftermath of a crackdown on the recently enjoyed press freedom: “The Pettinato case continues to be discussed. It is said that the best journalists are afraid of writing, because in doing so, they would meet the same fate as Giobbe ... Castelletti ... Borsani ... and Pettinato.”¹⁰⁶

It deserves to be emphasized, once again, that all its participants were directly appointed by Mussolini, with basically unrestricted access to him. It seemed for a while that Italians enjoyed an almost alarming degree of freedom of expression. But on closer examination, this is obviously not true, since the only people speaking their minds in the press were friends of the Duce. In this light, it is entirely possible to regard the whole *Politica dei Ponti* as a controlled exercise in Fascist self-presentation, whose true parameters consisted not only of

¹⁰⁵Bocca, 223, 269.

¹⁰⁶Cannistraro 1975, 342. The quotation is from a Colonnello Collù. The text misidentifies the date of the report as April 1944, but the footnote on p. 411 indicates August 19, 1944.

Mussolini's tacit approval, but the temporary German willingness to drop preventive censorship.

The significance of the Pettinato episode lies in the light it sheds on Mussolini's relations with the members of his government. If both he and the intransigents had been in basic agreement on propaganda policy, one could have expected to see at the very least Pettinato given an official reprimand, not to mention removed from his post immediately. But punishment was delayed. He continued to serve as editor of *La Stampa*, even though his presence there continued to seriously annoy Pavolini, who remained intent on pursuing the matter against him right up until the last weeks of the war. Considering the level of alarm his outburst had caused, why was his removal delayed for almost nine months, until a few weeks before the end of the war, when it hardly mattered? It seems plausible to surmise that, for the same reason Pini found himself appointed undersecretary in the Interior Ministry, answerable only to the Duce: Pettinato enjoyed Mussolini's protection.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANTI-SEMITISM

Until Badoglio's surrender and the German occupation that followed it, the Jews of Italy had mostly been spared the unspeakable horrors suffered by their co-religionists in the rest of occupied Europe. But this does not mean life was not already difficult and dangerous for Italian Jews. Anti-Semitic oppression, designed to set them apart from the rest of the nation, had begun in 1938 with the racial laws. Under these measures, Jews were stripped of civil rights, removed from professions, public administration, state education, the military, the Fascist party; prevented from marrying Christians; and subjected to strict regulation of their property. No Italian, however, had yet been killed for being a Jew.¹ Yet in the midst of the racial laws and ever-increasing propaganda, most Italians remained hostile to anti-Semitism.² Even the army, fighting alongside its German

¹ Michele Sarfatti, *Gli ebrei nell'Italia fascista: Vicende, identità, persecuzione* (Turin, 2000) 201. None in Italy, that is. Two were killed in a pogrom in Italian-occupied Bengasi in 1940. Throughout the 1938-43 period Italian Jews suffered hundreds of physical assaults involving beatings and castor oil as well as (not officially condoned) looting of property and desecration of synagogues. Many Jews were also drafted into forced labor after 1940.

For a review of Sarfatti's work see Meir Michaelis, "Ebrei nell'Italia fascista," *Rivista storica italiana*, CXIV, F.1, 2002, 266-271. Michaelis refers to Sarfatti's meticulous and "revisionist" work as among the three most important on the subject (next to De Felice's and his own), and credits him with a much more thorough investigation of early Fascism's conflict with Jews than anyone else has done, as well as a successful elaboration of his central thesis: that Jews were in danger from the moment Fascism took power. He finds, however, that Sarfatti's book omits discussion of issues "that do not serve his ideological objectives" (such as Mussolini's private condemnation of anti-Semitism, remarked upon by many of his interlocutors) and so cannot be considered wholly successful revision of De Felice's earlier work.

² The degree of anti-Semitism in Italian society remains a contentious topic, and includes the question of to what degree Fascism itself was anti-Semitic. Most historians of Fascism agree that while anti-Semitism was not entirely absent from the Italian population, there had never been any real "Jewish question" in Italy – that is, Jews were never a political issue until the late 1930s. This point is discussed in more depth in the pages that follow. See the comprehensive discussion of consensus among historians on this topic in Meir Michalis, "Renzo De Felice quale storico dell'ebraismo italiano," *Italian Quarterly*, Winter-Spring 2004, Year XLI, Nos. 159-160, 7-45,

ally, repeatedly refused Nazi requests to hand over, for “resettlement in the east,” the non-Italian Jewish populations living in the areas of Yugoslavia, Greece, Albania, and southern France occupied by Italian forces until September 8, 1943.³

Loss of Italian autonomy and Mussolini’s new role as Hitler’s puppet ensured that the Holocaust would be extended to Italy. The Italian Social Republic’s participation in the round up and murder of thousands of Jews stands as one of the more conspicuous reasons for why historians have long characterized this period as Italian Fascism’s most extreme phase. Soon after the Germans came onto the scene, the Nazi S.S. began systematically to hunt down Jews and send them to death camps in Poland and Germany, from which only a handful emerged. But the Germans could not have done this without Italian help to identify who was Jewish. In December 1943, they enlisted local Italian police to help round up Jews. Due to the courageous (and clandestine) help of many Italians, including many members of the Church hierarchy at the local level, four out of five of Italy’s Jews managed to avoid capture and death. Nevertheless, almost eight thousand individuals, or eighteen percent of Italy’s pre-war Jewish population, perished during the twenty months of German occupation.⁴

who observes, “The difference between Italy and the majority of other nations resides in the fact that in Italy, the general opinion was that the Jews had so effectively assimilated (“disebraizzarsi”), that a “Jewish question” in the common meaning of the word, did not exist” 10.

³ See Jonathan Steinberg, *All or Nothing: the Axis and the Holocaust, 1941-1943* (London/New York, 1990). See also Menachem Shelah, “The Italian Rescue of Yugoslav Jews, 1941-1943.” and John Bierman, “How Italy Protected the Jews in the Occupied South of France, 1943-1943.” both in Ivo Herzer, Klaus Voigt, and James Burgwyn, eds., *The Italian Refuge. Rescue of Jews During the Holocaust* (Washington, 1989) 205-217; 218-230; and Sarfatti, 200-224.

⁴ Renzo De Felice, *The Jews in Fascist Italy* (trans. Robert L. Miller) (New York, 2001 (originally published in Italian in 1961 as *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo* and revised in 1993; in

What part did Italian anti-Semitic intellectuals play in Salò, when the most notoriously fanatical anti-Semites, such as Giovanni Preziosi, Telesio Interlandi, Roberto Farinacci and Guido Buffarini Guidi, were established in ministerial, press and party positions? An answer must first take into consideration some of the larger, long-term forces that shaped the hideous situation facing the Jews: Fascism's legacy of anti-Semitism, Mussolini's own attitude towards the Jews (and that of his ministers), but most important, the presence in Italy of the German military and S.S. Another aspect of this question is what impact might Salò have had on intellectuals.

I. The Growth of Fascist Anti-Semitism until September 1943

Although the size and importance of an anti-Semitic tradition in modern Italy remains a matter of debate, historians are in broad agreement that before Mussolini's 1938 racial laws, it was negligible compared to other parts of Europe.⁵ Moreover, in response to the development of a "Jewish problem" in

citing, I refer to 1993)) 450. De Felice puts the figure at slightly less than 7,000. Cf. Meir Michaelis, *Mussolini and the Jews: German - Italian Relations and the Jewish Question in Italy, 1922-1945* (Oxford, 1978) 392. Michaelis, however, states that of the approximately 44,500 Jews resident in Italy at the time of the capitulation (of whom roughly 12,500 were foreign), at least 7,682 died at the hands of the Germans. Sarfatti, 268-269 claims 7700-7900 on the basis of studies by Liliana Picciotto Fargion, "Italian Citizens in Nazi-Occupied Europe: Documents from the Files of the German Foreign Office, 1941-1943." *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual*, VII, 1990, 93-141 and *Il libro della memoria. Gli ebrei deportati dall'Italia (1943-1945)* (Milan, 1990) 25-27. Klinkhammer, 411, cites the same figure as Michaelis.

⁵ Bosworth 1998, 101, ordinarily antagonistic to De Felice and his "school" concedes that De Felice and "previous historians" were correct in their assessment of Italian racism: "A certain degree of racism doubtless speckled Italian minds but, both in the Liberal era and in much of the Fascist one, Italy was the least anti-Semitic country in Europe. Rather, a fearful mimicry of Hitler drove Mussolini to dabble in anti-Semitism, despite the fact that in the past he had frequently derided it." See also Enzo Collotti, *Il Fascismo e gli ebrei. Le leggi razziali in Italia* (Rome/Bari 2003) 3-39, who comments on recent studies of commonplace assumptions and stereotypes that are beginning to alter historians' perceptions about the level and intensity of Italian anti-Semitism, especially with regard to the influence of various Catholic press organs from the late 19th century, as well as

other European states, many Italians, including, in the 1920s, Mussolini himself, often remarked on its absence in Italy. Contributing to this absence was the small size of the Jewish community – almost 50,000 in a population of over 42 million – and its degree of assimilation. Because of a continuous Jewish presence stretching back to the days of ancient Rome, with little recent Jewish immigration into Italy, Jews were less likely than in the rest of Europe to be regarded as alien, speaking a foreign language and “invading” the community with foreign ways and attitudes; moreover, even during the middle ages, Renaissance and Counter-Reformation, in Italy “the line of division between Christian and Jew was never as sharp as it was elsewhere,” according to H. Stuart Hughes.⁶ Most of Italy’s Jews had been released from the ghettos during the Napoleonic occupation, thriving throughout the nineteenth century; those in the Papal States were freed with Italian unification in 1861 and the capture of Rome in 1870.⁷ Jews tended to be among the most literate and highly educated Italians, which facilitated their swift

Italian colonial ventures in Africa. This author nevertheless concedes that anti-Semitism had not become a political movement in Italy until the 1930s.

For the following remarks on the background to Fascist anti-Semitism I rely primarily on the following works: De Felice, *The Jews in Fascist Italy*, Michaelis, *Mussolini and the Jews*, Sarfatti, *Gli ebrei nell’Italia fascista*, Susan Zuccotti, *The Italians and the Holocaust: Persecution, Rescue and Survival* (New York, 1987), Jonathan Steinberg, *All or Nothing: The Axis and the Holocaust, 1941-43*. For an assessment of De Felice’s, Michaelis’, Zuccotti’s and Steinberg’s books, see Charles Delzell, “The Italians and the Holocaust,” *Italian Quarterly*, XXXII: 123-124, Winter-Spring 1995, 85-97.

⁶ H. Stuart Hughes, *Prisoners of Hope: The Silver Age of the Italian Jews, 1924-1974* (Cambridge/London, 1983) 14. Recent studies have brought to light a more pervasive anti-Semitism in modern Italian society before the Holocaust, challenging much of the standard historiography on the topic. For a study of the influence of Catholic-inspired anti-Semitism in modern Italy, see David I. Kertzer, *The Popes Against the Jews: the Vatican’s Role in the Rise of Modern Anti-Semitism* (New York, 2001).

⁷ Sarfatti, 1-8.

rise in social and economic importance after Italian independence.⁸ “Before the turn of the century Italy’s Jews appeared fully integrated into the national life,” indeed they constituted “a special and respected variety of elite,” according to Hughes, who also observes they were often known as ardent supporters of the Risorgimento and continued, even after promulgation of the racial laws, to be regarded by their countrymen as the most staunchly patriotic Italians.⁹

In late nineteenth century Europe, anti-Semitism grew explosively, especially in the Hapsburg Empire, Russia, and France, and along with it grew a large body of anti-Semitic propaganda. But because of Italy’s comparative lack of an anti-Semitic tradition, Italians were rarely exposed to this kind of literature, a situation that persisted until Giovanni Preziosi published his translation of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in 1921. For Italians of the Liberal period, anti-Semitism was something one might find abroad, but not in Italy, and when encountered, it was often greeted with disgust and incomprehension. Such a response can be seen, for example, in the Italian reaction to the Dreyfus Affair in France in the 1890s, whose vitriolic anti-Semitism Italian journalists tried to explain to their readers as an instrument of resurgent clericalism.¹⁰ What little anti-Semitic propaganda could be found in Italy appeared mostly in the Catholic press, in periodicals such as *La Rassegna Nazionale* or the official Jesuit

⁸ Zuccotti, 12- 20. See also Sarfatti, 6-7, who demonstrates with figures based on government statistics that the illiteracy rate among Italian Jews in 1900 was 5.7 percent, at a time when the national illiteracy rate was still 49.9 percent.

⁹ Hughes, 19.

¹⁰ Maurizio Raspi, *L’Affaire Dreyfus in Italia* (Pisa, 1991) 22. This book consists of a compilation of Italian newspaper articles covering the Dreyfus Affair.

periodical *La Civiltà Cattolica*. But even the Catholic anti-Semitic tradition was in abeyance in Liberal, secular Italy; as Susan Zuccotti observes, “Dreyfus was especially persecuted [in France] by an aristocratic, clerical class that in Italy had been dispossessed by the Risorgimento.”¹¹

The Fascist party articulated no official position with regard to anti-Semitism until well after Hitler’s rise to power in Germany, and, until Mussolini began his anti-Semitic campaign in 1936, many Italian Jews in the early years of the regime felt little reluctance in joining the Fascist Party. Of Jewish participation in the Fascist party, De Felice observes “their presence was a sort of guarantee of the loyalty and patriotism of their fellow Italian Jews and an obstacle to the appearance of real anti-Semitism.”¹²

According to the historians De Felice and Michaelis, the responsibility for Fascist Italy’s becoming an officially anti-Semitic state belongs solely to Mussolini, whose sudden recognition of an Italian “Jewish problem” in the 1930s resulted primarily from wishing to cement closer ties with Hitler’s Germany.¹³ According to Michaelis, “Mussolini had all sorts of grievances with the Jews but

¹¹ Zuccotti, 279.

¹² De Felice 1993, 58. See also Alexander Stille, *Benevolence and Betrayal: five Italian Jewish families under Fascism* (New York, 1991).

¹³ De Felice 1993, 231-232: “an Italian alignment on anti-Semitism would automatically overcome certain German suspicions toward Italy.” Sarfatti disagrees with De Felice and Michaelis; his research brings to light much evidence, published and unpublished, of a steadily increasing Fascist hostility toward Jews, which resulted in the anti-Semitic legislation of 1938. This allows him to conclude that Mussolini’s urge to align Italian policies with German ones was irrelevant. Michaelis’s essay of 2004 challenges Sarfatti’s view by quoting testimony of contemporary witnesses, German, Fascist and antifascist, left out of Sarfatti’s discussion, as well as Mussolini’s own disavowals of a Jewish question both before and after the racial laws were promulgated.

only one reason for persecuting them as a ‘race’ – his ill-fated alliance with a Jew-baiter.”¹⁴ His extraordinary cynicism is worth noting; there is much evidence to demonstrate that privately, Mussolini never believed Jews constituted any kind of threat to Italy or the Fascist regime, and that he regarded Nazi racial ideology as bogus and irrational;¹⁵ as late as 1942 his doubts about it, and his incomprehension of their centrality to Nazi ideology, were strong enough that “he still harbored the illusion that ‘Rosenberg’s theories’ would not succeed after the war and should be revamped.”¹⁶ While it was primarily for the sake of close alignment with Nazi Germany that Mussolini opted for state-sponsored racism, another motive arose when, from the mid-1930s onwards, he tried to move the regime in a more totalitarian direction. This necessarily involved the exclusion of “outsiders” who honored separate traditions; any politics which were not Fascist politics, such as Zionist politics, threatened the totalitarian consolidation he envisioned.¹⁷

Furthermore, it is clear Hitler never tried to pressure Mussolini into adopting anti-Semitic measures. The assumptions of many anti-Fascist historians

¹⁴Michaelis 1978, 125.

¹⁵Michaelis 1978, 138: “During his official visit to Germany (25-29 September 1937) Mussolini told a German acquaintance (a diplomat with whom he had been acquainted both before and after the Nazi take-over in 1933) that Hitler’s persecution of the Jews and the Churches was a source of embarrassment to him, adding that he would have preferred to deal with a less extremist regime.” Michaelis cites Hoepke, *Die deutsche Rechte und der italienische Faschismus* (Düsseldorf, 1968) 259.

¹⁶De Felice 1993, 237.

¹⁷Sarfatti’s discussion (53-102) of the growth of Fascist hostility to Jews between 1922 and 1936 is the most meticulously researched and up-to-date treatment of the topic, according to Michaelis 2004.

writing immediately after the war – that Hitler directly influenced Mussolini in this regard – have been exploded; as De Felice notes, “no document or eye-witness account has surfaced from that period to the present suggesting, before [late 1942—early 1943] that any such direct intervention took place.”¹⁸

In earlier years, Mussolini often demonstrated ambivalent, contradictory behavior towards the Jews. His intellectual and emotional mentor, Angelica Balabanoff, and his long-time mistress (until the mid-1930s) and first official biographer, Margherita Sarfatti (who converted to Catholicism in 1928), were Jewish. Until reined in by Hitler, many early Nazis in Germany were loudly critical of Mussolini for his lack of anti-Semitic views.¹⁹ Before his rapprochement with Germany, his hostile references to Jews were confined to the financial power of “international Jewry.”²⁰ He also expressed sharp distrust toward Italian Zionists, whom he suspected of a conflict of loyalties. The Italian Zionist Congress that was to be held in Milan in November 1928, for example, provoked him three weeks after the event to publish an unsigned article in *Il Popolo di Roma*, “Religione o Nazione?” criticizing Italian Jews as unpatriotic; after the Congress concluded he followed up with another article in mid-December dismissing the idea that Zionists could call themselves patriotic Italians while at the same time aspiring to the creation of a Jewish state on Palestine.

¹⁸De Felice 1993, 231-32. He also quotes Ciano’s diary from 1937: “The Jews are accusing me in insulting and anonymous letters of having promised to Hitler that they would be persecuted. Untrue. Never have the Germans spoken to us about this issue.” See also Michaelis, 120-168 for a highly detailed reconstruction of the kind of German influence exerted in Italy before 1942.

¹⁹Michaelis 1978, 36, 127.

²⁰Id., 30.

However, he did continue to permit Italian Jews to engage in Zionist activities within certain limits.²¹

The first officially sanctioned criticism of Jews appeared in the Italian press in late 1932, alongside articles by Italian Jews expressing horrified reaction to events in Germany on the eve of the Nazi seizure of power. Mussolini saw fit to quickly suppress this Jewish reaction as much as possible; while privately contemptuous of Nazi racial ideology, he was unwilling to permit Italian Jews to offend the leader of a “fellow fascist” movement, perhaps recognizing there were, after all, many things Fascism shared with Nazism. Throughout 1933 and 1934 Mussolini repeatedly condemned Nazi racial theories as “unscientific nonsense” and “barbaric,” held Hitler at arm’s length, voiced doubts about his sanity and remarked disparagingly about him in private, referring to him in February 1934, for example, as “that idiot in Berlin.” In the immediate aftermath of Hitler’s rise to power, Mussolini was more concerned to highlight the ways Nazism and Italian Fascism differed from each other, with Fascism insistently identified as a “spiritual movement.” The Italian press even launched a sustained attack on Hitler’s Nordic master race creed at the end of 1933.²²

The Italian invasion of Ethiopia marked the decisive turning point in the evolution of Mussolini’s attitudes toward the Nazi regime. Enraged by British and French denunciation of Italian aggression, and always contemptuous of the

²¹ Philip V. Cannistraro and Brian R. Sullivan, *Il Duce’s Other Woman* (New York, 1993) 343-345.

²² Michaelis 1978, 76-80. He also, however, welcomed Hitler on an official visit to Italy in May 1934.

western democracies anyway – destined, he believed, to be eclipsed by the new dynamic dictatorships – he now cast a more sympathetic eye on Germany. International events soon pushed Italy and Germany closer together, a development that would by 1939 culminate in the Pact of Steel, the formal military alliance between the two nations. In March 1936, Hitler reoccupied the Rhineland, shattering the French system of alliances and turning Germany into a viable military ally against the democracies, and in July of that year Mussolini launched his country's participation in the Spanish Civil War, further alienating Britain and France. Hitler at this moment reached out to Mussolini by recognizing Italy's conquest of Ethiopia. Thereafter both dictators began to collaborate by loosely coordinating their propaganda machines vis-à-vis anti-communist propaganda, in a diplomatic pact in October 1936 which Mussolini dubbed the Rome-Berlin Axis. He now began to drop his public stance of toleration toward the Jews.

According to De Felice, “in order to give credibility to the Axis, it was necessary to eliminate the most glaring difference in the policies of the two regimes . . . an Italian alignment on anti-Semitism would automatically overcome certain German suspicions toward Italy.”²³ Before Mussolini began taking steps to incorporate anti-Semitism into Fascist ideology, there arose a parallel cause for the growth of his racial consciousness: the conquest of Ethiopia had brought in its wake rumors of miscegenation between Italian soldiers and African natives.

²³De Felice 1993, 231-232.

Mussolini reacted to this by issuing a series of racially discriminatory decrees that strictly regulated sexual relations between Italian troops and the Ethiopian population.²⁴ As De Felice argues, racial consciousness would help prevent “mongrelization” which Mussolini feared would result from the presence his Italian troops among African natives.²⁵

Mussolini always showed reluctance in admitting wholeheartedly to biological racism, which he had long scorned as the product of a materialistic and positivistic mentality, although he later endorsed biological racism in the “Manifesto of the Scientists” and in the subsequent racial legislation enacted in 1938. He often insisted Fascist anti-Semitism must be different, must “acquire its own character and not simply turn out to be the Italian version of Nazi legislation.”²⁶ In the late 1930s he seized upon the views of one of Gentile’s followers, Julius Evola (1898-1974), whose theories positing “spiritual racism” countered the materialistic racism of the Nazis. Evola’s doctrine, a bizarre conception of spirit and race in which “all that appears in the world of sense experience is a manifestation of spiritual energies,” and that underlying the

²⁴Michaelis 1978, 115-116. Sarfatti, 106, 113-123, notes that it was during the Ethiopian campaign that Fascist persecution of the Jews moved from the stage of persecuting their equality, to “the persecution of single Jews (and particularly their rights)”.

²⁵De Felice 1993, 237-239.

²⁶De Felice 1993, 236. Michaelis 1978, also points out that Mussolini’s own aversion to the Jews was quite different than Hitler’s, for whom “racialism was the foundation and corner-stone of his whole being, whereas for Mussolini it was little more than a tactical move caused by a European shift in the balance of power. 183.

biological fact of race are “invisible spiritual formative energies,”²⁷ apparently never seemed contradictory to Mussolini, although the Germans regarded it with scorn and suspicion for its lack of the “scientific” foundation which they claimed underlay their own racism. Evola’s strange theories “succeeded in being accepted as the official Fascist view of race,” even though Mussolini never settled definitely on either the “spiritual” or biological side of the issue.²⁸ Along with a weekly column in Farinacci’s *Il Regime Fascista*, Evola published three works that won him the admiration of the Italian dictator and led in 1941 to an official invitation: *Rivolto contro il mondo moderno* [Revolt against the Modern World] (1934), *Il mito del sangue* [The Myth of Blood] (1937), and *Sintesi di dottrina della razza* [Synthesis of the Racist Doctrine] (1941).²⁹ Apart from his influence on Mussolini’s racism, Evola was to play no direct personal role in the Salò Republic.³⁰

²⁷ Adriano Romualdi, *Julius Evola: l'uomo e l'opera* (Rome, 1968) 49. For its laudatory view of its subject, this book deserves to be treated with caution. For a more recent (and balanced) discussion of Evola’s ideas and activities in Salò, see Gianfranco de Turreis, “Un tradizionalista nella RSI.” *Nuova storia contemporanea*, V: 2, March-April 2001, 79-100.

²⁸ Romualdi, 52. See also Sarfatti, 187 and De Felice, 229-230, but also the ten points raised in the “Manifesto of the Scientists” summarized below, which explicitly endorsed biological racism.

²⁹ Thomas Sheehan, “Diventare Dio: Julius Evola and the Metaphysics of Fascism” *Stanford Italian Review*, 1986, VI, 1-2, 279-292. “Mussolini did, in fact, read and was influenced by Evola’s works on race, especially *Il mito del sangue* (1937) and *Sintesi di dottrina della razza* (1941), but the net effect was simply that il Duce was allowed to adduce higher motives for degrading and persecuting Italian Jews. The utter imbecility of Evola’s racial theories is perhaps captured by a passage (which Mussolini did in fact read) in which Evola describes a ‘limit case’ called ‘telegenesis’: ‘A [white] woman whose sexual relations with a black man have been over for years can, nonetheless, in union with a white man give birth to a black baby’ through ‘subconscious influences.’” Sheehan, 281.

³⁰ For an account of how Evola occupied himself in Austria during the last year of the war, see “Julius Evola.” by Gianfranco de Turreis, in Andriola, ed., 179-198.

The Fascist regime set about preparing popular acceptance of anti-Semitic discrimination by means of a massive press campaign, first unleashed in September 1936 by Roberto Farinacci. Fascist attacks were not limited to denouncing “international Jewry” but this time focused specifically on Italian Jews. Farinacci aggressively set about orchestrating the standard clichés: Jews as agents of a nefarious international conspiracy bent on world domination; Jews secretly plotting with Italy’s enemies to subvert the nation’s interests; the “Bolshevik-Jewish peril.” Employing such poisonous imagery, he published a series of articles attacking Italian Jews for their supposed lack of enthusiasm for the regime. Included in these attacks was a perverse call for Jews to give acceptable proof of their patriotism by demonstrating enthusiastic support for Italy’s one true international friend, the German Führer.³¹ A host of explicitly racist publications had already been launched and joined the chorus of abuse, such as the magazine *Quadrivio* [Crossroads], and the Roman daily edited by Telesio Interlandi, *Il Tevere* [Tiber]. The most notorious of all, the monthly supplement to Farinacci’s *Il Regime Fascista*, under the direction of Giovanni Preziosi, called *La Vita Italiana*, had taken an explicitly anti-Semitic turn in 1920. Not only were racist publications involved in this campaign, but nearly all of Italy’s most prestigious newspapers, including *Corriere della Sera* and *La Stampa*, eventually took part, whose editors (many in Mussolini’s pay) outdid themselves in

³¹“Fascismo ed internazionale ebraica. Una lettera del comm. Ravenna presidente della Unione delle Comunità israelitiche italiane.” *Il Regime Fascista*, September 24, 1936 (quoted in Michaelis 1978, 111).

sycophancy trying to convince their readers that Italy now faced a new and growing problem.³² The apex of this campaign was the publication of Paolo Orano's *Gli ebrei in Italia* [The Jews in Italy] in April 1937, a speciously argued tract purporting to demonstrate Jewish power over Italian economic life and international developments, and charging that Jews were incapable of caring about Italian national interests.³³ Many of his observations were widely trumpeted in the mainstream press, although by the second half of 1937 the campaign was toned down, even as anti-Semitism continued to feature prominently in the racist publications mentioned above.³⁴

On the whole, Italian public opinion reacted negatively to anti-Semitism; as De Felice observes, “on the mass level it had failed to make any headway among the Italian people. Accustomed for decades and centuries to living with Jews without clashes or difficulties, Italians could not comprehend why they should suddenly hate them and persecute them.” One author, Adriano Tilgher, published an article attacking *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, as “the fruit of the imagination of a fanatical and reactionary anti-Semite.”³⁵

³² De Felice 1993, 203: “Few among newsmen, writers and persons of culture were able to avoid this psychosis; most of them would go all the way.” Jewish reaction on the whole was “disgusted and resigned,” but continued to attempt to demonstrate to Mussolini “the good faith, the Italian sentiments, and the Fascist loyalty of all Italian Jews.”

³³ Paolo Orano (1875-1945), a writer and president of the University of Perugia during the 1930s, was a former Socialist and revolutionary syndicalist before joining the Fascist camp.

³⁴ De Felice 1993, 204. On June 8 [1937], “Mussolini ordered Pini, the editor of *Il popolo d'Italia*, to quickly put an end to the campaign.”

³⁵ De Felice 1993, 205. Strangely, Sarfatti comments on Jewish reaction to the racial laws (130-134) but not on those of the Italian public. Michaelis 1978 notes “Pope Pius XI publicly branded it as a ‘disgraceful imitation’ of Hitler’s Nordic policy.” See also Bosworth, 102, who largely accepts

When 1938 began, the only place Jews suffered official discrimination was the Third Reich; by the end of that year, official anti-Semitism had spread to include not only regions seized by Hitler – Austria and the German-speaking Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia – but also Hungary, Romania, and Italy. Early in that year, Mussolini stepped up his anti-Semitic campaign by deciding to remove Jews entirely from public life with a series of decrees similar to the Nazi Nuremberg laws. In January 1938 the anti-Semitic campaign in the press began anew its effort to convince the Italian public of the need for racial legislation. Its language was more violently racist now, reminiscent of the kind of campaign underway in Germany for the previous five years.³⁶ Italians were exhorted to think of themselves as “Aryans,” and to believe that any kind of racial mixing with “non-Aryans” led to weakening and debasement of the race. Fascist propagandists quickly mounted a campaign claiming that Fascism had been anti-Semitic from its very origins, and published long articles “proving” Fascism’s racist roots going back to 1919. In August 1938, Telesio Interlandi founded yet another racist newspaper, *La Difesa della razza* [Defense of the Race].³⁷

This intensified campaign met with the same shock and disgust, yet public reaction was more muted: now, anyone speaking up on behalf of Jews or expressing outrage at their persecution was attacked with the sneering epithet of

the “familiar story” that Italian racism was “rejected by the Church and the Italian people, who did their best to circumvent the law and who largely succeeded in doing so, except when the Salò Republic was reduced to a German puppet....”

³⁶De Felice 1993, 244. “The din quickly became so loud that even De Bono noted in his diary: ‘the press ... is more disgustingly slavish than usual.’”

³⁷Sarfatti, 146.

“pietist.”³⁸ On July 14, the infamous “Manifesto of the Scientists” was published in virtually every major national newspaper (edited anonymously by Mussolini and signed by a few unknown scientists and university assistants),³⁹ which left no doubt to Italians (who “received it with ‘resentful shame’” according to an English observer) where the regime stood on the “Jewish question.”⁴⁰ De Felice observes that police reports of public reaction bear out the conclusion that “Fascist propaganda failed the test for the first time ... many began to open their eyes to Fascism on this occasion and revise their opinions.”⁴¹ At the end of August, Mussolini’s government demanded a special census of Jews and their property. A new agency was created within the Ministry of Interior called the Department of Demography and Race (afterwards referred to as “Demorazza,”

³⁸ Although it is hard to speak of “public reaction” in general terms when discussing life under a dictatorship, De Felice points out that in the early 1930s the Italian press, even the overtly Fascist press, tended to express revulsion for the Nazi anti-Semitic campaign: “Among the most vocal in the Fascist press on anti-Semitism were Balbo’s *Corriere padano*, *Antieuropa* (October 1933-March 1934) and *L’Italiano* (November 1934), all of which dedicated two issues to the debate against Nazi racism.” De Felice 1993, 113.

³⁹ Michaelis 1978, 155. See also Sarfatti, 149 (who claims much of it was written by Guido Landra, and then edited by Mussolini and Landra’s boss, Dino Alfieri) and De Felice 1993, 289, where he reports that Mussolini boasted during the meeting of the Fascist Grand Council on October 6-7, 1938, “I practically dictated it myself.” Milan’s *L’Ambrosiano* was the only major daily to not publish it.

⁴⁰ Michaelis 1978, 152-153. Michaelis summarizes the Manifesto as follows: “(1) different human races exist; (2) a difference exists between the great and the lesser races; (3) the concept of race is a purely biological one; (4) the population of Italy is of Aryan origin and its civilization is Aryan; (5) there has been no change in the racial composition of the Italian people in the last thousand years (i.e. since the Lombard invasions); (6) a pure ‘Italian race’ exists; (7) it is time for the Italians frankly to proclaim themselves racialists and to give their racialism an Aryan-Nordic direction; (8) a clear distinction must be made between the European (Western) Mediterranean races on the one hand and Orientals and Africans on the other; (9) Jews do not belong to the Italian race and are therefore unassimilable; (10) the purely European physical and psychological characteristics of the Italian race must not be altered in any way; hence, while intermarriage with foreigners of Aryan blood is admissible in principle, intermarriage with non-Aryans is not.”

⁴¹ De Felice 1993, 296-297. He cites, among police reports, the memoirs of the head of OVRA, Guido Leto, *OVRA. Fascismo-Antifascismo*, (Bologna, 1952), 191-192.

which, in the Salò Republic would become the Inspectorate of Race). Italians were enjoined to “discriminate, but not persecute.” Finally, there came the first discriminatory measures passed by the Fascist Grand Council on October 6-7 and thereafter signed into law.⁴² The King, after privately expressing misgivings and sympathy for the Jews, acquiesced in Mussolini’s racial initiatives, only remarking to the dictator that certain “deserving” Jews ought to receive exemptions from the racial laws. The Pope’s initially hostile attitude (Pius XI, who died February 10, 1939) stemmed mostly from his fear that if Jews were defined as a race, rather than a religion, conversions to Catholicism would count for nothing. Overall, however, the Vatican was “intent not on defending the Jews, but on defending the very specific prerogatives of the Catholic Church.”⁴³

With the Munich crisis looming in the background, September 1938 inaugurated the period in which the rights, although not yet the lives, of Italian Jews were persecuted. The racial laws, whose declared purpose was “defense of the Italian race,” were intended to alter the legal status of Jews, placing them in an entirely separate classification from the rest of the nation, and narrowly circumscribing their rights as citizens based upon that classification.⁴⁴ After the meeting of the Fascist Grand Council on October 6, 1938, all Jews were expelled

⁴² Sarfatti, 150. The census established the Jewish population as 58,412, of which 48,032 were Italian, and 10,380 foreign (mostly refugees from Germany and Austria).

⁴³ Michaelis 1978, 247-254 and 371-378, argues against critics “belittling papal opposition to the Rome-Berlin Axis and Catholic resistance to Fascist racial policy,” and he defends both Popes Pius XI and XII from charges of anti-Semitism, insisting that their behavior in the face of Fascist and later Nazi anti-Semitism was based on the belief that prudence and discretion would save more Jewish lives than “clamor.” See also De Felice 1993, 280-281.

⁴⁴ De Felice 1993, 236.

from the Fascist party, and it became illegal for Italian “Aryans” to marry Jews (the Church ignored this prohibition and continued performing marriages); illegal for Jews to employ “Aryans” as domestics; illegal for Jews to either own or manage a business employing more than one hundred “Aryans”; illegal for Jews to own more than one third of the shares of capital of a corporation; and illegal for Jews to publish books or articles or participate in conferences abroad. Foreign Jews were not permitted to establish residency in Italy; any Jew who had become an Italian citizen after 1919 had his or her citizenship revoked. All state institutions, including elementary and secondary schools, the universities, public administration, and the military, were ordered to immediately dismiss Jews from employment. Jews were no longer allowed to attend universities, although children were permitted to attend elementary and secondary schools. Controls were placed on Jewish bank accounts and any other liquid capital to prevent moving assets abroad.⁴⁵

As soon as Italy entered the war in June 1940, life became much more difficult for Italian Jews, although it must be acknowledged – in the context of the Holocaust – that Jewish lives were never in any danger from Italian authorities. They had to put up with many more petty restrictions on their daily lives, so that “by the end of the year [1940] it was estimated that no less than half of Italy’s Jews had lost their means of earning a livelihood.”⁴⁶ In contrast to areas of

⁴⁵De Felice 1993, 269-297.

⁴⁶Michaelis 1978, 292.

Europe occupied by Nazis, Jews in Italy were never forced to wear the yellow star of David, nor confined to ghettos. In May 1942, Jews between the ages of 18 and 55 were mobilized for forced labor.⁴⁷ Jews of foreign nationality were interned in Italian camps, although evidently not maltreated, as in German concentration camps.⁴⁸ As in Nazi Germany, Fascist propaganda had taken to blaming the Jews for planning and starting the war. Disciplinary measures were taken against Fascist party members who maintained personal relations with Jews,⁴⁹ however most of the Italian population proved immune to propaganda and continued on the whole to treat them with decency. That Jews continued to enter Italy clandestinely until September 1943 testifies to the fact that even though Italy was Germany's principal ally, it was regarded by European Jews as an island of refuge in a sea of Nazi barbarism.⁵⁰

Meanwhile, from late 1942 until Mussolini's fall, the Italian forces occupying Greece, Yugoslavia, Albania, and southern France cooperated in a wide conspiracy to thwart German efforts to murder the local Jewish populations there. According to Jonathan Steinberg, once it became known to senior members of the Italian army, the Fascist party, and the diplomatic corps what fate lay in store for any Jew falling into German hands, there emerged a widespread

⁴⁷Id., 292-293.

⁴⁸Id., 303 and Sarfatti, 174. For the extraordinary story of the largest internment camp, that of Ferramonti-Tarsia in Calabria, see Carlo Spartaco Capogreco, "The Internment Camp of Ferramonti-Tarsia," in Herzer, *et al.*, 1989, 159-177.

⁴⁹Michaelis 1978, 293-294.

⁵⁰Id., 303.

connivance to impede their ally's demands for handing over Jews for "resettlement." The Germans were baffled at seeing Italian officers risk creating bad relations with an ally for the sake of Jews who were not even Italian. "Until the sudden armistice on 8 September 1943 ended the Axis partnership, no Jew under the protection of the Italian forces was ever surrendered to the Germans, the French, the Croatians or anybody else."⁵¹

II. The Impact of the Salò Republic on the Fate of the Jews

After Badoglio gained control of the Italian government in July 1943, he assured the Germans that Italy would remain a faithful ally and continue the war at their side; much of Fascism began to be dismantled, but as one guarantee of his good faith to the German ally, Badoglio remained silent about the racial laws. During the ensuing forty-five days, in which many of the nation's newspapers and periodicals for the first time indulged in scathing criticisms of the Fascist regime, anti-Semitic propaganda all but completely ceased. Within a week of the fall of Fascism there appeared calls in the Italian press for the immediate abrogation of the racial decrees.⁵² When Badoglio and the royal family suddenly abandoned the helm, there were still approximately 43,000 Jews living in Italy, of whom roughly 8,000 were foreign refugees. Nearly 500 managed to cross the front lines south

⁵¹ Steinberg, 9. "I am convinced that the gradual awareness of the German intention to exterminate the entire Jewish people made a profound difference to the way the Italian political class behaved, not least because ... that knowledge reached it at the moment when a series of crises in North Africa and on the Russian front suddenly brought the prospect of defeat and the end of the regime into view."

⁵² De Felice 1993, 429. "The most open position on the subject was taken by [historian] Guido de Ruggiero." "Una nostra intervista." *Il Resto del Carlino*, August 1, 1943.

into territory occupied by the Allies, and around 5,000 succeeded in entering Switzerland (mostly through paying bribes).⁵³ Around one quarter of the Jews remaining in Italy were concentrated in the Rome area, with large populations also living in Milan and Trieste. Until panic spread and Jews began abandoning their homes and going into hiding, they were quite easy to locate, since provincial and municipal authorities, even after July 25, never ceased keeping a close watch on their whereabouts through continuously updated lists and censuses.⁵⁴ Similarly, after September 8 nearly all Jews in southern France, Yugoslavia and Greece who owed their lives to the protection afforded by the Italian army (now interned in German camps) were immediately captured and sent to Auschwitz. Very few returned.⁵⁵

Only a few days after the surrender on September 8, the first massacre of Jews on Italian soil took place in several resort villages on the banks of Lake Maggiore, in which forty-nine mostly Greek-Jewish refugees were hunted down by the S.S. to be either shot outright or bound hand and foot and tossed into the lake to drown.⁵⁶ The many brutal round-ups that took place between late September and the end of December were the work of the German RSHA (*Reichsicherheitshauptamt*), which gathered all Jews, regardless of nationality

⁵³ Sarfatti, 232-233. The figure of 5,000 escaping to Switzerland is disputed by Klinkhammer, who puts the number at around 2,000. Klinkhammer, 408, and note on 611.

⁵⁴ Sarfatti, 236.

⁵⁵ Klinkhammer, 400.

⁵⁶ De Felice 1993, 450. See also Frediano Sessi, "Settembre sul lago, e iniziò l'Olocausto," *Corriere della Sera*, September 4, 2003, who puts the death toll at 56.

(including Turks and South Americans living in Italy), as though they constituted a security threat.⁵⁷ The Germans remained solely in charge of arresting Jews until mid-December, a month after the Verona congress reaffirmed the racial legislation of 1938, point seven of whose charter read “Those belonging to the Jewish race are foreigners. During this war they belong to an enemy nationality.”⁵⁸ Thereafter, their arrest and internment became, at least nominally, an Italian responsibility. On November 30, the Ministry of the Interior broadcast over the radio orders for the arrest of all Jews living in Italy and their internment in concentration camps, along with the confiscation of all their property to be used to reimburse victims of Allied bombing.⁵⁹ After these measures were passed, it fell to the Fascist Republicans to enforce them; thus the moment finally arrived when Italian officials became directly implicated in the murder of Jews.⁶⁰ In early December, the German RSHA “informed the German foreign office that it did not have enough troops available to sufficiently carry out the number of arrests required of it, and requested that the Italians be asked to hand over any Jews arrested by Italians.” Sarfatti claims that between mid-December 1943 and the following February, “the government of the Third Reich and the RSI reached

⁵⁷ Sarfatti, 241-244.

⁵⁸ De Felice 1997 (*Mussolini l'alleato*), 611.

⁵⁹ Sarfatti, 246-247. See also Michaelis, who claims that because of this broadcast “warning,” thousands of Jews immediately went into hiding. “According to E.F. Moellhausen, Rahn’s second-in-command in Rome, this was precisely what the ‘Jew-lover’ Buffarini had hoped to achieve.” Michaelis, 351.

⁶⁰ See Michaelis, 351, who suggests the November decrees regarding the Jews may have been meant to restore a degree of Italian sovereignty.

agreement for the delivery to the Germans and the subsequent deportation (and murder) of the Jews arrested by the Italians”]; this agreement Sarfatti terms a “terrible secret,” for no documentation attesting to it has ever surfaced.⁶¹ From these months onwards, local Italian police, acting under orders from the German S.S., set about hunting down and arresting Jews, and delivered over to the Germans the Jews already interned in the various hastily built internment camps throughout northern and central Italy as well as the central transit camp, Fossoli, near Modena.⁶² Moreover, many of the autonomous Fascist militia squads, such as the one commanded by Pietro Koch in Florence and then Milan, took the initiative, without being asked, to hunt down and hand Jews over to the Germans. Until the last days of the war, a total of 43 convoys of railroad cars carrying thousands of men, women and children moved northwards up the Italian peninsula through the Brenner pass.⁶³ After Allied air raids destroyed most of the railway system, they were shipped north in trucks and loaded onto barges when they reached a river crossing. That the government of the RSI reached such an “agreement” with the Germans was due in no small measure to the fact that no

⁶¹ But see Michaelis 2002, 270-271, who disputes Sarfatti’s claim of a “terrible secret” by observing that no German document, published or unpublished, has ever surfaced indicating a German interest in having Italians collaborate with them in the Final Solution, although it is clear Mussolini must have known about their plans. Moreover, he observes that De Felice’s condemnation of Mussolini in this regard was even more severe, for while Hitler certainly believed everything he said about the Jews, Mussolini admitted privately they were entirely innocent, but left them to their fate anyway. He cites, as the “better analysis,” Liliana Piccotto [*sic*]: “Mussolini, in spite of his apparent disinterest, would certainly not have been pleased that on his territory – without any kind of advance notice or consultation – roundups of Italian citizens, even though Jewish, were taking place: it was the most complete confirmation of what the Germans meant by ‘alliance’ with the Republic of Salò.”

⁶² Sarfatti, 262-263.

⁶³ Delzell 1995, 88.

one in occupied Italy was in any position to refuse German orders. Michaelis underscores the significance of the German occupation on this issue, concluding that “if the ‘Jew-lovers’ of Salò had been masters in their own house, no Italian Jew would have perished in the Holocaust.”⁶⁴ To the very limited extent they were masters of their own house, many Republican Fascists continued to impede German plans for murdering Jews.

But Mussolini aimed to be that master once again, and wanted Italians to believe in the Republic and have confidence in him as its leader, which they were far less likely to do if the Republic was so uncompromisingly identified with Nazis and their fanatical anti-Semitism. Thus in Salò, anti-Semitic intellectuals installed in positions of power who would gladly have done even more harm to the Jews found themselves placed in positions where they could do little of anything. Among the most prominent of these intellectuals at Salò was Telesio Interlandi (1894-1965), an admirer of Nazi racial theories (before 1933) who had served as founding editor of the anti-Semitic *Il Tevere* (1924-1943), and the fortnightly *Quadrivio* (1933-1943). Because of his conspicuous anti-Semitism, he was chosen to lead *La difesa della razza* in 1938, thus devoting years of his career to the cause of racism.⁶⁵ He was among the first to be arrested in Rome after Mussolini’s fall, and was confined for several weeks at the nearby prison of Forte Boccea before being released by the Germans in mid-September. Offered the

⁶⁴Michaelis, 352. The Germans, possibly at Preziosi’s instigation (349), typically referred to the governmental authorities in Salò as “Jew-lovers.”

⁶⁵Giampiero Mughini, *A via della Mercedes c’era un razzista* (Milan, 1991) 187.

opportunity to visit Mussolini, who was still in Germany, Interlandi spent a week in Munich with him. Upon his return to Rome, he was immediately transferred to Salò, where he installed his wife and son in lodgings in nearby Desenzano and went to work for the Ministry of Popular Culture. He was subsequently enlisted as one of the five journalists who formed the Comitato consultivo per la propaganda headed by Giorgio Almirante; Interlandi was in charge of radio and print propaganda aimed at Allied-occupied southern Italy.⁶⁶ His one notable achievement at Minculpop was to secure Mussolini's permission to broadcast an "Appeal to the Intellectuals," on November 12, 1943 (printed in *Corriere della Sera* on November 14-15).⁶⁷ This amounted to little more than an attempt to shame Italian intellectuals into supporting Mussolini's new government by identifying Fascism and Italy as one and the same.

Although Preziosi maintained an office and a residence close by, there is no evidence the two men worked together in any capacity; indeed Interlandi complained to Mussolini a few weeks before the war's end that in an upcoming issue of *La Vita Italiana*, Preziosi had, for polemical purposes, grossly distorted something Interlandi had written regarding an Italian admiral.⁶⁸ Despite a few memoranda making random suggestions to Mussolini on miscellaneous topics,

⁶⁶ Cannistraro 1975, 333.

⁶⁷ ACS, SPD CR RSI, b.1 f.1, sf4, letter to Duce, October 29, 1943. Reflecting on his political involvement vis-à-vis journalism during the *ventennio*, Interlandi claimed "I acted towards the 'intellectuals' as a mediator between fascist extremism - despisers of culture - and culture itself, in the name of national decorum." *Corriere della Sera - 'Il Pomeriggio'*, "Agli intellettuali: Siate con noi per salvare l'Italia." November 13-14, 1943. See also, Mughini, 197.

⁶⁸ ACS, SPD CR RSI b.1 f.1 sf 4, "Appunti per il Duce," March 29, 1945.

from newspaper reform to a diatribe against representative democracy, Interlandi seems to have had very little effect on events in Salò.⁶⁹ There is no mention of Jews or racism in any of his correspondence with Mussolini. At war's end, he and his family went into hiding in Brescia, emerging only in late 1946 after charges against him were dropped. After the war he was shunned by Italian journalism and spent most of the remaining years of his life in his native Palermo. It has become extremely hard to find copies of any of the three journals he published; evidently even most library copies were burned.⁷⁰

III. Giovanni Preziosi and the Inspectorate of Race

Among the most infamous and reviled figures of modern Italian history belongs the name of Giovanni Preziosi, the most conspicuous anti-Semite of Mussolini's regime, a defrocked priest who devoted the last twenty-five years of his life to the cause of anti-Semitism. In the words of De Felice, Preziosi became "the only really coherent Italian anti-Semite of the twentieth century, a racist who did not repeat verbatim the words and slogans coined by others, but for over thirty years proceeded to 'study' the Jews."⁷¹ It was Preziosi for whom a government office and title was specially created at Salò: Inspectorate of Race. According to the German ambassador Rudolf von Rahn, "just to pronounce his name among Italians provoked immediate gestures of exorcism, fear and protection."⁷² Among

⁶⁹ ACS, SPD CR RSI b.1 f.1: "Appunti per il Duce," December 17, 1943 and January 20, 1944.

⁷⁰ Mughini, 27.

⁷¹ De Felice 1993, 5.

⁷² Bertoldi, 392.

the most common descriptions of him is the one De Felice quotes from the memoirs of E. F. Moellhausen – Rahn’s second in command in Rome – as “the real incarnation of hate.” Moellhausen added that he was generally known as the “*Innominabile*” – the Un-nameable, “because people refused to pronounce the name of the person famous for being the most formidable jinx in all of Italy.”⁷³ Giovanni Dolfin, Mussolini’s secretary, described him as “undoubtedly a man of culture and scholarship, with a professional appearance, small, thin, apparently insignificant; when he spoke or wrote of these problems which have tormented him for twenty years, he gave the impression of a fanatic. And yet his ideas were clear and certainly his reports directed to the Duce were frightfully logical. Mussolini did not enjoy hearing him spoken of.”⁷⁴ Certainly Preziosi managed to earn a vast amount of antipathy from his contemporaries, who left remarkably consistent descriptions of him, so that rarely one finds his name uncoupled with such modifiers as “fanatic,” “obsessed,” “paranoic,” “unbalanced,” and “possessed.” Mussolini disliked him as much as anyone, but created the Inspectorate of Race for him anyway. That was because in Salò, Preziosi had little need of being in Mussolini’s good graces; his power and influence derived directly from his standing with Hitler.⁷⁵

⁷³ De Felice 1993, 603, n. 1217. The author cites E. F. Moellhausen, *La carta perdente* (Rome, 1948) 311-316.

⁷⁴ Dolfin, 119.

⁷⁵ See Michaelis 1978, 348-349, who refers to Preziosi as Hitler’s “*homme de confiance*” while in Munich, and suggests Hitler was “impressed” by Preziosi’s view of the Italian situation. See also Sarfatti, 245, especially n. 46, who relates that certain German “interlocutors” of Mussolini’s

Preziosi's reputation as Fascist Italy's most fanatical Jew-hater rests on the vast amount of anti-Semitic propaganda he published for over twenty years in *La Vita Italiana*.⁷⁶ Born in 1881, near Naples, he grew up in a bourgeois family and studied philosophy at the university before taking holy orders. Early in his adult life his interests turned toward journalism and politics, especially the economic and social problems of the Italian south. By 1903 he had become involved with a democratic-Christian political group in Naples, making several trips to the United States to devote himself to a study of the problems encountered by Italian immigrants there, which included long stays in Cleveland, Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York between 1905 and 1912. In 1913, largely because he refused to curtail his political activities, he was forced to leave the Church. The journal he founded, whose original title was *La Vita Italiana all'Estero* [Italian Life Abroad] began publishing in 1913 with a primary focus on helping Italian emigrants to make a rapid and positive transition to their new environments without letting go of their Italian identity. Preziosi's early writings reveal no signs of anti-Semitism, despite his early exposure to much of it in Catholic circles at the turn of the century; indeed during the first few years he published various articles written by Jews.

conveyed to him that they considered that collapse of the regime to have been the work of the Jews.

⁷⁶Very little has been published on Preziosi's early years and intellectual formation. For his political activities before the 1930s I rely almost entirely on De Felice's *Intellettuali di fronte al fascismo: saggi e note documentarie* (Rome, 1985) 129-137. See also Ganapini's discussion of Preziosi, 135-145.

After the war began in 1914, Preziosi's journal took an abrupt political turn away from emigration problems and became strongly anti-German, nationalistic, and interventionist, forcefully advocating Italian claims to Trieste and Dalmatia. Shortly before Italy entered the war, Preziosi became preoccupied with what he regarded as the baleful influence of German high finance on Italian economic life; thereafter he began to violently target the Banca Commerciale Italiana (among the most important banks in Italy) as a front for German control of the Italian economy. These articles reveal much about Preziosi's mentality; according to De Felice, since "they were written with great polemical force, but with an apocalyptic tone and at the same time were exasperatingly moralistic ... wishing at all costs to draw conclusions and personalize denunciations." He collected them into a book in 1916: *Germania all conquista dell'Italia* [Germany in the Conquest of Italy]. According to De Felice, Preziosi's writings reveal an obsessive interest in "unmasking occult forces that dominate economic and especially political life in Italy – today German high finance, tomorrow Judaism and freemasonry."⁷⁷ In July 1915, he shortened his journal's name to *La Vita Italiana*. By the end of the war the journal's political tone had turned sharply anti-democratic and anti-socialist, while Preziosi's campaign against German finance earned him the friendship and collaboration of the decidedly anti-parliamentary and deeply anti-Semitic Maffeo Pantaleoni. Anti-Semitism made its first appearance in *La Vita Italiana* with Pantaleoni's articles, written shortly

⁷⁷De Felice 1985, 135.

after the war ended. In 1920 Pantaleoni introduced to Preziosi the notorious forgery, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This evidently amounted to a life-changing experience for him; according to De Felice, it seems Preziosi's conversion in 1920 to an intense and fanatical anti-Semitism came about quite suddenly after reading the *Protocols*. In 1921 he translated and published them in Italian.⁷⁸ Given his affinity with "unmasking occult forces," his worldview was undoubtedly highly receptive to the kind of conspiracy theory the *Protocols* tries to establish. De Felice observes that his anti-Semitism was "neither personal nor the result of Italian experience" that it was always highly ideological.⁷⁹ From the summer of 1920, *La Vita Italiana* began showing signs of an emerging anti-Semitism; by 1922 anti-Semitism had become its dominant theme and remained so until its last issue in 1945. In August 1922 Preziosi featured an article by an anonymous German who signed himself as "*un bavarese*" [a Bavarian] entitled "*Gli ebrei, la passione e la resurrezione della Germania*" (*Il pensiero di un tedesco*) [The Jews, the passion and resurrection of Germany (Thoughts of a German)], later identified as authored by Adolf Hitler.⁸⁰ In a September 1930 article, Preziosi praised Hitler and endorsed his Nazi creed.⁸¹

⁷⁸De Felice 1993, 43. The *Protocols* was "the main ideological and documentary source" of Preziosi's beliefs.

⁷⁹Id., 43.

⁸⁰Id., 44. "Thanks to the statements of Preziosi and his friends, repeated in Germany and never denied, we now know that the author was Adolf Hitler himself."

⁸¹Id., 109.

Quite soon after Mussolini became Prime Minister in 1922, Preziosi became similarly obsessed with freemasonry and sought to convince his readership that all high places in Italian politics, administration and business were as much infested with freemasons as with Jews. For the rest of his career he made it his personal mission to root out and expose both groups. He had participated in the March on Rome, yet he never grew close to the dictator, who by all accounts felt considerable distaste for him.⁸² He believed hidden enemies within the regime had been kept forcefully away from every position of power, and this belief further aggravated his paranoia and sense of isolation.⁸³ From 1923 until 1929 he edited the Naples daily *Il Mezzogiorno* until he tried to “expose” two of Mussolini’s closest supporters as freemasons, which resulted in the temporary closing of the newspaper. In the mid-1930s his attack on the Church in an article called *La Chiesa e gli ebrei* [The Church and the Jews] earned him praise from Farinacci, and thereafter they grew close. From 1936 until 1942, Farinacci allowed him to present *La Vita Italiana* as the monthly supplement to *Il Regime Fascista*, and after 1936 until shortly before the collapse of the regime in July 1943, Farinacci acted as his protector. The anti-Semitic campaign in the late 1930s saw his fortunes rise within Fascist circles, even as other fervent anti-Semites continued to personally avoid him. Naturally he was the first to speak out bitterly against the regulations exempting some Jews from the racial laws. In

⁸² Michaelis 1978, 350. Speaking in 1944 to Count Serafino Mazzolini, head of the Foreign Ministry, Mussolini described Preziosi as “a repulsive creature, a real figure of an unfrocked priest.”

⁸³ Andriola, 166.

1939 he reissued his translation of the *Protocols*, and in April of that year publicly called for the removal of all Jews from Italy. In October 1942 he was named minister of state, a development which some saw as a signal that Farinacci was in the ascendant, since Preziosi was regarded as a Farinacci protégé. It has been suggested that this might have been a way for Mussolini to “control” Preziosi, whose close relations to the German hierarchy, especially Himmler, were already well known, at a stage when Italy was becoming dangerously dependent on Germany and coming close to having to take orders from its ally.⁸⁴

Preziosi was already on his way to Germany on July 26 to confer with Nazi-party ideologue Alfred Rosenberg about organizing a conference when the news of the regime’s collapse was made public. Now arrived in Germany and known personally to Hitler, Preziosi was in a privileged position to initiate consultations with the Führer on Italian political developments, and was accepted into the neo-Fascist circle forming in Munich, led by Pavolini, Ricci and Farinacci.⁸⁵ According to Goebbels’ diary, during his colloquium with the Nazi dictator Preziosi severely criticized Mussolini for not having solved the Jewish question in Italy, a personal failing that led directly to the coup. Hitler never permitted anyone to criticize Mussolini, indeed sent Farinacci packing for the same offense, but evidently sympathized with his observations and met with him

⁸⁴Andriola, 165-170. Aldo A. Mola makes this observation.

⁸⁵Deakin, like De Felice 1993, relies upon Goebbels’ diaries for his account of Preziosi’s activities in Munich and East Prussia. See Deakin, 497 and 534.

again in November.⁸⁶ After Mussolini's return to Italy in mid-September 1943, Preziosi stayed on in Munich and made a series of inflammatory radio broadcasts in Italian criticizing Mussolini for not having rooted out the Jews and freemasons in their midst, whom he blamed for the collapse of the regime. In November, an angry Mussolini insisted that he return to Italy. On December 2 he did so, presenting himself at Salò with an obsequious note to the dictator indicating his willingness to serve.⁸⁷ A few days later, he forwarded to Mussolini a packet of articles he had written and published in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, the official Nazi press organ, during his time in Germany. These sought to demonstrate that Italy had always been in the hands of the Jews, that even Mazzini, Garibaldi and Cavour, architects of the Risorgimento, had been surrounded by and controlled by Jews, that Jews had never ceased controlling the press, the schools, the banks, and the administration of the Italian state. They also purported to explain to the German public how the presence of Jews and freemasons within the regime inevitably led to its collapse.⁸⁸ In mid-December he was again named minister of state and allowed to go back to Germany.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ On Hitler's reaction to Farinacci's criticism of Mussolini, see Deakin, 496-497.

⁸⁷ ACS, SPD CR RSI b. 24, f. 166r, sf. 2, letter to Duce dated December 3, 1943: "Duce, I have returned from Munich and have learned that you are unhappy with me. It is my fate. And yet I have served you and do serve you now with faith, abnegation and the consciousness that in doing so I serve Italy."

⁸⁸ The first of these articles is briefly examined in Giuseppe Mayda, *Ebrei sotto Salò: La persecuzione antisemita 1943-1945* (Milan, 1978), 177.

⁸⁹ ACS, SPD CR RSI b. 24 f. 166, press clipping from *Il Messaggero*, "Giovanni Preziosi nominato Ministro di Stato." December 18, 1943.

By now, Preziosi felt sufficiently emboldened to force Mussolini's hand by playing the Hitler card. At the end of January 1944, Preziosi addressed a long memorandum to Mussolini repeating his accusations regarding the hidden presence of Jews and freemasons, the blame they deserved for the July 25 coup, the dangers they posed to the future of Fascism and Italy's war effort, and finally accused Mussolini of foolhardy blindness in not confronting the Jewish question. He concluded this fourteen-page diatribe with the following words: "I wish again to tell you that the only way of regaining our honor is through absolute loyalty to the betrayed ally. Therefore, so as to put an end to every unconscious anti-German attitude, whatever form it takes, keep in mind that what is being built must be for the sake of an Aryan European unity, and to attain this, nothing is better suited than the German racial laws."⁹⁰ He then forwarded a copy of this to Hitler, making sure Mussolini learned of it.⁹¹ Mussolini, according to his secretary, was enraged.⁹² Mussolini's subsequent creation of the Inspectorate of Race on March 15, 1944, and appointment of Preziosi as its minister, answerable only to the President of the Council, was the bribe Mussolini paid to remove him

⁹⁰ ACS, SPD CR RSI b. 24, f. 166r, sf.2, Letter to Duce, dated January 31, 1944. This is reproduced in De Felice 1993, Document 36, p. 735.

⁹¹ ACS, SPD CR RSI b. 24, f.166r, sf. 2: "Führer! Allow me to transmit to you a copy of a letter that I felt it was my duty, returning from Italy, to write to the Duce. It refers to what prompted me to try to explain to you in the audience you granted the highest honor of according me last November 18."

⁹² Dolfín, 264.

from proximity to Hitler and his entourage and to retain control of his own racial policy.⁹³

Preziosi's activities as minister of the Inspectorate of Race revolved around two related objectives: rooting out Jews and freemasons hidden within the government and trying to convince Mussolini to enact even stricter racial laws. Conspiracy and persecution ran like a leitmotiv through all his correspondence with Mussolini. He was given to making unfounded accusations against anyone and everyone, suspicious as he was that secret forces within the new regime were gathering against him; as Moellhausen observed in his memoirs, Preziosi was likely "to write Hitler and denounce everyone, Mussolini and Rahn to begin with, as traitors, pro-Jewish and pro-Masonic."⁹⁴ In the autumn of 1943 he started a campaign against both Interior Minister Buffarini-Guidi and Party Secretary Pavolini, accusing the first of freemasonry, the second of obscure, secret relations with Jews (Pavolini's sister-in-law was Jewish).⁹⁵ Similar denunciations, along with carefully itemized pieces of "evidence" showing he was being secretly undermined by hidden enemies, can be found in virtually every memorandum he wrote. In an undated letter to Mussolini, for example, he claims the racial

⁹³ De Felice 1993, 440. See also Pichetto, 98-99, citing Politisches Archiv. Bonn, Preziosi a Steengracht, 8 March 1944, in which Preziosi practically admitted to the undersecretary of the German foreign office that what he had done was successful blackmail: "I wish to inform you that, immediately after my letter of January 31, 1944, a copy of which I sent to the Führer, the Duce recalled me to Italy to establish a General Commissariat for Race and Demography, which will be answerable directly and exclusively to the Head of Government..."

⁹⁴ De Felice 1997, 603, n. 1217.

⁹⁵ De Felice 1993, 438. He also accused them of secretly sabotaging the racial laws. The Buffarini investigation was closed in late 1943 when the Germans found Preziosi's accusations against him groundless. See also Michaelis, 348, and Ganapini, 137, n.21.

legislation enacted in 1938, which was supposed to have been based on the Manifesto of the Scientists, had been secretly sabotaged by Masonic elements within Mussolini's council.⁹⁶ His litany of accusations continued until the very last days of the war; as an example, on February 26, 1945, he wrote to Mussolini:

Exactly five days after my arrival here from Germany – it is a year now – a fascist who knew and with whom you are acquainted, told me: you will never establish the Inspectorate. And he gave me ample and secure particulars of this decision.

For an entire year I have doubled my personality, and have been observer and actor together. Actor, that is, who daily tries to overcome all maneuvers; observer who studied, coordinated these maneuvers and saw they formed a part of a plan.

Only today can I tell you that a deep examination of this “episode” – the Inspectorate – will enable you to realize the power, the methods and the system of which freemasonry still avails itself, whether its actors be conscious or unconscious.

It is enough for me to tell you that from the March onwards, excepting the Giunta, the President of the Council has always had as his undersecretary a freemason, and the Head of the Cabinet has always been a freemason.

For freemasonry, the Inspectorate – even its objectives and the person you called to establish it – is enemy number one.⁹⁷

It is almost comically indicative of Preziosi's conspiratorial mentality that in the first sentence of the above accusation, he cites a witness whose identity cannot be disclosed, and yet whose knowledge he considered unassailable. The “episode” mentioned above referred to an exchange of letters, all forwarded to Mussolini, between Preziosi and Mezzasoma, head of the Ministry of Popular Culture, and arose after Preziosi once again accused unknown enemies within the

⁹⁶ ACS, SPD CR RSI b. 24, f. 166r, sf. 2, Letter from Preziosi to Duce, s.d.

⁹⁷ ACS, SPD CR RSI b. 24, f. 166r, sf. 2, Letter to Duce, February 26, 1945 (Preziosi's underlining). See also, in same file, Preziosi's letter to Duce, dated February 6, 1945, blaming the low sales of his translation of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* on a secret boycott organized by freemasons and Jews.

Salò administration of secretly thwarting him. Problems had arisen with the distribution of some of his writings: one of the last issues of *La Vita Italiana* was late getting off the press due to the worsening paper shortage, and Mezzasoma had ordered a printing and circulation of a paperback version of the *Protocols* that did not include Preziosi's introduction. Preziosi's response, predictably, was to denounce a Minculpop staff member as a freemason and a Jew, a charge, Mezzasoma observed, denied by all who knew the man. It was furthermore pointed out that the man in question had acted recently as a liaison officer with the German army. After dismissing Preziosi's charges as groundless, Mezzasoma conveyed his impatience to Mussolini by suggesting "that the director of *La Vita Italiana* must evidently be the victim of hallucinations when he can see only boycotting and sabotage in the very organizations that have enabled him to do what little he has done and about which he has spoken so much and spoken to you."⁹⁸ Mezzasoma, no friend of the Jews himself, went on to add that his office had done better with regard to disseminating anti-Semitic propaganda than had the newly created Inspectorate of Race, whose director "is happy to see plots everywhere." He subsequently forwarded to Mussolini copies of his own propaganda directives regarding anti-Semitism.⁹⁹

For years, Preziosi had fretted over what he regarded as the inefficiency of Fascist racial laws. Only a week after he took office, he presided over a meeting

⁹⁸ACS, SPD CR RSI b. 48, f. 540, "Appunto per il Duce." January 30, 1945.

⁹⁹Id., "Appunto per il Duce." February 5, 1945.

convened to draw up far more stringent ones. The measures he submitted finally for Mussolini's approval on May 17 began by defining a member of the Italian race as one whose forbears had lived in Italy since January 1, 1800, and whose blood was "unmixed with that of Jews or other heterogeneous races." "Metics" became a legal classification that included anyone with a non-Italian parent. Procreation with a "metic" or a person of non-Italian blood was termed a "crime against the race." All surname changes were annulled, and all "aryanizations" were subject to further review.¹⁰⁰ Finally, a "*scheda genealogica*" [genealogical chart] was devised for the sake of creating a racial profile for all citizens, who were to declare, as far back as their great-grandparents, the identities of their forbears.¹⁰¹ But in all this, too, he met with defeat. Buffarini Guidi reacted violently against these measures, and in fact stayed up all night drafting a memorandum to present to Mussolini the next day, which managed to convince him that Preziosi's measures were highly unscientific and contained so many "aberrations" that they could only harm the republican government politically (i.e., in the eyes of the Germans).¹⁰² Buffarini-Guidi's intervention at this moment prevented any new racial laws to be passed until mid-April 1945, by which time the U.S. Fifth army was advancing into the Po valley, the German command was engaged in secret negotiations to surrender their forces in Italy, and

¹⁰⁰ACS, SPD CR RSI b. 24, f. 166r, sf. 3, decree of "Il Duce della Repubblica Sociale Italiana."

¹⁰¹ACS, SPD RSI b. 42, f. 385. "Scheda genealogica".

¹⁰²De Felice 1993, 441-442. The author cites Glauco Buffarini Guidi's biography of his father, *La vera verità* (Milan, 1980) 56.

insurrections were about to break out in the cities. These final laws aimed not at the lives of Jews, but at more stringent economic measures, laying the basis for further property confiscations.¹⁰³ Nor could Preziosi convince Mussolini to allow him to confiscate and review archives and other records of the Jewish community from the Ministry of the Interior; for this he had to appeal directly to the Germans. As Moellhausen recalls, “Preziosi succeeded in provoking the intervention of the S.S. and in fact, one day, a non-commissioned officer of the S.S. and some soldiers withdrew from the Ministry the cases which contained the folders of 15,000 religious dossiers which were then delivered over to the *Innominabile*.”¹⁰⁴ The bulk of the records, however, he was never to see, in spite of his repeated protestations, for they remained at the disposition of the Ministry of the Interior (i.e., under Buffarini Guidi’s control) in an archive in Brescia.¹⁰⁵

Having failed to win the dictator over to harsher laws against the Jews, Preziosi tried instead to refashion the Inspectorate of Race into a police organization modeled after the Gestapo. On June 28, 1944 one of his staff members, Luigi Renoldi, identifying himself as a grandson of Giuseppe Garibaldi, addressed a 15-page memorandum to Mussolini, which argued, on Preziosi’s behalf, that the Inspectorate be subjected to a total reorganization with a view to turning it into a kind of super police force with powers to go anywhere and act against anyone: “it is necessary that the General Inspectorate for Race urgently

¹⁰³ACS, RSI, PC, Gabinetto, Atti amministrativi (1943-45) b. 64, April 16, 1945.

¹⁰⁴Bertoldi, 407 (citing Moellhausen, 326).

¹⁰⁵Mayda, 201.

create regional sections enabling it to take a profound part in the police activities of any sector of national life . . . the Inspectorate must be able to strike at any subject of the Italian Social Republic without question.” With constant reference to hidden enemies lurking everywhere – “the subtle Judeo-masonic war against Fascism shows no signs of ending, nor will it end until we have adopted countermeasures worthy of the intelligence of the enemy; that is, the creation of a secret organ just as subtle and intelligent, which will revenge once and for all the dead and the living” – this memo obviously bears Preziosi’s stamp.¹⁰⁶ This initiative also earned him a rebuff; there is no evidence Mussolini ever granted the Inspectorate any police powers or indeed any powers other than those it had been endowed with at its inception.

Preziosi considered the Inspectorate’s mission as overwhelmingly important, and so bitterly regretted its inadequate funding, which in turn fed his sense that the Jewish-masonic threat was being undervalued, and his own efforts impeded, by elements within Mussolini’s governing circle. As for not having been accorded sufficient resources to properly staff his ministry, he blamed not the chronic lack of funds of the Italian Social Republic, the chaotic wartime economy or even bureaucratic bungling, but hostile intrigues, a “plan,” hatched by the undersecretary of the Council of Ministers, whom he accused of being a secret freemason.¹⁰⁷ Mussolini finally resolved the problem by establishing the size of

¹⁰⁶ACS, SPD CR RSI b. 42, f. 385. See also De Felice 1993, 443.

¹⁰⁷ACS, SPD CR RSI b. 24, f. 166r, sf. 2.

the Inspectorate and the amount of its financial support with a decree law on February 28, 1945.¹⁰⁸

The defrocked priest met the Fascist dictator for the last time shortly before Mussolini abandoned Gargnano for Milan in April 1945. Preziosi had come to personally reaffirm his denunciation of Francesco Barracu, undersecretary to the Consiglio, as a secret freemason. Mussolini waved aside his allegations: “leave it alone, your usual mystery novel.” But then Mussolini asked him how much influence freemasons might exercise on Stalin, whose ruthlessness he had come to admire by the end of the war. Preziosi answered by declaring that the alliance between the “Anglo-Saxon powers” and Russia was indeed the product of a Jewish-masonic plot.¹⁰⁹

Preziosi met his end two days before his master was executed at Dongo. Along with his wife and nine-year old adopted son, Romano, he fled Desenzano days before the final Axis surrender in a convoy of vehicles that included Vittorio Rolandi Ricci and his family. They were ambushed by partisans a few miles northeast of Milan and put against the wall to be executed, but before the partisans began shooting another convoy arrived and a gunfight erupted. In the ensuing chaos, Preziosi and his family escaped with Rolandi Ricci (whose sixteen-year old nephew was killed). The historian Giuseppe Mayda, relying on eyewitness testimony, narrates that Preziosi and his family made it to Milan on

¹⁰⁸Mayda, 249.

¹⁰⁹Bertoldi, 407-408, who cites Felice Bellotti's *La Repubblica di Mussolini* (Milan, 1947) 200-208.

foot where they spent two days with relatives of Vittorio Rolandi Ricci in an apartment on the Corso Venezia, around the corner from the *prefettura* where Mussolini resided during his final stay in Milan. Here, they intended to await the arrival of the American army and the re-establishment of some kind of authority, but his dread of Jewish reprisal – “the inevitable and implacable Jewish revenge” – proved too much. Rolandi Ricci failed to calm his fears, and on April 26 he and his wife threw themselves out of a fifth-story window into the courtyard below. His body was picked up and laid in a mortuary, where it was identified the next day by a reporter from the *Corriere della Sera*.¹¹⁰

Both Meir Michaelis and Aldo A. Mola emphasize – not to defend, but to set the record straight – that Preziosi never called for the Final Solution.¹¹¹ However much it may be true that his ceaseless propaganda never called explicitly for Jewish extermination, he must certainly have been aware of what the Germans were doing, and aware that any Jews handed over to them faced certain death. Considering his close personal relations with the most extreme Nazi elements, including S.S. chieftain Heinrich Himmler as well as chief Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg, and considering, too, that a large body of Italian army officers and diplomats had become aware that an unspeakable fate lay in store for any Jew captured by the Nazis, it seems wholly incredible that Preziosi

¹¹⁰Mayda, 250-251.

¹¹¹Michaelis 1978, 350: “he never went so far as to advocate a policy of extermination;” see also Mola, “Giovanni Preziosi,” in Andriola, 169.

could possibly have remained uninformed.¹¹² His silence on the topic proves nothing. For that matter, the Nazis themselves never trumpeted to the world what they were up to with regard to the Jews; instead, they opted for the euphemistic phrase “resettlement in the east” or *Judenrein*. It would appear worse than ingenuous to assume that, based on the evidence we have of Preziosi’s activities, he did not condone, and consciously collaborate with, the Nazi extermination campaign, whether he verbally advocated it or not. He need not have explicitly advocated a policy of extermination; he offered his whole-hearted cooperation, body and soul, in order to see it fulfilled.

Preziosi’s actual accomplishment at Salò seems meager when compared to his ambitions. He never succeeded, until the final days of the regime, in persuading Mussolini’s government to enact further discriminatory laws against the Jews; those passed in late November 1943 came about in consequence of the Verona manifesto and were largely meant to reassert Italian sovereignty in the face of German occupation.¹¹³ He failed to turn the Inspectorate of Race into anything approximating an effective governmental agency. It is true that he was

¹¹²Steinberg, 50-59. The author also records that Mussolini did not object when he learned all Jews in occupied Croatia handed over to the Germans would face certain death (56).

Ardengo Soffici, whose close ties to Mussolini went back to the first decade of the twentieth century, certainly knew about what was going on in the Warsaw Ghetto. He recorded in his diary on September 20, 1941, that a writer of his acquaintance, one who worked for Mussolini’s *Il Popolo d’Italia*, had visited the ghetto and, confronted by rotting cadavers in the street, was overtaken by nausea and vomited. The man then observed to his German guide that “perhaps it would have been better to massacre them, these people.” To which his guide responded, “But that is what we want to happen.” Ardengo Soffici, *Sull’orlo dell’abisso. Diario 1939-1943* (Milan/Trento 2000) 77.

¹¹³This is how Michaelis, 1978, 351, interprets the “series of ‘moderate’ anti-Jewish decrees” promulgated in late 1943, when the German occupation was still new.

thwarted at every turn, mostly by the very people who should have been his natural allies, but whom he alienated with his endless accusations. His propaganda initiatives, meant to instill anti-Semitism in the population, were dismissed as laughably ineffective by the Ministry of the Interior; and he was always held at arm's length by the dictator, who despised him as an unbalanced crank and resented his influence with the Germans.

To realize what Preziosi did accomplish it is necessary to look at the damage done throughout the span of his entire career as Italy's most fanatical anti-Semite.¹¹⁴ In Salò his efforts may not have taken anti-Semitic persecution to the extremes he envisioned, but, as De Felice observes, "Italy was not to become anti-Semitic because of Preziosi and his miserable little group, but the Italian public, as it rejected anti-Semitism, became unconsciously accustomed to hearing its slogans and some of its ideas."¹¹⁵ This is an observation about Italian anti-Semitism that De Felice repeats at the end of his book as well – that Italians, notwithstanding a rather scant anti-Semitic tradition, did succumb (although in few numbers) to hatred of the Jews.¹¹⁶ While it is certainly true that the real driving force behind the Holocaust in Italy was the presence of German forces, it is equally true that there were Italian anti-Semites who cooperated with the

¹¹⁴Sarfatti, 252, n.65, takes issue with De Felice's assessment of Preziosi's impact on events in Salò. De Felice attributed to Preziosi a worsening of the anti-Jewish persecution, but Sarfatti claims "highly serious levels of persecution" had already been reached before Preziosi received his nomination to the Inspectorate. Sarfatti, though, often seems unwilling to cite De Felice's qualifications on his own research.

¹¹⁵De Felice 1993, 45.

¹¹⁶De Felice 1993, 443-447.

Germans. In this regard, Michaelis reminds us that “Italian resistance to the final solution took the form of unofficial sabotage and futile complaints about German violation of Fascist race laws.”¹¹⁷ The Italian people, compared to other countries occupied by the Germans, have one of the best records for non-cooperation in the Holocaust.¹¹⁸ De Felice, however, draws a bleaker picture: precisely because there had been a rather weak anti-Semitic tradition in Italy, and the Nazi persecution was short-lived and somewhat less severe compared to Eastern Europe, these facts “increase [the persecution’s] moral more than material significance;” Italians, he argues, must not minimize the responsibility they bear. Although cognizant of Italian and even Fascist resistance to the German occupiers, he reminds his readers that after the autumn of 1943, the Germans were militarily hard-pressed on every front and unable to spare the manpower to hunt down Jews entirely on their own. At the Eichmann trial, according to the testimony of Herbert Kappler, the German charged with the round-up of the Jews of Rome in October 1943, all arrests of Jews in Italy after that date “were carried out not by Germans, but by Italians.”¹¹⁹ How did Germans find anti-Semitic collaborators in a nation that had until recently boasted of a negligible anti-Semitic tradition? In my opinion, the answer to this can be found in the anti-

¹¹⁷Michaelis 1978, 405.

¹¹⁸Michaelis 1978, 352. De Felice 1993 concurs in this, but offers a decidedly more nuanced picture and reminds his readers that many Italians did in fact participate in the Holocaust. But he points out that “the peasant population of central and northern Italy made a significant contribution to this rescue operation. While there were many pro-Fascist elements among them, and many were fearful of the harsh punishment that was meted out to those who helped or gave shelter to the Jews, the solidarity of the rural populations ... was fundamental.” 460.

¹¹⁹De Felice 1993, 445.

Semitic poison instilled by the likes of “intellectuals” such as Preziosi, Interlandi and Evola, which had penetrated into the awareness of many Italians, thanks to its constant repetition in the press, and had possibly even come to function at the level of common sense and common knowledge.

Certainly Mussolini deserves the blame for institutionalizing anti-Semitism in Italy. The racial laws he had promulgated in 1938, and his alliance with Hitler, led directly to the destruction of Italian Jews. But Giovanni Preziosi was more responsible than any other single Italian, including Mussolini himself, for intensifying the anti-Semitic atmosphere of Salò. Some of these attitudes can be observed among several examination essays written by candidates at an army officer training school in Fontanellato in August 1944, from a course in “political-racial culture” (*Corso di cultura politico-razziale*) taught by a Generale Auro D’Alba, an old associate of Preziosi.¹²⁰ Five of twelve essays picked at random, answering the question “How would you conceive a racial action in the Italian Social Republic?” (*Come concepite un’azione razziale nella Repubblica Sociale Italiana?*) disclose, from certain elements they share in common, that the course was meant to inculcate particular views on race.¹²¹ All five are written by seemingly well educated young men. Their answers draw upon core themes of the course: the existence of an Italian race and its preservation, biological versus spiritual racism, the concept of an elite and the formation of a racial “caste”

¹²⁰ACS, SPD CR RSI b. 47, f. 498, “Dell’attività del Generale Auro D’Alba.” January 3, 1945. Memo explaining that D’Alba’s son had personal contact with Preziosi and was overheard insisting on Buffarini-Guidi’s treachery.

¹²¹ACS, SPD CR RSI b. 47, f.498.

among the population, and the threat posed by the Jews to “Aryan” civilization. Four books were assigned: Evola’s *Il mito del sangue*, Preziosi’s translation of the *Protocols*, Sergio D’Alba’s (the son of the aforementioned general) *Lezioni di cultura politica-razziale*, and Giovanni Papini’s *Gog*.

Three of these essays try to sidestep endorsing racist persecution by emphasizing “spiritual” racism over biological. One, written by a Giovanni Marconi, goes so far as to virtually dispense with a biological definition of race, identifying race finally as “an idealist privilege of a people, a spiritual orientation, a way of conceiving of and living life.” According to this cadet, “perfecting spiritual values” should be regarded as the ultimate aim of a racist action. He barely concedes a “Jewish problem” and refrains from calling for persecution: “the racist problem is here restricted to the anti-Semitic problem and following this, the anti-Masonic problem. Immunizing against an invasion of a false conception of life in a Jewish sense will have to be dealt with by the directing caste.” It is interesting to note that another essay – which develops a radically aristocratic outlook, blaming Italy’s current predicament on the mentality of the masses – entirely rejects the persecution of the Jews: “Denying the right to life to the Jew, who has been accepted among us, who has worn our uniform and praised our program, would have been impossible” (signed by Piero della Verità).

Two of the essays, on the other hand, are strikingly anti-Semitic, and one in particular amounts to the kind of hysterical rant that certainly would have earned Preziosi’s approbation. It is interesting that in both, Jews have moved to the center of Italy’s war aims. In both we find an imaginary construct of Jews,

replete with the clichés and stereotypes disseminated by Preziosi's propaganda and that of the Nazis. The milder of the two was written by a Cesare Mosconi, who claimed to have had only one experience with Jews – seeing them confined in a concentration camp in Croatia, “with big yellow stars affixed to their chests as a sign of identification. Had I not known who they were, these identification marks and their downcast faces would have stirred compassion for them in my soul.” But this soldier, already familiar with the many “poisonous and hidden” ways in the Jews have worked to bring about the “material and spiritual ruin” of Italy and the rest of the “Aryan” world, and comes to regret wasting even a moment's pity on them. “They are all alike,” he says, and the reader must wonder how, with so little personal experience with Jews, a soldier no older than his early twenties could have developed such a chilling repugnance for ordinary humanity. But he immediately reminds us why they deserve so desolate a fate: their responsibility for undermining the spiritual and cultural values of the Christian world. The boundaries between Europeans and Jews are more “spiritual” than biological, he argues, yet no less deterministic for that, for spirit and culture have been turned into racial characteristics, the product of biological endowment. He develops his argument by invoking spiritual values and cultural norms, with Jews identified as secretly and implacably undermining all that is valuable, worthy and sacred; Europe emerges as an idealized spiritual collective, threatened by dangerous enemies, both internally – the Jew, and externally – the Allies, controlled by the Jews.

Expressing many of the same attitudes, yet with a dramatically heightened ferocity, Nino Muccioli's essay begins as an indictment of the modern world, and then turns into an argument for genocide. For "proof" of what a danger the Jews represent, he points to the societies where modernity has taken deepest root – Britain, France and the United States – where the "dissolution" is most advanced, where spiritual values are most subverted – and where the Jews reign supreme. Modern characteristics like Jazz, or the "refined sensuousness" of American cinema, or the liberation of women "who have forgotten their family function" are unmistakable signs of the advanced rot. "Two centuries in this direction have done nothing but undermine our highest beliefs." The modern world he regards as a "trick of the Jews" to "enslave and undermine" the "Aryan" world, with the current war being waged as a struggle for its "restoration of health."

What is immediately striking about Muccioli's essay is the roster of famous names he invokes: Einstein, "who sought to undermine science at its base with his doctrine of relativity," and Freud, "who believed that by exploring the unconscious he could explain the soul of man," along with Weininger, Solomon Reinach, Max Nordau, Bergson, Debussy, Wasserman, and even Disraeli. The names he lists here belong to an earlier generation and their impact may have troubled the intellectual certainties and cultural norms of his parents', or even grandparents' generation, but not his own. Thus we wonder how someone who came to maturity in the late 1930s or early 1940s could have been so deeply troubled by figures from the past. The accomplishments of these intellectuals had never been an issue for Fascism – until now.

“The first infiltration of the Jews into the Aryan world was accomplished through Christianity,” he states. Before the world was “Jewified” there existed a perfect synthesis of spirituality and materialism, combined in the personality of the ancient Roman. The appearance in Europe of Jewish influence in the form of Christianity tore this perfect synthesis apart, with spirit and matter at war ever since. To save the world, he insists we must resort to racism – “heroic, Roman, spiritual.” “Hidden powers” at work in the upper reaches of the nation’s life have so far impeded the application of the racial laws; his fellow citizens have failed to comprehend that “racism is the ethical foundation that our social-fascist movement rests upon.”

A “race war” is thus called for against the Jew, who is “characteristically subversive of every ordering ideal, like an acid corroding everything but creating nothing.” Stripped of all human qualities, the Jew is likened to “a terrible gangrene,” cancer, corrosion – they are the “anti-race” incarnating absolute evil. What is the solution to these imaginary problems, hatched by an imaginary enemy?

Repeatedly during his eight-page essay he calls not for the removal of Jews, but for their extermination: “A pitiless war of extermination;” “a war to the death must be declared against every Jewish tendency;” “ferocious persecution;” “It is time to finish with this accursed Jewish anti-race that, with demonic fury, has for centuries undermined the basis of our existence;” “We fight this current war not only for the life of our people, but for the existence of all humanity;” “No pity for corrosive and anti-racial elements in either their hidden or obvious form;”

“war until the complete destruction of the anti-race and the whole framework that supports it.”

Such fanaticism is Preziosi’s true legacy. Little in Italian culture, and virtually nothing in Fascist rhetoric during the previous twenty-five years, can be blamed as the source for this outlook.¹²² These are Nazi views, transplanted into Italian circumstances. These, thanks to Preziosi, Interlandi and Evola, were the values that animated ordinary Italians to follow Nazi orders, and to do Nazi evil.

Yet it must be acknowledged that a far larger number of ordinary Italians were clearly deaf to such propaganda; otherwise so many Jews would not have survived twenty months of German occupation. The relationship between a small number of anti-Semitic “intellectuals” and Mussolini as nominal head of state during the Salò Republic sheds light on the degree of power the Duce exercised in this government. During the years of the regime, Preziosi had had a very small part to play, notwithstanding his commitment to Fascism, because, by all accounts, Mussolini loathed him. His sudden rise to ministerial rank (and this came as an afterthought; Mussolini had appointed all his other ministers four months earlier) argues that he had somehow become much more valuable to Mussolini after the Germans came on the scene. But this cannot be true: Mussolini, as we have seen, brought Preziosi into the government in order to keep him away from the Germans and where he could curtail and impede his activities

¹²²Although it must certainly be acknowledged that the Vatican played a role in disseminating anti-Semitic attitudes and “in the development of the policies of discrimination and harassment that set the stage for the Holocaust,” as David Kertzer points out in *The Popes Against the Jews*, 265.

whenever he found it appropriate. Mussolini seems to have had little choice; Preziosi was somebody he was forced to “live with” regardless of how he felt about him. Considering Preziosi’s relationship with Hitler, it was out of the question for him to be dismissed. It seems, from the evidence presented here, that Mussolini’s presence might perhaps have even mitigated Preziosi’s toxic influence in some degree; what Preziosi unleashed would have been like, with only the Germans to answer to, is fearful to imagine.

Nevertheless Mussolini’s characteristic impulse to control or channel the output of intellectuals for his own benefit can be seen at work here. His overriding concern in Salò was to secure a basis for popularity among Italians, and he knew the Germans and their anti-Semitism were deeply unpopular in Italy. It seems plausible that he realized anti-Semitism was no longer really politically useful to him, now that the Italian relationship to Germany had taken such an unexpected turn, now that Italy was occupied by its “ally.” But circumstances would never permit him to abandon it now. In this regard, Mussolini’s dealings with Preziosi might be seen as one more maneuver in a larger project of Fascist self-presentation, with Mussolini quietly, behind the scenes, fighting him and the Germans for control of the degree to which the Salò Republic would be seen by ordinary Italians as anti-Semitic. This is not meant to suggest, however, that Mussolini was anything but indifferent to the fate of the Jews, regardless of how many times he privately confessed his doubts about anti-Semitism. But for the sake of securing autonomy from the real powers operating in the Salò government

– an autonomy which might even assure his future political survival – he was interested in giving ordinary Italians what they wanted.

CHAPTER SIX: SOCIALIZATION

Nothing about Salò suggests more of a rupture with the previous years of Fascist rule – indeed nothing seems more completely at odds with the spirit of Fascism itself – than Mussolini’s declared intention to restructure the Italian economy along socialist lines. “The State which we wish to set up will be national and social in the highest sense of the word: that is, it will be Fascist, thus going back to our origins,” he announced during his radio broadcast from Munich on September 18, 1943. To set about doing this, he added, it was first of all necessary “to annihilate the parasitic plutocracies and at last make labor the theme of our economy and the indestructible basis of the State.”¹ Two months later, fully 10 of the 18 points of the Verona Manifesto elaborated this new turn toward socialism. Point 9 summed up the new socialist ethos: “The basis of the Social Republic, and its primary object, is manual, technical, and intellectual labor, in its every manifestation.”²

At the time of the Verona congress, Mussolini regarded socialism, or, as it was called in Salò, “socialization” as an answer to several problems at once. First and foremost, it would serve as revenge against the Italian bourgeoisie, which he felt had turned against him at the time of the German alliance, shown no enthusiasm for the war effort, and thwarted his armaments programs. Many

¹ Quoted in Deakin, 565.

² De Felice 1997, 610-613.

among the bourgeoisie he suspected of harboring pro-British feelings.³ Among the intransigents, who regarded the bourgeoisie in the same light as the July 25 “traitors,” this suspicion was as good as established fact.⁴ As the war continued, Mussolini’s view of the Italian upper classes as an internal enemy hardened. *Socializzazione* would punish the bourgeoisie and deny them power and influence forever.⁵

Next, socialization would take the wind out of the sails of the communists by lessening the appeal of their propaganda. This, he suspected, had found a place in the hearts of the working classes, whose wartime sufferings and yearnings for social justice he could hardly have been unaware of.⁶ Socialization would win them over to Fascism at a time when no other idea for continuing the war presented itself. He saw socialism as a way, too, of undermining Italian loyalty toward the Allied-supported royal government in the south.

Furthermore, a Fascist socialism would create difficulties for the slowly advancing Allies. After capturing Italian territory, the Anglo-American armies would find a socialist system in place and Italian workers hostile to its removal. After the war, a socialist economy would impede the harmonious meshing of

³ Deakin, 671. In a memo to Ribbentrop on February 11, 1944, Rahn related that “the Duce pointed out that the behavior of Italian industrialists, the majority of whom were secretly drawn towards Britain, was responsible for the inadequate results achieved by Italian industry.”

⁴ Ganapini, 368.

⁵ Salotti 1986, 163. According to Salotti, the name “*socializzazione*” was proposed by Bombacci to replace the name selected by Angelo Tarchi and Mussolini, “*Carta della collaborazione sociale*.”

⁶ Dolfin, 236. On February 5, 1944, Mussolini vented to his secretary, “between becoming an English dominion, a German province or a Soviet federal republic . . . 95 percent of Italians would opt for Stalin.”

Italian industry into the world capitalist economy dominated by the British Empire and the United States, with Italy lost forever to bourgeois capitalist exploitation.⁷ But most importantly, a Fascist government popular with the working classes would strengthen Mussolini's hand vis-à-vis the occupying Germans. Since Hitler believed the only valuable resource Italy now brought to the war effort was its labor force, for Mussolini to command its allegiance would position him as mediator and protector of the one thing about Italy for which the Germans still had use.⁸

And yet another reason for Mussolini to turn to socialism was that he had begun to see the monarchy's betrayal as a direct consequence of Fascism abandoning its "central task." Compromises with the monarchy and the bourgeoisie at the time his dictatorship was established had warped the true nature of Fascism, whose central task had started out as revolutionary and socialist. The original revolutionary syndicalist core, long-since buried during the years following the founding of the *Fasci di combattimento* in 1919, was now to be revived at Salò. Mussolini's September broadcast from Germany had restored a sense of legitimacy to those leftist and anarchist elements discarded and suppressed when Fascism moved to the right and acquired a conservative base after 1920. Taking heart from the Duce's rediscovered socialist sympathies, these

⁷ Amicucci, 152. See also, Salotti, 166 and 197.

⁸ Deakin, 667: labor was "the only real asset of the republican regime – the ultimate control of which was the only source of political power."

elements from Fascism's early days clamored for a voice at the Verona congress, and gave noisy endorsement to his socialization plans.⁹

Except for members of his government, there were two figures Mussolini saw more often than any other guests during his stay at Villa Feltrinelli: Nicola Bombacci and Carlo Silvestri.¹⁰ From October 1943 on, their frequent visits led observers to regard them as personal advisors. Neither can be considered intellectuals except in the broadest sense – both had worked for years as journalists. Both shared the same background in socialist politics, working alongside Mussolini before and during the First World War. Silvestri was a highly atypical socialist, Bombacci an equally atypical communist; as leftists, they had been silenced and marginalized during the first ten or so years of the regime – until becoming reconciled to Fascism. Bombacci helped to found the Italian Communist Party in 1921, and Silvestri led the anti-Fascist opposition in the press during the Matteotti crisis, enduring in consequence six years of internal exile (*confino*, or confinement to a remote town). Both rallied to the Duce at Salò.¹¹ What kind of influence might they have exercised in shaping Mussolini's socialization program?

I would first like to briefly adumbrate Mussolini's socialist background vis-à-vis the formation of Fascist politics. This I regard as crucial for

⁹ Id., 666-667. See also, Bocca, 160. Some of the more extremist members of the Fascist left wing demanded the abolition of private property.

¹⁰ This is what Dolfin observed during his tenure as head of Mussolini's secretariat, October 1943 to March 1944. Dolfin, 118, 192. See also Salotti, 162-163.

¹¹ It deserves mention that there is no record of any socialist or communist ever having supported Mussolini's *socializzazione* program.

understanding what socialism meant to him by 1943-1944. Then I will appraise what kind of socialism, if any, took shape under the Italian Social Republic, before finally assessing the possible impact Silvestri and Bombacci might have had on Mussolini's efforts to establish socialism in Nazi-occupied Italy.

I. Mussolini's Socialist Background

Mussolini's own conception of socialism has always seemed too eclectic and too peculiar for many people not to doubt its genuineness.¹² His father had been a socialist, and Mussolini often boasted about socialism's formative impact on his life. He began publishing articles in local socialist papers in northern Italy and Switzerland as soon as he left school. During the early years of the twentieth century, the Italian Socialist Party was split between two warring camps: reformists and revolutionaries; his sympathies were decidedly with the latter. From the first, he regarded the reformists as deeply tainted by "bourgeois degeneracy." Thanks to his fiery performance at the Socialist Party congress at Reggio Emilia in 1912, which helped the revolutionary wing capture the party leadership, he was able to advance into the higher ranks of the party hierarchy. He won appointment in November of that year to serve as editor of *Avanti!*, the most widely circulated socialist newspaper in Italy.

¹²For the following discussion on the evolution of Mussolini's socialist background, I rely upon three sources: Zeev Sternhell with Mario Sznajder and Maia Asher, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology* (trans. by David Maisel) (Princeton, 1994) 195-258; Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario, 1883-1920* (Turin, 1965 and 1995) 3-22, 46-176; and Gentile 1996, *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista*, 53-110.

No sooner had he reached power within the Socialist Party than he began a long, slow detachment from socialism. Although he called himself a Marxist, and even professed a belief in the class struggle, he was never a doctrinaire Marxist. He had read the *Communist Manifesto*, but his familiarity with Marxism was largely second-hand, and came from reading about Marxist dialectics in the writings of socialist theoretician Arturo Labriola and syndicalist Georges Sorel. Nietzsche's philosophy and Pareto's theory of elites probably played a greater part in forming his worldview than Marxism did. As a young man, he developed a strong enthusiasm for the ideas of the Italian futurists, the propaganda of the Nationalist party, and the anti-positivist and anti-democratic themes found in the avant-garde Florentine journals *Leonardo* and *La Voce*, to which he occasionally contributed articles.¹³ These influences formed the ideological bedrock of his views for the rest of his life.

Mussolini remained a member of the Socialist Party until he was expelled during the intervention crisis at the end of 1914. Even before that event, his writings had become quite critical of socialism. His attitudes towards Marxism in particular developed in a negative direction under the influence of the anti-materialist and vitalist revision of Marx he found in Sorel. Starting in early 1914, he began to launch violent attacks against Marxism and even founded his own journal, *Utopia*, as a forum for anti-Marxist views. A turning point came with the failure of the Italian Socialist Party to reap advantage from the insurrectionary

¹³ Adamson 1993, 227-262.

turmoil of “Red Week” in June 1914, which caused him to lose all belief in the political capacities of the socialists and in the ability of the proletariat to fulfill its historic mission.¹⁴ By the time of his expulsion from the Socialist Party in November 1914, he was ready to admit his loss of faith. Founding his own newspaper, *Il Popolo d'Italia*, allowed his views to evolve even further away from anything recognizably socialist. He began insisting on the need to create a special elite, a renovated humanity, that had prepared itself for the task of carrying out a revolution. Between 1912 and 1915, he began to reconceptualize the revolution in entirely different terms, as nationalist and anti-Marxist, and as a “spiritual transvaluation of all values.” After Italy entered the war in May 1915, he turned on his former socialist comrades and denounced them as traitors. By the end of the war, Mussolini’s articles in *Il Popolo d'Italia* (whose masthead he changed in 1918 from “socialist daily” to “combatants’ and producers’ daily”) called not for socialist revolution, but for the “renovation” of the Italian economy, in which all social classes would collaborate on behalf of economic growth, efficiency and productivity. After the founding of the *Fasci di combattimento* in Milan in March 1919, he and his followers moved to the right.

Mussolini’s views on socialism reveal the peculiar nature of his idealism. He was less interested in the revolution’s result – an end to the deprivations and indignities suffered by the working class – than in the violence that would overthrow the old order. Violent struggle would inaugurate the complete

¹⁴Cannistraro and Sullivan, 112-115.

reshaping of humanity, he argued; violence would transform Italians, bringing to the surface the strongest, most ruthless, and most worthy elements, on which socialism could build. Such ideals were more characteristic of a revolutionary syndicalist than a Marxian socialist. Mussolini's politics as a socialist seem more embedded in rage and personal frustration than in any larger hopes for humanity; the kind of yearnings for justice and humanity commonly associated with Marxist socialism tended to excite his contempt. This, along with any vestige of "bourgeois culture" – the legacy of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, parliamentary democracy and humanitarian values – he violently rejected as weak and degenerate.¹⁵

By late 1920, Mussolini's political movement began to lose its nucleus of original followers and to acquire a mass following of mostly unemployed, angry ex-soldiers. By 1921, when blackshirted *squadristi* were beating and murdering socialists by the thousands all over Italy, he had already de-emphasized the leftist tendencies within the original Fascist program.¹⁶ Once in power, he did virtually nothing on behalf of the Italian working classes, whose fortunes declined during the twenty years of Fascist rule. Italy was in fact the only western European country in which real wages for industrial workers dropped between 1925 and

¹⁵Gentile 1996, 64. "He explained his natural egotism as a noble sign of the exceptional individual he was, who was outside the vulgar mentality of the age, a forerunner of a future humanity renovated by the revolution and by the triumph of reason over religious and social superstitions. Mussolini thought of himself as a 'primitive' of this future world, uneasy living in the old world, whose destruction he dreamed about and prepared for."

¹⁶De Felice 1965, 742-743.

1943.¹⁷ Workers were forbidden by law to strike. The Socialist Party was outlawed. Such social initiatives as the Fascist “Charter of Labor” and Corporativism (1926-27) proved little more than smokescreens for government control and suppression of labor on behalf of the country’s powerful economic elites.¹⁸

After his release from captivity in September 1943, Mussolini announced his intention to take Fascism back to its socialist roots. Fascism’s errors had to be acknowledged, wrongs righted, and much was going to be re-evaluated, he said. The “real” Fascism, pure and undistorted by compromises with the bourgeoisie and monarchy, could now show its true face. But the record shows Mussolini had abandoned socialism before any such compromises had ever taken place, and whatever arrangements he made with the wealthy and powerful in order to create the dictatorship obviously came years after the transformation of his attitudes toward socialism.

What kind of economic system did he have in mind at this moment, with Germans all but in total control of Italy’s economy, when he invoked the word *socializzazione*? One glimpse into his thinking is afforded by the views he confided to his German doctor, Georg Zachariae, sent to him by Hitler in October 1943, who remained with him for the duration of the Salò regime. In his autobiography published a few years after the war, Zachariae recalled these

¹⁷ Spencer M. Di Scala, *Italy: from Revolution to Republic* (Boulder/Oxford, 1995) 238.

¹⁸ This is so undisputed in the historiography of Fascism as to be a virtual cliché, but see, besides the above, Bosworth 2002, 288-292, and John Pollard, *The Fascist Experience in Italy* (London/New York, 1998) 82-88.

reflections about the current crisis and Mussolini's determination to transform Italy into a socialist state.¹⁹ Mussolini's long ruminations on his socialist past recounted his alienation from Marxism and growing disillusion with the working class, from Marxism and the idea of class struggle, and from the Socialist Party itself. He came to believe a proletarian revolution could only fail, since laying the groundwork for a socialist society represented a challenge neither Marxists nor the working classes were not equipped to face: "I became convinced, from the years of my youth onwards, that socialism is neither a purely economic question, nor a question of class with regard to only part of the populace, but that it is above all *a question of character*" (my italics). Looking back over his career, he claimed socialism, not Fascism, had been his sole objective from the beginning: "the goal of a successful fascism was only to reach the first stage, that of discovering the means to create a new social order in Italy. And the more fascism spreads into the hearts and minds of every Italian, becoming part of their moral life, the closer the moment approaches for the birth of the future socialism."²⁰

Undoubtedly the bitterness of these reflections owed something to the recent turn of events set in motion by the treacherous bourgeoisie. Indeed, a long-suppressed suspicion and hostility toward the Italian elite seems to have strongly

¹⁹George Zachariae, *Mussolini si confessa: rivelazioni del medico Tedesco inviato da Hitler al Duce* (trans. from German *Als Arzt und Vertrauter Freund bei Mussolini*)(Cernusco sul Naviglio, 1949) 139. "I wish therefore to repeat here Mussolini's own words, which I have attempted to synthesize in the clearest manner possible, but which I can guarantee as corresponding perfectly to the ideas he expressed since, not being an expert in such a subject [socialism], I considered opportune to transcribe them almost literally after each conversation, while I was still under the direct and immediate impression of his words."

²⁰Id., 138-146.

influenced Mussolini's peculiar version of socialism, which had less to do with supporting the working classes, and more to do with punishing the bourgeoisie. He told Zachariae the modifications to the economic system he envisioned would not touch private property, yet they would rein in the power of big capital: "in truth, what would be needed to create a real socialism is to overcome the workers' servile condition to an anonymous force, whether private or state capital." It was precisely this anonymous force in the form of "state capital" that he blamed for causing the demeaning condition of Soviet workers. Repeatedly, he denounced Soviet communism for having created nothing but misery for the workers of Russia. He had come to believe the state had no moral right to use its power to maintain the privileges of private capital, and deplored that fact that workers under capitalism have no right to share in the profits their labor creates. He insisted, however, on the legitimacy of private property, which he carefully distinguished from the power of big capital. Unequal pay scales for different jobs he defended as necessary, but demanded a limit on profits paid to investors, with the "excess" to be put aside for improving the lives of workers with such schemes as building more housing and improving transportation and access to medical care. The ultimate goal of his socialization program, he revealed to Zachariae, was the creation of a new social order in which the bourgeoisie would no longer exist:

When the value of money depends only on work and productivity, rather than on gold or stock shares, the capitalist system will have completely ceased to exist. With that, a certain category of people will have been excluded from the community and from society and perhaps destroyed –

those people for whom money is a god; and this, to humanity, can only come as a great benefit.²¹

II. Socialism at Salò

The ideal of socialism Mussolini sketched out to Dr. Zachariae bore great resemblance to what emerged as *socializzazione* during the first months of 1944. The Verona Manifesto contained few specifics on how socialism would be installed in northern Italy. The rough draft of it was put together by Mussolini, with the final version being completed by Pavolini and resubmitted to the Duce for approval.²² At the conclusion of the Verona congress in mid-November, Mussolini created the new Ministry of Corporate Economy. Silvio Gai, the first appointee to this ministry, soon proved unsatisfactory, so Mussolini chose as his replacement a chemical engineer of some renown, Angelo Tarchi, on December 31, 1943. Tarchi, a moderate who had served in the Fascist bureaucracy, and a man who did not believe in “demonizing big capital,” had many friends among Italian financiers and industrialists, and at first glance does not seem the perfect choice to lead a campaign on behalf of socialism.²³ Yet he was in fact well disposed to Mussolini’s ideas and served him faithfully in his ministerial capacity for a year.²⁴

²¹ Id., 141-157.

²² Deakin, 626.

²³ Ganapini, 370-378. See also, Giuseppe Pardini, “Angelo Tarchi” in Andriola, ed., 1999, 129-146, as well as Tarchi’s memoir, *Teste Dure* (Milan, 1967) 51-72 (on whose reliability Ganapini expresses doubts (377)).

²⁴ At some stage during his appointment, Tarchi became concerned about the disproportion between the level of income various businesses were taking in, versus the amount paid in salaries. He notified Mussolini of this in a long memo (unfortunately undated), suggesting that some of the

On January 12, 1944, the day after the executions of the “July traitors” in Verona, Tarchi submitted a memo to the Council of Ministers called “A Basic Premise for the New Structure of Italian Economy,” which the Council passed without discussion. This document, a rough draft of the decrees sought by Mussolini, backed away from some of the more extreme positions of the Verona Manifesto.²⁵ Its introduction acknowledged the failure of corporativism, a failure that “has demonstrated how the State is unable, at the current historical moment, to limit itself to a purely mediating function between social classes, since the greater power of the capitalist class thwarts any judicial parity . . . and succeeds in dominating and turning to its own advantage the very power of the State.”²⁶ On the same day it passed, a major propaganda campaign was launched in the press to explain to the public the nature of the new socialist economy. The Basic Premise, though, was not published yet.

Instead, Tarchi submitted it to ambassador Rahn for comment, who called him in for a three-hour interview the next day. Rahn admitted he did not expect a positive reaction from Hitler or any of the German military authorities, and

problem was due to having too much manpower in some sectors of the economy, and not enough in others. He sought the remedy for this in a series of proposals that would create an agency of “temporary availability” for various industrial workers – in essence, a temporary agency. See ACS, CR RSI b.83 f.654, sf.2.

²⁵ Bocca, 160. “The measures [in the Basic Premise] were furthermore seen as a way to marginalize the extremists who at the Verona congress were demanding abolition of private property.” See also Deakin, 665-668.

²⁶ ACS, SPD CR b. 83, f. 654, sf. 1, “Per la creazione della nuova struttura dell’impresa.” Parlato, 310, suggests that Pavolini himself was somewhat convinced of the necessity of a turn to the left, but one quite different from Mussolini’s, one that “sank its roots on one hand in squadristism, in the anti-bourgeois vision of *combattentismo* and on the other in the project of a militia-party . . . able to control the state itself.”

recommended the Italians rethink some of their propositions in light of German economic and political needs. The next day Rahn had a conversation with Mussolini, who rather forcefully insisted on receiving German support for his plans.²⁷ Reporting back to Berlin, Rahn quoted Mussolini as saying:

this new system should present the opportunity of awakening in the Italian industrial worker a sense of participation and an interest in his firm. This had hitherto proved impossible through the fault of the big Italian industrialists, who were for the most part typical representatives of high finance. One could not expect a positive attitude on the part of the workers who had up to the present been neither trusted nor guided by their employers and had no other link with the enterprise. Without these measures which the Duce proposed to introduce there was a danger that the workers might plunge headlong into Communism.²⁸

On the following day Rahn explained the socialist campaign in considerable detail to the German foreign minister Ribbentrop in a long telegraphed memo which Deakin quotes in full. He began his description to Ribbentrop, significantly, by observing that the socialist campaign was an endeavor to capture consensus from a populace steeped in communist propaganda. He added, "Germany herself must surely have an interest in supporting the Fascist government in its struggle against the plutocratic and Communist forces in the country."²⁹ He explained further that the measures were to be applied only to enterprises with more than fifty employees or having a capital investment exceeding one million lire. No expropriation was to take place.

²⁷Klinkhammer, 254-255, emphasizes this as among the few times Mussolini refused to back down under German pressure, and it seems to have been the only time he expressed a willingness to go over Rahn's head and appeal to Hitler directly.

²⁸Deakin, 672.

²⁹Id., 668.

The key innovation was the establishment of boards of directors in which half the members were to be elected by the shareholders, and the other half by the workers, technicians and clerical staff. This, Ganapini argues, was the “central act” of socialization in Salò: “the culminating and decisive moment proving the revolutionary essence of the new fascism was the introduction of workers to the decisional level of management.”³⁰ Elected representatives were first nominated from a list approved by the Ministry of Corporate Economy, to exclude communist participation. Regarding distribution of profits, a percentage figure was to be established, with anything exceeding that amount to be divided up among the workers in proportion to their salaries.³¹

The German response was contradictory. Ribbentrop reported back to Rahn that Hitler “took the view that the socio-economic measures adopted by the Duce were no concern of ours . . . he was, furthermore, under the impression that the Duce’s measures were chiefly directed against the industrialists and factory owners, who bore the brunt of the responsibility for sabotaging his armament programme.”³² In other words, Mussolini had already spoken to Hitler in person about his economic plans, and Hitler had made no objection. Rahn chose not to intervene further.³³

³⁰Ganapini, 369.

³¹Deakin, 671-672.

³²Id., 672-673.

³³Although Rahn did organize a breakfast meeting of several leading Italian industrialists the following week in order to get an impression of their attitudes toward the measures. See ACS, SPD CR RSI b. 27, f. 221r, “Appunto per il Duce,” unsigned, but on letterhead of Milan Prefecture, s.d., but refers to recent laws passed on January 13, and “last Monday the 7th.”

The German military authorities in Italy, however, took a much darker view. General Leyers, who commanded the German “War and Armaments Commission” (RUK), reacted quite negatively, circulating a memo to various factory heads in northern Italy demanding the names of any persons who tried to implement the socialization measures.³⁴ In this, he was met with enthusiastic collusion on the part of virtually all industrialists throughout northern Italy.³⁵ Many of the Italian industrialists, as well as the German economic authorities, were frankly confused by some of the decrees, especially the ones pertaining to distribution of profits to workers. Swiss investors, too, who represented around 25 percent of capital invested in Italian industry, also made their opposition known.³⁶ The intransigents, led as usual by Farinacci, gave vent with characteristic malevolence toward anything even vaguely leftist. Farinacci sneered, “no social program can be realized until the war has been won. And wars are won with soldiers, not with strikes.” Julius Evola tried to psychoanalyze Mussolini in one of his articles, suggesting his regression to an earlier form of Fascism was due to the shock of the “betrayal.”³⁷

³⁴It is necessary to keep in mind that socialization of Italian industry took place in the context of total subordination and exploitation of the Italian economy to German military needs, that there were German representatives at every level of the economic structure whose consent was required for every important decision, and that the Germans carried out a policy of destruction of Italian industrial plant as they retreated in the face of the Allied advance. See Ganapini, 380-383.

³⁵Klinkhammer, 254-255. See also, Dolfin, 210: “Industrialists, obviously, did everything they could so that the decrees would not apply to their companies.”

³⁶Deakin, 675-677.

³⁷Bocca, 160-164. See also Parlato, 290, who cites a report prepared for Pavolini on November 27, 1943 on the topic of the attitudes of the general population towards socialism: “if fascism had lost popular consensus, this had happened ‘because nothing revolutionary had been done with regard

On February 12, with some modification, the decrees were passed by the Council of Ministers, with the stipulation that they would not go into effect until June 30.³⁸

On March 1-3, industrial strikes broke out in Turin and quickly spread to Milan and Genoa. The entire Fiat complex of factories came to a halt, while strikes among railway workers kept thousands from reaching factories. These were violently suppressed by Fascist police squads with the help of the German S.S. The strikes caused considerable consternation in Berlin, and were ruthlessly punished on Hitler's orders on March 6 by deporting twenty percent of the strikers to labor camps in Germany.³⁹

Mussolini (as well as many contemporary historians) saw the strikes as the reaction of Italian labor's communist leadership to his socialist project.

Klinkhammer demonstrates convincingly that this was not true, as they were meant to be staged much earlier, but eventually took place while the socialization campaign was still being discussed in the press. In fact, they were originally

to what had been promised in the social sphere, and it had not been done because the Party and Regime were substantially in the hands of conservative forces.' These forces, 'the invisible hierarchy' which exercised effective command of Italian society, succeeded in corrupting fascism, which had not had the strength to liquidate the old bourgeois power, which had been based exclusively on the power of one man, and which had not constructed in twenty years one solid revolutionary thought."

³⁸ ACS, SPD CR RSI b. 27, f. 221r. Handwritten letter from Tarchi to Duce, February 11, 1944, reports a conversation between Tarchi and Ambassador Rahn, in which the latter suggests that the socialization measures might be delayed until further discussion take place, possibly between Mussolini and Hitler directly. He warned that the German military authorities were not as favorable as he was, and suggested that certain inevitable obstacles could be overcome if Hitler were to be given a more precise understanding of them.

³⁹ Rahn succeeded in having this order rescinded, so that only 1200 of the strikers suffered this fate. Klinkhammer, 426.

planned for January, to demonstrate support for the Allied landings south of Rome at Anzio beach, but were postponed several times in order to coincide with the capture of Rome. Finally, having given up on Rome's imminent capture (which anyway did not take place until June 4), the Action Party decided to call the strikes for March 1.⁴⁰ The real attitude among workers towards Mussolini and his socialization program was actually more dismissive than hostile: "the masses refuse to accept anything from us . . . in brief, the workers consider nationalization as a mirror to catch larks, and they keep well away from us, and the mirror."⁴¹

On June 30, the decrees were partially implemented for approximately seventy firms, all newspaper and publishing enterprises throughout the summer and fall of 1944.⁴² Thereafter socialism in the Salò Republic was effectively a dead letter in terms of transforming the Italian economy; its only further use was as a propaganda tool.⁴³

⁴⁰ Klinkhammer, 255. Ganapini, 408-413, attributes the strikes to several basic factors having little to do with politics, such as the constantly diminishing food rations, worsening work conditions, and the threat of deportation to Germany.

⁴¹ Deakin, 677, quoting Fascist syndicate leader Vaccari's report to the Duce, June 20, 1944. Deakin often translates the word "*socializzazione*" as nationalization. There exists a memo, unsigned, dated June 6, 1944, reporting that the writer had made various inquiries to industrial workers in Turin to understand their attitudes toward the new socialization decrees. He reports, "in the majority of cases, they are persuaded that the measures will never come into force because of opposition from the industrialists and the German authorities. This conviction, almost general, is very dangerous if it turns out to be true, because it would have the effect of increasing the mistrust felt by the mass of workers towards the party and the state. . . . The second observation made is that the law has been much too preoccupied with safeguarding the interests of industrialists and limiting profits to workers." ACS, SPD RSI b. 27, f. 221r.

⁴² Deakin, 676.

⁴³ ACS SPD CR RSI b. 27, f. 221r. Letter to Duce by Tarchi regarding the the socialization decrees, dated June 30, 1944, and detailing the nature of the obstacles to their successful implementation:

III. Nicola Bombacci and Carlo Silvestri

Mussolini was convinced the working classes were overwhelmingly loyal to the communist leadership of the partisan movement. Thus, to proclaim a “return” to socialist roots, to recast the war as a proletarian struggle against plutocracy, to vilify Italy’s liberal capitalist elite for the king’s “betrayal,” and to create at least the illusion of a socialist restructuring of the economy, were steps taken as part of a campaign to win the allegiance he lacked since the war’s beginning and, in his current circumstances, urgently required. The socialization program aimed to split the rank and file members of the partisans from their communist leadership, and can be seen as integral to the *Politica dei Ponti* – the effort to woo the majority of the partisans away from their leaders by creating the illusion that common ground could exist between the Fascists and their enemies on the left. But still the challenge remained: how to construct an appeal so enticing the workers would begin to dismiss communist propaganda the same way they had long dismissed Fascist propaganda?

Mussolini’s approach was to employ “advisors” from the other side, namely, Nicola Bombacci and Carlo Silvestri, who were still remembered and still reviled among Fascists for their leftist views and early opposition to the regime. Their sudden enjoyment of almost unlimited access to Mussolini, which at the time deeply troubled the intransigents, has led some scholars to assume they probably influenced the way Mussolini’s socialism took shape. Ganapini,

“the hostility and resistance of capitalist forces ... and also the very indifference and mistrust with which the world of labor accepted the announcement of the reforms.”

however, dismisses their relevance to Mussolini's socialist initiatives, and regards their importance as overstated by most scholars.⁴⁴ Deakin too, barely mentions them, but sums up Bombacci disparagingly as a "renegade socialist revolutionary" who attached himself to Mussolini as a "self-appointed adviser," and whose "shop-soiled baggage of ideological catchwords had some resemblance to that of Mussolini himself." He mentions Silvestri only to describe his role as intermediary between Mussolini and the Resistance leadership in April 1945, but does not discuss his constant interaction with the Duce over a period of several months beginning in December 1943.⁴⁵ De Felice, in the final volume of his biography of Mussolini, devotes a long footnote to commenting insightfully on the possible psychological dimension implicit in their personal relationships with Mussolini. He suggests their influence may have resided in evoking a strong nostalgia for his early days as a socialist activist, although, significantly, he prefaces his remarks by noting that the scantiness of the documentary evidence available prevents an accurate assessment of their impact.⁴⁶ Recently, both Bombacci and Silvestri have found biographers who have tried to more precisely define the nature of their relationship to Mussolini. These conclude, on the contrary, that their importance has not been adequately emphasized. Exploring what is known about their interaction with the Duce during those months might help us separate fact from speculation.

⁴⁴Ganapini, 376.

⁴⁵Deakin, 626-627, 796-797.

⁴⁶De Felice, 539-541.

Bombacci (1879-1945) was teaching elementary school in the Romagna in the early years of the century when he met Mussolini. They became well acquainted while working together in the Socialist Party, but their lives took separate paths after Mussolini's expulsion.⁴⁷ During World War I, Bombacci moved even further to the left, joined the ranks of the "*massimalisti*" and produced speeches and articles endorsing Lenin and his Bolshevik take-over in Russia. With his incitements to revolution during the *biennio rosso*, he soon earned a reputation as "Lenin *romagnolo*." In November 1919 he was elected to the Chamber of Deputies. After helping to found the Italian Communist Party in January 1921, the Italian government chose him to participate as a special envoy to a meeting in Copenhagen with representatives of the Soviet government to re-establish commercial relations between the two countries. In 1938, in an article published in *Verità*, he admitted that he dated his diminishing idealism about the Soviet experiment from his shock at the extremely cold and unpleasant encounter he had had with Litvinov. Soon after, he formed part of a delegation of Italian communists to Moscow to meet with Lenin in the summer of 1921. He was again on his way to Moscow to attend the Fourth International when the Fascists staged their March on Rome in October 1922. From this point onwards, he became something of an expert in Italian-Soviet trade relations, and continued to work as an intermediary between the two governments until the late 1920s, long after his political career had ended.

⁴⁷Salotti, 26-30.

By early 1924, Bombacci was isolated and ostracized within the Italian Communist Party for challenging its orthodoxy. Some of his pronouncements in the Chamber of Deputies began to raise the suspicions of Communist Party comrades, particularly with regard to the correct attitude toward nation and class. The communist view was that there was only one *patria* – the working class. Bombacci disagreed; for him, the nation was still an ideal to fight for: “we want to go beyond the nation,” he interpellated to Mussolini, “not destroy it; we wish more than you for it to be great, and therefore we want it to be ruled by a government of farmers and workers.”

In 1927, he was formally expelled from the Italian Communist Party for his heretical views. A personal rapprochement with Mussolini took place in the early 1930s when the dictator donated funds to help him pay for his son’s medical expenses. As a “renegade socialist,” known for harboring a highly idiosyncratic – perhaps even incoherent – conception of socialism, spurned by the left and right, he drifted so far from his ideological moorings that he began to slowly acquiesce in the reality of Fascist Italy. He had, moreover, through the years retained a sense of personal loyalty and affection for Mussolini.

A significant turning point in his attitudes toward the Fascist regime came when Mussolini and the League of Nations squared off against each other over the Ethiopian crisis in 1935. This example of the way plutocratic nations such as Britain and France deny rights to “proletarian” countries infuriated him. To his last day, he remained attached to slogans and catchwords representing Italy as a proletarian nation. At the end of 1935 he wrote long, fulsome letters declaring his

personal devotion to Mussolini, who in return paid him scant attention, although Bombacci was now permitted to found a review, *Verità*, in 1936. This publication endorsed a revision of the prevailing view of Fascism as reactionary, urging socialists and communists instead to re-evaluate Fascism as a way of developing socialism much more readily and effectively than the communist and socialist parties could. This about-face did not rehabilitate his reputation among Fascists, who continued to hold him at arm's-length, but by the end of 1937 Bombacci was subjecting Bolshevism and its failures to examinations as "pitiless" as were his diatribes against the plutocratic powers of Britain, France and the United States.⁴⁸

After July 25, Bombacci felt compelled to offer his services to Mussolini from a sense of outrage at the betrayal of the "old elites"; he had always nurtured a particularly deep hostility to the institutions of monarchical Italy.⁴⁹ He wrote a letter to the Duce on October 11, 1943 which resulted in his first contact with Mussolini since before the fall of the regime in July:

Duce, as I wrote in *Verità* last November – after my first premonitions of what freemasonry, plutocracy and monarchy were plotting against you – I AM TODAY, MORE THAN YESTERDAY, TOTALLY WITH YOU. The lurid King - Badoglio treachery, which unfortunately has dragged Italy down to ruin and dishonor, has however freed you from all the plutocratic-monarchical compromises of '22. Today the road is open before us, and in my judgment we can reach our socialist goal. But first: victory in arms. To assure victory, we need the adherence of the working masses. How? With decisive and radical adjustments in the economy and trade unions. I have mentioned my ideas to Minister Buffarini. Are you

⁴⁸ Salotti, 129-130.

⁴⁹ Klinkhammer, 250.

willing? Always at your service, with the same affection as thirty years ago.⁵⁰

Giorgio Pini recalled after the war that Bombacci was still seen by Fascists, twenty years after the *biennio rosso*, as “the personification of evil.” Mussolini finally received Bombacci shortly before the Verona congress, while its Manifesto was being drafted. Pini mentions, too, that Bombacci (as well as Pavolini) confided in him that he had contributed something to the final version of the Verona Manifesto.⁵¹ No direct evidence for this assertion has emerged.

Bombacci remained resident in Rome, awaiting Mussolini’s response to his proposals for collaboration, while making occasional visits to Gargnano until December 5, when he officially accepted a paid position in Mussolini’s government. The position offered was, however, somewhat problematical, as it consisted of preparing an official study of the housing situation for workers – not exactly what he had been expecting.⁵² It might have been little more than a rationale to keep him near Gargnano and within easy reach of Mussolini for impromptu conferences. Far more important a task than his official duty in the housing sector was to serve as “one of the advisors most listened to by Mussolini.” Bombacci’s daughter recollects constant telephone calls coming from Mussolini at their temporary residence in Gargnano. Even from the scant

⁵⁰ ACS, RSI SPD CO b.19, f.792, letter from Bombacci to Duce, October 11, 1943.

⁵¹ Pini, 40.

⁵² Salotti, 159-160.

evidence available it appears he was received often at Villa Feltrinelli. Giovanni Dolfin, Mussolini's secretary, wrote in his diary on November 30 that

Nicola Bombacci . . . was first among those who fought for a real social revolution. He was for a time Mussolini's adviser in all this business. He was a real friend to him, and I believe Mussolini was even fond of him . . . he is to have his office at the Ministry of the Interior . . . for now, he compiles a series of memos for the Duce, who receives him constantly. We wonder, jokingly, "communist"? And he responds smiling, "if you want." He is convinced that Mussolini can find himself again only through decidedly proletarian politics.⁵³

Dolfin is but one of several observers who have confirmed that Bombacci did confer with Mussolini on many occasions, but as De Felice observed, it seems impossible to evaluate the nature of his influence on the evolution of the socialist campaign with any precision. His biographer, Giuglielmo Salotti, asserts that the "final socialization measures seem to reflect Bombacci's basic ideas of establishing the direct participation of labor" in the management of enterprise. Yet this only tells us the final measures seem to coincide with Bombacci's views, some of which Mussolini might have held already. His conception of socialism had moved quite far from the Marxism he espoused when he founded the Italian Communist Party, and in fact had moved close enough to corporativism for him to seem sympathetic to Fascism. Mussolini would hardly have been willing to take any of his views into consideration had they not already been similar to his own. In many of Salotti's assertions there is so much assumption and speculation that the reader is left feeling many of the author's conclusions may not rest on solid ground.

⁵³Dolfin, 118.

What we can assess with a degree of certainty is Bombacci's role as an instrument of Mussolini's effort to sustain the *Politica dei Ponti*. His real job was to validate, as a leftist, the new socialist ethos of the Salò government and win workers over to its support. One way he did this was by continuously presenting his credentials as an "authentic" leftist. In several articles and speeches he extravagantly talked up his past as having worked with Lenin, often reminding his audience that he had devoted his life to fighting the bourgeoisie. Most importantly, he argued it was Soviet communism, not he or Mussolini, that had strayed from the path of Leninism. Investigating this dimension of Bombacci's role as unimpeachable left-wing voice of the Salò Republic discloses a further, ancillary role. It becomes apparent why criticism of the Soviet Union and Stalin had been so muted in the Salò press, especially compared with its endless abuse of plutocratic England and America. Criticism of Russia had to be handled delicately by someone like Bombacci, for fear of alienating the very audience Mussolini was trying to win over – and worse, entirely collapsing the *Politica dei Ponti*.⁵⁴

Even after the socialization measures died a quiet death, Bombacci remained tirelessly at work giving speeches and writing articles through the last days of the Salò regime.⁵⁵ In early 1945 Mussolini launched a campaign with the

⁵⁴ *Corriere della Sera*, "Dove va la Russia? (Dal comunismo al panslavismo)." August 19, 1944, "Stalin ha tolto la terra ai contadini. Realtà e metodi bolschevichi." September 16, 1944, and in *Crociata Italica*, March 19, 1945, "Questo è il comunismo." March 19, 1945, and "Questo è il bolscevismo." March 26, 1945

⁵⁵ Salotti, 189, 202. On March 11, 1945 he gave a speech in Genoa criticizing Stalin, referring to him as a capitalist, asserting Mussolini was the real socialist.

slogan “*Seminare la Valle Padana di Mine Sociale*” (Sow the Po Valley with Social Mines), a renewed effort to leave the Italian economy too socialist to be of any use to the Allies. When Mussolini moved his government from the shores of Lake Garda to Milan on April 18, 1945, Bombacci followed him there. He was executed at Dongo a week later at the side of many of his intransigent foes, facing the firing squad with the final cry “*Viva il socialismo!*” The next day his body was strung up alongside Mussolini’s in the Piazzale Loreto in Milan.

Carlo Silvestri (1893-1955), on the other hand, survived the war to be vilified as a Fascist sympathizer and socialist apostate. Also an old companion in arms from Mussolini’s early socialist days before World War I, he could never make up his mind about which side of the Socialist Party he belonged to – Mussolini’s revolutionaries, or Turati’s reformists (he was never drawn to communism). His biographer, who presents him as almost neurotically torn between the two leaders, emphasizes a recurring personal trait she regards as a veritable key to his personality: an extraordinary willingness to fight on behalf of whomever he saw as victimized. In the aftermath of the First World War, Silvestri finally split with Mussolini, repelled by Fascist violence, and sided with Turati’s reformists. But it was the Matteotti assassination in June 1924 that roused him to do open battle with Mussolini and his supporters. He had idolized Mussolini before World War I, and in fact until the end of his life could never really accept the fact that Mussolini had ever stopped being a socialist. For this reason, the Matteotti affair troubled him deeply, and convinced of Mussolini’s complicity, Silvestri led the opposition against Fascism in the press from the

pages of Milan's *Corriere della Sera*. For this impertinence against tyranny he was punished with six years (1926 -1932) confinement first to the remote island of Ustica, off the coast of Sicily, then to Ponza and Lipari.

During the early 1930s, now shunned and silenced, he started to reexamine the evidence against Mussolini in the Matteotti affair, and slowly began to accept the possibility of his former friend's innocence. By the mid-1930s, he had come to see Mussolini with new eyes, as morally superior to his supporters in the regime and relatively unaware of their activities. Silvestri's attitudes toward Fascism began to soften too, as a result of his hero-worship of Mussolini, while at the same time, against the background of the Ethiopian crisis and Italy's entry into the Second World War, he turned increasingly nationalistic. The more desperate the military situation in Russia and North Africa, the more fervent his support became of the Italian cause. During the Axis retreats, he wrote hundreds of letters of support to Italian troops. In the space of twenty years, despite the bitterness of his confinement, he passed from being a militantly anti-Fascist socialist to becoming an idiosyncratic socialist supporter of Mussolini.

Silvestri was horror-struck by the events of July 25, disgusted by the subsequent anti-Fascist venting during the Badoglio period, and filled with shame at the news of Italy's surrender to the Allies. When he finally heard Mussolini's broadcast from Munich proclaiming the new socialist government, he felt his

belief in Mussolini as a socialist finally vindicated. He wrote to him in late September asking his old friend to receive him.⁵⁶

Mussolini delayed a positive response until he learned Silvestri had been locked up and tortured by the German S.S. in Milan and was under threat of execution. On November 12, a bomb had exploded in the German tourist offices at Stazione Centrale; the Fascist and Nazi police quickly rounded up suspects from among known socialists and non-sympathizers. Silvestri's wife solicited the help of Mussolini, who intervened immediately and had him released. On November 29 Silvestri renewed his entreaties to the Duce to be received in person, and this time was granted an audience on December 6.

Silvestri's aim in making contact with Mussolini was to propose a series of dialogues with the Duce. These were to have three purposes: to enable him to make constructive suggestions on the creation of a socialist state, to secure Mussolini's intercession on behalf of people endangered by the Germans and Fascist militia, and to gather material for a book he intended to write called "Mussolini Estremo."⁵⁷ According to Silvestri's own notes, there were fifty such meetings.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ ACS RSI SPD CR b. 7, Letter to Duce from Carlo Silvestri, September 25, 1943.

⁵⁷ After the war he wrote four books: *I responsabili della catastrofe italiana. Guerra: 1940-1943. Armistizio: 8 settembre 1943* (Milan, 1946); *Matteotti, Mussolini e il dramma italiana* (Rome, 1947); *Contro la vendetta* (Milan, 1948); and *Mussolini, Graziani e l'antifascismo* (Milan, 1949).

⁵⁸ Gabriele, 251. There are 22 surviving transcriptions in Silvestri's hand, some of which were later typed. According to Silvestri, these notes recorded Mussolini's exact words. Notes from 18 other meetings were burned by his wife after his death, but some of these can be reconstructed from material he quotes in two books he wrote after the war, according to his biographer. All of Silvestri's notes of his personal meetings with Mussolini can be found in ACS, Archivio Susmel, b.8, f. "Carlo Silvestri". See, also Dolfin, 192, 239.

By the time of their first meeting in early December, the specter of looming civil war was becoming an issue of considerable urgency. His intent during his first few interviews was to hammer out a definition of pacification between Fascists and anti-Fascists, as other figures such as Gentile, Biggini and Giorgio Pini were also trying to do. Silvestri presented Mussolini with a memorandum that called for the complete overhaul of Fascism, as something much closer to a democratic polity, the same thing other intellectuals had done on behalf of the *Politica dei Ponti*. In reading these proposals, the modern reader is struck by Silvestri's naiveté; he appears sincerely to have believed that within the Fascist dictator beat the heart of a true socialist. His proposals aimed to replace "old Fascism," with a renewed Fascist movement that would be "inspired by the principles of democracy and socialism." He was especially keen on persuading Mussolini to throw out the old *gerarchia* and start with new people. Naturally, he bore a strong personal grudge against the old Fascists for their hand in his persecution during the last twenty years; the intransigents meanwhile also continued to view his relations with Mussolini with suspicious hostility. These people – "antisocialist by mental and moral formation," unscrupulous, without any idealism – he considered highly dangerous to the new socialist society he hoped to build.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ ACS RSI SPD CR b. 7, "Carlo Silvestri": Linee di un movimento per un governo-stato-regime (socialista) capace di intendere e risolvere tutti i grandi problemi del popolo (s.d., but almost certainly December 1943).

Silvestri tried to persuade Mussolini to see that the present circumstances required a kind of national reconciliation comprising elements from both sides of the political spectrum, minus the extremists on both sides. This meant excluding not only the intransigent Fascists, but also the communist leadership of the partisan movement, as well as anyone who had personally cooperated with the monarchy and Badoglio. The economic measures that were soon to be revealed were the centerpiece of a plan of action which he expected to appeal to moderate Fascists as well as to antifascists who feared communism. The message to be broadcast: “we want to win the war in order to construct a socialist society.”⁶⁰

Silvestri’s utopian longings are especially evident in this first memorandum, in which he contemplated a grand rearrangement of the whole international scene. Once the war had been won, all nations were to be converted through a “democratic-political ordering” that would be “collectivist-socialist-economic” in structure. He also called for a downsizing of the British Empire, along with the “internationalization of all colonies.” The capitalist system, which inevitably produced war, must be brought to an end entirely, to be substituted with a “social-fascist regime.” The Fascist and communist totalitarian societies (presumably including Nazi Germany) which had shown themselves to be “coercive of the freedom of the individual, must be converted to democracies.” He summed up his proposals with the observation that “democracy without

⁶⁰ ACS, Archivio Susmel, B.8, “Carlo Silvestri”, colloquia 7, December 30, 1943.

socialism is a form empty of substantial content; socialism without democracy betrays itself in a suffocating tyranny of the human personality.”

It is difficult to determine what Mussolini might have thought of these ideas. The kind of collaboration that eventually evolved within a few months between the two men had a limited, concrete objective: putting into effect their concept of pacification, which meant undermining the partisan leadership's ideological hold on the rank and file. This emerged most conspicuously during the Giramondo affair, between the middle of March and the end of May 1944 (See Chapter Four). Their meetings usually consisted of Silvestri furiously jotting down every word the Duce uttered in his long, rambling monologues about the Grand Council and the monarchy's treason, Ciano, the antifascists, the war, and his increasing loathing of the Germans.

Silvestri's humanitarian impulses met with success in other ways: he was able to secure Mussolini's help on several occasions on behalf of people destined for Fascist prisons or German death camps; many of these would-be victims, perhaps as many as a hundred, included Jews. He referred to this personal crusade as the *Croce rossa* (red cross). He also managed to convince Mussolini that a general attitude of clemency and tolerance toward antifascists would go far toward establishing an attitude of trust toward the new regime. Thus on Silvestri's recommendation, Mussolini decreed that non-Fascist Party members were prevented from being tried by the Fascist special tribunals that had been set

up to punish members of the Fascist rank and file who had betrayed Fascism and gone over to Badoglio.⁶¹

The Giramondo affair represents the culmination of Silvestri's collaboration with the Duce. These were a series of fifteen articles published in the *Corriere della Sera*, between March 12 and May 23, 1944, ostensibly in response to the recently concluded strikes in the northern industrial cities. Until fairly recently, the identity of their author was a matter of controversy and speculation, with suspicion falling on Carlo Borsani, Bombacci, Silvestri, and Mussolini himself. The historian Guglielmo Salotti demonstrated in 1986 that it was most likely Silvestri who wrote them, with Mussolini making minor last-minute changes.⁶² Silvestri's biographer has supported this judgment with a stylistic analysis; besides pointing out the extraordinary resemblance in writing style between Giramondo and Silvestri, she also demonstrates that certain locutions and images found in Giramondo's articles are also found in other writings by Silvestri.⁶³ Many suspected at the time that Silvestri was the true author, but he consistently denied this until the end of his life. Regardless of who may have written them, it came to be widely known that given the circumstances of war, occupation and dictatorship, they could only have been published at Mussolini's behest. Their publication caused a considerable commotion across the political spectrum.

⁶¹ Gabriele, 271-272.

⁶² Salotti 1986, 875.

⁶³ Gabriele, 284.

The basic intent behind the Giramondo articles was to divide the anti-Fascist front by presenting an attractive image of a national reconciliation based on non-communist antifascists collaborating with moderate Fascists. The first four articles offered an analysis of the recent strikes as an example of a morally bankrupt communist leadership willing to endanger Italian workers, which Giramondo contrasted with non-communist rank and file members, whose courage, tenacity and resourcefulness he consistently praises from the first article onwards. He even contrasted them to some Fascists who showed none of the same virtues, whose only interest was in reaping advantages from party membership.⁶⁴ Yet ultimately he represents the non-communist partisans as dupes for allowing themselves to be used; they are the “pure,” and the purest antifascists, he argues, are also the most naive, and so the most susceptible to being taken advantage of. Their commitment to fighting Fascism was being harnessed to the secret strategy of the Anglo-Saxon powers, whose plan for winning the war depended on a fight to the finish between Germany and the Soviet Union. London and Washington wanted the destruction of both Germany and Russia so they would then be free to subjugate what was left of Europe.

Each of the last ten articles elaborates various discrete themes, such as the irreproachable Italian loyalty of the northern partisans, as opposed to the southern

⁶⁴ *Corriere della Sera*, “Analisi anatomica del fallito sciopero (che doveva valere ‘una grande battaglia vittoriosa’).” March 12, 1944: “Not all the leaders of the clandestine movements belonged and belong in truth to this category. There are those who have paid personally, who are endowed with courage, energy, tenacity, pride, dignity, who can be pointed to as an example and a reproach to so many fascists who have got so much out of fascism they did not deserve...”

one in the pay of the Allies; the anglophilism of Benedetto Croce; Stalin's control of the partisan movement – but running like a thread through all is the preoccupation with the criminality and treachery of Badoglio and the king. For Giramondo, it was this element that bore responsibility for Italy's current shameful abnegation, and for the bombing of northern Italian cities during the "forty-five days" which they did nothing to stop. And since Badoglio had been in contact with Togliatti, the communist leader, it was doubtless true that the communists had advance knowledge of the coup d'état and Italy's subsequent surrender to the Allies.

Giramondo's articles never succeeded in their intended effect. The communists remained an integral part of the partisan leadership until the German army surrendered to the Allies in April 1945. So far as is known, no socialists or antifascists made any kind approach to the Salò government on the basis of the appeals launched by the articles signed by Giramondo.

Shortly after the last of these articles appeared, Silvestri dropped out of the scene, in consequence of the heated exchange in the press that took place with Farinacci over the Miglioli affair (see Chapter Four). That the feud went as far as it did risked making Mussolini's authority in Salò seem weak. His regular meetings with the Duce ceased at this time, and, except for a few messages that passed between them in the autumn of 1944, contact also came to an end. He was not to see Mussolini again until April 1945, as the Allies were advancing into the Po Valley during the final weeks of the war. Silvestri renewed his contact with Mussolini on November 9, 1944, to endorse Edmondo Cione's "Raggruppamento

repubblicano socialista” which had been taking shape since the late summer. Cione (1908 - 1965), a scholar close to Croce and with socialist sympathies, had been introduced to Mussolini at Gargnano the previous August by Education Minister Biggini. Mussolini received him affably, flattered him with praise of his latest book and even praised his frankness in admitting his antifascism. Cione was completely taken in: “indeed I can say that the high moral temperature created by my resolute and honest attitude, even if it led to some moments of dramatic tension, imprinted on the whole conversation a sense of profound nobility and a spirit of ardent and open-minded patriotism.”⁶⁵ It was Mussolini himself who then proposed that Cione lead a group of “patriotic opposition” whose function would be to bring precisely what Cione believed had always been so signally lacking within Fascist ranks: the element of criticism. His subsequent activities were of course followed with suspicious interest by the intransigents, who warned Mussolini of Fascist hostility and German concern about Cione and his followers.⁶⁶ His group of socialist anti-Fascist intellectuals was allowed to publish a newspaper during the last month of the war (*L’Italia del Popolo*).⁶⁷

Deakin quotes at length one of the Duce’s harangues to Rahn on March 31, which

⁶⁵ Edmondo Cione, *Storia della Repubblica Sociale Italiana* (Caserta, 1948) 189. See also, “*Studi Bresciani*” *Quaderni della Fondazione Micheletti*, 13-2002, Fabio Gentile, “Edmondo Cione: dal crocianesimo liberale al corporativismo della Repubblica Sociale Italiana.”

⁶⁶ ACS SPD CR RSI, b. 45, f. 433, two “Appunto per il Duce,” October 24, 1944, and February 2, 1945, signed by Pavolini. Both memoranda indicate Cione was being closely watched and the Germans were unsettled at the kind of attention he was getting from anti-Fascists, and were “making inquiries of Italian sources for clarification.”

⁶⁷ De Felice, 1996, 133. De Felice refers to Cione’s organization as “a minor group.” Ganapini, 447-455, suggests Mussolini was torn between two impulses: to make one last gesture on behalf of bridging the ideological divide, and to “sow social mines” in post-war Italy.

perhaps sums up better than anything the abiding cynicism he still harbored for socialists, even as he conducted his *Politica dei Ponti*:

To take the wind out of our opponents' sails I let certain counter-currents have their say, as soon as I thought the New Fascism in Italy strong enough; among other things, I allowed the formation of an opposition group under Professor Cione. This group calls itself national, republican and socialist. Professor Cione is no great brain, and will have no success. But the people who are now seeking an alibi will gather around him, and will therefore be lost to the much more dangerous Liberation Committee. This Liberation Committee is furious about the new group, and already labels Cione and his friends all as the worst kind of traitors. On the other hand the members of the Fascist Party have been very excited over this new group, and are launching a full-scale attack against it. This suits me perfectly, since it is a further incitement to Fascists to take a stand and do something active. I have allowed the Cione group to put out a small weekly newspaper. If the Foreign Minister sees some danger in this, I will have it suppressed. But I should regret this, for it would take away from the new group part of its ventilating function (*sic*) which I consider extraordinarily important.⁶⁸

After he moved his government to Milan on April 18, 1945, he re-established contact with Silvestri and saw him on April 21 and 22. He was interested in using him as an intermediary with the Committee of National Liberation. Silvestri delivered an unsigned letter drafted by Mussolini to a member of the Action Party, in which the Duce offered to surrender himself. The member, Riccardo Lombardi, assured Silvestri that the letter had been given no consideration at all.⁶⁹

Mussolini's efforts to socialize the Italian economy in Salò reveal, more than anything else, the limits of his power as head of state. Regardless of its

⁶⁸Deakin, 784 (quoting from German Collection, War Office Archives, Rahn telegram, March 31, 1945).

⁶⁹Deakin, 797.

highly peculiar nature, he undeniably looked upon his conception of socialism as the quintessential component of the Italian Social Republic, as the way it differed the most from his earlier regime. His greatest wish was to see it launched. But it made little difference how central this was to his vision of a new, purified Fascism, if the real powers at Salò remained intent on frustrating its implementation. The Germans and the intransigents, the men who held all the cards, clearly wanted no part of it, were at best willing to pay lip service to it, and so it never got off the ground. Thus the newer, purified Fascism of the Salò Republic was, in the end, more compromised by German power than the old had been by high finance and the monarchy.

The *Socializzazione* campaign discloses, too, that Mussolini never lost confidence in his ability to “read” the Italian public and exploit its susceptibilities. His efforts were predicated on the certainty that socialism would win them over, would make up for the years of tyranny, corruption, war, and German occupation and would, he believed, re-establish his popularity on a firmer footing, thus denying to the Germans control of the one thing about Italy they still regarded as valuable – its labor supply. If successful, he would emerge with his former power intact, minus the impediments represented by the intransigents, therefore more able to deal with the Germans on his own terms. Yet by early 1945, Mussolini had either lost touch with reality, or must have realized socialization was not going to ever go forward on his watch, but decided his propaganda had to continue anyway, possibly in the hope that propaganda by itself would be enough to “sow social mines” and make it difficult for the Allies to occupy Italy.

Mussolini dealt with intellectuals only if he could orchestrate their output for his own benefit. This kind of exploitation is especially clear in the case of Bombacci and Silvestri, two deluded ex-socialists who thought their time had finally come. Bombacci was led to believe his own ideas about socialism were of importance to Mussolini, but really only his reputation as a “genuine” communist was of use to the dictator. Silvestri was encouraged in the belief that his utopian musings would find expression in Mussolini’s arrangements for the post-war world, but his only real value to the dictator was as a possible intermediary with the leadership of the Resistance. How Mussolini used Cione in launching the Raggruppamento, even as Allied armies were poised to enter the Po Valley, demonstrates finally that he never lost confidence in his talent for hoodwinking intellectuals, all the while using them to advance his own interests. At the close of his memo to Rahn, we see resurfacing once again his usual cynical impulse to divide and rule, to foster the illusion his opponents could actually write what they wanted to write and so believe what they were doing was going to make an impact on events – “this I consider extraordinarily important,” he insists. Of course it was. That was how he had always dealt with intellectuals, and his admission here is indicative of a technique he could never let go of, even at the end, even with the world falling down around his ears.

CONCLUSION

Within the historiography of the Italian Social Republic it has generally been acknowledged that Mussolini's two primary concerns were socializing the economy and bringing the Italian army back into the field, and that these represented an attempt to establish some kind of political autonomy. What so far has been unsatisfactorily explained are the motives behind his campaign to project a freer and more humane vision of Fascism at Salò, an undertaking that included the politica dei Ponti. Historians have been apt to explain the Politica dei Ponti as an effort to mitigate extremism on both sides of the political divide. This suggests Mussolini took a secret hand in the press campaign as a way of circumventing a developing civil war. But this interpretation does not integrate the Politica dei Ponti within the overall picture of motivating factors behind his urge for political autonomy. I am not suggesting the dictator's concerns about a civil war were not genuine and that he saw the function of the Politica dei Ponti as a way of dividing the rank and file partisans from their leaders. Rather, I have tried to show that his use of intellectual figures was analogous to his attempt to socialize Italian industry and restore the Italian army as a credible fighting force, with all three endeavors sharing the same ultimate political goal. Studying the tense interactions between Mussolini and the members of his government during these final twenty months of Fascism clearly discloses his willingness to subvert his own ministers, the German-backed intransigents. To win independence from them he needed to persuade the Germans that it would be wiser for them to deal

with him as a real leader rather than as a figurehead, that if they really intended to make worthwhile use of the one Italian resource they still held as valuable – its labor supply – then his participation would be key. If the Germans learned they would have more success dealing with him on his own terms, his power as Duce would be restored.

A popular base among Italians – a level of popularity larger than he had enjoyed even at the height of his so-called years of consensus (1929-1936), was necessary to establish such power. Scholars have sometimes depicted Mussolini's socialization project as only a cynical ploy to win approval from industrial workers – yet clearly, Mussolini did strongly believe Italians were sympathetic to socialism, and this view happened to dovetail with his own reappraisal of Fascism's historical trajectory. So he would make sure they got socialism, but he also realized Italians were fed up with being muzzled and forced to march to the Fascist tune, and that they were deeply miserable under Nazi occupation. Since he had already embarked on a rethinking of Fascism, now would be the time to present Fascism as more receptive to dissent, to internal reform, to political pluralism. Whenever he had the opportunity to appoint an intellectual to a position that could influence public opinion, attitudes, or values, he consistently chose men whose moderate views he could count on. He was the great organizing force behind this renewed vision of Fascism; it would never have come about except by through instigation. He strove throughout the twenty months of the Italian Social Republic to put a new face on Fascism by holding out the illusion that freedom of discussion and political pluralism would be possible under

republican Fascism. Thus, in the writings of his appointed editors, in the midst of war and occupation, a seemingly free and open debate suddenly emerged on the meaning of Fascism. In the years leading up to the war, some debate of this nature had taken place in the pages of sophisticated journals, but remained tightly controlled; the topic then was how to define a Fascist aesthetic, not Fascism itself. Discussing the meaning of Fascism was only possible by means of coded language. Yet during the Salò Republic it was very much Fascism – what was wrong with it, how it could be improved, what it should mean to Italians – that was explored in a variety of ways by a host of newspaper editors and even by one of the most important intellectuals in the country, and in a way that entirely contradicted the “official” way of looking at it. That such discussion was allowed to go forward seemed proof positive that Fascism was indeed capable of embracing political freedom. Gentile, Pini, Pettinato, Borsani, Biggini, even Bombacci and Silvestri, publicly articulated individualized conceptions of Fascism against a background of intransigent propaganda hostile to the very idea of free discussion. The intransigents countered by projecting images of Fascism that were more extreme, authoritarian and bloody-minded than anything before seen, dramatically in contrast to what Mussolini’s writers were elaborating. Thus two projects of Fascist self-presentation were launched in Salò, one by Mussolini and his appointed editors, another by his intransigent ministers, with each meant to subvert the other. This observation should have a bearing on future historical assessments of the Republic of Salò.

APPENDIX: CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS IN THE SALÒ REPUBLIC

July 10, 1943: British and American troops land in Sicily.

July 18 and 19: Mussolini meets Hitler at the Feltre conference to ask for massive military help in the face of an expected Allied invasion. Hitler refuses this request, telling him no German troops could be spared to fight in Italy.

Evening of July 24/25: After several secret meetings, the Italian king, Vittorio Emanuele III, the former London ambassador Dino Grandi agreed to remove Mussolini from power by provoking a rising against him from within the Fascist hierarchy, and then to begin peace negotiations with the Allies. In collusion with at least three other *gerarch*i (former Minister of Education Giuseppe Bottai, President of the Accademia d'Italia Luigi Federzoni, and Mussolini's son-in-law, Galeazzo Ciano) and two senior members of the military, Marshal Pietro Badoglio and Army Chief of Staff General Vittorio Ambrosio, Grandi circulates a motion to the Fascist Grand Council to put an end to Mussolini's personal dictatorship and hand over the conduct of the war to the king. The vote passes with 19 in favor of Grandi's motion, seven against. The next day Mussolini is arrested, bundled into a waiting ambulance and taken away to secret confinement. That night, Badoglio makes a radio broadcast announcing the end of Fascism and the determination to stand by the German alliance.

July 26 to September 8, 1943: The "45 Days" of Badoglio's rule. Badoglio swears loyalty to the Germans, and the Germans pretend to believe him. Aware of secret negotiations between Italy and Allied representatives in Portugal, they

begin preparations to invade Italy. With several divisions already installed in strategic areas, they move more divisions into Italy without Italian permission.

July 27: Farinacci and Preziosi arrive at Hitler's headquarters, and are soon joined by a handful of their followers, including Pavolini and Buffarini Guidi. These "intransigents" soon begin laying plans for the creation of a new Fascist government, backed by the occupying Germans.

September 7: Deeply suspicious, the German army begins rounding up Italian soldiers. This continues until mid-September. Several thousand resist in Greece and are subsequently massacred. 615,000 Italian troops, refusing to renounce their oath to the king, spent the rest of the war in German concentration camps, with approximately 30,000 dying in captivity.

September 8: The Allies land at Salerno, south of Naples. Badoglio and the royal family abandon Rome, leaving Italian military forces without orders. The Germans hasten their occupation of northern and central Italy and counterattack Allied armies south of Naples.

September 9: From Munich, the intransigents broadcast an appeal to Italians to rally on behalf of Fascism and the German alliance.

September 12: A German S.S. brigade rescues Mussolini from his secret confinement in a ski lodge atop the mountain of Gran Sasso in the Abruzzi and flies him to Germany. After spending a day with his family, he is flown to East Prussia to confer with Hitler for two days.

September 18: Mussolini addresses Italians by radio broadcast from Munich to announce the formation of the Italian Social Republic.

September 27: Mussolini and his entourage arrive in Italy, and he convenes his first official meeting with his new Council of Ministers. Himmler appoints S.S. General Karl Wolff to be in charge of security in Italy.

September 28: Mussolini appoints the editors for all of Italy's major daily newspapers.

October 1: Naples falls to the Allies, after several days of popular insurrection against the German army.

October 15: The royal Italian government headed by Badoglio in southern Italy (under Allied occupation) is obliged, according to their surrender terms, to declare war on Germany; henceforth Italy had the status of "co-belligerent."

November 9: Intent of reconstructing the army, Mussolini orders a call-up of conscripts (a potential of 180,000). The Germans find many ways of obstructing the provision of barracks, uniforms, and weapons to the 87,000 men who answer. A struggle erupts between Mussolini and Marshal Graziani, on one side, and Pavolini and Ricci, on the other, over the reconstruction of the army and whether the Fascist Militia should be subordinated to it. After several months, an agreement resulted from negotiations with the Germans to train four Italian divisions, and for a few thousand interned Italian officers to be released from the German camps to officer the new force. This turned out to be largely a smokescreen for Hitler to evade Mussolini's many requests to get the Italian army back in the field. No effective military force was ever put at Mussolini's disposal. Eventually in June 1944 the Germans endorse the creation of a series of armed

squads, the *Brigate Nere*, composed of very young, and often criminal, elements, usually more loyal to their German backers than to Italian authorities.

November 14/15: Mussolini postpones convening a constituent assembly, and instead calls for a Fascist Party congress. This, the Verona congress, is chaired by Pavolini, who presents the congress with an eighteen point program, the Verona Manifesto.

November 30, 1943: The Ministry of the Interior broadcasts orders for the arrest of all Jews and their internment in concentration camps, along with confiscation of their property to reimburse victims of Allied bombing.

January 8, 1944: The Verona trials open against the “July traitors.” The Fascists were able to lay hands on only six members of the original nineteen who voted against Mussolini. One receives a thirty-year sentence, the other five, including Mussolini’s son-in-law, Ciano, are sentenced to death by firing squad. The following day, each of the condemned are executed by being shot in the back.

January 12: Minister of Corporate Economy Angelo Tarchi submits a memo to the Council of Ministers, a rough draft of the socialization decrees called “A Basic Premise for the New Structure of Italian Economy.”

January 22: The Allies land at Anzio beach, south of Rome, in an attempt to outflank the Germans.

February 12: The Council of Ministers passes Tarchi’s “Basic Premise” with minor modifications.

March 1-3: Industrial strikes break out in the northern cities of Turin, Milan and Genoa.

April 15: Giovanni Gentile is assassinated in Florence.

May 31: Preventive censorship is reinstated.

June 4: Rome falls to the Allies. Two days later, the Allies land in Normandy.

June 21: Pettinato publishes “Se ci sei, batti un colpo” in Turin’s *La Stampa*.

August 13: After a popular insurrection, the Germans retreat from Florence and the Allies march in.

November 1944: The Allies halt their advance south of the Apennines.

December 16: Mussolini briefly travels to Milan to make his last public appearance at the Teatro Lirico, before returning to Gargnano.

March 7, 1945: The Allies in France and Belgium cross the Rhine into Germany.

April 5: The Allied armies south of the Apennines launch their spring offensive and move towards Bologna.

April 18: Mussolini and his entourage leave Gargnano for Milan.

April 20: Bologna falls to the Allies.

April 25: Mussolini discovers the Germans have been negotiating surrender terms behind his back. A partisan insurrection breaks out in Milan. Mussolini and his entourage leave Milan that evening for Como, in an attempt to gain asylum in Switzerland.

April 28: After being discovered by partisans on the western shore of Lake Como, Mussolini and his followers are executed. The next day their bodies are brought back to Milan and strung up feet first in Piazzale Loreto.

April 29: German forces in Italy surrender to the Allies.

May 7: The war ends in Europe.

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CR: Carteggio riservato

CO: Carteggio ordinario

MI: Ministero del Interno

PC: Presidenza del consiglio dei ministri

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