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MUSSOLINI 1883-1915

Triumph and Transformation of a
Revolutionary Socialist

EDITED BY

SPENCER M. DI SCALA
AND EMILIO GENTILE



Italian and Italian American Studies

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Spencer M. Di Scala • Emilio Gentile
Editors

Mussolini 1883–1915

Triumph and Transformation of a
Revolutionary Socialist

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“I have had a very stormy and adventurous youth. I have known the good and the evil of life. I have built for myself a culture and a solid scientific outlook. My time abroad has facilitated my acquisition of modern languages. I have trekked from one horizon to another... It has been three years since I have been living in Forlì, and I feel once again the nomadism in my blood spurring me to go elsewhere. I am restless, with a wild temperament, and I shun popularity.

“I have loved many women, but oblivion is extending its grey veil over the memory of those long ago loves...

“What does the future hold for me?”

“Completed on March 11, 1912, the eve of my liberation, at 3:00 P.M., cell number 39, Forlì prison.”

Benito Mussolini, *La Mia Vita*

PREFACE

The details of Mussolini's life in the period between 1902 and 1914, when he was a militant Socialist, have been studied widely both during the period of the Fascist regime and, particularly, after its fall and the death of the Duce. The varying and contrasting interpretations made by historians of Mussolini the Revolutionary Socialist swing between those who compare him to Lenin in his vision of revolution and the revolutionary party and those who instead deny that Mussolini ever was a true Socialist or Marxist, even when he was one of the most powerful leaders of the Italian Socialist Party and editor of the Party newspaper *Avanti!*. All these interpretations have been influenced by the Fascist experience that followed and have a tendency to look for Mussolini the Fascist in Mussolini the Socialist.

The essays in this book concentrate on different aspects of Mussolini's life during his youth, when he was a Socialist. Fascism did not exist and was not even dreamt of, so the authors and editors wrote them (as far as possible) imagining that Mussolini had died on May 23, 1915, when Italy entered the First World War. Thus, the contributors have tried to avoid reading the future into the past, and reject any notion of inevitability, which they believe to be ahistorical. In order to accomplish this aim, they have highlighted the most important aspects of the young Mussolini's life, and their impact, and have tried to maintain a dispassionate tone in their writing. Of course, they are aware of Mussolini's later history and understand the consequences of his regime, but the extent to which his early experiences contributed to these later events can be seen in the young man's philosophy and actions are a matter for a different discourse, perhaps related to his early thought, perhaps not.

It is now 100 years since Italy's intervention in the Great War. This intervention stood at the root of Mussolini's dramatic break with the Socialist Party. It took place as a result of his conversion to the support of Italy's involvement in hostilities, his foundation of the *Il Popolo d'Italia* newspaper, and his expulsion from the political party. At this distance in time, both the editors and the contributors to this book believe it useful to reexamine the experience of Mussolini the Socialist without looking back from his later position as the founder of Fascism and the leader of a totalitarian regime.

The essay taken from the notes of the late Philip Cannistraro reexamines Mussolini's childhood. The Swiss academic Simone Visconti analyzes here Mussolini's time spent in Switzerland, one of the most important periods of his educational and political development; the essay he presents forms part of his ongoing research into Mussolini's progress from socialism to fascism. Mussolini's subsequent stay in Trento, and in particular his relationship with Cesare Battisti, is examined by Stefano Biguzzi, the author of an important biography of this Irredentist from Trentino. Marco Gervasoni, one of the foremost Italian experts on the theories of George Sorel, revolutionary syndicalism and the culture of political socialism, sheds new light on the controversial question regarding the influence of revolutionary syndicalism on Mussolini's thought and actions. In addition, two American historians have investigated Mussolini's relationship with reformist socialism: Spencer M. Di Scala, the author of seminal works on Filippo Turati and Italian socialism, has examined the attitude of reformists on the left to Mussolini's ideas of revolution, while Charles Killinger, the most influential American biographer of Salvemini, has brought to light both areas of profound discord and passing agreement between the revolutionary from Romagna and the reformist dissident from Puglia. To the professional journalist and press historian, Pierluigi Allotti, has been entrusted the chapter on Mussolini the Journalist. Emilio Gentile has recounted Mussolini's experience as a Socialist from his debut as a militant Socialist to his conversion to interventionism, placing at the center of his investigation the influence that the reality and the ideal of the *Terza Italia*, the Third Italy, had on his ideas of revolution and his later support for participation in the war. The first chapter, by Spencer Di Scala, describes how Mussolini observers (including Mussolini himself) have interpreted his youth, and what are the most important contributions of these essays that, we hope, will influence readers' understanding of the "wild adventure that was his life."

In works such as this, some repetition is inevitable, as are differences in the value given to and the judgments made upon particular questions. However, such diversity is certainly of benefit in this attempt to analyze the thoughts and actions of Mussolini the Revolutionary Socialist without seeing him already dressed in a black shirt and leading armed squads intent on destroying the Socialist Party, an organization that he himself had been instrumental in setting on an uncompromising course toward revolution—a path from which it could not turn back.

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The editors wish to acknowledge the work of an experienced translator, Peter Winch, for taking on the difficult job of translation and for the capable and expeditious manner in which he completed it. Earlier Italian versions of the essays by Pierluigi Allotti, Stefano Biguzzi, Spencer Di Scala (“The Battle Within”), Emilio Gentile, Marco Gervasoni, Charles Killinger and Simone Visconti were published in *Mussolini socialista* (Rome: Laterza, 2015). We thank Bob Browning, who owns the literary rights, for consenting to the use of the late Philip Cannistraro’s research material for a chapter in this work. Many thanks to Palgrave Macmillan History Editor Kristin Purdy and History Editorial Assistant Michelle Smith for the work they have put into getting this book out. Finally, we thank James E. Thayer for his skilled technical help with parts of the book.

Spencer M. Di Scala

Emilio Gentile

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Stefano Biguzzi studied at Venice's Ca' Foscari University dedicating himself particularly to the question of Irredentism and the crisis of the Liberal State from the Great War to the advent of fascism. In 2003, UTET published his work *L'orchestra del duce* [The Duce's Orchestra], an analysis of fascist cultural policy; this was followed by its publication of *Cesare Battisti*, Biguzzi's biography of the Socialist and Irredentist politician from Trentino.

Philip Cannistraro was a distinguished professor of Italian American Studies at Queens College of the City University of New York. He was trained in modern Italian history at New York University and specialized in the study of Italian Fascism. His most influential work is probably *La fabbrica del consenso*, a groundbreaking book on *Fascist propaganda*, but he also published widely in the field and in Italian American Studies. He edited Geatano Salvemini's *Italian Fascist Activities in the United States* and the *Historical Dictionary of Fascist Italy*. He published (with Brian Sullivan) an important book on the life of Mussolini's mistress Margarita Sarfatti highlighting her influence on art during the Fascist regime, *Il Duce's Other Woman*. Phil Cannistraro died on May 28, 2005.

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Simone Visconti is an assistant lecturer of Modern History at the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Lausanne. He graduated from the University of Geneva with a thesis on Mussolini's ideas of nationhood during the First World War. He then won a scholarship from the Paris West University Nanterre La Défense for a doctoral thesis on Mussolini's political and intellectual journey from socialism to fascism.

Making Mussolini

Spencer M. Di Scala

In the case of Benito Mussolini, for decades historians seem to have taken as a paradigm William Wordsworth's famous line, "The Child is father of the Man." In discussing the youth of the future "Duce," that is, before his watershed decision advocating a greater role for Italy in the world by dropping its absolute neutrality in the Great War, only a few biographers have spent much time analyzing his early career in any depth. Most of them describe the same events in his life to such an extent that they have become a requirement to illuminate his character and to predict his future: the trouble he caused his unfortunate mother as a child; how he led bands of children on expeditions to steal fruit from the trees of enraged peasants; how he used a penknife to stick one of his classmates at boarding school. These events are narrated as if they are self-explanatory, and Mussolini's explanations usually go unmentioned. In short, the young Mussolini was a little "duce" from childhood, and it is little wonder that he grew up to be a dictator. Also portrayed as bumbling and inefficient, one wonders how he took over a major Western country and gave rise to a movement that had a fundamental impact on world history. In the common view of him outside Italy, especially among the young, he has become Hitler's sidekick.

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This vision contrasts with the reality of Mussolini's youthful period that is analyzed in this book. Although many of the "facts" of Mussolini's youth are as known as they will ever be, his early writings, the context in which he operated, and which greatly affected his development as a thinker and as a politician, have not been adequately scrutinized. To understand Mussolini's world when he began his political career, particularly the Italian Socialist milieu, in detail—its ideas, divisions and impact—from the end of the nineteenth century to the outbreak of World War I requires thorough analysis that generally has not been forthcoming. Another requirement for understanding his youth is a meticulous examination of the Europe in which Mussolini lived at the beginning of the twentieth century. The essays in this book make an effort to illuminate these worlds.

In attempting to avoid reading history from the present back, these essays have been written as if Mussolini the Fascist never existed between his birth on July 29, 1883 and Italian intervention in World War I on May 23, 1915, as indeed he did not. This method required a greater effort than one might think at first sight. It is easy enough to see an incident from Mussolini's youth that reminds historians of the later Duce, so the editors asked authors to proceed as if Mussolini had died in May 1915. However, Mussolini did not die, and in fact, one can argue that he was "born" then if we consider how both the young and mature Mussolini have been interpreted. Complicating the historical problem has been the influence of Mussolini the Duce on the history of Mussolini the revolutionary Socialist. It will come as no surprise that, at the height of his power, Mussolini encouraged hagiographic biographies by his admirers, while his enemies denigrated him and his career. These developments made it difficult to insert Mussolini's life and actions into a valid historical context.

MUSSOLINI AND FRIENDS

Ironically, we have a direct testimony of Mussolini's youth in the form of an autobiographical work written between October 14, 1911, the date of his arrest for his opposition to the Libyan War, and March 11, 1912, the eve of his liberation from jail. With the exception of his some of the violent events in his youth that are beloved of biographers, this brief work, *La Mia Vita* (My Life), has not been exploited for its historical value as much as it could be.¹ This first "autobiography" is written in the clear and simple language that characterized Mussolini's writing and that made him so accessible to the masses. Dating to a period before he became famous and with the aim of whiling away the time during the monotony of his jail term, it appears as honest as any autobiography is likely to be.

A spare, bare-bones account, *La Mia Vita* is divided into 20 chapters of two or three pages each, written in spare, sometimes moving, prose. Despite having been the source for a number of anecdotes used in many biographies, observers generally leave out the impact the young Mussolini and omit his explanation of them. For example, biographers will explain that, while in boarding school, he wounded a fellow student with a knife (probably a penknife) during an altercation, leaving an impression of a violent, insensitive, unrepentant youth. However, descriptions of this incident usually do not dwell on the exasperation the boy felt at the social and disciplinary conditions to which the boy and his classmates were subjected in the religious boarding school. The remorse felt by the person who became the ruthless dictator contrasts with this image: “Horried at what I had done, I started crying and implored forgiveness, but no one came.” When the school authorities arrived, they found a boy “Prostrated by pain, desperation, and fear, I knelt on the floor and invoked the help of all the saints in heaven,” that crawled away. His punishment: being compelled to spend the night locked up with ferocious guard dogs who attacked and forced him to climb the gate to get away, leaving part of his trousers in their jaws.² Today, this treatment would trigger an investigation and a probable shutdown of the school.

Mussolini’s description of the boarding schools he attended to fulfill his mother’s hope of calming him down and preparing him for a teaching career exemplifies one of the themes of his first “autobiography”—the desperate poverty and social conditions that afflicted not only Mussolini but also persons of his class. *La Mia Vita* is the tale of a person who would not put up with such conditions and consistently rebelled against them by becoming a revolutionary Socialist and by preaching that violence was the only way to overthrow an oppressive system. This theme, for example, emerges strongly when describing his sojourns in Switzerland and in Trent, and the stories of his arrests. He describes the difficulties of finding work, extreme conditions, low pay and disrespect for Italian laborers who, through their toil, made a fundamental contribution to the building of Switzerland’s modern infrastructure. He described a European control system that involved constant surveillance, easy arrest, trumped up charges and expulsion under dire conditions. In one incident in Bern, he was arrested after giving a speech to union leaders supporting a general strike; the next day, he was invited to the local police station, interrogated, arrested, subjected to “humiliating anthropomorphic measurements,” photographed, locked up and expelled from the canton. “I won’t tell you about the trip from Bern to Chiasso in the tight cell of the prison train

with four other prisoners who were being expelled! We would have died from the heat and the smoke if it had not been for some kindhearted people along the Gotthard line who paid for some cold beer for us.”³

Other themes that emerge in Mussolini’s youthful account of his life, besides his professional development as a journalist and Socialist agitator, also contrast with that of many biographers. For example, he is generally portrayed as a “loner,” a self-serving myth Mussolini himself perpetuated when he was at the top of the world,⁴ while his story is full of the support of friends.⁵ Usually pictured as a superficial intellectual by biographers, he describes his intense reading: “At one time, it could be said, I devoured an entire library.”⁶ Another striking feature of *La Mia Vita* is the endless string of women with which Mussolini had relations.⁷ This feature of his personality could stand more scrutiny than it has been given. Mussolini admitted that he lost his virginity at a brothel at age 17, then felt guilty and later became obsessed with sex, but biographers emphasize his casual or cruel treatment of women.⁸ In fact, he does seem to have treated some with tenderness and to have elicited a like response in them that lasted in some cases for years after the affairs ended, and he did listen patiently, over tea, to his 73-year-old landlady in Lausanne tell him of the tragedies in her life.⁹

Rather than taking this work in context as an attempt of a young man reared in poverty who had made the choice to dedicate himself to overthrowing the existing social, economic and political structure and facing an uncertain future, many biographers have utilized *La Mia Vita* as a resource either to malign or to praise Mussolini—either to demonstrate that he was a violent fraud from the beginning or to prove that he was a man of the people and came from them. It is thus unsurprising that the first to distort Mussolini’s youth was Mussolini himself, with the aid of Richard Washburn Child.

“With much of the drama it contains I, being Ambassador of the United States at the time, was intimately familiar; much of the extraordinary personality disclosed here was an open book to me long ago, because I knew the man who now, at last, has written characteristically, directly and simply of that self for which I have deep affection.”¹⁰ In his Foreword, Child proudly took responsibility for the Duce’s *My Autobiography*, probably ghostwritten by Mussolini’s brother Arnaldo and translated by Child. The target audience was the world’s English-speaking population and the book did not appear in Italian for 50 years. Safely ensconced in power and revered, especially in the USA, the book was a very successful propaganda.¹¹

The *Autobiography's* chapter on his youth suddenly changes character from how Mussolini described it in *La Mia Vita*. The emphasis on his family life and on his love for his parents remains, but the incident in which he stabbed a fellow student in boarding school has disappeared: "I was about to enter into a period of routine, of learning the ways of the disciplined human herd. I studied, slept well and grew."¹² Yes, he admits, "I was, I believe, unruly. And I was sometimes indiscreet," but, understandably so because "Youth has its passing restlessness and follies."¹³ He received a teaching diploma, but no job, he wrote, emphasizing the difficulty of finding work and, not wanting to call on important persons to use their influence and unwilling to be a burden on his family, left for Switzerland. Life in that country was difficult, but "The difficulties of life have hardened my spirit" and they "taught him how to live."¹⁴ Learning firsthand the problems of Italian emigrants, "I threw myself headforemost into the politics of the emigrant—of refugees, of those who sought solutions." He learned to hate "men who grow rich in politics." Even while suffering hunger, he remained committed to intellectual activity, following the course of lectures of the famous sociologist and economist Vilfredo Pareto, whose ideas supposedly influenced the development of fascism; however, in his earlier autobiography, he did not mention Pareto.¹⁵ Of all the real hardships, his engagement in radical politics, his arrests and his expulsions, not a word. He returned to Italy because "There was the yearning for home which blossoms in the hearts of all Italians," and he also felt compelled to return to do his compulsory military service.¹⁶ There is no mention that he had stayed in Switzerland to avoid military service, had been sentenced to a year in jail *in absentia* and had benefitted from an amnesty that allowed him to return to Italy to complete his service instead of emigrating to New York.¹⁷

Clearly, Mussolini hid much of his background because of developments following the period he discusses in his earlier autobiography, but he could not conceal his time as a militant Socialist, editor of the official Socialist Party daily, *Avanti!*, and his switch from an opponent of Italian intervention in World War I to supporter. His technique in *My Autobiography* was to admit all of these facts, while at the same time emphasizing his success as a politician during that period because "I understood now that the Gordian knot of Italian political life could only be undone by an act of violence."¹⁸ It was the same reasoning that had allowed him so successfully to come to power. Mussolini was fairly accurate in describing the reasons that convinced him to favor Italian intervention in World War I—a question

that had become and remains a hot issue in interpreting the man—but omitted the charge that he had “betrayed” the Socialist cause and took money so he could found his own newspaper.¹⁹ He also exaggerated the role he and that newspaper played in bringing the country into war on May 23, 1915.²⁰

My Autobiography was an important arch in the construction of a structure mythologizing Mussolini, because it “authenticated,” a previous biography. Margarita Sarfatti, from a well-off Jewish family had married into a wealthy one. She had become a Socialist and had worked with Mussolini as the art critic of *Avanti!* when Mussolini edited the newspaper, followed him to *Il Popolo d'Italia*, became the “art dictator” during his regime and went into exile as a result of the anti-Semitic laws of 1938.²¹ As his mistress, she was one of only three women who caused his tolerant but well-informed wife “great unhappiness.”²² Realizing, as Mussolini had, the great importance and need to cultivate the English-speaking public, Sarfatti published a very successful biography, *The Life of Benito Mussolini* in 1925, followed the next year with an Italian edition, *Dux*, published by one of Italy’s largest publishers; eventually it was translated into 17 languages.²³

The book sported a pompous Preface by Mussolini, who identifies himself as a “public man” of the kind chosen by fate, born and not made, who must bear this burden and “stigma” all through his life. He claimed to “detest those who take me as a subject for their writings and discourses” no matter if they criticize or speak well of him. He is not out for vanity or publicity, he claimed, “No, it is the thought, the realization, that I no longer belong merely to myself, that I belong to all—loved by all, hated by all—that I am an essential element in the lives of others: this feeling has on me a kind of intoxicating effect.”²⁴

Sarfatti’s biography, an unabashed paean to her lover, takes mythmaking to new heights. Like the ancient epics, it attempts to give Mussolini a pedigree, comparing him to “Heros” such as Alexander the Great, Oliver Cromwell and George Washington. World War I, Sarfatti claims, seems to be an exception in that it lacked such heroes, but a new social order evolved from the “cataclysm” that produced new styles and great leaders, from the frigid North and the sunny South. “Lenin the Asiatic and Mussolini the European: the one came to demolish, the other to reconstruct.” Concentrating on Mussolini “the devout optimist, believing in God,” Sarfatti’s epic describes the merits of the Mussolini family and those of his ancestors, his childhood (comparing him to Goethe) and the

legendary status of his wonderful region, the Romagna.²⁵ Well informed about his life, her technique takes the incidents the youthful Mussolini had written about in *La Mia Vita* and transforms them into tests that the new Hero successfully overcame in order to reach his current exalted position.

Sarfatti's book hit its mark by helping make Mussolini a household name in the USA and in the English-speaking world. Soon after the book appeared, in 1927, William Randolph Hearst tried to sign up Mussolini for his media empire by offering him a contract. The negotiations failed, but his wife Millicent traveled to Rome in 1930 and renewed the attempt by paying attention to him and by publishing an article describing him as "a great executive, a true leader of men." She proposed a regular collaboration with the Hearst newspapers by offering to pay him \$1500 per article, the current equivalent of more than \$15,000 per piece. This time, Mussolini consulted with Sarfatti, who, as his mistress and a shrewd businesswoman and propagandist, would ghostwrite the articles. She negotiated an agreement by which Mussolini would deliver 12 articles in 1931 on "newsworthy current events" selected by the Hearst group, at \$1500 an article, with an option to do the same thing in 1932.²⁶ Sarfatti thus mythologized Mussolini, popularized his image worldwide and established a model for the hundreds of favorable and hagiographic works that subsequently appeared on him and from whose influence popular authors have not been fully able to liberate themselves.

MUSSOLINI AND HIS ENEMIES

According to one of his biographers, Mussolini attempted to gain the sympathy of a woman who refused him by saying that he needed someone to inspire him. Two women were madly in love with him, he explained, but he did not love them: "One was too ugly, but had a noble and generous soul; one was very beautiful, but devious and cunning."²⁷ The beautiful woman was Sarfatti, the ugly one, Angelica Balabanoff. And the two women did not like each other. Here is Sarfatti's description of Balabanoff: "Small, mis-shaped [sic], hunch-backed [sic], 'Comrade' [sic] Balabanoff was extraordinarily intelligent—a strange hysterical creature with a flashing mind." As a woman, Sarfatti thought her "a freak of the wonderful Slav nature."²⁸

Angelica Balabanoff had been born in Russia of a wealthy Jewish family but had left young because of her sympathy for the working class that her family's treatment of its servants brought home. She wandered over

Europe, meeting most of the major European Socialist leaders, including, in Lausanne, a down-and-out Benito Mussolini—"I had never seen a more wretched-looking human being." When Mussolini complained about his luck because he had been offered 50 francs to translate into Italian a pamphlet by Socialist Karl Kautsky from the German, but did not know the language, she pitied him and offered to help with the translation.²⁹ Seeing that "he knew little of history, of economics, or of Socialist theory and that his mind was completely undisciplined," Balabanoff writes, she undertook to school him but was careful to make him feel that she was his collaborator rather than his teacher. As his confidence increased, and his status changed from tramp to "writer," and though he had read nothing of Marx besides the *Communist Manifesto*, Balabanoff maintains that Mussolini began arguing with real workers and intellectuals, some of whom had been scholars of Marxism for years.³⁰

In the ensuing years, Balabanoff moved to Italy and militated in the revolutionary wing of the Italian Socialist Party for more than a decade. She became part of the Central Committee, editing newspapers and writing articles. In the run-up to the Congress of Reggio Emilia, she collaborated with the left wing that took control of the party in 1912. When Mussolini became editor of *Avanti!*, Balabanoff became the newspaper's "co-editor." The two seemed to have a good relationship until Mussolini came out in favor of Italian intervention in World War I. Balabanoff described this action as "the most infamous betrayal of modern times,"³¹ never forgave him, and became his sworn enemy for the rest of her life.

This helps explain Sarfatti's attempt to discredit Balabanoff by presenting her as the worst kind of shrew. Part of this animus was certainly personal. After suggesting that she was promiscuous, not having any sense of beauty ("Otherwise she would have thrown herself down the nearest well," but, as it was, she had only "the slightest possible acquaintance with water"), Sarfatti described her as being the worst kind of simpleminded leftist.³² It was this woman who "imposed herself on young Benito Mussolini." While feigning a respectful relationship, she followed Mussolini as his assistant when he took over *Avanti!*. And then:

What clashes of temperament there were between them! and what fierce feuds! He was never revolutionary enough for her. Every now and again, over the tone of some comment of his or hers, they would fall out violently. Then for days and weeks together they would not speak. They would communicate with each other by means of memoranda, often sharply spiced.

“Your remarks yesterday on the Elections [sic],” she would write, “were not vigorous enough. You ought to have emphasized the victory of the Extremists [sic] at the Congress.” And he would reply: “You understand nothing whatever about it. Get on with your own work!”³³

Eventually, Mussolini sent her away, but, Sarfatti maintains, she never tired of denouncing him as the “hired assassin of the bourgeoisie” and “must still be foaming at the mouth with rage!” because after the Bolshevik Revolution, Balabanoff had gone to Russia and had been expelled while the Duce’s ambassador was on his way to Moscow after he had recognized the Soviet state.³⁴

Personal but above all ideological motives induced Balabanoff to paint a fascinating but at the same time a devastating portrait of Mussolini because it was necessary to destroy his character from the time he was a youth in order to justify how this onetime radical Socialist had betrayed his comrades, destroyed his old party and founded a successful movement that had world appeal. Her description of his negative qualities influenced later biographers.

Balabanoff began her story by revealing when she first met Mussolini, describing him as an intellectually mediocre person—something that has remained in the literature on him ever since. He knew little of Marxism, was ignorant of socialism and had no faith in the political education of the masses, according to her. His conception of a revolution was not, nor ever was, Marxist but, because of his readings in philosophers who emphasized individual action and not that of the masses, “It was inevitable that he should be intoxicated with the theories of the French radical [Auguste] Blanqui, who conceived of revolution as a *coup d’état*, the seizure of power by a small group of revolutionary adventurers; and it is to Blanqui, rather than to Marx, that one must look for the key to Mussolini’s subsequent career.”³⁵ Balabanoff refers to Blanqui as a “radical” instead of an early Socialist, and omits pointing out that this notion of revolution had at least some resemblance to Lenin’s, whose revolution she later approved at least in the short term. Mussolini’s articles, even when he became more prominent and edited Socialist newspapers, she maintains, demonstrated his continuing intellectual confusion.³⁶

Besides attacks on his intellectual capacities, Balabanoff concentrated on Mussolini’s supposed personal faults as a means of breaking down his image. When she first met him, she noted that he dressed poorly, was “extremely dirty,” had to be supported materially by generous comrades

and was very timid until his association with her allowed him to gain more confidence. At that point, he became boastful and let his enormous ego take over. He held a series of menial jobs because compelled to choose between “vagrancy” and hunger. In the Socialist exile community, his laziness was legendary, and his anticlericalism crude.³⁷ He lied continually, was untrustworthy, ungrateful and a coward. According to Balabanoff’s account, the Executive Committee of the Socialist Party named him as editor of the party newspaper because a member argued that it made no difference because the whole committee bore responsibility for the paper, while an offended Mussolini wavered in accepting the job because one of the Committee’s members described him as “ecocentric.”³⁸ Even when he became editor of *Avanti!*, he would get out of work by claiming he was sick and by regularly going to see a doctor during working hours. He feared writing to the former editor of the newspaper to inform him that he would no longer be allowed to write for it, asking her to do it. At night after the paper closed, he would wait for Balabanoff to go home because he was afraid to walk the streets of Milan after dark and wanted her company, telling her that he was afraid of his own shadow, “Yes, my own shadow!” Yet, his language was always violent and vengeful. One night on the way home, he pointed out some trees and said: “These are the trees on which we shall hang the reformists, [Filippo] Turati and [Camillo] Prampolini.”³⁹

These attitudes came to a head when World War I broke out and Italy proclaimed its absolute neutrality. Mussolini strongly declared himself in favor of this position during a meeting of the Executive Committee, but left the meeting early and asked her to vote for him. According to Balabanoff, the inspiration behind this move was to provide him with a loophole should he later modify his opinion so he could claim to be consistent.⁴⁰ Balabanoff then goes on to paint a picture of Allied plotting to encourage Italy to enter World War I on their side. With regard to Mussolini, she writes that, given the strong opposition of the Socialist Party, the only way the Allies could achieve their goal “was to make the war against Germany appear to be a *revolutionary* war. For this, the Allies needed a demagogue who knew his revolutionary phraseology and who could talk the language of the masses. Such a man was to be discovered in the person of Benito Mussolini.”⁴¹ The rest of Balabanoff’s story is one of French agents pulling together the money to get Mussolini to change his mind and advocate Italian entry into the war. They concentrated on Mussolini’s desire to found his own newspaper. True to form, Mussolini

lied, cheated blamed others, said he would always be a Socialist, and came up with spurious arguments to advocate Italian intervention that in his pocket for a time even fooled Balabanoff. But even as he spoke, she claims, he had the contract for his new newspaper that would support entry into the conflict. When the newspaper appeared, “Everyone knew... that Mussolini’s ‘conversion’ had a financial basis.”⁴²

At a distance of 100 years, it is difficult to understand whether the incidents recounted by Balabanoff and her opinions about the young Mussolini were true or not, and the real basis of Mussolini’s switch to intervention is still debated. However, Balabanoff’s account on Mussolini’s youth and character, and with another important book, influenced the historical discourse ever since.

In 1938, the same year Balabanoff’s memoir appeared, an Italian-American professor published the only biography to concentrate entirely on the young Mussolini, as opposed to the Duce of fascism. In “A Personal Note” introducing his book, Gaudens Megaro explains that he was aware that the task of understanding Mussolini’s personality must be sought in his youth, but that this duty had become muddled by a growing mythology. He describes the difficulties of his endeavor because of the Fascist government’s attempt to hide the sources but believes that “To know Mussolini the fascist, one must know Mussolini the socialist.”⁴³

In this work, Megaro wears his heart on his sleeve, and it suffers because of both the dearth of materials he was able to access and his position as a contemporary with the mission of debilitating Mussolini’s favorable image. Both positions are understandable for the time the book was published, but the author argues that he is proceeding from an unbiased position. He asks: “Is it necessary to wait decades for the so-called ‘facts’ about Mussolini when it is possible to ascertain them now through careful and exhaustive research?”⁴⁴ This raises a philosophical question about history and how necessary it is to gain distance from the historical events one is examining in order to comprehend and interpret them better; it would be strange if no progress were made after decades, but in the case of Mussolini, it remains difficult for historians to achieve a certain detachment from their subject.

Subtler than Balabanoff’s book, Megaro’s account finds the young Mussolini wanting. Megaro’s book has the merit of adding a wealth of detail to what was known about Mussolini’s early career, from his birth to his emergence as the leader of the left—or revolutionary—wing of the Italian Socialist Party. Megaro delves into Mussolini’s actions and discusses

his rebellious nature, the relationship with his friends, the nuts and bolts of the trials he underwent, but sticks to the conclusion that Mussolini was a superficial thinker and not “really” a Socialist.

For Megaro, as for Balabanoff, Mussolini was a “Blanquist” with an anarchist tinge, not a Marxist, interested in violence led by élites and vanguards rather than in mass organizations. During his leadership of the Socialist Party in 1912–1914, he was the “Duce” of that organization as he later was the Duce of fascism.⁴⁵ His utilization of this term demonstrates a willful confusion when used for English-speaking audiences. For them, it was and is identified only with fascism, whereas in Italian, it meant (before Mussolini’s takeover), simply the leader of a movement. In effect, by using this term, Megaro identified Mussolini with fascism even before the movement was invented.

Megaro makes certain to devalue Mussolini’s credentials as an intellectual. He deliberately uses the term “socialist intellectual” and “socialist culture” in quotation marks when referring to Mussolini, and labels him only an agitator and propagandist who, like many others, inhaled some of the intellectual oxygen of the time. He explains: “we mean to suggest not only that he was essentially a propagandist rather than a manual worker but also that he was familiar with the conventional and stock theses known to all socialist agitators. Our long review of his propaganda has illustrated this.” Dismissing Mussolini’s intellectual credentials, Megaro maintains that it was not difficult “for a professional socialist agitator to acquire a fair knowledge of problems pertaining to Marxism without having read or even having seen the book covers of a work by Marx.”⁴⁶ Megaro further demolishes Mussolini’s intellectual pedigree in his chapters on Vilfredo Pareto and on Georges Sorel, casting doubt that he attended the lectures of the first and arguing that he contradicted himself with regard to the second, about whose influence Mussolini the Duce of fascism frequently boasted. He points to Mussolini’s attempt as head of the government to exaggerate the intellectual influences on him and to place himself within the context of the major intellectual currents of the twentieth century, concluding that he “has contributed to the growth of legends not only about his intellectual masters, but also about his entire life.”⁴⁷ True enough, but his assertions while in power were clearly propaganda, and historians cannot read this tendency into the past; if it tells us something about the young Mussolini, it is probably very little.⁴⁸

While *Mussolini in the Making* filled in the details of a complex youth, it is primarily a book designed to combat “that shameless fraud which passes for his ‘Autobiography’ (1928), published in English but not in Italian.”⁴⁹ In this sense, the book should be considered a counterweight

to *My Autobiography* rather than as a fundamental contribution to the study of the youthful Mussolini, but, like Balabanoff's account, it had (and has) an important influence on those biographers who saw a straight line from Mussolini's socialism to his fascism.

MUSSOLINI'S BIOGRAPHERS

This impact can be seen in the reaction to biographers who took more a sophisticated view of this interpretation. Following World War II and the execution of Mussolini by Communist partisans on April 28, 1945, it is not surprising that the new Italian Republic, and that its intellectuals on the left who held a cultural hegemony, would attempt to bolster the Republic's founding myth as an anti-Fascist state by creating a new orthodoxy regarding Mussolini and fascism in the country's cultural institutions.

The major tenets of this orthodoxy were that Mussolini had betrayed his early socialism, such as it was, lacked any kind of ideology, and had imposed his rule on a reluctant populace in concert with the bourgeoisie solely through ruthless violence. These ideas influenced not only Italian publications on him but found their way even into American surveys of modern Italian history—a kind of censorship distorting an important area of Italian and world history.⁵⁰

In 1965, historian Renzo De Felice published the first of what became a multivolume biography of over 6500 pages and set off a firestorm in Italy. De Felice proposed to interpret Mussolini without preconceptions, based on archival documents and arguing that he and fascism should be analyzed in historical context. Moreover, he criticized the conformist views toward Mussolini as dangerous, arguing that the Fascist/anti-Fascist dichotomy no longer made any sense and contending that “preserving anti-Fascism as the ideological underpinning of the postwar republic has produced a bankrupt leadership and an inefficient government, by inhibiting the use of state powers.” On television, De Felice stated: “Democracy reduced to anti-Fascism runs the risk of suicide.”⁵¹ Leftist intellectuals immediately accused him at aiming to rehabilitate Mussolini and fascism. By the time of his death in 1996, however, it was no mean accomplishment that De Felice had made discussion of the subject of Mussolini respectable even if still unpleasant.⁵² This debate is beyond the scope of this chapter, which is concerned with Mussolini's youth, but it can be readily accessed.⁵³ From the historiographical point of view, De Felice's volume on Mussolini's early career, “Mussolini the Revolutionary,” constitutes a reference point for anyone wishing to understand or to begin research on the subject.

The importance of De Felice's biography rests on the documents he used, his method and his conclusions. He did not propose a work motivated by pro-Mussolini or anti-Mussolini sentiment, nor one based on a Fascist or anti-Fascist viewpoints, but one "linked to an evaluation of Italian reality and of the social forces that operated and still operate within them."⁵⁴ This principle allowed De Felice to come to new conclusions that challenged the main tenets of accepted Marxist historiography on Mussolini,⁵⁵ exposing his work to disparagement in the press and his person to physical threats.

As for Mussolini's early life, De Felice emphasized the influence of Benito's father, saying that despite the stress of *My Autobiography* on his supposed noble origins to please his English-speaking audience for propaganda purposes, Mussolini never renounced his peasant heritage and remained proud of his rise to power as a Socialist, thinking that it would have pleased his father. De Felice contended that Mussolini never forsook the idea learned at Alessandro's knee that "*revolution* ... was the only way to achieve socialism."⁵⁶ He discussed Mussolini's intellectual credentials serenely and, for example, cited Pareto himself that Mussolini had indeed attended the sociologist's lectures but dismisses his claim that he knew Pareto personally.⁵⁷ As for the argument that Mussolini was not a Marxist, De Felice highlights the doubts that important thinkers had about Marxist tenets as time went by, and notes that Mussolini had them as well. "He did not have any scruples about affirming that in Marxism, as in any other system, there was an impermanent part." In short, Mussolini believed that "We are neither theologians, nor priests, nor bigots of the Marxist faith." In a speech entitled "What is alive and what is dead in Marxism" on May 1, 1911, Mussolini affirmed that Marxism could be reduced to three important principles: economic determinism, the class struggle and the concept of a catastrophic end to capitalism (i.e., violent revolution). According to De Felice, these ideas were the basis of his fight against reformism, which argued for a gradual and non-violent road to socialism.⁵⁸ In effect by 1912, De Felice believed, Mussolini had evolved a conception of Marxism that was not orthodox and maintained that it could change according to evolving times. In short, a conception of Marxism that was not based on ignorance of the doctrine, as critics such as Balabanoff had affirmed, but had as its guiding principle adapting the theory to the times.

As we have seen, those critics struck out at Mussolini primarily because he had turned his back on the Socialist Party's support of absolute neutrality and because of his supposed betrayal for taking money for his new

newspaper. However, as the distinguished Italian historian Delio Cantimori wrote in the Preface to De Felice's first volume, there were different types of interventionists—from republicans to nationalists, from revolutionary syndicalists to democrats; and the “old” Socialists did not understand Mussolini's kind.⁵⁹ De Felice elaborates on this point later in his book, stating that—whatever his later evolution—Mussolini in 1914 represented the “marching wing” of the Socialist Party. That is, the party choice to support neutrality meant that it would become irrelevant, that it would destroy all chances that it would become “nationalized,” in the sense that hanging on to neutrality created a split within the country (unlike what happened in France) that would endure for decades. In short, the Italian Socialist Party was stagnant and promised to remain so while Mussolini hoped to impart movement to it. Adding salt to the wound, De Felice cited Antonio Gramsci, founder of the Italian Communist Party, to prove this point. In a painful process, Mussolini had understood that the party “had to demonstrate its maturity not only as an opposition party but also as party of responsibility and government [*potere*],” while at the same time remaining true to itself.⁶⁰ In short, De Felice took seriously Mussolini's reasoning in favor of Italian intervention, which he justified not only on the grounds of the need of the party to remain relevant but also necessary to defend European democracy—probably the only time Mussolini ever came to its defense.⁶¹ In other words, Mussolini changed his mind for valid reasons; he was not a traitor to the Socialist cause.

Another author who took a similar position was Paolo Monelli, in a rich and detailed biography of Mussolini published in 1950, *Mussolini piccolo Borghese*. Working so early after Mussolini's death gave Monelli the advantage of interviewing people who knew him, which allowed him to add some interesting details to our understanding about Mussolini's youth.⁶² Most interesting is his account of Mussolini's reaction immediately following the Sarajevo assassinations that sparked the conflict. Monelli describes the real pain Mussolini felt at having to condemn the interventionists publicly while privately being convinced that a war on the side of the Allies seemed to him to be “just and inevitable.”

Called back by his newspaper from a vacation following the Sarajevo assassinations, Mussolini had a conversation with Michele Campana, a journalist from the Romagna who filled in the author. According to Campana's testimony, Mussolini did not believe in a policy of absolute neutrality for Italy from the very beginning of the international crisis. He had not the slightest doubt that the German Socialist Party would

support the Emperor in the war, that the Socialist Second International would collapse, and that the war would not be confined to the Balkans. He said: "Let's not create any illusions. The Central Powers aim to strike at England and France through Serbia. A European war is inevitable, and France will be the first victim if the more civilized peoples do not unite to save her. The defeat of France would be a mortal blow for European liberty." He vented his anger at his own party, claiming that he could not stand his comrades any longer and longing for an opportunity to guide the party intelligently during the great happenings that were about to occur. He summarized his feelings:

I would like it if the Socialist Party did not lock itself in an *a priori* opposition to the government; that it would declare itself in favor of conditioned neutrality in order to prevent at any cost an intervention on the side of the Triple Alliance. But then the party should not deny its consent for eventual intervention on the side of France, if it is dragged into the conflict. The struggle would be to make these gentlemen [*signori*] of the party understand these elementary realities. They are great revolutionaries in word only; but they fear losing their little positions of power [*cadregghino*] and their own skins. Yes, I know them well—all of them.⁶³

In addition to reporting this exchange, Monelli looks into the specific charge that Mussolini switched from opposing to supporting intervention because he was promised funds to start his own newspaper, but concludes that this charge is not proven.⁶⁴ While Mussolini did take funds from various sources, he did so after he had made up his mind to come out in favor of a conditioned neutrality and eventual intervention. The evidence indicates that he took these funds later, when his newspaper ran into financial difficulties and he needed them in order to continue to run it and to continue his campaign in favor of intervention.

Aside from a translation of Monelli's book into English in 1953 (*Mussolini an Intimate Life*), English-speaking audiences do not have much access to the intricacies of these questions or to much objective information on Mussolini's youth in books written after Mussolini's fall. In 1961, Laura Fermi, wife of the physicist Enrico Fermi, published a biography that dedicated about a quarter of its pages to Mussolini's youth. Fermi had left Italy with her husband and family because of the passage of the racial laws,⁶⁵ but admits that although she had lived a good part of her life under the Mussolini regime she had understood little of him. As she got into her research, her previous understanding

of Mussolini changed, “But the greatest transformation occurred in my view of Mussolini himself: the man who had committed, to be sure, errors and sins, but who had been all of one piece, monolithic to use a word popular in Fascist times, strong, assured, intelligent to the point of being almost a genius, gave way to a far more complex personality, full of contradictions, of unanswered and probably unanswerable questions.”⁶⁶

In her examination of the youthful Mussolini, she emphasizes how he developed a certain style, for example, the extremist opinions he always expressed in his writings and speeches—in this following his father’s example. He avoided ambiguous, “middle of the road” statements on such issues as revolution, religion, class warfare, anti-monarchism and antimilitarism, but proclaimed his opinions strongly, a technique that sometimes led to paradoxical viewpoints but that always made him stand out and made people remember him. He arrived at this method almost by instinct. “He was the actor who perfects a mannerism and dramatizes his performance in order to excite a strong reaction in his audience.” Fermi described his development as an actor who could speak with feeling, whether or not he had any feeling about a subject or not, yet he could also describe facts in a direct way that simple people intuitively understood.⁶⁷ This ability characterizing the young Mussolini carried on into his later career. Fermi described his intellectual development without condescension and even his relationship with Balabanoff without the rancor with which the Russian Socialist expressed herself.⁶⁸ In considering the charge of his former comrades who had accused him of betraying the party by advocating its abandonment of the “absolute neutrality” policy, Fermi concludes: “History...has neither decisively shown how *Il Popolo* was financed nor fully disproved that Mussolini received money from France.”⁶⁹

Ivone Kirkpatrick, a former British diplomat who wrote a careful and detailed biography of Mussolini and who also conducted an investigation into the question, arrives at the same conclusion.⁷⁰ Kirkpatrick writes that the young Mussolini demonstrated his complex character early. He wanted to reach the “top,” and early understood his power over the crowd and that this could serve as his vehicle; and he succeeded in doing so already as a Socialist.⁷¹

If these biographers sought to provide an “objective” interpretation of Mussolini, the British historian Denis Mack Smith took an outspokenly negative view of his subject in his biography of Mussolini and in other writings. The result was a very public debate with Renzo De Felice. Mack Smith became very popular in Italy, “the apparent compatibility of his

views with those of Gramsci [one of the founders of the Italian Communist Party, PCI] which were contemporaneously being circulated by pro-PCI historians, made him a special hero on the Left and among all those who had critical views of the history of United Italy or who still thought of themselves as anti-Fascists.”⁷² Whatever readers might think of Mack Smith’s opinion of Mussolini’s entire career, his biography spends little effort in describing the young Mussolini. He sees continuity between the young and the mature Mussolini—his desire for fame, his opportunism, his inconsistencies, his supposed exaggeration of his family’s poverty—and tends to read too much of the future into the past. Thus Mussolini seems “all of a piece,” as Laura Fermi put it, and the biography’s lack of detail does not allow for the complexities that marked Mussolini during his youth and into his maturity.⁷³

Likewise, later, more popular biographies do not devote much space to the young Mussolini, summarizing his history and that of Italy, and rush ahead to the “meatier” parts of his life, when he was in power and when he fell.⁷⁴

YOUNG MUSSOLINI

The essays collected in the present book present a more detailed and nuanced look at Mussolini’s youth, seeking to give readers a better idea of his complex personality and trying to avoid partisan and “default” interpretations. The editors believe that understanding history with as few preconceptions as possible is a better way to avoid pitfalls than by adapting historical facts or context to a priori attitudes. Mussolini’s life has been particularly subject to such distortions, so each chapter in this work seeks to start fresh in analyzing the different phases in his life as a young Socialist.

In discussing Mussolini’s childhood, Philip Cannistraro’s essay raises important, historically unresolved issues. It concentrates on the influence of family, not the inspiration of Mussolini’s native Romagna, which Cannistraro seeks to keep in greater perspective than some biographers do. Like other observers, Cannistraro considers the impact of Benito’s father Alessandro to be fundamental, but beyond Alessandro’s commitment to the anarchist-tinged socialism emphasized by his son’s biographers, Cannistraro indicates that what is remarkable about the elder Mussolini is the intellectual atmosphere that, because of him, permeated the Mussolini home. The absence of a psychological study highlighting tensions between the intellectual awareness present in the family milieu

and its poverty is unfortunate.⁷⁵ As a child, Benito, thanks to his father, imbibed not only Socialist literature from the time of his birth but also the concepts of great writers, contemporary and not, like Victor Hugo, Dante Alighieri, Emile Zola, Alessandro Manzoni and the positivist philosopher and ex-priest popular in Italy at the time, Roberto Ardigò; and he kept up this interest for the rest of his life. Among the political thinkers of the time, the father transmitted not only knowledge of the Socialist champions Karl Marx and Mikhail Bakunin⁷⁶ but also information about the more radical Italian heroes of unification Giuseppe Mazzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi. It is interesting that these influences came from his uneducated but self-taught father rather than from his mother, who was a teacher, and, from a psychological viewpoint, it would be useful to understand why the socialistic concepts of the father seized control of Mussolini's mind rather than the Catholic faith of his mother, who he loved so tenderly.⁷⁷ Why did Mussolini become a Socialist instead of a priest?

The intellectual atmosphere of the Mussolini household described by Cannistraro cannot be considered "normal." If we reflect upon the young Adolf Hitler, with whom the young Mussolini is often compared, their youthful periods were quite different. When both were down and out, Hitler turned to painting postcards and selling them, Mussolini to journalism and writing philosophical tracts. We do not see many serious intellectual influences on the young Hitler, and—despite his critics' denigration of Mussolini's youthful intellectual development—if we compare the quantity and quality of their readings, there is nothing comparable in Hitler's life. In Vienna, Hitler turned to reading pamphlets that distorted Darwin's thought; in Lausanne, Mussolini "devoured" a whole library. Given that Mussolini's intellectual influences are well known and that there exists a large corpus of his youthful writings (conveniently collected in the *Opera Omnia* already cited), it is remarkable that there is no close study or analysis of his youthful works that might help explain his intellectual growth and his psychological development. Moreover, there is no reason to lament, as commentators sometimes do, that Mussolini did not write an ideological statement like Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, considering that his collected works total over 35 volumes.

Vital to an understanding of the young Mussolini are analyses of the time he spent in Switzerland and Trent. Serious accounts of those periods are essential to any serious biography. Both the essays of Simone Visconti and Stefano Biguzzi provide readers with greater insight into Mussolini's sojourn in these areas, allowing them to grasp the essence of Mussolini the "revolutionary."

Visconti concentrates on the young revolutionary's education. The usual view of Mussolini's Swiss experience is that he arrived in the country, worked menial jobs and, these requiring too much physical exertion, turned to political activity because, unlike other emigrants, he had a smattering of education. However, Visconti offers us a new perspective: that of an emerging political leader operating within a changing Italian emigration more congenial to him and intensifying his education—mostly on his own but also attending some university courses—in preparation for a larger role. The Italian emigration was changing, according to Visconti, from a class that emigrated just to find work it could not obtain in Italy to a “new” emigration, which included political refugees, skilled workers, artisans and entrepreneurs who had come from Italy or had learned the ropes in Switzerland itself. Visconti emphasizes that it was this sea in which the youthful Mussolini swam and this intellectual elite with which he spent his time in Switzerland: “This was the social network which Mussolini joined and in which he evolved: it was both a human and intellectual experience that was new and important for his development as it allowed his immediate participation in the political life of the contingent of Italian emigrants.” In short, it was the radical elite, not manual workers, who constituted the “target audience” for his writings and speeches.

Thus his “real” political activity began in Switzerland, and the widening circle of intellectuals and political organizations representing Italian workers, with which he came into contact, provided him with concrete experience in the field of labor agitation and in the ideological disputes then beginning to split the Italian Socialists, particularly the revolutionary–reformist dispute that was to take up most of his attention. In this context, Visconti divides the young Mussolini's Swiss period into two distinct phases. The first lasted until 1903, when he was primarily concerned with the Socialist ideal, the need to define it, and the necessity of spreading the word. The second, more important, lasted for the rest of his stay in the country, and involved “his affirmation of a revolutionary concept of socialism and was based on real and intellectual experiences which gave him a more coherent view of social reality and political action.”

Mussolini's political activity coincided with a crucial period in the internal reorganization of the Swiss section of the Italian Socialist Party. Because of the departure of better-known personages and the difficulties in finding a suitable new secretary, which Visconti describes in detail, the Swiss section turned to Mussolini who became both secretary and editor of the local party newspaper. Mussolini's activities drew the praise of

his comrades (including that of Angelica Balabanoff, in contrast to what she would later write in her memoirs), allowed him to work in a job that appealed to him, concentrate more on theory, and provided opportunities for reciprocal exchange of ideas regarding socialism in preparation for his later role in the Italian Socialist movement. They contributed to his development of “a program of ‘Marxist and revolutionary socialism’” as an alternative program to reformist socialism. He demonstrated himself to be a very energetic leader, in demand as a speaker who observers described as “brilliant” and “well prepared.” Visconti considers this period as Mussolini’s “apprenticeship” during which he learned the skills and major problems of the Socialist movement that were to serve him so well later.

A valuable part of Visconti’s essay tackles the young Mussolini’s studies, including the works he read, their influences on him, and the recurrent issue of whether or not Mussolini attended Pareto’s lectures. After reading Visconti’s description, there can be no doubt of the seriousness of Mussolini’s dedication to his readings, which clearly were not superficial and which helped him in his writings, speeches and labor agitation. With regard to Pareto, Visconti confirms that Mussolini probably attended some of his lectures but did not know him personally. However, Visconti points out that Pareto probably influenced him anyway through his assistant who actually taught the course, Pasquale Boninsegni. He also deplors the concentration on Pareto by Mussolini’s biographers and emphasizes the greater influences that other professors who taught at the University of Lausanne had on him. These influences generally go unmentioned. Visconti has provided a more nuanced, sophisticated and original analysis of Mussolini’s Swiss experience than have other writers. Its importance, he concludes, “lies above all in its intellectual dimension since it provided the bases for a particular view of the world, a view that Mussolini would subsequently modify and embellish but which he never abandoned completely.”

Not surprisingly, Mussolini’s increased prominence attracted the attention of the Swiss authorities, who worked to expel him.

If Mussolini’s time in Switzerland reveals the “education” of a revolutionary, his brief period in Trent portrays a maturing revolutionary. Stefano Biguzzi’s essay presents a changing, more nuanced Mussolini influenced in surprising ways by yet another foreign experience, this time in 1909 in the Trentino—an Italian-speaking area that remained part of the Austrian Empire after Italy’s unification and that suffered continuing discrimination under Austrian control. Along with Trieste, it was an important part

of the Irredenta, unredeemed lands that Italians yearned to join to Italy. In the Trentino, the Italian patriot Cesare Battisti founded a Socialist organization linked to the Italian Socialist Party, but emphasized unification with Italy and conflicting with the internationalist ideology that characterized socialism before the Great War. Battisti's party defended workers, democracy and the Italian identity of the inhabitants, and condemned pan-Germanism. However, the commitment of many local Socialists to Socialist internationalism caused serious splits.

Once again, it was thanks to these divisions and to his growing reputation as an efficient labor agitator and journalist that the Trent Socialist organization offered Benito Mussolini the job of editor of the local newspaper and secretary. Although Mussolini found Trent to be an intellectually dull city, Biguzzi concludes that his seven-month stint in the city allowed him to define his ideology and to strengthen his commitment to Italian socialism.

The young Mussolini threw himself into labor organization, political disputes and expansion of the local newspaper's role with his customary energy. In a preview of his later editorship of *Avanti!*, he improved the quality of the newspaper and increased its circulation by 50 percent, transforming it into an "effective weapon of combat." His success in his labor organization efforts was less spectacular but still creditable. He entered the political fray advocating violence and concentrating his attacks on the pro-Austrian Catholic *Popolari* led by Alcide De Gasperi and the Catholic establishment.⁷⁸ Biguzzi describes Mussolini's violent conflicts with both in detail, but the most interesting aspect as far as his Socialist career in Trent is concerned is that this battle culminated, necessarily, according to Biguzzi, in a violent anticlericalism because this was "the only area where Mussolini's revolutionary beliefs and the reformist path followed by socialism in Austria and Trentino" could confront each other.

Even the dull Trent did not interrupt Mussolini's intense intellectual activity. He read the upstart Florentine review that greatly influenced Italian culture of the period, *La Voce*, and later wrote for it. In a review of Georges Sorel, as Biguzzi emphasizes, Mussolini agreed with the French writer on the fundamental role of violence in history. He serialized a popular novel in Battisti's newspaper that helped keep the tabloid alive and was translated into ten languages; Mussolini tired of the female lead character and threatened to kill her off, but Battisti begged him not to do so for fear that his newspaper might fold. Most important, he published an essay on the problem of the Trentino from a "Socialist" point of view that was

one of his most successful earlier pieces. He wrote that most residents of the Trentino were uninterested in the question of unification with Italy, but it was obvious to readers that, as the editor of *La Voce* pointed out, the national question affected Mussolini, who criticized the Italian bourgeoisie of Trent for not taking it seriously. Mussolini's book represents a fissure in his support of internationalism that was to recur later. In short, Mussolini's Trent experience may help explain his conduct in 1914 and his turn from neutrality to support for Italian intervention in World War I.

By the time of his Trent experience, the young Mussolini was already a seasoned journalist. Pierluigi Allotti describes his method of communication as a revolutionary innovation. Throughout his career, Mussolini avoided journalism as generally practiced, especially its overly erudite language and complex phraseology that made it difficult to understand. For Mussolini, the journalist's job was to express strong opinions, not to report events that may have been witnessed in a balanced manner. The newspaper was for him Socialist propaganda, with revolution embedded in its prose. Not even consistency was important, because thought continually shifted.

Even at an early date, for him the daily newspaper was not an instrument to report or to record facts; it was not a means of education (as the reformists believed); it was not a forum for the exchange of ideas; it was a "fundamental weapon" for revolution in the hands of modern political parties. He praised "personalism," or the clear expression of a writer's ideas, for which he had been criticized, insisting on the absurdity of depersonalizing ideas. Revolutionary journalism was not supposed to be neutral, it was the direct, forceful development of the journalist's ideas at the service of his party and of revolution.

This kind of journalism was in a sense modern, because it anticipated the emphasis on opinion (although not the forceful, revolutionary exhortation that Mussolini favored!), rather than "just the facts." It appealed alike to revolutionary intellectuals and to the revolutionary masses. Among its admirers were the young revolutionaries and future founders of the Italian Communist Party, Amedeo Bordiga, Antonio Gramsci and Palmiro Togliatti. As far as the masses were concerned, Mussolini's appeal to them and to Socialists was obvious. He claimed to have quintupled *Avanti!*'s circulation in the two years he edited it, from 1912 to 1914, while party membership (using the daily newspaper as a vehicle) approximately tripled. By the time World War I broke out, Mussolini had become the revolutionary hero of the Socialist Party.

A SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONARY

But what kind of revolutionary? Because of Mussolini's association with anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists, he has been labeled as both in order to disparage his "Marxism." Despite his support of violence, he was no Anarchist. Socialists of the time—even reformists—supported the egalitarian and the humanitarian ideals of Anarchists, defending them from repression, but not their methods, and Mussolini did not favor their ideology. Anarchists condemned highly organized parties directed from a strong center, even formal organization, concentrating instead on the individual—exactly the opposite of what the revolutionary Socialist Mussolini advocated.

Revolutionary syndicalists were different. Like Mussolini, they believed in the necessity of violence to overthrow the political system. They took their inspiration from the French thinker Georges Sorel, who had a large following in Italy and the support of notable intellectuals. Both as a revolutionary Socialist and later in power, Mussolini claimed to have been influenced by Sorel's ideas on violence, the general strike and the role of myth, while Sorel paid close attention to Mussolini's career as early as 1912.⁷⁹

Marco Gervasoni labels the description of the young Mussolini as a revolutionary syndicalist, in no uncertain terms, as "a persistent legend" propagated by his earliest biographers and by some later ones. Both they and Sorel scholars aimed to demonstrate that Mussolini imported something alien into Italian Socialism that was an "inevitable step" on the way to fascism. This position gained further conviction because when Mussolini came out in favor of Italian intervention in World War I, it had been revolutionary syndicalist leaders who pressured him to make his decision public.

Gervasoni's essay summarizes the historiography of this idea, then turns to an analysis of revolutionary syndicalism in order to explain its essence and see whether it applies to Mussolini's case. As a movement, revolutionary syndicalism was difficult to define and caused much confusion, but because it was grounded in the labor movement in which the young Mussolini was intimately involved, he had to have contacts with it. Moreover, unlike the reformist-dominated Socialist labor movement, its emphasis on strikes, especially general strikes, violence, sabotage and factory occupations made it more congenial to Mussolini. Revolutionary syndicalism was the antithesis of reformism and between 1903 and 1906, when its adherents were expelled from the Socialist Party, and they battled the reformists for control of the organization.

One of its major Italian theorists, Arturo Labriola, categorically rejected the parliamentary action the reformists favored. All dominant social classes developed their specific institutions to maintain their power and to resolve disputes, he explained. The bourgeoisie had created parliaments with strict mechanisms that would prevent the adoption of reforms that threatened its power, even if it allowed minor ones for adjustments. The bourgeoisie led on the Socialists which, as Mussolini explained in the flagship revolutionary syndicalist newspaper, Milan's *Avanguardia Socialista*, they had become transformed into just another parliamentary clique.⁸⁰ For revolutionary syndicalists, as for Mussolini, the Socialist Party consisted of intellectuals who had corrupted socialism, transforming it into an electoral organization that survived by manipulating the workers. When the proletariat became dominant, Labriola argued, the party and the parliament would disappear and the workers would determine their own polices through their own specific organizations, the trade unions. After the revolution, the trade unions would seize control of production, federate among themselves up to the national and international level, and avoid the formation of elites they accused the bourgeoisie and the reformists of fostering.⁸¹

Some of these ideas understandably attracted Mussolini, and it is not surprising that he would contribute articles to *Avanguardia Socialista* during the heyday of the syndicalist challenge to the reformists (1903–1906); that the friendships he made would last for decades; and even that he would later utilize some of their ideas for his Corporate state. However, the basic syndicalist principles clashed fundamentally with those that had already come to define him. Mussolini never believed that trade unions would govern society in the future through a process that would allow them to control their own affairs by federating among themselves, nor do any of his writings indicate that he thought this desirable. In addition, even as a revolutionary Socialist, he believed in elites, and especially that they would lead the revolution. Gervasoni aptly describes Mussolini's relationship with the revolutionary syndicalists as complex, and he deconstructs it in order to demonstrate how it influenced Mussolini's political culture. The result is that Gervasoni agrees with Emilio Gentile in downplaying Sorel's influence on Mussolini and the importance of syndicalism for him, viewing it as a varietal of socialism.⁸² In fact, in 1913, Mussolini—now de facto chief of the Socialist Party—considered the revolutionary syndicalist organization, *Unione Sindacalista Italiana* (Italian Syndical Union, USI), a rival of his party because of its greater capacity to mobilize the masses owing to its support among workers.

Another germane consideration examined by Gervasoni is Mussolini's conversion to entering the European conflict in 1914. As a young man, Mussolini was a well-known and committed antimilitarist and antiwar agitator. Unlike him, the revolutionary syndicalists did not oppose war on principle, and, in fact, favored it. When the Libyan War broke out in 1911, the revolutionary syndicalists supported it because it would supposedly help modernize the country, while Mussolini demonstrated against it and was jailed for his efforts.⁸³ When the Great War broke out, they favored Italian intervention, hence the argument that they influenced Mussolini's "conversion." Even as he opened the columns of his new newspaper, the *Popolo d'Italia*, to them, however, Mussolini remained unconvinced of their reasoning for advocating Italian entrance into the war. The syndicalists advocated a sort of "national syndicalism" that Mussolini eventually accepted, if only partially, but, in Gervasoni's view, only after he had been expelled from the Socialist Party. He accepted the idea of war as a revolutionary instrument that the syndicalists preached, but while he was making his decision, he attempted to win over the Socialist rank and file by emphasizing the fight for "civilization" on the side of the French and British against the Germans and abandoned Sorel, who initially favored German *Kultur*. Mussolini considered the decision of other Western Socialist parties to support their countries against Germany in a positive light, and demonstrated sympathy for the model of a Jacobin revolutionary war. He also argued that intervention in the conflict was necessary to defend democracy. No doubt that the relationship of the young Socialist revolutionary and revolutionary syndicalism was complex and sometimes seemed contradictory, but Gervasoni's research leads him to be adamant. He concludes that "one can say that Mussolini decided to support the war not because of his 'syndicalism' (which was nonexistent...) but because he believed himself a Socialist, because all the leaders of European socialism, from Guesde to Vandervelde and Kautsky, had done likewise."

Among the staunchest detractors of Mussolini's were the reformists who he repeatedly accused of warmongering. They condemned Mussolini's support for Italian intervention, when it came, but they contended that it was neither a betrayal nor a surprise but the logical extension of Mussolini's ideology and position on the role of violence. In fact, for them, Mussolini was more consistent than his supposedly revolutionary comrades, "who totter between an intransigence that is purely electoral and parliamentary, and revolutionary action."

Although the quarrel between Mussolini and the reformists is often cited in the historical literature, the chapter on “The Battle Within” goes into detail about the ideas of both, examining their major differences, and concretely defining the parameters of the ideological struggle by citing the literature of the period. Given the sophistication, superior culture and greater experience of the reformists, observers might have reasonably believed that they would win the battle. Why they failed to do so is still a question mark. Interestingly, even Mussolini’s more urbane opponents within his own “revolutionary” wing did not like him, but in 1914, they also went down to defeat as Mussolini’s prestige greatly increased because of the spectacular growth in the circulation of the party newspaper and in Party membership. Perhaps it is time to ask why Mussolini was so popular among the Socialist masses at the time, and how he motivated them. Perhaps it is time for greater research on the masses themselves as then constituted, and on why revolutionary ideology so appealed to them, in order to explain Mussolini’s popularity, instead of concentrating on his supposed “betrayal” of those masses. Revolutionary Socialist ideology had a greater capacity to move the masses than did the more reasoned ideology of reformism, which stressed long-term aims, because it was so simple-minded. Violent revolutionary ideology of the prewar period spawned two children—fascism and communism (fascism as it actually existed and “actually existing socialism”), a notable leftist Italian scholar and partisan has emphasized.⁸⁴ Of course, there were differences between them, but perhaps they were more similar than different. Already in 1914, the reformists charged that under Mussolini, the party believed “in the thaumaturgy of the *Idea*, in the miracle-working of the *will*” independent of facts, which the reformists believed would lead to disastrous results for the Socialists. They later made the same argument against the Bolsheviks.⁸⁵ The difference was that in Italy Mussolini knew his left-wing comrades very well and understood that they were verbal, not real, revolutionaries. This understanding gave him an important edge in his defeat of them between 1919 and 1922. At the apogee of his career, Mussolini admitted that his own tactics in coming to power compared to the Bolsheviks were “Much the same. Our tactics were decidedly Russian.”⁸⁶ He also explained that the differences in his taking power in Italy differed from Russia only because there the state had collapsed.⁸⁷ Interestingly enough, Mussolini was one of the first to declare his intention to recognize the Soviet Union, in 1923, and a treaty granting full recognition was signed in February 1924, only a few days after Great Britain did so in a surprise move.

In 1923, when he had taken power and, as *Duce*, toured his native area, Mussolini greeted the crowd with these words: “Friends of the Romagna, where are the Socialists now? Where are those who despised the Fatherland and the victory?” A voice from the crowd responded in dialect: “T’an ved Benito, ca soma tutt acqué?” (Don’t you see us Benito, we’re all here?).⁸⁸

We learn from Charles Killinger’s essay that Mussolini had the approbation not only of the Socialist masses but also of important Socialist intellectuals, and not only revolutionaries. Killinger describes how Gaetano Salvemini, famed historian, dissident reformist, champion of southern rights and an early opponent of Mussolini the Fascist, was enthusiastic about him as a Socialist revolutionary. Killinger explains how the 20-year regime of Mussolini the Duce has obscured the intense relationship between the two men during Mussolini’s Socialist period, an association that illustrates the emblematic rapport between Mussolini and intellectuals.

What brought the two men together and led them to esteem each other, according to Killinger, were their energetic and persistent denunciations of Giovanni Giolitti, the statesman who dominated Italian politics from 1901 to 1914. Ironically, unlike Mussolini, Salvemini did not preach violence and aimed to strengthen not destroy the parliamentary system. He was an unabashed reformist, but one who left the Socialist Party because he believed that the reformist leaders were too timid. For example, Salvemini advocated universal suffrage as a means of elevating the South and exploding the Giolittian system, a devastating picture of which he gave in a pamphlet that achieved a wide circulation at the time, *Il Ministro della mala vita* (The Minister of the Underworld).

It is important to explain why a respected democratic intellectual made such flattering remarks about the young Socialist revolutionary who later became his mortal enemy, something that one finds in the attitudes of other intellectuals who later suffered after Mussolini came to power. In fact, there were points at which the ideas of Mussolini and Salvemini converged. A convinced reformist, Salvemini nonetheless attacked Filippo Turati and other reformists as being too weak and too slow to take action, especially in the South. Mussolini opposed reformism *tout court* but Salvemini appreciated his attacks on the party’s policies, hoping that they would succeed in forcing the reformists to drop all support of the government in their attempts to gain reforms or otherwise change their ways.

Perhaps most remarkable question mark in their relationship was why the two Socialists converged with regard to the Libyan War in 1911 and World War I in 1914. Both Salvemini and Mussolini strenuously opposed

the Libyan War. Salvemini wrote against and made powerful arguments that the war was useless and that Libya was not the mineral-rich, fertile garden that pro-war advocates pictured it. Mussolini demonstrated against it because he was antimilitarist and antiwar in principle. When World War I broke out, Salvemini became part of the group known as the “democratic interventionists” who believed that Italy should intervene in the conflict to help save democracy in Europe against autocratic Germany and Austria-Hungary. Mussolini initially opposed Italian intervention, but then changed his mind with a stunning article in *Avanti!*. As Killinger reminds us, Salvemini responded by sending him a warm telegram of congratulations.

However, the different motivations of each with regard to the wars is symbolic of their odd relationship, as Killinger emphasizes throughout his essay, and set the stage for their later enmity. For example, while Salvemini championed universal suffrage as a major reform (enactment would have given the vote to illiterate males) that would help the masses end Giolitti’s control, Mussolini regarded it as restoring oxygen to a sick parliamentary system that deserved to be destroyed. While Mussolini expressed sympathy for revolutionary syndicalism (and here Killinger takes a different view from Gervasoni), Salvemini did not; when Mussolini expressed ideas that supported “internal nationalism,” in Giuseppe Prezzolini’s influential *La Voce*, Salvemini was irritated. In short, the political cultures of Mussolini and Salvemini were incompatible and irreconcilable, and these factors guaranteed the later hostility between the two men. Their basic conceptions of socialism were contradictory: theoretical and revolutionary for Mussolini, practical and reformist for Salvemini.

Emilio Gentile reinforces this idea by quoting Mussolini himself complaining, even as a young man, about the changes in the Socialist movement over previous decades: “Then there were Socialists who had fallen in love with an ideal; today there are Socialists—a lot of them, even the majority—who have fallen in love with money. Italian Socialism has now become a huge accounting ledger of giving and getting.” Gentile’s essay produces convincing evidence demonstrating that contemporaries recognized the young Mussolini as a Socialist who selflessly dedicated himself to the revolution and disdained financial gain, and even the reformists agreed with this view. Mussolini had developed a “religious” conception of revolution gained from his readings in Italian and European Marxist literature, with the addition of ideas gleaned from modern philosophers, according to Gentile. He felt ill at ease among his left-wing comrades,

proclaiming himself “very distant from the Philistine revolutionary beliefs of many of my friends.” This theme of uneasiness with the lack of a revolutionary culture among his own faction consistently bothered him.⁸⁹ As Gentile emphasizes, Mussolini’s concept of a revolutionary party was that of a “small resolute, audacious nucleus [of activists]” focusing on the creation of a “revolutionary consciousness” in the masses in order to destroy bourgeois society. His revolutionary ideal was in line with the thought of Pareto and Sorel and closely resembled Lenin’s desire to build a “revolutionary culture” in proletarian ranks, in contrast to the “trade union consciousness” that reformist action represented. One might argue about his ideology and Lenin’s, but one scholar states that between 1912 and 1914, Mussolini was “the Italian Lenin politically. He had staked out the most extremist antireformist positions in Italian politics and had reduced Marxism to its revolutionary essence.”⁹⁰ Mussolini’s revolutionary concept appealed to the most prominent young Italian revolutionaries of the time, including Antonio Gramsci and Palmiro Togliatti, and the strong desire for revolution among the new generation of intellectuals—Socialist and not—favored Mussolini’s takeover of the Socialist Party.⁹¹

The originality of Mussolini’s thought during his early period, Gentile believes, was his willingness to incorporate the concepts of non-Marxist thinkers into Italian Socialist tradition without overly concerning himself about its orthodoxy or heterodoxy, which favored a radical revision of Socialist theory. This inclination allowed him to look seriously at new and interesting concepts, including some that would lead to his “conversion” from absolute neutralism to support of Italian entrance into World War I.

In discussing Mussolini’s change from his original position of neutrality as an essential policy toward the Great War, Gentile stresses that it was far from “sudden.” Already in 1908 and 1909, he criticized the Italian bourgeoisie because of its backwardness and stated his admiration for a modern bourgeoisie, while condemning Prime Minister Giolitti and the Parliament as leaders of a government that persistently placed obstacles on the road to Italy’s evolution into a modern country. In this context, Mussolini enunciated the principle of an Italy that was getting ready “to fulfill by itself a new epoch in the story of humanity” once the corrupt monarchical and liberal Italy was swept away. This concept was an unusual one for a Socialist and represents a crack in the closed door to nationalistic ideas. When World War I created the circumstances for a new synthesis concerning the myth of the nation and nationalism, the Socialist revolutionary Mussolini and others made the transition to the

new amalgam while keeping their faith in the revolution considered as a radical transformation of the state.⁹² These indications combined with Mussolini's interest in the national issue discussed in the Biguzzi essay demonstrate that his stances against nationalism as a young man were not written in stone.

Gentile sees these signs of future change as symptoms of what actually occurred in 1914, of Mussolini's "conversion" to war while still remaining a Socialist revolutionary. An astute observer, Mussolini had realized that "Red Week" in June of 1914 and its results indicated that there was no possibility of a revolution in Italy. After that event, Mussolini was at a "dead end" from which the outbreak of the Great War rescued him. The war had cataclysmic effects on the European Socialist parties, including the collapse of the Second International. Mussolini the realist understood that the nation had proved stronger than he had thought, and that the Socialist Party he had to work with was not the one he required; he recognized that something had to be done, or else the Party would perpetually remain in its stagnant state, left behind, unable to make a revolution or to modernize the country—and he gave his reasons in his famous article recommending the end of absolute neutrality.

At this point, Mussolini remained a Socialist revolutionary, not a traitor. The charge that he "betrayed" the party, Gentile argues, hardly holds up. He had come a long way from his humble beginnings to be the leader of the major opposition party and the editor of the major opposition newspaper, a revered leader at the height of his prestige. For the first time in his life, he had a decent, steady salary. Why would he risk all of this in order to try to bring an organization he knew was strongly antiwar into the conflict (the reformists also opposed Italian intervention)? In fact, because of his change, the party expelled him, his popularity plummeted, and only a few Socialists followed him out of the Party. The argument that he betrayed the Party because he wanted to establish his own newspaper is unconvincing. He eventually received financing from various quarters, including the French and Belgian Socialists, but only after he had made his decision and had already founded *Il Popolo d'Italia*. It is not surprising that he would later accept funds, when his newspaper was floundering, and that Italian and foreign supporters of Italian intervention would help him get his message across, because inducing Italy to intervene in the war was also their fight. In reality, the newspaper was not a major force in bringing Italy into the conflict; policies at the highest level of government determined that, not Mussolini's *Il Popolo d'Italia*.

From the essays in this book, it seems clear that the young Mussolini remained a revolutionary Socialist even as an interventionist. If until November 1914, when the Socialist Party expelled him, Mussolini believed that he would be successful in rallying his party behind him to support Italian intervention, but after that date, he became more and more convinced in the power of the nation to attract the revolutionary energies of the proletariat. After his expulsion, he never looked back because he had been converted to a new idea—the importance of the nation for revolutionary socialism—and was committed to this new course, not because he had “betrayed” the idea of socialism or revolution. After all, the major European parties had modified their policies on the conflict, and he was not the only European Socialist to switch from an antiwar position to favoring the war for different reasons—or to change his views while still believing in revolution. In short, he advocated “national socialism” as a revolutionary force. As to his later evolution that brought him to found fascism,⁹³ it is a complex question and less obvious than is made out to be in much of the historical literature; there is still research and reflection to be done.

NOTES

1. This work, 50 pages long, is reprinted in Edoardo and Duilio Susmel, *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini XXXIII. Opere Giovanili (1904–1913)* (Florence: La Fenice, 1961), pp. 219–269; hereinafter, OO 33.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 231–232. Mussolini later described his experience in boarding school to his wife emphasizing the social differences there. Rachele had suffered similar discrimination as a child: Rachele Mussolini, *The Real Mussolini* (Westmead, England: Saxon House, 1973), pp. 14–15.
3. *La Mia Vita*, OO 33, pp. 250–251.
4. Emil Ludwig, *Talks With Mussolini* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1933), pp. 221–222.
5. For one example among many, see *ibid.*, p. 250.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 257.
7. For what no doubt was his technique with women, see his wife’s Rachele’s description of their “stormy courtship,” Rachele Mussolini, *The Real Mussolini*, pp. 13–21.
8. Denis Mack Smith, *Mussolini* (New York: Vintage, 1982), p. 4.
9. See, for example, Mussolini’s accounts of the affairs with Giulia F., OO 33, pp. 246–247, and Eleonora H., a medical student of Polish origins with a husband in Russia, OO 33, pp. 251, 254–256, 258. The story of Mussolini’s attention to his landlady is in OO 33, p. 257.

10. Benito Mussolini, *My Autobiography* (London: Hutchinson & Co., n.d. [1928]), “Foreword” by Richard Washburn Child, p. 5.
11. For Mussolini’s popularity in the USA, see John P. Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).
12. Mussolini, *My Autobiography*, p. 22.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
15. The description of his time in Switzerland is in *Ibid.*, pp. 26–27.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
17. *La Mia Vita*, OO 33, pp. 253, 258.
18. *My Autobiography*, p. 31.
19. Mussolini’s discussions of his reasoning are in *Ibid.*, pp. 45–47.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 47–50.
21. See Philip V. Cannistraro and Brian R. Sullivan, *Il Duce’s Other Woman* (New York: William Morrow, 1993).
22. Rachele Mussolini, *The Real Mussolini*, p. 12. The other two were Ida Dalser, who claimed to have married Mussolini before Rachele did, and Claretta Petacci, his young mistress during his mature years.
23. Margarita G. Sarfatti, *The Life of Benito Mussolini. With a Preface by Benito Mussolini. Translated by Frederic Whyte* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1925).
24. *Ibid.*, Mussolini Preface, p. 10.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 15–38.
26. David Nasaw, *Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), pp. 471–474.
27. Paolo Monelli, *Mussolini piccolo borghese* (Milan: Garzanti, 1983 [originally published in 1950]), p. 70.
28. Sarfatti, *Mussolini*, p. 114.
29. Angelica Balabanoff, *My Life as a Rebel* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968, but originally published in 1938), pp. 42–44. In *La Mia Vita*, OO 33, pp. 257, 258, Mussolini states only that the two collaborated on two translations.
30. Balabanoff, *My Life*, pp. 44–45.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
32. Sarfatti, *Mussolini*, pp. 114–115.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 116–117. Of course, Balabanoff had a different version of her sojourn and why she left Soviet Russia. See Balabanoff, *My Life*, pp. 173–182. See also Balabanoff’s swipe at Sarfatti on pp. 55–56.
35. Balabanoff, *My Life*, p. 46.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 90–91.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 42–50.

38. Ibid., pp. 98–99. Her account goes counter to the evidence that Mussolini wanted and worked hard in order to obtain the position.
39. Ibid., pp. 99–101.
40. Ibid., pp. 118–119. Italy was a member of the Triple Alliance and at the time it was believed that the country might intervene on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary, and thus against Russia.
41. Ibid., p. 119.
42. Ibid., pp. 121–28. The quotation is on p. 127.
43. Gaudens Megaro, *Mussolini in the Making* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1938), p. 10.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., pp. 106–107.
46. Ibid., pp. 109–110.
47. Ibid., pp. 112–17; 228–45. The quotation is on p. 244.
48. There has been little attempt to contrast the “default” position that Mussolini was not a real intellectual and that his Marxism was bogus, and attempts to do so remain controversial. Renzo De Felice, discussed later, made the most successful effort. A. James Gregor’s similar, interesting, endeavor in English, *Young Mussolini and the Intellectual Origins of Fascism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), has not had much influence.
49. Ibid., p. 244.
50. See Spencer M. Di Scala, “Modern Italy Seen by Americans: A Survey of General Histories,” *Mondo Contemporaneo* (Rome), N. 3, 2011, pp. 129–151.
51. Roberto Suro, “Italy Debates its 45 Years of Aversion to Fascism,” *The New York Times*, January 17, 1988.
52. Spencer M. Di Scala, “Renzo De Felice’s Heritage: The Renewed Respectability of Debate,” in *Italian Quarterly, Special Issue: Renzo De Felice and the Problem of Italian Fascism*, edited by Spencer M. Di Scala, Vol. 36, No. 141–142 (Summer-Fall 1999), pp. 7–11.
53. Readers will have no problem finding material on this debate. A good place to begin is Borden Painter’s “Renzo De Felice and the Historiography of Italian Fascism,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 95, No. 2 (Apr. 1990), pp. 391–405.
54. Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario, 1883–1920* (Turin: Einaudi, 1965), p. XXI.
55. See Michael A. Ledeen, “Renzo De Felice and the Controversy over Italian Fascism,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Oct. 1976), pp. 269–283.
56. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 7–9. The quotation is on p. 7.
57. Ibid., pp. 37–38.
58. Ibid., pp. 118–119.
59. Ibid., Preface by Delio Cantimori, p. XIX.

60. Ibid., pp. 262–263.
61. For De Felice’s interpretation of Mussolini’s famous article renouncing absolute neutrality, see Ibid., pp. 258–261. For a general account of Italy’s intervention, see Spencer M. Di Scala, “From Neutrality to Intervention? Italy’s Long Road to War,” in Alan Sharp, ed., *28 June: Sarajevo 1914–Versailles 1919* (London: Haus, 2014), pp. 158–173.
62. Paolo Monelli, *Mussolini piccolo borghese* (Milan: Garzanti, 1983); see, for example, pp. 27–31.
63. Ibid., pp. 76–77.
64. Ibid., pp. 77–78; pp. 315–319.
65. Laura Fermi was Jewish; Enrico Fermi was not.
66. Laura Fermi, *Mussolini* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. v–vi.
67. Ibid., p. 29–30; the quotation is on p. 29.
68. Ibid., pp. 43–44; pp. 68–77.
69. Fermi discusses this question in Ibid., pp. 99–113. The quotation is on p. 110.
70. Ivone Kirkpatrick, *Mussolini: A Study in Power* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1964), pp. 59–69. Kirkpatrick’s investigation closely resembles the account given by Monelli, pp. 314–319.
71. Ibid., p. 10; pp. 53–56.
72. R.J.B. Bosworth, *The Italian Dictatorship* (London: Arnold, 1998), pp. 79–81; the quotation is on p. 80.
73. Mack Smith covers Mussolini’s youth in 25 pages; see his *Mussolini*, pp. 1–24.
74. See, for example, Anthony James Joes, *Mussolini* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1982); Richard B. Lyttle, *Il Duce: The Rise and Fall of Mussolini* (New York: Atheneum, 1987); and Jasper Ridley, *Mussolini: A Biography* (London: Constable, 1997).
75. If it is true that the founder of fascism’s life has not “stimulated psychohistorians to examine” his case, as has been done in the cases of Hitler and Stalin, because there is a supposed “consensus” that Mussolini was merely a “mountebank” dictator, as Bosworth argues (*The Italian Dictatorship*, p. 78), this attitude represents a grave historiographical failure.
76. At this time, confusion surrounded the terms “socialism” and “Socialist.” The movement included Communists, Anarchists, trade union organizers and other left-wing radicals, all united in the “First International.” This organization lasted from 1864 to 1876, when a dispute between Marx and Bakunin broke it apart. In Italy, the early radical milieu was dominated by Bakunin, with Marx’s ideas being little known, thus explaining Alessandro Mussolini’s attraction to Bakunin. Marxist ideas won out in the country with the establishment of the Italian Socialist Party in 1892. For more on this issue, see Spencer Di Scala, *Dilemmas of Italian Socialism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980).

77. Elementary school teachers were not well educated and did not have to attend university in order to enter their profession. In addition, they were one of the most poorly paid groups in Italy.
78. De Gasperi would become an opponent of Mussolini during his regime and Italy's most important Prime Minister of the immediate post-World War II era.
79. James H. Meisel, "A Premature Fascist? Sorel and Mussolini," *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Mar., 1950), pp. 14–27.
80. Benito Mussolini, "Democrazia Parlamentare," *Avanguardia Socialista*, July 3, 1904.
81. For these ideas, see Arturo Labriola, *Riforme e rivoluzione sociale*, 2nd ed. (Lugano: Cagnoni, 1906), pp. 5–10, 18–38, 98–103, 135–164, 206–209, 217–221; A.O. Olivetti, "La reazione sindacalista," *Lotta di Classe*, March 2, 1907; and A.O. Olivetti, *Questioni contemporanee* (Naples: Società ed. Partenopea, 1913), pp. 170–176.
82. For the parabola of revolutionary syndicalism within the Socialist Party, see Di Scala, *Dilemmas*, pp. 74–93.
83. For the revolutionary syndicalist position rejection of pacifism, see L'Avanguardia, "La Pace," *Avanguardia Socialista*, September 5, 1905. For their support for the Libyan War, see Arturo Labriola, *La Guerra di Tripoli e l'opinione socialista* (Naples: Scintilla, 1912), pp. 7–25, 38–54, 69–85, 103–109.
84. Giorgio Bocca makes a good argument for this thesis in *Mussolini socialfascista: il socialismo reale non è fascismo ma come gli somiglia* (Milan: Garzanti, 1983); see, for example, pp. 20–24.
85. See Filippo Turati's prophetic speeches to the 1919 and 1921 Italian Socialist Congress in Filippo Turati, *Le vie maestre del socialismo* (Naples: Morano, 1966), pp. 313–346 and pp. 347–363.
86. Ludwig, *Talks With Mussolini*, p. 90.
87. *Ibid.*, pp. 95–96.
88. Bocca, *Mussolini socialfascista*, p. 7.
89. See Monelli, *Mussolini*, pp. 76–77, cited earlier in this essay.
90. Richard Drake, *Apostles and Agitators: Italy's Marxist Revolutionary Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 137. Drake reports Lenin's complaint (although this might be an anecdote) about the Italian Socialists letting go of the only person who could make an Italian revolution. As the Italians say, "se non è vero è ben trovato."
91. In addition to Gentile's chapter in this book, these observations draw on Gentile's remarks in his interventions on the theme at conferences in Verona on October 27, in Pescara on November 21 and in Rome on December 3, 2015.
92. Emilio Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity: Nationalism, Futurism, and Fascism* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), pp. 6–7.

93. The term “fascism” comes from the Italian “fascio,” from the ancient Roman symbol for unity and power, the fasces. This meant “bundle” and consisted of a bundle of rods, usually with a blade in the middle. In the USA, the symbol was put on the American dime and still graces the podium of the House of Representatives and can be found on other institutions, monuments and flags. In the Italian of the period, “fascio” simply meant a “group” organized for a special purpose and was applied to groups of different political persuasions, including Socialist; this was the case, for example, of the “fasci siciliani” during the 1890s. A “Fascist” was a member of one of these groups; in Italian, *Fascista* drops the final “a” in English and becomes “Fascist.” “Fascista” is used exclusively to refer to Mussolini’s political movement. “National Socialist,” which would perhaps be more accurate for the Italian movement, has become identified with German Nazism.

Father and Son

Philip Cannistraro

The explanation of Benito Mussolini's wild story is to be found, first, in the regional and family roots from which he came, then in the ideas that influenced him, and most broadly in the political, social, and economic crucible that was Italy's history—and in his own internal demons. Mussolini himself recognized the influence of his early environment on his later development. In the 1920s, when he was the *Duce* of Fascism and dictator of Italy, he manipulated the image of his parents to feed his own mythology. The Fascist propaganda machine imbued the memory of his mother with saint-like status, and in his *Autobiography*, ghostwritten by his brother Arnaldo, he is quoted as saying, “My greatest love was for my mother. She was so quiet, so tender, and yet so strong. Her name was Rosa.” Mussolini's assessment of his father Alessandro, who, because of his radical politics was all but forgotten during the Fascist regime, was more accurate: “If my father had been another kind of man, I would have turned out entirely different.”¹

¹The late Philip Cannistraro was a noted historian of fascism. This chapter was put together using his notes.

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Mussolini deeply admired his father and grew up much more closely bound to Alessandro's world of rebellious political militancy than to his mother's conservative lower-middle-class aspirations. Much about Mussolini's adult character lay buried in the dynamics of the tension-filled relationship between Alessandro Mussolini and Rosa Maltoni, and in the clash of their conflicting values.

For 30 years, from 1877 to 1908, Alessandro Mussolini labored as the blacksmith of Dovia, a rural village of several hundred people. The surrounding commune of Predappio lay in the province of Forlì, a district in Italy's Romagna region. Situated at the easternmost reaches of the Po Valley, between the Apennines and the Adriatic Sea, the Romagna was a land of extremes. Its people were at once generous and harsh, oppressed and violent, poor and hardworking. In the low inland plains of the Romagna, the soil was darkly rich and productive, with agricultural estates run by capitalist managers who exploited the labor of the *braccianti*, the impoverished seasonal migrant workers. In the higher areas further east, where the Mussolinis made their home, parched, rocky hills and sunbaked volcanic slopes gave the region a barren look—"a dreary landscape," Mussolini later recalled.² Here, where the *braccianti* were less numerous, the countryside was dotted with small farms rented by sharecroppers or owned by poor but independent peasant proprietors.

Alessandro Mussolini was born in the small hamlet of Predappio in 1854, six years before Italy became a nation. His ancestors had been subjects of the pope for generations, and his own father, Luigi, had been in a papal prison. Luigi had owned small plots of land but had fallen on hard times and in his youth had been something of a rebel.

Mussolini later described Alessandro—not without some inaccuracies—in a memoir he wrote while in prison:

When barely ten he was sent to the nearby village of Dovadola as an apprentice to an ironsmith. From Dovadola he moved to Meldola, where between 1875 and 1880 he became acquainted with the ideas of the [anarchist and socialist] Internationalists. Later, having mastered his craft, he opened a shop in Dovia. This village ... did not have a good reputation. Its people were quarrelsome. My father found work there and began to spread the ideas of the International. He founded a local branch which had many members but which later was closed down by a police raid. He was twenty-six years old when he met my mother.³

Alessandro learned to read at home, after which he went to elementary school in Predappio until the end of the third grade. He was then apprenticed to a blacksmith, taking evening classes while learning his craft during the day.⁴ Alessandro was essentially an autodidact, whose education came through reading. He devoured the literature of social protest, especially Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, Emile Zola's novels, Alessandro Manzoni's poems, and Giuseppe Mazzini's *The Duties of Man*.⁵ Early in 1868, when Alessandro returned to Predappio after a six-month apprenticeship in Dovadola, he discovered and became a regular reader of the Romagna's many radical newspapers.⁶

While the books he read helped form Alessandro's social conscience, the poverty and social injustice everywhere around him turned him into a political militant. The people of the Romagna had long embraced forms of radical politics, including the Jacobinism of the French Revolution in the 1790s, the conspiratorial uprisings of the Carbonari against despotic monarchs in the early 1800s, and more recently, the patriotic republicanism of Mazzinian revolution. Mazzini had been one of the principal exponents of Italian unification.⁷ His conspiracies had been aimed at overthrowing the monarchs of Italy and replacing them with a single, democratically based republic. Although he did help to instill a sense of national identity in many Italians, he was deeply disappointed in the way Italy had been unified—through the military conquests of Piedmont's House of Savoy and the political-diplomatic machinations of the chief Savoyan minister, Camillo Cavour. In the years after unification, Mazzini continued to try to arouse a revolutionary spirit in Italy and advocated populist ideas. But he did not want to see a genuine social revolution in which private property would be seized as a result of class warfare. It was for this reason that in 1871 Mazzini bitterly condemned the bloodshed and radicalism of the Paris Commune uprising, a position that cost him many followers and gave impetus to the incipient Internationalist movement.

In the years when Alessandro was in his teens and twenties, the difficult social conditions in the Romagna worsened as a result of a general agricultural crisis that impoverished many peasants. The poor rural economy made the Romagna a center of anarchism and socialism, for these doctrines promised to end exploitation and bring about the common ownership of property. The refugee Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin developed a committed following among the peasants of the region after his arrival in Italy in 1864.⁸ Bakunin's anarchist doctrines propounded the efficacy of violent revolution through popular uprising of the people. The masses

were already infused with the spirit of revolt but needed the guidance of revolutionary militants driven by a single-minded faith in the libertarian ideal. Bakunin proposed the expropriation of capitalist property and its transfer into the collective hands of the people—land to the peasants and the means of production to the workers. He was convinced, moreover, that the state—even a worker state—was a repressive mechanism that had to be abolished.

In the same year that Bakunin settled in Italy, Karl Marx founded the first International Workingmen's Association in London, and he and Bakunin vied for the loyalties of Italians for years to come. In 1872, Marx engineered Bakunin's ouster from the International, for Bakunin had rejected Marx's authoritarian doctrines.

But in the Romagna, as elsewhere in Italy, Bakunin's anarchist doctrines held sway and won Alessandro Mussolini's heart and mind. Bakunin's revolutionary ideals sparked a series of unsuccessful uprisings during the decade that were fiercely suppressed by the Italian government.

Alessandro first entered the local political struggle in May 1872, when he gave a speech in the main square of Predappio commemorating a socialist worker killed by republican rivals. That August, just before he turned 18, he moved to nearby Meldola, where he found work in the blacksmith shop of a political idealist who had fought under Giuseppe Garibaldi. Here Alessandro became organizationally active. Bakunin's followers had just formed the Italian Federation of the International, a rival organization to Marx's group, and when anarchist Andrea Costa started a regional chapter in the Romagna in 1874, Alessandro joined. That summer, during the anarchist insurrection led by Bakunin to precipitate revolution, Alessandro led a group of some 50 men toward Bologna before the police halted them.⁹

Many *Romagnoli* radicals, especially autodidacts with little theoretical sophistication like Alessandro, never formed clear-cut ideas that set them exclusively in either the anarchist or the socialist camp. Bakunin died in 1876, and the dominant figure in Romagna radicalism thereafter was Andrea Costa, a handsome and charismatic leader who commanded a powerful personal following that transcended the Bakunin–Marx split.¹⁰ Costa's personal trajectory, which led him away from a purely anarchist position toward socialism, exemplified the fluid ideological situation in the Romagna. Alessandro Mussolini joined forces with Costa in 1876 at an Internationalist meeting in Bologna, where he represented the radicals of Meldola and Predappio. The two men became fast friends¹¹ and Alessandro began a correspondence with Costa and other Internationalists,

including Amilcare Cipriani, a veteran of the Paris Commune uprising of 1871. Little in the way of Marxist literature was directly available in Italy at the time—anarchist Carlo Cafiero published a popular commentary on Marx's *Das Kapital* in 1879, but anarchist Pietro Gori's translation of *The Communist Manifesto* appeared only in 1891.¹² Alessandro, who read only Italian, got his limited knowledge of Marxian socialism from these translations as well as from newspapers, pamphlets, and through his correspondence. Further complicating the political scene was the strong republican presence in the region, for in the Romagna, the anti-monarchist followers of Mazzini were intransigent and often prone to violent tactics. Despite these sectarian divisions, at times anarchists and republicans, at other times socialists and republicans, made common cause on particular issues.

In 1877, after his release from prison for his role in the Bologna insurrection, Costa went to Switzerland, where he met a young Russian woman named Anna Kuliscioff.¹³ Beautiful, blond-haired Kuliscioff possessed a brilliant mind and, like Costa, was an impassioned anarchist. She had become a radical while studying engineering in Zurich, and was now an exile from Tsarist Russia. They remained ardent lovers until 1885, during which Kuliscioff gave birth to a daughter, Andreina. She soon converted to Marxism, and her persuasive intellect no doubt influenced Costa in the same direction.

In the summer of 1879, Costa dropped a bombshell by issuing an open letter "To my friends in the Romagna," announcing the need to abandon the idea of violent revolution and to embrace a legalitarian socialist posture that involved peaceful political action through the electoral system and by running for public office. "We worry more about the logic of our ideas and the content of our revolutionary program," complained Costa, "than studying the economic and moral condition of the people and their immediate needs."¹⁴ Alessandro agreed with this sentiment and, like Costa, would later take part in electoral politics, but he remained committed to direct action for many years to come. The ideological flexibility of the region's activists led Alessandro to contribute articles to both socialist and republican newspapers and, on the heels of Costa's "conversion," led him to declare that despite differences about tactics, all true "socialists" saw revolution as the means and anarchism as the end of their struggle.¹⁵

Alessandro's understanding of socialism derived from his passion for social justice and his day-to-day association with the struggles of workers and peasants for a better life. In his mind, the monarchy, the Catholic church, and the landowners were the enemies of the people. In an article

entitled “What is socialism?” he explained his simple position: “Socialism, we answer, is the open, violent, moral rebellion against the inhuman order of things as now constituted. It is the science and excelsior that illuminate the world. It is reason that wins out over faith. It is free thought that rebels against prejudice. It is free love that takes the place of a legal contract. It is a freely made pact among all human beings to live a truly civil life. It is true justice that reigns supreme on earth”.¹⁶

Whether it was as an anarchist or a socialist, to be a political rebel like Alessandro Mussolini in Italy in the last decades of the nineteenth century was dangerous. During Alessandro’s adult years, Italy seethed with instability. In the 1870s, when revolts erupted in central and southern Italy, the government saw the anarchists as the greatest danger to the social order and imposed a wave of reaction on the subversives that lasted until the beginning of the new century and that struck anarchists and socialists alike. Laws intended to destroy revolutionary movements branded all radicals as criminals and confiscated their newspapers, and the government closed down their cells and meted out stiff jail sentences to anyone engaged in activity deemed dangerous to “public safety.” Many sought refuge in exile abroad, especially in Switzerland, France, or the USA. Alessandro’s fate was typical of his generation of what the state called “subversives.” Despite his doctrinal flexibility, he was clearly a committed revolutionary. In November 1878, he organized a rally of *braccianti* in the face of a police order forbidding the meeting. In retaliation, the police raided his shop, which had become the local radical headquarters, and found a stash of pamphlets by Bakunin and letters from Costa and Cafiero. Alessandro was sentenced to six months in prison. On his release, the government placed him under a formal sentence of police surveillance for four years, requiring him to keep a regular reporting schedule to the local authorities.¹⁷

Alessandro’s politics made his personal life difficult. After having finished his apprenticeship in Meldola in the fall of 1877, Alessandro had moved back to Dovia, where he opened his own blacksmith shop. At about the same time there arrived in town a 19-year-old woman named Rosa Maltoni, who had just been appointed as Dovia’s first elementary school teacher—a new law had just made elementary education compulsory for the first time. Rosa was an attractive woman of serious character, born in the nearby village of San Martino in Strada in 1858. She had studied in Forlì and earned a diploma qualifying her to teach the early grades of elementary school. Black-haired and stocky, she had basic good looks but a square jaw that her first son would inherit. Rosa had

moved to Dovia with her father, Giuseppe, a retired veterinarian, and her mother, Marianna Ghetti. The Maltonis, who owned a small parcel of acreage that would later pass to Rosa, were somewhat more comfortable than the Mussolinis and had modest pretensions to lower-middle-class status. Despite the strong tradition of anti-clericalism in the Romagna, the family was devoutly Catholic, and this religious belief gave Rosa's life meaning. Her greatest, indeed, perhaps her only, self-indulgence was the pilgrimage she made to the sanctuary of the Virgin of Loreto after the birth of her children.¹⁸

The young teacher's position gave her a certain status in the village, where she became the center of attention.¹⁹ The 24-year-old Alessandro, by all accounts a muscular, good-looking man with blue eyes, black hair, and a large mustache, took a fancy to Rosa, who had seemed oblivious to the attentions until he managed to slip a letter to her in the composition book of a young pupil.²⁰ Alessandro eventually proposed. Rosa agreed but her parents objected strenuously to his revolutionary politics and his constant brush with the authorities, to say nothing of the young atheist's priest baiting. Complicating matters was Rosa's professional success, for her reputation as a dedicated teacher came to the attention of her superiors, who offered her what must have been a rare opportunity for a rural schoolmistress—she could move to the provincial capital of Forlì and teach at a better school, while also taking courses at the local university on a scholarship. The chance to live in a real city and to advance her career appealed to her greatly, and the decision to turn down the offer caused her much inner anguish. But love won out. While telling her superiors that she could not abandon or uproot her elderly parents, she kept to herself the fact that she had fallen in love with Alessandro Mussolini.²¹

It took four years of courtship and Alessandro's promise to abandon politics in favor of blacksmithing before the Maltonis gave their consent to the match. The couple was married in a religious ceremony—the devout Rosa and her family insisted on it, much to Alessandro's dismay—in January 1882. Some months later, after the police surveillance had been canceled, a civil ceremony followed.²² Alessandro's atheism and anti-clericalism would remain a source of tension in the family and a cause of personal distress for Rosa.²³ For despite his promises to the contrary, Alessandro refused to abandon his political convictions. Only a few months after his marriage, he returned to the fray by campaigning on behalf of Costa, who was seeking election to the Chamber of Deputies. Costa won, becoming the first socialist in Parliament.²⁴

Rosa's schoolhouse was a run-down stone building located at a spot called Varano dei Costa, a small hill overlooking Dovia. At first, the couple lived on the ground floor of the building, with classes held in an adjoining room. A year later, when Rosa became pregnant, Alessandro installed his blacksmith shop on the ground floor and the couple moved living quarters and the classroom upstairs, both of which were entered from the same outside staircase. Symbolizing the division between husband and wife were the portraits hung on their walls, one of Garibaldi and the other a picture of the Madonna of Pompei.²⁵

Rosa gave birth to their first child on July 29, 1883, a sweltering Sunday afternoon, at 2:45 P.M. "Eight days earlier," Mussolini would later write about his own birth, "the sun had entered the constellation of Leo."²⁶ Rosa insisted on baptizing the boy, and Alessandro on naming him Benito Amilcare Andrea—all in honor of three political heroes, the Mexican revolutionary Benito Juarez, Amilcare Cipriani, and Andrea Costa. Eventually, the Mussolinis had two other children. A second son, Arnaldo (named after Arnaldo of Brescia, a twelfth-century heretic), was born in 1885, followed by a daughter, Edvige, in 1888.

While Rosa continued to teach and shoulder the burdens of a growing family, Alessandro threw himself back into politics. A year after Benito's birth, Alessandro headed a local delegation to a socialist congress, where he led an anarchist faction against Costa's increasingly moderate position. Costa's personal pleading, however, persuaded Alessandro to compromise,²⁷ and over the next several years, he came to accept the idea that control of public office could result in tangible benefits for the peasants and workers. He worked hard to organize the local peasantry and the *braccianti*, never losing his passion for social justice or his belief in the cause of working class unity. In 1889, he took part in a rally to commemorate the anniversary of the Commune, in his words, "the glorious Parisian revolution of 1871."²⁸ That same year, he and 14 workers won election to the communal council of Predappio. Over the next several years, Alessandro sponsored a cooperative for *braccianti* that purchased two steam-powered threshing machines; he also pressed for a subsidized medical program for workers, traveling libraries in rural areas, and other socially progressive programs. His greatest pleasure may have been getting the local school board to put pictures of Garibaldi in classrooms. Alessandro remained on the Predappio council until the socialists were swept out of office in 1896, but he was elected again in 1899.²⁹

Alessandro enjoyed a great deal of local prominence as a result of his political activity, and the articles and letters he wrote for socialist and republican newspapers—articles not always grammatically perfect but eloquent in their simplicity—earned him a certain status. Widely recognized as “the father of Predappio socialism,”³⁰ he had a reputation as the champion of common workers and peasants against the economic and political establishment. He also fought for the rank and file within the socialist movement itself. When socialist leaders decided in 1890 to hold their congress in Lugano that year, Alessandro condemned the decision in a powerfully worded letter to the newspaper *La Lotta*, accusing the leadership of making it impossible for the workers themselves to get to Switzerland. Socialism, he railed, was a matter for the masses, not a select few.³¹

Benito Mussolini did not grow up in a tranquil household. Alessandro’s political activity may have won him respect among the peasantry, but it caused serious problems at home. During the Fascist regime, the biographers who wrote about Mussolini and his parents were discreet and did not discuss the family tensions directly, but there is clear evidence that the Mussolini home was anything but happy. The chief source of the discord was Alessandro’s complete lack of concern for money and Rosa’s constant though justifiable recriminations that the support of the family depended entirely on her. Her aspirations for a comfortable, respectable life were shattered by Alessandro’s radicalism. Rosa, whom one contemporary source called “parsimonious,”³² reminded her husband repeatedly that, contrary to the promise he had made on their marriage, he entirely ignored his blacksmith business, spending all his time instead at political meetings or traveling throughout the countryside organizing peasants and giving speeches. Because of Alessandro’s politics, some parents withdrew their children from Rosa’s class. To make matters worse, Alessandro’s good-hearted nature led him to give what little money he had to the less fortunate and even fall into debt helping unemployed workers. When Rosa inherited her parents’ property, Alessandro sold it and gave away the proceeds. He was, Benito later agreed, “excessively altruistic.” As a result, in addition to rearing their children and teaching school, Rosa was forced to spend the early and late hours of each day spinning flax and weaving at a loom, the products of which she bartered to peasants for sacks of flour and other foodstuffs.³³ In the meantime, Alessandro was frequently heard shouting his opinions, but this was always about politics and never about matters of home life.³⁴

Growing up in such a strained household, Benito could hardly fail to be pulled in opposite directions, and the contradictory values to which he was exposed impacted on his childhood consciousness as well as on his adult development. Emotionally and spiritually he was closer to his father, yearning to emulate his libertarian life. At the same time, as he withdrew from his mother's seriousness and her pessimism while absorbing her resentments, he rebelled against her emphasis on religion as a moral compass and on discipline as a means to self-improvement. "My mother," he confessed to a friend, "had wanted me to be educated in the bosom of the Holy Roman church. But my father understood everything about me." Yet if Alessandro's ideals drew him to the working class, his mother's lower-middle-class aspirations pushed him away from his father's ideas—indeed, as he matured, he would come to see his future not as a laborer but as an intellectual, and he developed in himself what he later scorned as the "bourgeois I," the preoccupation with the self rather than with others.³⁵

As a child, Mussolini knew bleak circumstances—a family economy close to the edge of poverty, a rural setting marked by a grim isolation and limited horizons, and, as one biographer has written, an "atmosphere of frustration and envy."³⁶ These circumstances were not exceptional for children of the same background and region; what would prove unusual were the drive and the experience that would lead Benito to transcend his environment.

In June 1884, before Benito was a year old, school officials moved his mother's elementary class and the family to new quarters in a large but deteriorating three-story building known as Palazzo Varano. Benito remembered his new home as "austere and melancholy." The family lived on the second floor, and to get to their rooms, they had to walk through the classroom.

The living quarters contained two adjoining spaces, one a kitchen with a fireplace, the other a bedroom. Privacy was virtually unknown. After the other children were born, Benito and Arnaldo slept together in a large bed in the kitchen and Edvige in her parents' bedroom. Later, Rosa's widowed mother also squeezed into the already tight quarters. From the window next to his bed, Benito could see the Rabbi River, the hills, and at night the moon. The kitchen furniture consisted of an armoire and large trunk, and in the center of the room a table served as both dining surface and desk. Near the window stood a bookcase filled with old books and newspapers, and one day, Benito happened on a discovery among the shelves that filled him with surprise and emotion—a packet of Alessandro's love letters to Rosa. "I read some of them," he later confessed.

Life was simple in the Mussolini household. Mattresses were rough cotton shells filled with corn leaves. Lunch each day, prepared in the open fireplace, consisted of vegetable soup and dinner of chicory gathered from the fields and eaten from a common platter; on Sundays, mutton broth broke the monotony. Grapes from a small rented plot of vines provided wine for home consumption.³⁷

“There was great misery all around us,” Mussolini remembered, and one of the early images that remained fixed in his mind was the sight of poor families, bent under sacks containing their meager belongings, who continuously left Dovia and surrounding towns and emigrated to South America. Benito’s father wrote articles about the emigration of local peasants who undertook the journey “to unknown lands to see if in the new world the honest labor of their limbs could earn them the scraps of bread that in ... bourgeois Italy are denied to poor workers.” Alessandro believed that the trauma of emigration could be prevented if only the uncultivated fields or those in marshy terrain were made arable and given to peasants.³⁸

Belying his later reputation as a powerful orator, Benito seemed unable to utter a comprehensible word for his first three years, a fact that troubled his parents greatly until a doctor in Forlì assured his grandmother, “Don’t worry, he will speak, he will speak; I think, in fact, that he will speak too much.”³⁹ When he did begin to talk, he was able to do so both in Italian as well as in Romagnol dialect, for Rosa insisted that the family use proper Italian at home.⁴⁰

As a young boy, Benito developed a circle of companions his own age, but frequently cowed them by his aggressive and impetuous nature. Having a marked tendency toward violence, he imposed his leadership by force over a band of mischievous followers. Thanks to his incessant brawling, he was constantly scuffed and bloodied. As the older brother, Benito alternately bullied and protected his younger one, who grew to be a “quiet, rather fat little boy somewhat short-sighted, unassuming.”⁴¹ One childhood companion recalled that Benito “never discussed things, he just hit!” At times, he seemed to enjoy fighting for its own sake. “I was a ceaseless and brutal rogue,” he admitted. “Many a time I returned home with my head injured by a stone. But I knew how to avenge myself.”⁴²

If from life in the fields Benito learned the uses of physical force, the lessons were sometimes reinforced at home. Though a decent father, Alessandro was a fairly typical Italian country parent who disciplined his chronically mischievous son with physical punishment. When the boy’s

concentration wandered while pumping the bellows in the blacksmith shop, or if he winced as sparks flew from the anvil, his attention would be recalled by a smack on the back of the head. And when Benito committed more serious infractions—as when he was expelled from school—he felt the sting of his father’s strap. Nonetheless, such acts of discipline do not seem to have diminished Benito’s affection for his father, and it was Rosa who stood out in his memory as the stern authoritarian. Alarmed by Benito’s fractious temperament, Rosa drew closer to her second child, Arnaldo.⁴³

Nor could his mother instill in her first son the religious belief and respect for the church that was the sustaining force of her life. She and her mother took Benito to mass each Sunday but he was so unruly that she would insist on his remaining outside the church so as not to disturb the other parishioners. “I was unable,” he recalled, “to remain very long in church, especially during the longer ceremonies. The red light of the candles, the penetrating smell of the incense, the colors of the sacred vestments, the drawling singing of the faithful, and the sound of the organ, all disturbed me deeply.” In this, too, Benito followed his father’s example, and developed a strong antipathy to priests and organized religion.⁴⁴

After he began attending school, Benito experienced much of his leisure time in isolation, sullen, introverted, and restless. In the summers, he spent hours on lonely walks in the fields or sitting alone in the hills watching birds and daydreaming. From an early age, Mussolini preferred to read books both to satisfy his natural curiosity and as a substitute for personal relationships. Rosa taught him the alphabet at the age of four and by the time he was five, he could read with ease. Reading was the most important—indeed, the only—way in which a young boy living in the isolated provinces of Italy could expand his intellectual horizons and gather a sense of the wider world around him. Reading made Mussolini broadly conversant with the culture and ideas circulating in the Italy of his youth, and had much to do with shaping the direction of his early life. He bought, read, and kept books all his life, even when in later years he was preoccupied with affairs of state.⁴⁵

The first book to affect Benito’s sensibilities was Hugo’s *Les Misérables*, the moving tale of social injustice much praised by early socialists. A copy of the book in Italian translation, probably one owned by Alessandro Mussolini, who had read and admired it, was read aloud to the townsfolk of Dovia when they gathered in a cowshed on winter evenings. The dramatic story of the unjustly persecuted Jean Valjean appealed to the young

boy's nascent social consciousness. The other work with which he became familiar early on was Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and he remembered the powerful impression it made on him when he first saw the famous edition illustrated by Gustave Doré in the home of a classmate. In school, Mussolini learned passages of the great medieval work of allegory by heart and would sprinkle his early writings with allusions and quotations from Dante. At the kitchen table, Benito read the other volumes that were in the Mussolini household, including the poems of Alessandro Manzoni, and especially the widely circulated works of Roberto Ardigò and Francesco Fiorentino, two Italian popularizers of philosophy whose books were much in vogue at the time.⁴⁶

Ardigò's influence on Mussolini, as on other Italian socialists of the period, was deeply felt. Like nineteenth-century positivist philosophers, who believed that the observable data of sense experience constitute the only basis for truth, he presented in *La morale dei positivisti*, a linear theory of progress—all things, he argued, were in a constant state of progressive evolution to higher forms, and human history worked in a parallel fashion. In his system, history could be seen as an uninterrupted chain of links ("events"), each predetermined by its predecessor. Ardigò's mechanistic notion of history had much to do with Mussolini's adult understanding of "destiny," for he always found it difficult to reconcile this sense of historical fatalism with his revolutionary principles—and this conflict was at the core of his belief that his own life was a continual struggle between "fatality" and "will."⁴⁷

Benito's early introduction to socialist doctrine came from his father's political pamphlets, Marxist tracts, and radical newspapers. Mussolini's formal education began in his mother's classroom, which he attended from the ages of six to eight. He then walked the two miles to Predappio for a year to attend a class taught by Silvio Marani, a socialist friend of Alessandro. Under ordinary circumstances, Benito's education might well have ended there, and his father would have gladly trained him in the art of blacksmithing. But Rosa's burning ambition was to see to a good education for her children, one that would allow them to rise above the social status of her proletarian-artisan husband. Rosa felt that a well-structured school regimen would cure her unruly son of his misbehaving ways, but she hoped secretly that boarding away from home would free him from the socialist influences of her husband.⁴⁸ Much against Alessandro's judgment, she decided to send Benito to a religious boarding school in Faenza, about 20 miles away. The school, run by Salesian monks, had

been recommended by a wealthy acquaintance and promised not only to give the boy a decent education but also to teach him discipline and religious piety.

In January 1891, the year before he went off to Faenza, Benito accompanied his father to Milan, where Alessandro purchased a threshing machine on behalf of the agricultural cooperative in Predappio. The bustling industrial city must have appeared overwhelming to the provincial boy of eight, and years later, he still remembered the Piazza del Duomo covered in snow. Alessandro took him to a number of meetings with socialist leaders, who had made Milan the unofficial capital of the Italian socialist movement.⁴⁹

Benito dreaded the prospect of leaving home, and during the summer of 1892, he misbehaved even more blatantly than usual, so that when he left for Faenza in October it was with a bandaged hand injured in a fight. Alessandro drove his son to school in a donkey-drawn cart. When he turned to leave at the school gates, Benito burst into tears.⁵⁰

The two years that Benito spent in the Salesian school were the most difficult of his early life. He was immediately struck by the class distinctions imposed on the students, who were divided into groups according to the economic status of their parents. Much to his embarrassment, Benito had to take his meals with the poorest, which made up the majority of the 200 students at the school. This was his first real lesson in social discrimination. According to his own account of these bleak years, the discipline enforced by the monks bordered on cruelty. The pupils were awakened before sunrise, had to wash in cold water, and were compelled to attend mass every morning before breakfast. Meals were eaten in silence. The food was meager and often bad, especially for the poorer students. Lessons began and ended in prayer. He remembered the headmaster as an incredibly thin man whose appearance frightened him, especially as every student had to kiss his hand at the end of the day. Sunday walks and a daily period of recreation were the only break in the monotonous regimen. Disobedience resulted in beatings and other forms of punishment.

When Benito developed swollen feet because of the damp cold, he was refused warm-water treatments and his condition worsened. During a visit to the school, Alessandro discovered that his son was limping and took him to a doctor, complaining loudly to the headmaster. The monks then took to referring to the boy sarcastically as the “son of a people’s leader,” for which, Benito suspected, he was regularly beaten and mistreated. He detested one teacher in particular, whom he described in the bitterest of

language. When the man beat him to the ground for an imagined infraction, Benito threw an inkwell at him, for which he was deprived of all recreation and his main course at dinner for a month. "A feeling of revolt and vengeance," he confessed, "grew in my soul."⁵¹

During the summer that followed, his parents found Benito even moodier and aggressive, prepared, they feared, to drown himself in the Rabbi River. He worked with his father on the threshing machine in July and August, but in September 1893, he was ordered back to Faenza. The second year at school was even more traumatic. For a time, he feigned illness to avoid attending morning mass, but was threatened with punishment if he continued to do so. Soon after the new term began, his patience ran out. When he realized that the poorer students were given bread infested with ants, Benito led a protest that, inevitably, was answered by severe punishment.

In June 1894, Benito fought with a fellow student and stabbed him in the hand with a pocketknife. He was locked in a room for the rest of the day. That night, he felt the wrath of the detested teacher, who grabbed him by the hair and screamed, "Your conscience is black as coal!" In 1911, when Mussolini wrote about the incident in a memoir, he remarked, "Twenty years have passed, and forty will go by, but I will never forget these words." He was then flung into the exterior corridor to spend the night with the fierce dogs that guarded the school, only to be chased by them when he tried unsuccessfully to open the gate that led to dormitory rooms. With one of the dogs nipping at his pants cuff, he scrambled over the gate just in time.

The school authorities ordered Benito's expulsion but Rosa pleaded with them to keep him until the end of the term. But this was hardly a reprieve, for during the last month of his stay at the school, Benito spent a week in isolation, after which he was forced to stand during recreational time in a corner of the courtyard and was regularly deprived of dinner. When he left, the headmaster told his parents that he would not be allowed back in the fall.

After two years at Faenza, Benito had gained little in the way of formal education at the hands of his tormenters. Having proved to be gifted with an almost photographic mind and able to memorize assignments after one reading, as a student he passed all his exams easily. When his required study periods were over, he spent most of his time reading borrowed books, mainly adventure stories, and became particularly enamored of the tales of Jules Verne. "The moral education that I suffered," he said years later, "pressed me to imagine a world of sinners and perverts, in which only priests represented good, disinterest, and piety."⁵²

After his carefree years in the countryside, Benito felt imprisoned, persecuted, and tormented at school. So indelibly stamped into his memory were those years that the anger and hatred he harbored never subsided. An official school report on Benito noted that he had “a sharp intelligence and a singular memory, but his character was anything but stable.” The trauma seems to have reinforced the worst aspects of his already sullen personality.⁵³

By the fall of 1894, after a summer of study at home, Rosa decided that 11-year-old Benito should continue his education at a new school recently opened in Forlimpopoli, the Collegio Giosuè Carducci, named after the famous Nobel Prize-winning poet. A lay institution run by Valfredo Carducci, the poet’s brother, attendance at mass was entirely voluntary and most of the staff held strong anti-clerical sentiments. Discipline was humane and the teachers and staff decent. It was, said Mussolini, “like going from hell to heaven.” Benito would spend the next six years here, formative years during which he developed into a young man with a decent culture and earned a teaching license.⁵⁴

It was clearly difficult for the Mussolini family to continue supporting Benito’s schooling away from home, and at the end of the first year, Rosa wrote to the prefect of Forlì for a government subsidy, claiming that her son’s education would have to be suspended without financial assistance. The request was refused but Benito earned a small annual scholarship by taking special examinations. He was less well off than most of the students at the school—classmates noticed that the cuffs and knees of his clothing were always mended—but social distinctions among the students were ignored. For the first several years, Benito lived at the school, but in January 1898, he wounded a fellow student with a penknife during a quarrel and was forced to leave the school residence hall. He then lodged in town with the family of a socialist friend of Alessandro’s, who each Saturday morning would come with a cart to bring him home for the weekend. Toward the end of his stay at the school, a stroke of good luck improved his family fortunes slightly when one of his mother’s aunts died and left her an inheritance of perhaps as much as 10,000 lire, a goodly sum that allowed them to pay off their debts and eventually buy a small piece of farm property. He later returned to school lodgings but was expelled again, this time for staying out all night.⁵⁵

Benito found most of his teachers pleasant if not brilliant. They taught him history, geography, and Italian literature, his best subjects, and he also studied mathematics—which he failed—philosophy, music, French,

pedagogy, and drawing. His favorite books now included two epic works of the sixteenth century that glorified medieval warfare and heroic legend, Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Torquato Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*. He also developed a passion for Giosuè Carducci's poems, which were widely popular at the time. Carducci held the chair in Italian literature at the University of Bologna when Benito was studying at the school named after him. His *Barbarian Odes* (1877–1889) celebrated the pagan spirit and classical forms as inspired by imperial Rome. He had also achieved notoriety for his polemics against the papacy and the Italian monarchy. Benito himself began to write poetry during his last year in school, as did many of his classmates, and by his own admission he filled notebooks with rhymed clichés. Later, he destroyed most of what he had written in those days, but he did keep one, dedicated to the French radical socialist François Babeuf, who had advocated the abolition of private property during the French Revolution.⁵⁶

When not in class, Benito would generally climb up to the rooftop of the church that was attached to the school with an armload of books and spend the day alone, absorbed in reading, still his major pastime. Classmates found him “taciturn” and “serious,” but no longer constantly angry and sullen. Finally, he seemed to have made a few friends, including Sante Bedeschi and Rino Alessi, whom he invited to his office in Palazzo Venezia years later when he was prime minister.⁵⁷

One public event stood out in Mussolini's mind as he looked back on his days at Forlimpopoli. In March 1896, news arrived of the defeat of Italian troops at Adowa in Ethiopia, where Prime Minister Francesco Crispi had sent them to achieve a great imperial conquest. The death of thousands of Italian soldiers at the hands of the indigenous warriors of Emperor Menelik II shocked the nation and brought down the Crispi government. Mussolini remembered that the newspapers were filled with headlines and that his fellow students were consumed with the story for weeks. The blow to Italian pride was staggering, and a strain of patriotic spirit seemed to have imbedded itself permanently in his socialist sentiments. In 1911, despite being in jail for his socialist agitation against the Italian war in Libya, Mussolini wrote that the numbers of the dead and wounded of 15 years earlier “still hammer in my brain”—he would remember the defeat bitterly years later as “the stain of Adowa.”⁵⁸

As he entered his teens, aspects of Benito's character seemed already well formed. Thirty years later, he would point out to an interviewer that “Anyone who knew me well at that time could already have recognized

when I was sixteen what I now am, with all the light and shade.”⁵⁹ A photograph taken in 1897 reveals much of his personality: with his head tilted back and his arms folded across his chest, he appeared precociously self-willed and arrogant. His wide mouth and full, sensuous lower lip are already pursed in the hint of a smirk, and his large, round eyes peer unabashedly at the camera. The photograph of the 14-year-old boy uncannily suggests what we know will be the appearance of the adult man of 40 years later.

By the time Benito had left school in the summer of 1901, he had “for some time” been calling himself a socialist, on occasion skipping classes to attend political meetings. Unlike most of his classmates with socialist sympathies who wore flowing red bow ties, Benito sported a black tie that expressed solidarity with the anarchist tradition, but his views were still unformed and confused. During summer vacations, he accompanied Alessandro to socialist events. By 1898, when he began to attend socialist meetings in Forlimpopoli, he was a regular reader of *Avanti!*, the official daily newspaper of the Socialist Party. In April 1901, at the age of 17, he submitted to the paper a review of a book by local socialist Francesco Bonavita, although he withdrew it after learning that it had angered the author, a friend of his father’s (ironically, years later Bonavita would defend Benito in court on numerous occasions and would be among the founding members of the first Fascist organization). From time to time, Benito gave brief speeches at socialist recreational events, including one at a dance hosted by the Karl Marx Circle of Forlì.⁶⁰

Benito had developed the habit of going off by himself to practice giving speeches, possibly to prepare for his appearances at socialist meetings, and his teachers recognized his public speaking skills. His first formal opportunity to give a talk at school—he called it his “oratorical debut”—came in January 1901, when word came that the venerable Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi had died. For the official school commemoration, Valfredo Carducci chose Benito to give a speech about Verdi’s career. It is suggestive of his way of thinking that in his talk Benito put Verdi’s operatic work in the political context of the *Risorgimento*, Italy’s struggle for unification. The next day, *Avanti!* carried a brief notice of the speech by “student comrade Mussolini.”⁶¹

Benito took his final examinations early that summer, returning home to Dovia with a teaching license after six years. He was now 18. “Each of us students,” he wrote, “confronted his destiny and moved from the narrow confines of school out into the wider and dangerous field of life.”⁶²

For the young Mussolini, the completion of six years of studies at Forlimpopoli seemed the prelude only to an uncertain future. With the wider world open to him, the prospect of remaining isolated in Dovia oppressed his restless spirit. At home, he kept to himself much of the time, writing and reading, going out only at night. "I have lost weight, am pale and sullen," he wrote to his friend Sante Bedeschi in late July 1901. "I see these things in the mirror, but they are merely conditions that reflect my soul, which aspired to a less ignoble youth."⁶³

Mussolini spent the summer and fall of 1901 studying for the competitive examinations required for a teaching position while trying to find a suitable opening. In the meantime, he indulged the moods and unfocused urgings of his 18 years, writing poetry and pouring his despair into letters to Bedeschi. By mid-August, when he was turned down for a post in Predappio, he grew more despondent, complaining that he was sick of Dovia, and became an even greater recluse. A reprieve came later that month when a school friend, whose family had a house on the coast, invited him to visit; he spent the next month hiking and swimming along the Adriatic.⁶⁴

Mussolini's applications for jobs were continually rejected. "Frankly," he lamented, "I don't know where else to turn." He studied Latin and took violin lessons in Forlì, spending days reading in the public library there. In December, he published his first article, a short essay on the social background of the Russian novel, in an obscure educational journal. When a position as assistant clerk for the commune of Predappio became vacant, he applied for that, but again to no avail—the council was then in the hands of conservatives and his father's politics worked against him. A turn of luck finally came after Alessandro wrote for help to a friend in Gualtieri, a small town along the Po River in the region of Reggio Emilia and the first commune in Italy run by a socialist administration. In January 1902, word came that Mussolini had been offered a substitute teaching post in a tiny hamlet outside Gualtieri. The salary was low—56 lire a month, of which 40 would have to go for room and board—but he accepted with great relief, leaving Dovia the following month.⁶⁵

Mussolini arrived in Gualtieri dressed in a cheap jacket, a wide brimmed black hat, and a cape, and sporting a thin mustache. At the station, a delegation of socialists greeted him and insisted that he make a speech. Standing awkwardly on a small table in the local kindergarten, he proclaimed tersely that he had come to Gualtieri "to work in school and in life," that "words today had taken on excessive importance," and that "I prefer action to words. So, to work, comrades!"⁶⁶

Mussolini's performance in Gualtieri did not live up to the bravado of his words. He remained in Gualtieri until July, teaching and causing a stir among local socialists. His five months there brought home to him personally for the first time the widening gulf between the reformist and the revolutionary wings of the Italian Socialist Party. Both aimed at the creation of a socialist society, but they differed radically in means. The split had much to do with the ambiguities to be found in Marxism. The bulk of Marx's writings held to a mechanistic, or historical determinist, interpretation of history, by which he posited that economies over time moved from feudalism to capitalism and finally to socialism. Capitalists and proletarians were locked in irreconcilable conflict, with no room for negotiation, compromise, or bargains. Individual or party interventions were irrelevant; for capitalism eventually was doomed to collapse as a result of the inherent contradictions of the system. Although Marx saw particular events and individual will as sometimes playing a role in history, the overall pattern of historical determinism remained an important basis for his theories. Mussolini, who had read *The Communist Manifesto* but not *Das Kapital*, viscerally rejected the reformists but never fully embraced historical determinism. In Gualtieri, the local administration was in the hands of the reformists. Mussolini had not thought coherently about his own position, but he instinctively sided with the revolutionaries, whose views he had inherited from his home environment, where anarchist influences abounded: "My socialism," he explained years later, "was born Bakuninist, in the school of my father's socialism."⁶⁷ But although he joined the ranks of the revolutionaries, his belief in violence, not historical determinism, fed his revolutionary consciousness.

Aroused by Mussolini's militancy, the workers of the local socialist circle immediately elected him their secretary. He began a round of speaking engagements in which he vented his enthusiasm for extremism. In March, a local socialist newspaper asked Mussolini to explain his views on socialism. His response was revealing. "My socialist faith," he proclaimed, "is an ideology that tends toward the extreme revolutionary valorization of the proletariat... Only he who can be certain of sacrificing himself without hesitation for the cause ... can call himself a revolutionary. We must resolutely reject the reformism that eschews armed insurrection by the people, who for forty years have been the servants of their own false idols and of falsely democratic institutions. We must have faith first in ourselves and then in the generation able to understand us, namely the young." Indulging in ever more violent language at a speech commemorating Garibaldi, he aroused the concern of the local socialist authorities.⁶⁸

By then, Mussolini knew that his teaching job would not be renewed for the next year. The reason, however, was not politics, but sex. Soon after his arrival, he had attended an afternoon dance at which he met a young woman in her twenties named Giulia Fontanesi. She turned out to be married, although her husband was away on military duty. Mussolini carried on a secret and tempestuous affair with Giulia for weeks—he once cut her arm with a knife during an argument⁶⁹—until they were discovered and the woman’s in-laws, with whom she was living, threw her out of their house. She moved into a furnished room and, recalled Mussolini, “each night I went to her. She always met me at the door. Sometimes we went into the countryside and we made love in the fields along the banks of the Po. They were magical months. Our love was violent and jealous... Little by little I accustomed her to my exclusive and tyrannical love. She obeyed me blindly. I used her as I pleased. In the town our relationship became the object of scandal, and by now we made no secret of it... So I made a plan to immigrate to Switzerland to try my luck. I would then call Giulia to join me.”⁷⁰

On June 6, he wrote to Bedeschi, “when you receive this I will no longer be in the land of Dante, but in the land of W[illiam] Tell.” He had already requested a passport and asked his mother for money to pay for the trip, lying to family and friends that he had been promised a job in Switzerland.⁷¹

Switzerland seemed an obvious choice for Mussolini, who was again without a job and wanted least of all to go back to Dovia. The Swiss republic drew unemployed workers from all over Europe, and tens of thousands of Italian immigrants were able to find seasonal jobs there that were often sufficient to sustain them and to send money back to their families in Italy. With its neutral status and its tradition of giving safe haven to refugees, Switzerland had also become a haven for political exiles of all nationalities, especially radicals from Russia and Italy. The high concentration of foreign workers gave rise to socialist and labor organizations that recruited laborers along nationality lines. The period in which Mussolini arrived in Switzerland was a particularly acute one for Italian workers, who were engaged in tumultuous strikes and agitation. These volatile circumstances provided the context in which Mussolini would launch his apprenticeship in socialist politics.⁷²

NOTES

1. Quotes are in *My Autobiography by Benito Mussolini* (New York, 1928), 5, and Emil Ludwig, *Colloqui con Mussolini*, trans. Tomaso Gnoli (Verona, 1932), 43. Two biographies of Mussolini’s mother were published in the

- 1920s: Silvia Albertoni-Tagliavini, *La mamma del duce* (Bologna, 1927), and Virginia Benedetti, *Rosa Maltoni Mussolini* (Brescia, 1928). One biography of Alessandro, by an old socialist comrade, appeared: Francesco Bonavita, *Il padre del duce* (Rome, 1933).
2. BM, "La mia vita dal 29 luglio 1883 al 23 novembre 1911," OO, XXXIII, 220.
 3. Giorgio Pini and Duilio Susmel, *Mussolini. L'uomo e l'opera. I. Dal socialismo al fascismo (1883-1919)*, (Florence: La Fenice, 1953), hereinafter P/S, I, 14-15.
 4. Ivon De Begnac, *Vita di Mussolini (dalle origini al 24 maggio 1915)*, I, *Alla scuola della rivoluzione antica* (Milan, 1936), 61-62, 64.
 5. Paolo Monelli, *Mussolini. The Intimate Life of a Demagogue*, trans. Brigid Maxwell (New York, 1954), 21; De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 25; Bonavita, *Il padre del duce*, 41-42.
 6. *Ibid.*, 76-77.
 7. Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) was born in Genoa and became a fervid patriot, participating in the conspiratorial uprisings of the secret Carbonari organization. In 1831, he formed his Young Italy association, and in 1849, became a leader of the Roman Republic. He spent much of his life in exile in France and England.
 8. Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876) was born near modern Kalinin, Russia, of minor nobility. After a brief career in the army, he went to university and studied philosophy, becoming an admirer of Kant and Hegel. After studying in Germany, where he became interested in socialism, he emigrated to Switzerland. In Paris, he met Pierre Proudhon, from whom he developed his ideas of the state. He led an uprising in Dresden during the revolutions of 1848, and was subsequently extradited to Austria and then back to Russia, where he spent years in prison and in Siberia. Escaping from his exile, he made his way to London, where he befriended Mazzini. In 1864-1867, he lived in Italy, returning thereafter to Switzerland. On Bakunin and his influence in Italy, see Nunzio Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism, 1864-1892* (Princeton, 1993), T.R. Ravindranathan, *Bakunin and the Italians* (Kingston, 1988), and M. Nejrroti, "Bakunin, Michail," in Franco Andreucci and Tommaso Detti, *Il movimento operaio italiano. Dizionario biografico*, I (Rome, 1975), 123-136.
 9. RDF (Renzo De Felice), *Mussolini il rivoluzionario (1883-1920)* (Turin, 1965), 5; De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 87-89; Francesco Bonavita, *Mussolini svelato* (Milan, 1924), 39-40. On the general background to internationalism in the Romagna in these years, see Gastone Manacorda, *Il movimento operaio italiano attraverso i suoi congressi. Dalle origini alla formazione del partito socialista (1853-1892)* (Roma, 1963), 121, 125-126, 129-130.
 10. Andrea Costa (1851-1910) was born in Imola and was first inspired by democratic and republican principles. By the late 1860s, he had broken with the republicans and adhered to the Internationalist movement, becoming one of its most active leaders. He spent 19 months in prison for his role in the 1874

- uprising. He met Anna Kuliscioff in Switzerland. After his abandonment of anarchism, he was elected to Parliament in 1882, the first socialist to sit in the Italian legislature. On Costa, see Manuel G. Gonzales, *Andrea Costa and the Rise of Socialism in the Romagna* (Washington, DC, 1980).
11. RDF, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, 5.
 12. On *Il Capitale di Carlo Marx brevemente compendiato da Carlo Cafiero* (Milan, 1879), see Humbert Gualtieri, *The Labor Movement in Italy* (New York, 1946), 121, and Richard Hostetter, *The Italian Socialist Movement, I, Origins* (New York, 1958), 389; on Gori's *Manifesto del partito comunista* see Andreucci and Detti, *Il movimento operaio italiano*, II (Rome, 1976), 523.
 13. Anna Kuliscioff (1854–1925) was born in Moskaja, Russia, of a well-to-do Jewish family named Rosenstein. She enrolled in the Polytechnic Institute of Zurich in 1871 and soon joined the radical underground. Back in Russia again two years later, she became involved in the populist movement. Hunted by the Tsarist police, she escaped and made her way back to Switzerland. In Italy in 1880, she and Costa by now socialists, were arrested and spent five months in prison. In 1884, she moved to Naples, where she took a degree in medicine. Her relationship with Costa cooled and she met Filippo Turati. She and Turati moved to Milan in 1889. Kuliscioff was an ardent advocate for women's rights and for their place in the socialist movement. See M. Casalini, "Kuliscioff, Anna," in Andreucci and Detti, *Il movimento operaio italiano*, III (Rome, 1977), 6–20.
 14. Quoted in R. Zangheri, "Costa, Andrea," in Andreucci and Detti, *Il movimento operaio italiano*, II, 113.
 15. Gaudens Megaro, *Mussolini in the Making* (Boston and New York, 1938), 27. Alessandro Mussolini wrote occasional articles for *La Rivendicazione*, *La Lotta*, and *Il Risveglio*. See De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 350; P/S, I, 404–407.
 16. "Che cosa è il socialismo," *La Rivendicazione* (Forlì), February 10, 1891, quoted in Megaro, *Mussolini in the Making*, 27, and RDF, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, 7.
 17. RDF, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, 5; P/S, I, 17; Bonavita, *Il padre del duce*, 150. On the police surveillance system (*ammonizione*) see Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism*, 131–132.
 18. Albertoni-Tagliavini, *La mamma del duce*, 50–52.
 19. Beltramelli, 60; De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 93.
 20. Bonavita, *Il padre del duce*, 109.
 21. Bonavita, *Il padre del duce*, 106–107.
 22. P/S, I, 17. De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 100–101, 305–306.
 23. De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 104, 133.
 24. RDF, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, 5.
 25. P/S, I, 17; De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 100.
 26. BM, "La mia vita dal 29 luglio 1883 al 23 novembre 1911," OO, XXXIII, 219.

27. Manacorda, *Il movimento operaio italiano attraverso I suoi congressi*, 210–211; RDF, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, 5–6.
28. Quoted in Megaro, *Mussolini in the Making*, 26–27.
29. De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 102–103, 146–172, 204–205; Bonavita, *Il padre del duce*, 132–143.
30. Megaro, *Mussolini in the Making*, 38; De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 25; Bonavita, *Il padre del duce*, 119.
31. De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 165–167.
32. Bonavita, *Il padre del duce*, 120.
33. Mussolini's quote is from his "Mio padre," OO, III, 276, originally in *La lotta di classe*, November 26, 1910. On the financial disputes in the family, see Bonavita, *Il padre del duce*, 168–171; P/S, I, 24; De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 101, 133–134; P/S, I, 25.
34. Albertoni-Tagliavini, *La mamma del duce*, 8–9; De Begnac, *Vita*, 133–134; Bonavita, *Il padre del duce*, 169–171, 175; Giuseppe A. Borgese, *Goliath. The March of Fascism* (New York, 1938), 178–179.
35. De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 134–136, 138, 141; Rino Alessi, *Il giovane Mussolini rievocato da un suo compagno di scuola* (Milan, 1969), 14; the "bourgeois I" is from BM, "La Gente Nuova," *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, September 20, 1902, OO, I, 19; the Mussolini quote is in Yvon De Begnac, *Palazzo Venezia: Storia di un regime* (Rome, 1950), 131.
36. Monelli, *Intimate Life*, 20.
37. De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 132; BM, *Vita di Arnaldo* (1932), OO, XXXIV, 141–142; Mussolini's quote is from BM, "La mia vita dal 29 luglio 1883 al 23 novembre 1911," OO, XXXIII, 220.
38. Alessandro Mussolini, "Tutti in America," in *Il Pensiero Romagnolo*, March 20, 1898, reproduced in P/S, I, 406. See also Megaro, *Mussolini in the Making*, 30–31.
39. Edvige Mussolini, *Mio fratello Benito. Memorie raccolte e trascritte da Rosetta Ricci Crisolini* (Florence, 1957), 12.
40. Beltramelli, 66.
41. Sarfatti, *Life of Benito Mussolini*, 35.
42. Quotes: BM, *Vita di Arnaldo*, (1932), OO, XXXIV, 145; Beltramelli, 70; BM, "La mia vita dal 29 luglio 1883 al 23 novembre 1911," OO, XXXIII, 220. See also De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 129–131, 136; see also Mussolini's comments in his *Il mio diario di guerra* for Christmas 1916, OO, XXXIV, 101.
43. Sarfatti, *Life of Benito Mussolini*, 31–32; Alessi, *Il giovane Mussolini*, 27; De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 138; Albertoni-Tagliavini, *La mamma del duce*, 14–15.
44. BM, "La mia vita dal 29 luglio 1883 al 23 novembre 1911," OO, XXXIII, 220–221.
45. BM, "La mia vita dal 29 luglio 1883 al 23 novembre 1911," OO, XXXIII, 220; Sarfatti, *Life of Benito Mussolini*, 62; Beltramelli, 73; Edvige Mussolini, *Mio fratello Benito*, 158.

46. Sarfatti, *Dux*, 32–33, 39; BM, *Vita di Arnaldo* (1932), OO, XXXIV, 144–146; BM, “La mia vita dal 29 luglio 1883 al 23 novembre 1911,” OO, XXXIII, 233; Alessi, preface to Bedeschi, *Anni giovanili*, 25.
47. Ottavio Dinale, *Quarant’anni di colloqui con lui* (Milan, 1953), 16–17; A. James Gregor, *Young Mussolini and the Intellectual Origins of Fascism* (Berkeley, 1979), 35; A. Bortone, “Ardigò, Roberto,” in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, IV (Rome, 1962), 20–27. Mussolini cited Ardigò frequently in his early articles.
48. Benedetti, *Rosa Maltoni Mussolini*, 71.
49. De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 167–168.
50. BM, “La mia vita dal 29 luglio 1883 al 23 novembre 1911,” OO, XXXIII, 220–223; P/S, I, 30, 34.
51. BM, “La mia vita dal 29 luglio 1883 al 23 novembre 1911,” OO, XXXIII, 223–227.
52. BM, “La mia vita dal 29 luglio 1883 al 23 novembre 1911,” OO, XXXIII, 228–233; De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 185.
53. Quote from De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 313. See also RDF, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, 11; Alessi, *Il giovane Mussolini*, 11.
54. Quote from BM, “La mia vita dal 29 luglio 1883 al 23 novembre 1911,” OO, XXXIII, 234. See also RDF, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, 13, and Alessi, *Il giovane Mussolini*, 13.
55. Rosa Maltoni Mussolini to Prefect of Forlì, September 20, 1895, in De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 315–316; Alessi, preface to Bedeschi, *Anni giovanili*, 22, 26; P/S, I, 44; BM, “La mia vita dal 29 luglio 1883 al 23 novembre 1911,” OO, XXXIII, 237–238, 253; RDF, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, 15–16; Edvige Mussolini, *Mio fratello Benito*, 16.
56. BM, “La mia vita dal 29 luglio 1883 al 23 novembre 1911,” OO, XXXIII, 240–244; Bedeschi, *Anni giovanili*, 59; Alessi, preface to Bedeschi, *Anni giovanili*, 20, 31; De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 214, 227–228.
57. Bedeschi, *Anni giovanili*, 58, 60; Alessi, *Il giovane Mussolini*, 11–12; BM, “La mia vita dal 29 luglio 1883 al 23 novembre 1911,” OO, XXXIII, 244.
58. BM, “La mia vita dal 29 luglio 1883 al 23 novembre 1911,” OO, XXXIII, 235, 237; BM, *Vita di Arnaldo*, (1932), OO, XXXIV, 145.
59. Ludwig, *Colloqui con Mussolini*, 44.
60. BM, “La mia vita dal 29 luglio 1883 al 23 novembre 1911,” OO, XXXIII, 238, 242–243; RDF, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, 14–18; De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 199; Alessi, preface to Bedeschi, *Anni giovanili*, 26.
61. The text of the *Avanti!* notice, July 29, 1901, along with one that appeared in *Il Resto del Carlino*, a major daily of Bologna, is in OO, I, 244–245. See also BM, “La mia vita dal 29 luglio 1883 al 23 novembre 1911,” OO, XXXIII, 242; Alessi, preface to Bedeschi, *Anni giovanili*, 43–47.
62. BM, “La mia vita dal 29 luglio 1883 al 23 novembre 1911,” OO, XXXIII, 242.

63. BM to Sante Bedeschi, n.d. but July 1901; see also letters of July 17, August 3, 1901, all in OO, I, 203–207.
64. BM to Bedeschi, August 16, 1901, OO, I, 207; De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 237–238.
65. BM to Bedeschi, September 21, 1901, OO, I, 3–4, 208; P/S, I, 60–61; BM to Municipal Council of Predappio, December 6, 1901, OO, I, 208, 231; Sarfatti, *Dux*, 47; De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 243. On the Gualtieri period, see especially De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 243–264.
66. Quoted in De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 246.
67. De Begnac, *Taccuini Mussoliniani*, 9.
68. Quoted in De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 253–254; *ibid.*, 261–263; BM to Bedeschi, March 12, 1902, OO, I, 208–209.
69. BM, “La mia vita dal 29 luglio 1883 al 23 novembre 1911,” OO, XXXIII, 248; Fabrizio Castellini, *Il ribelle di Predappio* (Milan, 1996), 38–42.
70. BM, “La mia vita dal 29 luglio 1883 al 23 novembre 1911,” OO, XXXIII, 246.
71. BM to Bedeschi, June 6, 1902, OO, I, 210; De Begnac, *Vita*, I, 2326–2327.
72. See Guido Pedroli, *Il socialismo nella svizzera italiana, 1880–1922* (Milan, 1963).

A Romagnol in Switzerland: Education of a Revolutionary

Simone Visconti

On July 9, 1902, Mussolini left Pieve di Gualtieri, in Emilia, where he had been working as a teacher since February, to go to Switzerland. Professional difficulties linked to his job as a teacher without a permanent contract and the subsequent prospect of having to fall back on the resources of his own family led him to seek his fortune elsewhere.¹ This does not mean that a certain sense of adventure did not play its part, a factor upon which the hagiographies of Sarfatti and De Bagnac have laid particular stress. If it is true, as Mussolini wrote in his autobiography, that he lied to his family and to his friend, Bedeschi, about the job that was waiting for him in Switzerland and that, therefore, he left without any “fixed aim,”² it does not mean that his choice was original or unplanned as it followed in the wake of a steady wave of Italian migration toward that country.

At the end of the nineteenth century, important industrial development resulting from major infrastructural projects linked to the construction of railways and factories (bridges, tunnels and embankments) brought an

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ever-growing number of foreign workers to Switzerland; among these, the Italian contingent occupied second place after the Germans. Italians were the largest group in the building industry, where they provided the majority of unskilled labor.³ Between 1876 and 1910, Italian migration to Switzerland represented 8.7 % (982,000 individuals) of total migration⁴; this percentage was composed above all of northern Italians, manual laborers and bricklayers, who often emigrated for a season or for a limited time.⁵ Mussolini's move was therefore in line with the practices and migratory habits of his area.⁶

From a socio-professional point of view too, Mussolini did not represent an isolated case of emigration at the time: he belonged to the lower white-collar class of primary and high school teachers, who, despite the spread of education, were unable to find a job and were forced to either emigrate abroad or accept a humbler position in their own country.⁷ So it was not poverty, and even less, political reasons which prompted Mussolini to leave, rather it was a search for new possibilities and opportunities to satisfy more fully his personal ambition.⁸ Later on, political activity became for him a profession that offered the valorization of his intellectual abilities and the guarantee of a certain social prestige.⁹ However, this was not the only activity to which Mussolini dedicated himself during his stay in Switzerland, since, in those days he had to search out different ways to make a living.

It is not possible to establish precisely how much Mussolini worked, in which positions, and how much he earned, at least not from his own written accounts, which are either too vague or exaggeratedly detailed about specific episodes that only occupied a short space of time: emblematic in this respect is a letter to Bedeschi in which appears the image of a bricklayer forced to struggle against poverty, an image used later in Fascist hagiography to describe (Mussolini's) Swiss experience. The truth was very different, as the letter to Teofilo Panizzi¹⁰ and his own autobiography demonstrate.

Mussolini's stay in Switzerland marked a period of intense political activity that was paid, the money being earned through editing articles and giving lectures. However, these occupations did not provide sufficient income and Mussolini was frequently obliged to make up the shortfall with temporary and often boring jobs such as laborer, shop assistant, office clerk and private tutor.

With the exception of a few days as a manual laborer in Orbe, Mussolini began his political activity very quickly: his first article was published on August 9, a little less than a month after his arrival in Switzerland, while on

August 24, he gave a lecture in Montreux. From August 29, he occupied the role of vice-secretary of Lausanne's Union of Laborers and Bricklayers and soon after, on September 6, was elected its secretary.¹¹ The monthly payment for this was only 5 Francs but to this must be added earnings from articles and lectures.¹² In 1902, Mussolini earned on average between 15 and 20 Francs each month for articles.¹³ In 1903, between March and October, he wrote nine articles, which were paid 90 Francs, reaching an average monthly income of 15 Francs.

This estimate must be related to the economic conditions of the time. A worker's average monthly salary varied between 70 and 130 Francs.¹⁴ Slightly higher than this was the salary of the secretary of the Partito Socialista Italiano (Italian Socialist Party or PSI) in Switzerland who, according to records, earned 140 Francs (60 Francs for editing the newspaper *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore* [The Worker's Future], 50 Francs as a contributor to the newspaper, *Avanti!* [Forward!] and 30 Francs from party funds¹⁵). Another crucial factor in understanding Mussolini's economic position in Switzerland was the cost of living. When investigating the living conditions of Italian workers in Switzerland at the beginning of the century, Italian socialists claimed that the average monthly expenditure of a worker stood at around 65 Francs.¹⁶ However, it is possible that one could live for less if one considers that at the end of the nineteenth century, Lausanne Social Services distributed between 12 and 20 Francs each month to the most needy.¹⁷

The only proceeds derived from political activity, the monthly 15 or 20 Francs, not including lectures, were certainly insufficient for Mussolini's upkeep, but were definitely enough to keep him fed and allowed his stay in Switzerland to be less wretched than he might have tried to depict it.

The most important and most useful data for understanding Mussolini's experience in Switzerland are sociological in nature rather than economic or quantitative. Whatever the material conditions of his life may have been, Mussolini always frequented only the most intellectual representatives of Italian emigration such as lawyers (Salvatore Donatini, Tito Barboni), publicists and political organizers (Giacinto Menotti Serrati, Angelica Balabanoff), university students, teachers like himself (Ottavio Dinale) as well as artisans (the tailor, Sigismondo Bartoli) and businesspeople (Carlo De Paulis). The stratum of manual laborers and bricklayers, which Mussolini later claimed membership of, was in reality the target group for political action, the mass that was to be educated, made aware and organized. They were the public whom Mussolini met regularly at his

lectures, but not the people he mingled with. He lived in contact with the new social groupings of emigrants, such as the political refugees who had come to live in Switzerland following the anti-socialist repression of the end of the previous century, a repression which had contributed to the political reorganization of the Italian émigrés. Mussolini was also in contact with the new generation of skilled workers, artisans and small entrepreneurs, who since the beginning of the century were increasing in number and who had either arrived from Italy or had trained in Switzerland itself.¹⁸

Different ways of living and working separated the old from the new emigration.¹⁹ The politically militant emigrant who belonged to these new social categories and who often did not suffer the rigors of manual labor was able to dedicate a part of his or her time to meetings and to exchanges of ideas: this represented an essential, substantial and formative part of such an emigrant's life. In fact, from police records in Lausanne, it is apparent that during the summer of 1904, Mussolini was often in the company of Serrati and that they would meet to talk in the shop of another militant, Zanini.²⁰ This was the social network which Mussolini joined and in which he developed himself: it was both a human and intellectual experience that was new and important for his development because it allowed his immediate participation in the political life of Italian emigrants.

POLITICS

In Switzerland, Mussolini began his own real political activity, as he himself stated in the letter to Teofilo Panizzi, a man who quickly widened and enriched Mussolini's social circle. This was a crucial developmental process that was based upon contact with the political organizations representing Italian emigrants in Switzerland and their difficulties, as well as upon his direct experience in the field of labor disputes, something which affected him deeply. Moreover, the particular sociopolitical context of Italian socialism in Switzerland acted as a viewpoint from which he could analyze and absorb into his political thinking the changes and events that were happening in Italian socialism, especially the clash between reformists and revolutionaries.

Mussolini's political development came about through contact with and ideological influences of the various currents of socialism, from the intransigent and evolutionist, to the more revolutionary and Marxist and, in particular, that of nascent revolutionary syndicalism, without forgetting the influence of anarchism. Mussolini's socialism

had an ideologically heterogeneous character²¹ that was built around two concerns that mark, in the formation of his political ideas, two major phases of his stay in Switzerland. The first, from his arrival in the country until the beginning of 1903, was centered on the problem of the socialist ideal, its strength, the need to define it and spread its word through propaganda. The second phase was marked by his affirmation of a revolutionary concept of socialism and was based on real and intellectual experiences which gave him a more coherent view of social reality and political action.

This fundamental condition of experimentation and enrichment and the rapid widening of his circle of political contacts was made possible by the particular circumstances of Italian socialism in Switzerland. Mussolini's entry into the world of politics, his success and his thoughts were firmly bound to this reality, and it is from this crucial point that one must begin any analysis of his political thinking.

The arrival of the young Mussolini in Switzerland coincided with a delicate moment of internal reorganization within the Swiss section of the PSI following the departure of the party's secretary, Serrati in 1902, and that of Carlo Dell'Avale, the editor of the party's newspaper, *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, on June 14 of the same year. For a short while, Salvatore Donatini, a socialist lawyer from Siena, occupied the posts of both party secretary and newspaper editor: it was a difficult task which soon discouraged him and led him to giving up the secretaryship and to only editing the newspaper for a brief period.²² Notwithstanding this, his contribution was significant, as we shall see.

After Serrati's departure, the executive committee began the process to find a new secretary. The absence of a suitable candidate in Switzerland prompted the executive committee to look for one in Italy. A man was needed who could rise to the situation, who could consolidate and improve the party's political organization in Switzerland in line with the general trend in Italian socialism, that is, greater professionalism both at regional and local levels.²³ It was their recent adherence to the PSI, something strongly desired by Serrati but accepted by the PSI itself only reluctantly, which allowed Italian socialists in Switzerland to turn to their counterparts in Italy over the question of a new secretary.²⁴

The process revealed itself to be anything but easy as the first candidate chosen, Nino Mazzoni from Ravenna, was unable to accept the offer: his local section, that of Ravenna, staunchly opposed any move, claiming that the moment was not right given the severe tensions and conflicts

between socialists and republicans in their area. Enrico Ferri was forced to intervene personally to convince his comrades in Switzerland to abandon their first choice and he himself strove to find a second candidate, Ernesto Cesare Longobardi²⁵ who, in turn, also rejected the offer.²⁶ At this point, the executive committee decided to nominate the then editor of *L'Avvenire*, the Milanese lawyer, Tito Barboni, who had recently arrived in Switzerland. On August 9, *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore* published Mussolini's second article while, in the same edition, Barboni announced officially his assumption of roles as both the newspaper's editor and the party's secretary.²⁷ Thus, this difficult phase of transition and of the lack of leaders within the Socialist Party in Switzerland came to an end.

The contributions of Mussolini to the socialist newspaper from August 1902 were made at a time that was significant for Italian Socialist publication in Switzerland: the recent arrival of the PSI in the country brought the beginning of new political activity which the newspaper had the job of publicizing. After the departure of Dell'Avalle as editor and under the new editorship of the lawyer, Donatini, from June 21, 1902, there was a redefining of the newspaper's role and content. *L'Avvenire* had for some time been an object of severe criticism, such as that of Serrati who jokingly described it as "a vegetable garden" when alluding to the extreme variety and confusion of its contents, to its lack of in-depth articles, and to the excessive space given over to personal disputes.²⁸

As soon as Donatini took on his role, he announced the direction in which he intended to take the party's newspaper. Donatini wrote that the workers' organization was completely lacking in ideas and socialist ideals and that, if on the one hand he recognized the work which had been carried out on the constitution and consolidation of the party, on the other hand he declared the need to use the party's newspaper as a tool of propaganda, "to develop the idea of an objective towards which these organizations must work," without, however, ignoring information on the "practical questions of the moment." Donatini stressed that it was necessary to change the newspaper's structure by reducing the number of letters published and, above all, by ridding the paper of "deplorable personal questions." This would give greater space to new contributors, "so that the newspaper will act as a gymnasium for whoever wants to get used to writing."²⁹ This change was welcomed with satisfaction by many, who called it a "revolution,"³⁰ but many were also unhappy and did not renew their subscriptions. The situation resolved itself with the departure of Donatini and the arrival of Barboni³¹ who, although slightly less radical, continued along the path his predecessor had embarked upon.

Mussolini's arrival at the newspaper therefore coincided with the broadening of the party's publication and with its increased commitment to theory. In this way, the young teacher from Romagna had the opportunity to engage in the task of political reflection, a task which the newspaper not only allowed but also needed in order to fulfill its mission of political education. In contrast with what she later claimed during the years of Fascism, Angelica Balabanoff,³² who knew and became friends with the young Romagnol in Switzerland and in doing so contributed in a decisive way to his Marxist education, maintained that Mussolini's integration into the world of Italian socialism in Switzerland came about not only through the generosity of comrades toward a needy young man who was financially broke but that rather it was a coming together, a reciprocal exchange. For the socialist Italian emigrants, it meant accepting into their number an able and intellectually erudite man, useful in a party that had formed only recently, was often torn apart by internal squabbles and lacked militants who were good at organization and propaganda: for Mussolini, involvement in the PSI in Switzerland represented the opportunity to have a prestigious job, something in line with his aspirations. This does not detract from the generosity of the various socialists who welcomed and helped him during his stay in Switzerland.

So in Switzerland, Mussolini found an environment that was conducive to his rapid political and professional success. An Italian socialist living in Ticino remembered, "Mussolini was an assiduous contributor to *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*: his articles were popular and read by [socialist] comrades and this was something that pleased Serrati."³³ Mussolini's fame grew in line with his political activity. At the congress of the Swiss branch of the PSI held in Zurich in March 1904, he participated as a delegate of the Geneva section, thus demonstrating his rise and acceptance in politics. Mussolini's popularity was also helped along by a series of legal actions against him: his expulsion from various Swiss cantons (from Berne in June 1903 and from Geneva in April 1904) provoked much reaction in both the Swiss and Italian socialist and anarchist press.³⁴

By now, Mussolini was well known not only in the political worlds of Swiss and Italian socialism but also to the federal authorities: police surveillance of him began during the strike in Berne of 1903 and continued during his stay in Switzerland.³⁵ The young revolutionary was certainly popular as a public speaker although no record has survived of many of his lectures. The Lausanne police who were present during the debate between Mussolini and the evangelical priest, Alfredo Tagialatela, on March 25,

1904, described him as a “brillant orateur” (brilliant speaker), “fort bien documenté” (very well prepared) who spoke for an hour in front of 450 people.³⁶ The lecture, which was praised by Serrati in the party newspaper, was later published as a pamphlet by the Biblioteca Internazionale di Propaganda Razionalista (International Library of Rationalist Propaganda), a small publishing house set up in Geneva by Luigi Piazzalunga with the help of Mussolini himself.³⁷ Some years later in the *Gazette de Lausanne*, another eyewitness remembered attending a meeting held by the Belgian socialist, Emile Vandervelde, during which he was impressed by the physical presence of the young Mussolini and by his “grandiloquence” when he spoke.³⁸ As far as the development of Mussolini’s political ideas was concerned, his time in Switzerland represented a real apprenticeship during which he learned the skills and major problems related to political and union work. It hardened his view of politics in a revolutionary direction as he followed the vicissitudes of Italian socialism, although in the particular context of Italian socialism in Switzerland; it was an environment that involved unending work with Italian propaganda organizations and with the political education of emigrants. It meant, “creating groups that are strong in both number and belief” as Mussolini described his work at the beginning of his political career.³⁹

Such a program of work came up against a series of obstacles in the atmosphere of conflict surrounding Italian emigrants in Switzerland. When taking up his political position, the Swiss PSI’s new secretary, Barboni, had stressed the need to unite against the ever-present tendency toward bitter conflict that was not only verbal but also often physical. “How far we are from a feeling of brotherhood between workers!” wrote one of *L’Avenir*’s correspondents about a violent clash between Piedmontese and Milanese.⁴⁰ This explains why, at least in Switzerland, socialist propaganda was full of calls for solidarity and brotherhood, calls that were not just repetitions of simple, well-established socialist rhetoric, but served as constant exhortations to comrades to behave well toward each other and that socialism was putting itself forward as the real expression of a new and superior form of humanity.⁴¹ Mussolini also promoted this ideal:

This force [the socialist ideal] which has its finest and most eloquent expression in the proletariat that rises up towards the shining goal of Justice; this force which aims at humanizing the men of all the earth has already manifested itself as a sentiment which is making them brothers, an idea that makes altruism a right, a daily task of solidarity.⁴²

Daily was, indeed, the task of socialists in Switzerland to educate the masses to a level of political consciousness that would enable them to behave in a truly socialist way. Serrati knew this as he fully understood the world of the emigrant workers and all the obstacles that political education had to overcome, that it had to fight against indifference or, even worse, the hostility that many workers felt toward political and union organization.⁴³ These problems were in some way linked to the nature of Italian emigration to Switzerland: it was an unstable body of people due to the constant stream of arrivals and departures and therefore required a continuous and uninterrupted process of political education.⁴⁴ To complicate this already difficult task of organizing workers were also various Swiss entrepreneurs who recruited poorly skilled and politically naïve workers straight from Italy in a practice that was denounced by the socialist newspaper, *L'Avvenire*.⁴⁵

This difficult political task of propaganda and union organization was aimed not only at the defense and economic betterment of workers, it also had to solve the poor image that Italian workers had in Switzerland. Through education, the party and union bodies tried to aid the integration of the emigrants into Swiss society.⁴⁶ To this end were organized awareness campaigns against violence, the use and abuse of “alcohol and the knife,” on the importance of hygiene, attention to personal appearance and cleanliness at home as well as the necessity of solidarity among workers.⁴⁷ In short, it meant removing Italian emigrants from the state of wretchedness in which they found themselves and improving both their material living conditions and their public profile.

These problems of deprivation were met with different ideas and different forms of political language. For the socialists who, like the party secretary Tito Barboni, already enjoyed a more comfortable position, poverty inspired a feeling of anger mixed with pity; Barboni described the arrival of emigrants on Swiss soil thus:

It is the season when leaves fall and swallows take flight for warmer lands... when our own countrymen bent double under the weight of bags containing their miserable rags pass through the border posts in groups, often heaped together in wagons and maybe trussed up inside as in a cage [...]. In the face of these ghostly images a cry of rebellion rises up from our consciences.⁴⁸

It was the rhetoric typical of a certain kind of socialism, one that highlighted the social and physical degradation of man, and hoped for the workers' physical and moral regeneration.⁴⁹ It was the kind of language

which, as in the case of the lawyer Barboni, was often in line with reformist ideals which insisted on the improvement of material standards of living through slow changes.

The response to conditions of wretchedness was very different among the socialist fringe which placed socialist ideals before material problems.⁵⁰ This was the case of Mussolini: his language was similar to that of Donatini, being intent not only on improving workers' living conditions but also, and above all, on promoting their intellectual and moral education and developing their political consciousness through written and spoken propaganda rather than through the organizational programs, which in contrast stood at the center of Serrati's thought.⁵¹

The influence of Donatini on Mussolini was undoubtedly important. The lawyer from Siena defended a vision of socialism that was "political"; his ideal was that of the political party as a guide which championed the ethical dimension of socialist action against those "economist" leanings which were typical, in particular, of the anarcho-syndicalist group which at that time enjoyed a strong presence in Geneva.

But the social question is not simply about one's stomach. The economic question is the most immediate and the most important question, but it is not the only one. The social question is also about raising the level of moral and intellectual understanding; the working class will not be able to free itself until it can control itself, that is, until it is morally better.⁵²

It was in this direction that the magazine launched unsuccessfully by Mussolini and Donatini between the end of 1903 and the beginning of 1904 intended to commit itself; its aim was to "raise the worker's level of culture and widen his intellectual horizon," to fill "the deplorable gap left by the party's official press which is forced to overlook the educational and moral aspects of our emancipation movement as it is always absorbed in the particular needs of the day to day struggle."⁵³

Mussolini's view was that the party's ultimate aim should be the reaffirmation of socialist ideals by turning its attention away from transient problems to spread the principles of socialism: this was a program of Marxist and revolutionary socialism that came about in those years as an alternative to reformist socialism.⁵⁴ Reformist socialism concentrated its efforts on winning legal battles in Parliament and exploited the achievements and battles won by workers' economic organizations while avoiding revolutionary extremism.⁵⁵ Arguing against this trend, the revolutionary

syndicalist, Arturo Labriola, maintained indeed that socialism in its new democratic and reformist guise was reducing itself to a simple “matter of material wellbeing” while it should be a “compendium of all the efforts that are tearing away the mantle of the old society in the field of ethics, in the field of economics as well as in the sphere of politics.” With regard to this, Labriola pointed out that, “the revolutionary aims of Socialism are not always in accordance with the immediate interests of workers.”⁵⁶ The socialism advocated by the new revolutionaries, to whom Mussolini was close, looked toward a future that was radically different and in sharp contrast to reality as it then stood; it was a target that had to be maintained unaltered and reexamined on a regular basis to stop it being get lost in the maze of unforeseeable problems.

The specific circumstances surrounding Italian emigration to Switzerland and the need for a continuous program of propaganda and education undoubtedly favored in Switzerland the spread of those trends of Italian socialism (first Enrico Ferri’s intransigent and then Labriola’s revolutionary syndicalist version) which opposed reformism and supported the need for a continuous promotion of ideals and political education.⁵⁷

Therefore, Mussolini found in Switzerland a climate that was favorable to the elaboration of a vision of political revolution, which laid stress on the ethical and pedagogic aspects of socialism, that is, a climate that suited his temperament and intellectual development. The growth of this vision of revolution is plainly visible in Mussolini’s writings. After first supporting the need for gradual socialist action, a policy that was a long way from promoting “sudden attacks” and was dominant at the time, Mussolini’s political thought became more anti-reformist.⁵⁸ In an article written on the eve of the congress held at Imola between September 6 and 9, 1902, Mussolini sided openly against the policies of Filippo Turati. According to Mussolini, the abandonment of the policy of reaction and the adoption of a liberal direction by Giovanni Giolitti’s government were not the result of a political victory won by the extreme left but were the result of “a great moral strength that has developed in the whole country” and had forced the monarchy to “turn the rudder of the political ship towards the shores of wise government, shores which until now had merely been glimpsed.” Mussolini ended the article by stating the need for socialism to return “to its ancient methods of struggle,” to an “old, invigorating policy of socialism.”⁵⁹

With this reference to the socialist propaganda that had characterized the first stage of the expansion and success of the PSI, Mussolini was declaring openly his political leanings, although this does not imply for

the moment any schism from the reformists, as for Mussolini, just as for the majority of socialists, it was necessary to maintain the party's unity. However, in celebrating the success of the party's restored unity at the congress of Imola, Mussolini defined unequivocally his vision of socialism, a vision in which the dimension of ideas, the "moral reality," should govern men and political trends.

When men replace the Idea, the bourgeois ego (composed of petty vanities, obstinacy and meanness) reemerges in the soul.⁶⁰

It was exactly this gentrification of socialism and its resultant drift that Arturo Labriola had long been criticizing as part of his anti-reformist campaign that was becoming increasingly radical and which gave birth to the publication of *Avanguardia Socialista* toward the end of 1902. The aim of this weekly, to which Mussolini also contributed from September 1903, was to define with greater precision the profile and the program of the revolutionary wing. Until that date, Mussolini's journalism concentrated on the original socialist vision that laid stress upon the importance of moral strength, exalted the socialist ideal and bewailed the difficulties involved in its diffusion, difficulties to which the problematic task of socialist organization in Switzerland could attest; these were the themes of Mussolini's articles, chosen according to the requirements of the circumstances.

A second phase of political reflection began in 1903 when Mussolini developed an idea of revolution that was clearer and better structured. His political vision was based on his various personal experiences such as his participation in the struggles of Italian workers in Switzerland and the history of disputes and political radicalization within Italian socialism.

When Mussolini left Lausanne for Berne he had the chance to experience for real the practicalities, difficulties and the severe social tensions involved in an important strike by carpenters. Mussolini was sent by the Lausanne Union of Manual Laborers and Bricklayers, of which he was secretary, to help out with this industrial dispute.

The experience of this strike demonstrated that when it came to labor conflicts, it was possible to act in a way that placed a political message alongside a defense of material interests. Indeed, in Berne, it was not only the question of whether to continue the strike or not, it also involved linking symbolic political action with demonstrations of solidarity by workers in support of the strikers. These two aspects of struggle, the political and economic, had been artificially separated by the arguments

that accompanied the slow growth of the PSI in Switzerland. The party had been organized by those who, like Serrati, placed the importance of a political organization at loggerheads with the wishes of other socialists who concentrated only on the economic struggle to be carried forward by the unions in Switzerland.⁶¹ This separation had not resolved the problem of the relationship between those supporting political and economic action, and the debate on whether union action should remain politically neutral or not remain high on the agenda.

In Berne, Mussolini came into contact with the work of the anarcho-syndicalists—in particular with the group led by Luigi Bertoni—and experienced how it was precisely in the field of strikes that they concentrated their efforts of political struggle. The economic question, which so far had been absent from Mussolini's articles, was now, thanks to his experience in Berne, put on the same level as his educational agenda.⁶² This contact with labor disputes coincided with Mussolini's need to deepen his knowledge of Marxism. The first indications of this need appear in October 1903, when in one of his articles Mussolini recalled and explained briefly a history of socialism written by Werner Sombart,⁶³ a famous German economist and sociologist. Sombart's work injected into Mussolini's political thought the first ideas of historical materialism, that socialism was a result of a theory born of a particular socioeconomic environment, that is capitalism, and of the needs of the working class. This materialistic interpretation of history and of relationships within society brought to Mussolini's vision of politics a strong radicalization, already tested by practical experience and now supported by the theoretical idea of an inevitable conflict between the interests of the bourgeoisie and those of the proletariat, a conflict which would be resolved through class struggle that had as its objective social revolution. However, this deterministic and fatalistic interpretation of historical materialism must have seemed too mechanical to Mussolini and was the reason why at the end of his article he took care to stress, by using the words of Sombart, the importance of a program of socialist education and propaganda in the preparation and success of the revolution, and this to counter those who placed too much faith in the gradual and peaceful arrival of a socialist society.

On October 11, 1903, Mussolini wrote his first article for *Avanguardia Socialista*; within a short time, his work in the publication intensified and from October 25, his written contributions became frequent. In the pages of this publication, edited by Arturo Labriola and Walter Mocchi, Mussolini found a suitable space in which to express

freely his political ideas and to expound the outcome of a political journey that had led him to join the most extreme wing of socialism. It was a clear choice of position.

With regard to political ideas, the period of Mussolini's collaboration with *Avanguardia Socialista* coincided with a moment of reflection on the nature of revolution. Through his study of Marxism and general revolutionary literature, Mussolini learned about the inevitability of class conflict and revolution. However, he was also forced to recognize that there was a lack of detailed studies and agreed guidance on the policies and tactics to adopt in preparation for revolution and that above all there was little advice on the political role of violence and of the masses.

At the socialist congress of Zurich, held on March 19 and 20, 1904, the revolutionary socialists, who numbered Mussolini in their ranks, took up a pragmatic stance on the use of violence which, in their view, depended on historical context and the attitude of the bourgeoisie, and was not in itself an object of political debate.⁶⁴ In reality, this neutral and pragmatic view hid the understanding, and maybe the certainty, that revolution was inevitably violent.⁶⁵

Mussolini questioned himself many times on the conduct and process of revolution. The task of propaganda, which was regarded by many as central to the tactics of revolution, was aimed at preparing minds and making ready the forces necessary for revolution, but was not seen as part of the revolutionary event itself. This shortcoming came in part from the ideological mix of Marxism and evolutionism that characterized much socialist writing and led to an interpretation of society's future that was too deterministic. Before the arrival of revolutionary syndicalism, anarchist literature represented for Mussolini fertile ground in which to investigate further the dynamics of revolution.

From his reading of Kropotkin's *Words of a Rebel*, which he translated for *Le Reveil*, an anarchist newspaper published in Geneva and edited by Luigi Bertoni, Mussolini discovered a new component which he added to his political vision and that was the necessity and historical importance of small groups. According to Kropotkin, revolution would break out due to a series of concomitant factors, from the breaking down of state power to the action of small revolutionary groups and finally to the participation of the masses.⁶⁶ Later, in Pareto's theory of élites, Mussolini found a first scientific confirmation of the role of revolutionary minorities.

Mussolini's discovery of revolutionary syndicalism between the summer and fall of 1904, just when it became a distinct strand within Italian socialism, provided him with further guidance on the revolutionary process:

Today, however, we see a new socialist idea, an idea which is profoundly "aristocratic." Socialism, which has become an economic necessity for the proletariat, is concerned only with the interests of this martyred class. [...] The aim is no longer the nebulous socialization of the means of production, but the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. [...] The work of socialism has now become a dual process of differentiation and integration. From now onwards we shall differentiate ourselves in our relationships and in the lives of our communities by widening even more the gap that separates our ideas from those that govern bourgeois society. We shall promote the integration of technical, intellectual and moral capabilities into the labor unions, the nuclei of the future socialist community.⁶⁷

The effort described so far that Mussolini made to develop theory is only one aspect of his complex and heterogeneous political thinking. Although he followed the evolution of the anti-reformist opposition set out in Labriola's newspaper, Mussolini did not abandon his original ideas about the structure of socialism, a structure in which the party stood at the center of political action and had the crucial role of educating the masses. Labriola and other syndicalists shared the idea that the party should promote education but, in reality, they entrusted to the union a role that was increasingly important in counterbalancing the weight that the legal and parliamentary struggle was assuming within the party, and, since a revolution would essentially be against the state, it was a role to be worked upon outside and against institutional politics.⁶⁸

Mussolini never shared these conclusions: from syndicalism, Mussolini drew the idea of using Marxism as a form of revolutionary teaching that brought politics back to the original territory of class struggle and, indeed, Mussolini continued his career in the ranks of the PSI trying to make it adopt a direction and revolutionary program that would result not merely in an electoral battle but rather in both the educational development of the masses and the ideological struggle against opposing forces.⁶⁹ This was a concept of socialism that Mussolini developed from the very beginning of his stay in Switzerland.

STUDIES

Politics was an important part, although not the only part, of Mussolini's stay in Switzerland: it was accompanied by a growing need for intellectual development. Mussolini's program of study took various forms: reading newspapers, studying books in various libraries and even the partial and limited attendance at university. This effort to study was

born of particular circumstances and reasons. Mussolini became a point of reference for anticlerical and anti-religious propaganda (these were themes that were very important for Italian socialism in Switzerland) and this certainly prompted him to widen his knowledge, particularly his scientific knowledge. Mussolini's familiarity with the student community in Geneva and Lausanne influenced his decision to begin a course of study and this resulted in his enrollment as a student at the University of Lausanne in May 1904.

Mussolini's studies had a significant effect upon his political ideas and more generally upon his view of the world. Not only did Mussolini add to scientific knowledge already gained from his studies in Italy, and to his knowledge of evolutionary biology in particular, but likewise, he came into contact with new cultural ideas, with scientific and philosophical theories, especially those of Nietzsche whose work explored the irrational side of man's character and saw in life, in its strength and expansion, the font of all human and moral behavior. Mussolini's view of man and of society was enriched by new theories that he tried to incorporate into his interpretation of socialism. The culminating moment of Mussolini's intellectual journey was precisely his enrollment at the University of Lausanne where, in addition to drawing near to the ideas of Vilfredo Pareto, some of whose courses he followed, he deepened his knowledge of science and consequently developed a relativist approach to reality. Just as with politics, Mussolini's intellectual development was intimately linked with socio-cultural factors present in Switzerland.

Mussolini's desire to take up his studies came after an intense season of propaganda and political activity, something which had dominated his first year of residence in Switzerland. The decision was taken after his return to the country: he had left it for a while due to his mother's ill health but when this improved toward the end of 1903, he came back partly to avoid military service.

At the end of January 1904 and after a brief stay in France at Annemasse in the company of Salvatore Donatini, who had gone there after his expulsion from the Canton of Geneva, Mussolini moved to Geneva himself with the intention of enrolling at the university and he began to visit the university library regularly.⁷⁰ The works that he studied regarded mainly the question of the existence of God; this was the subject of a public debate that Mussolini held with the evangelical priest, Tagliatela, on March 26, 1904. The debate took place during a large anticlerical campaign, a campaign which Italian socialism in Switzerland

had been running since the beginning of the century in direct response to the competition between socialist and religious organizations, in particular the Opera Bonomelli.⁷¹

Socialists and Catholics vied with each other over the same mass of emigrants that had gone to Switzerland. Anticlerical propaganda had a politically precise objective: to hinder and limit the work of the Opera Bonomelli which not only tended to take away potential militants from the socialists but also turned Italian emigrants into a group which was very difficult to organize and to direct their efforts into labor disputes. The anticlericalist struggle was therefore considered as indispensable for the success and advancement of socialism in Switzerland, and internal divisions took place according to, if anything, the content of the anticlerical propaganda. Many socialists, among whom stood Mussolini, followed the group *Libero Pensiero* (Free Thought)⁷² and developed programs that were not simply anticlerical but became a general fight against religion. This tendency fell beyond *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore's* anticlerical line that was bound up with the struggle against the Opera Bonomelli: indeed Serrati considered *Libero Pensiero's* militancy a waste of energy and effort despite his initial adherence to the anti-religious and anticlerical movement; on the other hand the famous socialist and future revolutionary syndicalist, Angelo Oliviero Olivetti, believed that socialism was above all a battle against religious dogma.⁷³ Mussolini very soon became a point of reference on the question of religion and he received many requests for lectures on the subject.

Mussolini's reading in Geneva's library was, however, not limited only to socialism's anticlerical battle; it was in part influenced by his contact with an environment that was diverse in nature and reached beyond socialism. Frequenting the students of the local university introduced Mussolini to a cultural world that was both wider and more complex. If one looks at the list of books consulted by the various visitors to the library during the early months of 1904, one notes that Mussolini's choices fitted in well with that of other readers, particularly with those of Slav students.⁷⁴ Their book choices were often the same as those most requested by Mussolini (Nietzsche, Lichtenberger, Espinas and Labriola) and it is not unusual to find in the list of book loans requests that link works by Marx with those by Nietzsche, evidence of how a certain student culture, of Slav origin, was attracted by this juxtaposition of Marxist and Nietzschean thought rather than by socialist ideas.⁷⁵ That this was "fashionable" reading can be proved by the fact that many of the works chosen by different readers belonged to

the scientific culture of Late-Positivism that developed between 1800 and 1900 and was promoted by the rise, in the scientific and academic world, of psychology and sociology and was dominated by the question of the masses and the decline of peoples. It is, however, very probable that Mussolini's reading choices, at least as far as those in French were concerned, were influenced by cultural interests popular with students who frequented the library in Geneva.

Mussolini's familiarity with the Slav contingent of the local student community was aided not only by common academic interests but also by social and economic conditions that brought the Slav and Italian communities together. In a memorial of Geneva's Italian community for a petition, it was underlined how Slavs and Italians resident in Switzerland were the ethnic groups least protected by the Swiss authorities and were the most stigmatized and economically exploited sections of the country's population.⁷⁶ The nature of the contacts and relationships that Mussolini maintained with the Slav community has been distorted by fascist biographies. It was an experience that certainly cannot be reduced to a series of amorous adventures, but neither can it be considered a sort of apprenticeship in a "school of revolution." Indeed, there is no evidence that Mussolini had frequent contact with Russian revolutionaries: the contacts were sporadic and occurred by chance, as happened at the commemoration of the Paris Commune held at the Handwerk Hall in Geneva on March 18, 1903. Mussolini did frequent the community of students, many of whom came from Russia, but those had come to Switzerland more often for reasons of study than for political motives.⁷⁷ In his autobiography, Mussolini recalled and listed the names of some of those emigrants.

Along with Serrati, the publicist who had recently returned from New York, my bohemian lifestyle was shared by Tornoff, whom I have already mentioned, Eisen, the Romanian, Bontscheff, a Bulgarian, Gateaux, a Parisian and Sigismondo Bartoli, a tailor from Rome. We helped each other in turn. The well-being of each of us was everyone's responsibility.

Records make it clear that those mentioned by Mussolini were neither activists nor political exponents shadowed by the police but really only students. In his autobiography, Mussolini recalled above all Eleonora Horochowsky-Shéviakoff, a Russian from Yaroslavl, who was enrolled in Geneva's Faculty of Medicine, gained a diploma in August 1904 and a doctorate in gynecology in 1908.⁷⁸ Mussolini had an affair with her.

Teneff Panaiote Tomoff (or Tommoff), a Bulgarian, also a medical student in Lausanne, received a doctorate in 1909.⁷⁹ Barni Bontcheff, again a Bulgarian, also studied medicine in Geneva.⁸⁰ The Romanian, Maurizio Eisen, the last to be mentioned in Mussolini's autobiography, was a student of chemistry in Lausanne.⁸¹

Of these people and the contacts that Mussolini had with them, there remains only the description that appears in Mussolini's autobiography. In contrast to the claims made in fascist biographies about the young Mussolini's links with Slav emigrants in Switzerland, these contacts were mainly exchanges that contributed to his education. Therefore, it was not political internationalism, although widespread in the Helvetic Confederation, that gave Mussolini's Swiss experience a cosmopolitan character, rather it was his involvement in the university environment, both outside and inside the lecture theaters.

As far as the realm of ideas was concerned, the reading undertaken in Geneva's library enabled Mussolini to widen and bring up to date his scientific knowledge in line with the cultural changes that had taken place since the final years of the previous century⁸²: it was at this point that he discovered Friedrich Nietzsche's work, which was in turn tempered by the commentaries of Henri Lichtenberger and Alfred Fouillée. Although the latter recognized the originality of the German philosopher's thought, he preferred the conclusions of the French philosopher, Jean-Marie Guyau.⁸³ Thus Mussolini contemporaneously became acquainted with the thought of both these philosophers who came together in the celebration of life lived intensely and free from all external influences. Most of Mussolini's reading was directed toward a critique of old ideas of morality with particular reference to the latest scientific ideas in the fields of biology and psychology. Morality became, notably in the work of Nietzsche and Guyau, a separate matter, unconnected to the question of universal good.⁸⁴ Fouillée's critical review of Nietzsche's thought allowed the young socialist to learn about the German philosopher's ideas without committing him to his most radical and anti-socialist conclusions, conclusions which were rejected by Fouillée in favor of the more positive and sympathetic vision of Guyau.⁸⁵ The works of Nietzsche, Fouillée and Espinas examined, in ways and styles that were very different, the problem of human understanding, its limits and its relationship with the totality of aspects that make up, and at the same time, condition life. It was a question that dominated the transition between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, became central to the philosophical thought of the time and found its culmination

in France, in the ideas of Bergson, its most famous representative.⁸⁶ It was in France that philosophical deliberation began in the 1890s in a cultural climate of reexamination, and internal and external criticism, of positivism. Such questioning was simultaneously accompanied by advancements in scientific psychology and the consequent discovery of the irrational. In this climate, the need was felt to reform positivism without rejecting it; rather it should be “spiritualized.” For example, Fouillée had tried to reconcile positivism with idealism in order to reaffirm the importance of the will against biological mechanism.⁸⁷ Alfred Espinas, a one-time supporter of Herbert Spencer’s ideas, acknowledged the limits of Spencer’s thought and put forward the necessity of a more mature philosophy,⁸⁸ based on the study of human behavior. This was a matter which Espinas considered crucial in the French philosophical and political context, and it was, indeed, upon these questions of determinism, freedom of choice and its moral and juridical implications, that French contemporary thought was deeply divided.⁸⁹ He proposed the examination of individual and group behavior to relaunch the study of how society works and tackle evils whose origins should be sought, according to Espinas, not in the economy but in politics and morality.⁹⁰

In Espinas’ view, biology was still the science that could explain society’s workings, society being understood as a set of rules and ways of living which came about through the adaptation and reaction of any given human group to its particular surroundings. The problem rested upon, if anything, the study of origins and causes: according to Espinas, rules and customs were generated in an obscure part of the collective consciousness whose origins and stimuli were as yet unknown.⁹¹ Espinas based his theories on recent psychological studies to demonstrate how human behavior was in reality conditioned by emotions and in only an indirect way by ideas.⁹² In his quest for a new philosophy of action, the French sociologist stressed sentiment, will and desire, terms which were intimately linked and interchangeable. Action had to be supported by belief and the future could only be built on convictions that were supported by strong emotions:

we believe that we can act as we wish and turn the object of our preferences into reality; we believe confidently in our possession of the ability to create. We believe ourselves free, and in effect we are, subjectively, since without the force of our will, without the ardor of our passions and without the strength and perseverance of our convictions, nascent realities would remain in a state of nothingness.⁹³

Espinas certainly was not a follower of individualism and his philosophy, even if it seems an echo of Nietzsche's idea of willpower, was in reality based solidly on an organicist view of society, in which the individual's behavior was strongly predetermined. It was still a biological view of society but was not bound to a rational understanding of human behavior, which depended ultimately on unknown forces. As for Fouillée, his was an attempt to recreate and rediscover a spiritual dimension in human life, with science as its foundation.

It is difficult to evaluate what Mussolini might have gained from Espinas' book; indeed, library records show that he withdrew the book six times. It is possible that its insistence on a biological and psychological, rather than a rational, interpretation of human actions, and the assertion that they were of necessity determined by strong beliefs, struck Mussolini and confirmed his "evangelical" view⁹⁴ of socialism, a view based on the need for a theoretical stimulus and the importance of moral force in political actions. Espinas' theories allowed the celebration of the realm of ideas within scientific rather than metaphysical knowledge and it is very probable that it was in this moral, biological, human and not metaphysical dimension that the ideas of Nietzsche and Guyau found one of their logical destinations in the developing ideology of the young revolutionary. Thanks to the work of the two philosophers, Mussolini brought to the orthodox view of socialism, with its principle of solidarity, a new vision based on the celebration of life itself with neither precise aims nor ideals.

Deism's morality of renunciation will make way for "human morality": this is based on the principle of universal brotherhood, on the complete and free development as well as the fertile expansion of that mass of energies that make up the whole human persona!⁹⁵

Thus, Mussolini's studies in Geneva allowed him to expand his education into new scientific and philosophical areas which he then tried to integrate into his vision of socialism. However, Mussolini was confined to studying in the university library as his enrollment in the university was not possible due to his expulsion from the canton. Nevertheless, Mussolini was able to enroll at the university in Lausanne. He moved there after his release from prison in Bellinzona and his return to Romandy. Mussolini's student documentation shows that he matriculated on May 7, 1904.⁹⁶

Mussolini studied at the university for the summer term, from May, when he enrolled, until the middle of July. His student record lists three courses run by the Faculty of Social Sciences: Professor Pareto's course in

Political Economy which was, however, taught by Pasquale Boninsegni, who was making his debut at the university teaching some of Pareto's courses⁹⁷; he also attended a course of Sociology, again run by Pareto; and a General Philosophy course taught by Professor Maurice Millioud.

Mussolini's enrollment at university has given rise to argument over his actual presence in the institution's lecture theaters⁹⁸ and above all over the influence of Pareto's ideas. Although one can very probably exclude any direct contact with Pareto,⁹⁹ the influence of his ideas, albeit via Boninsegni, is documented.¹⁰⁰ It should also be noted that, at this time, nascent revolutionary syndicalism often made reference to Pareto's *Systèmes Socialistes*. It is possible that some of the Italian professor's ideas came to Mussolini in this way. An early written reference to the idea of élites can be found in an article of July 30, 1904,¹⁰¹ at the same time, therefore, as Mussolini's studies. He referred directly to Pareto's ideas in an article for *Avanguardia Socialista*, which contained a report on a lecture given by Pareto in Geneva at the beginning of October 1904. However, this does not prove a deep knowledge of Pareto's work by Mussolini, who in the article limited himself to summarizing the lecture, from which he selected various ideas that might be useful for the battle against reformism.¹⁰²

The overwhelming attention given to Pareto's influence on Mussolini has overshadowed what is perhaps the most important aspect of his university experience, and that was his attendance at Millioud's philosophy course. In contrast to Pareto's lectures, a certain number of indications testify to Mussolini's presence at some of the courses run by the professor from Romandy. Millioud's General Philosophy course during the summer term of 1904 was dedicated to nature, to man and to the question of morality and metaphysics.¹⁰³ Mussolini did not begin the course prior to Monday, May 9, that is, after his arrival in Lausanne and his enrollment. In May, teaching was dedicated to the origins of life and the evolution of animal species, following the development of scientific thought, in particular contemporary thought and in accordance with theories of evolution. Millioud explained not only these theories but also the difficult battles encountered in their assertion. Therefore, they were not simple courses on the history of classic philosophical thought, but were about a way of thinking that renewed the link with science.

The course could not fail to interest Mussolini, attracted as he was by scientific knowledge in its revolutionary dimension as a destroyer of dogma and an exponent of new truths. Beginning on June 6, Millioud examined the problem of man and his origin, a theme that he developed over the following weeks, passing on to the study of early civilizations at

the end of June. On Monday, June 13, Mussolini borrowed a copy of Gustave Le Bon's *L'Homme et les sociétés. Leurs origines et leur histoire*¹⁰⁴ from the university library in Lausanne. The content of this book has much in common with the themes covered in Millioud's course and it is therefore probable that Mussolini decided to borrow it on the same day as Millioud's lecture.¹⁰⁵ The choice cannot be explained otherwise: indeed, Le Bon was known for his writings on crowds (*Psychologie des Foules*, published in 1895) and on socialism (*Psychologie du socialisme*, published in 1898) and certainly not for his work written in 1881. Furthermore, it is significant that the record of library loans shows that during the whole of 1904, Le Bon's book was borrowed only by Mussolini and by a certain Stoyan Simeonoff, a Bulgarian, who also attended Millioud's course.¹⁰⁶

Mussolini not only attended parts the course, as can be proven, but also knew the professor personally.¹⁰⁷ For Mussolini, the path of academic learning did not last long. Nevertheless, he did not abandon his inclination and curiosity for study. The figure of the academic or scientist was often a pose that he adopted and flaunted in his writings, and in doing so he fell in line with Socialist culture that saw in science much of its future and many of its hopes for change. However, at the turn of the century, science was undergoing many changes: many things seen previously as certainties were being questioned by new scientific discoveries, and it seemed that it was exactly this lack of certainty that would characterize the future of scientific knowledge, something which in the eyes of many was evidence of the fallibility of science's attempt to explain the world.¹⁰⁸

Through his reading and the courses undertaken at the University of Lausanne, and in contrast to those who saw relativity, that is, a lack of absolutes, as one of science's failings, Mussolini considered the changes that were taking place in the scientific world as a positive thing. The ongoing, insistent, discourse on science's relativity was for Mussolini the proof of the discipline's vitality and strength:

While dogma represents a fixed point, that is the crystallization of human thought within the narrow limits of a formula, science transforms itself with agility, assimilates every new discovery and modifies, if necessary, its methods of investigation: it is ready to do away with a whole past if it is seen to be incorrect.¹⁰⁹

In contrast to dogmatic concepts of reality, relativism assumed a central and positive role in Mussolini's vision of the world and one upon which he could base his entire comprehension of the reality surrounding him:

Nothing in this world is absolute. Everything is relative. Nothing is static forever but is in a state of constant change, subject to the perennial movement of forces.¹¹⁰

This relativist view of the world allowed Mussolini to make sense of the various educational experiences that he had gained during his time in Switzerland: Marxism and evolutionary science seen through ideas regarding constant change and the realities of both nature and society; while, at the same time, Nietzsche's vitalism confirmed the absence of absolute laws both in the fields of human life and in morality.

Mussolini's collection of experiences in Switzerland characterized a political and intellectual development that then matured in contact with new social and cultural realities. The significance of Mussolini's time in Switzerland lies above all in its intellectual dimension since it provided the bases for a particular view of the world, a view that Mussolini would subsequently modify and embellish but which he never abandoned completely.

NOTES

1. B. Mussolini, "Lettera a Sante Bedeschi, Gualtieri, 6 giugno 1902", in B. Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, edited by E. e D. Susmel, (Florence-Rome: La Fenice-Volpe, 1951–1980), vol. I, 210.
2. "La mia vita dal 29 luglio 1883 al 23 novembre 1911," (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, cit., vol. XXXIII, 248).
3. On these matters, see in particular G. Arlettaz and S. Arlettaz, *La Suisse et les étrangers. Immigration et formation nationale, 1848–1933*, (Lausanne: Editions Antipodes, 2004), 40, 41, 22–24. See also M. Vuilleumier, "Les ouvriers italiens en Suisse avant 1914: les difficultés d'une integration," in A. Bechelloni, M. Dreyfus and P. Milza, eds., *L'intégration italienne en France. Un siècle de présence italienne dans trois régions françaises (1880–1980)* (Brussels: Complexe, 1995), 409–420.
4. M. Cerutti, "Un secolo di emigrazione italiana in Svizzera (1870–1970), attraverso le fonti dell'Archivio federale," in *Studi e fonti. Pubblicazioni dell'Archivio federale svizzero*, XX, 1994, 12.
5. G.M. Sabino, «In Svizzera», in P. Bevilacqua, A. De Clementi and E. Franzina, eds., *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana. Arrivi*, (Rome: Donzelli, 2001), 148.
6. In his memoirs, the Italian socialist Luigi Fonti recalls the presence in Ticino of a sizable group of socialists from Emilia and Romagna, cf. L. Fonti, *Un socialista italiano in Ticino*, (Milan: Mimesis, 2010), 70.
7. P. Milza, *Mussolini*, (Paris: Fayard, 1999), 55.

8. Ibid., 55–56, for Milza’s ideas on the reasons for Mussolini’s departure.
9. Schoolteachers were a socio-professional group canvassed by the leadership of the PSI to engage in propaganda work. Cf. M. Ridolfi, *Il PSI e la nascita del partito di massa, 1892–1922*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1992), 182.
10. “Lettera a Teofilo Panizzi, Berna, 8 marzo 1903,” (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, cit. vol. XXXVIII, 1).
11. Archives Cantonales Vaudoises (henceforth ACV), Archives privées, Fonds Jaquillard (Robert), Benito Mussolini: photographies de groupe et photographies de procès-verbaux d’assemblée PP 736, 5, 3 (= T 9, 5), Meeting of August 29, 1902, and meeting of September 6, 1902.
12. Mussolini received a payment of 5 Francs for a lecture given at Coira. Cf. M. Bezençon, “La vie âpre et aventureuse de Mussolini en Suisse,” *L’Illustration*, 882, August 1938, 28.
13. Ten Francs has been chosen as a rate of payment as this was the rate paid by the publication, *Il Proletario*, edited by Serrati. Cf. “Lettera a Teofilo Panizzi, Berna, 8 marzo 1903,” (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, cit., vol. XXXVIII, 1).
14. The data have been taken from G. De Michelis, *L’emigrazione italiana nella Svizzera, Note redatte per incarico del Commissariato della Emigrazione (ministero degli Affari Esteri)*, (Rome: G. Bertero, 1903), p. 69. According to contemporary sources, the average monthly salary of a textile worker was approximately 70 Francs. Cf. Gemesse, “Oh! La svizzera che paese incantevole!” in *L’Avvenire del Lavoratore*, January 18, 1902.
15. G.M. Serrati, “Risposta alle sezioni di Zurigo,” in *L’Avvenire del Lavoratore*, January 18, 1902.
16. Data taken from De Michelis, *L’emigrazione italiana nella Svizzera*, cit., 69.
17. J.P. Tabin, A. Frauenfelder and C. Togni, *Temps d’assistance: le gouvernement des pauvres en Suisse romande depuis la fin du XIXe siècle*, (Lausanne: Antipodes, 2008), 35.
18. M. Vuilleumier, “Les exilés en Suisse et le mouvement ouvrier socialiste (1871–1914),” in M. Degl’Innocenti, ed., *L’esilio nella storia del movimento operaio e l’emigrazione economica*, (Manduria: Lacaita, 1999), 74–76.
19. From the beginning of the twentieth century, the social composition of Basel’s Italian emigrant community began to change with the rise of a petit bourgeois element: this created a division, both social and political, at the heart of the Italian community. Cf. P. Manz, *Emigrazione italiana a Basilea e nei suoi sobborghi 1890–1914: momenti di contatto tra operai immigrati e società locale*, (Lugano: Edizioni Alice, 1988), 34–41.
20. ACV, Département de justice et police, Secrétariat général, administration KVII, b, 22, Dossier Serrati, Police de Sureté, “Rapport de l’agent Girardet du 28 juillet 1904 n.988.” (Agent Girardet’s report of July 28, 1904).

21. On the specific details and nature of Mussolini's development, see the comments of D. Musiedlak, *Mussolini*, (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2005), 171–173.
22. A. Rosada, *Giacinto Menotti Serrati nell'emigrazione (1899–1911)*, (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1972), 70.
23. Ridolfi, *Il PSI e la nascita del partito di massa*, cit., 184.
24. The PSI accepted its membership only in 1901. This move was designed to facilitate the employment of experienced people, both propagandists and organizers, who were needed primarily to develop the party's political role but also to better defend the interests of Italian emigrants at PSI congresses held in Italy. On the entire question cf. Rosada, *Giacinto Menotti Serrati nell'emigrazione*, cit., 43–50.
25. "Atti della C. E. del P.S.I. in Svizzera," in *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, June 28, 1902.
26. T. Barboni, "Per l'unisono," in *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, August 9, 1902.
27. Ibid., "Avanti!" in *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, August 2, 1902.
28. F. Berutti, "Siamo pratici," in *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, April 5, 1902.
29. S. Donatini, "Ai compagni!" in *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, June 21, 1902.
30. Ibid., "Ringraziamenti," in *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, June 28, 1902.
31. Rosada, *Giacinto Menotti Serrati nell'emigrazione*, cit., 70.
32. A. Balabanoff, *Ricordi di una socialista*, (Rome: De Luigi, 1946), 12 ff.
33. Fonti, *Un socialista italiano in Ticino*, cit., p. 132. Gaetano Zannini had noted the talent of the young man from Romagna and had informed Serrati. See the extracts from Zannini's letters to Serrati cited in R. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario, 1883–1920*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1995), 30.
34. On this question, see the various newspaper articles published in the appendices of Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, cit., vol. I, 246–248, 251–253.
35. On Mussolini's activities in Berne and police surveillance, see the article by P. Martig, "Mussolini und die Schweiz," in *Berner Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Heimatkunde*, 45, 1983, 185–196.
36. ACV, KVII, b, 22, Police de Sureté, "Rapport des agents Grassi et Desarzens du 26 mars 1904."
37. "La mia vita dal 29 luglio 1883 al 23 novembre 1911," (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, cit., vol. XXXIII, p. 254). Mussolini translated and edited A.H. Malot's work, *I ciarlatani neri*, (Geneva: Tipografia Operaia, 1904).
38. Ph. B., "Mussolini à Lausanne," in *Gazette de Lausanne*, January 24, 1928.
39. "La virtù dell'attesa," in *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, August 9, 1902, (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, cit., vol. I, 12).
40. "La bestia umana," in *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, September 13, 1902.
41. On this question see P. Audenino, *L'Avvenire del passato: utopia e moralità nella sinistra italiana alle soglie del XX secolo*, (Milan: Unicopli, 2002).
42. "Sport di coronati," in *Il Proletario*, June 29, 1903, (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, cit., vol. I, 32).

43. See in particular G.M. Serrati, *Viva l'Unione!*, (Lausanne: Federazione Muraria Unica in Svizzera, 1904).
44. T. Barboni, "Nulla si perde," in *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, December 20, 1902. On the difficulties of union work, see Vuilleumier, *Les exilés en Suisse et le mouvement ouvrier socialiste (1871-1914)*, cit., 78. See also De Michelis, *L'emigrazione italiana nella Svizzera*, cit., 115, 148.
45. Perlungher, "La situazione dei lavoratori italiani nel bernese," in *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, March 22, 1902.
46. Vuilleumier, *Les ouvriers italiens en Suisse avant 1914: les difficultés d'une intégration*, cit. The level of integration and defense of Italian interests in Switzerland at the beginning of the twentieth century is still considered very inadequate. Cf. De Michelis, *L'emigrazione italiana nella Svizzera*, cit., 148–152.
47. Rosada, *Giacinto Menotti Serrati nell'emigrazione*, cit., 33.
48. T. Barboni, "Autunno," in *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, December 6, 1902.
49. M. Gervasoni, *Speranze condivise. Linguaggi e pratiche del socialismo nell'Italia liberale*, (Lungro di Cosenza: Marco Editore, 2008), 80–86.
50. *Ibid.*, 90–91.
51. Rosada, *Giacinto Menotti Serrati nell'emigrazione*, cit., 79.
52. The quotation is taken from a summary of the public debate between Luigi Bertoni and Salvatore Donatini at Thalwil, "Legislazione sociale," in *La Sveglia Socialista*, August 23, 1902.
53. "Pubblicazioni. I Tempi Nuovi," in *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, January 23, 1904, (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, cit., vol. I, 249–250).
54. A. Riosa, *Il sindacalismo rivoluzionario in Italia e la lotta politica nel partito socialista dell'età giolittiana*, (Bari: De Donato, 1976), 15–39.
55. On the nature and complexity of the phenomenon of reformism, see Chap. 5, "Il socialismo riformista in Italia agli inizi del secolo XX," in M. Scavino, *Il socialismo nell'Italia liberale: idee, percorsi, protagonisti*, (Milan: Unicopli, 2007), 133–165.
56. A. Labriola, "Fabianesimo II," in *Socialismo*, June 9 and 25, 1902.
57. On the role of Ferri in his defense of anti-reformist propaganda, see R. Pisano, *Il paradiso socialista: la propaganda socialista in Italia alla fine dell'800 attraverso gli opuscoli di 'Critica sociale'*, (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1986), p. 55. For Arturo Labriola too, the education of the masses through propaganda was a fundamental task for which the PSI was responsible, cf. W. Gianinazzi, *Intellettuali in bilico: «Pagine libere» e i sindacalisti rivoluzionari prima del fascismo*, (Milan: Unicopli, 1996), 27, 72–73.
58. "La virtù dell'attesa," in *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, August 9, 1902, (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, cit., I, 11).
59. "La necessità della politica socialista in Italia," in *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, August 30, 1902, (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, cit., vol. I, 15).

60. "La gente nuova," in *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, September 20, 1902, (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, cit., vol. I, 19).
61. Rosada, *Giacinto Menotti Serrati nell'emigrazione*, cit., 24–28, 39–42.
62. "it is necessary to improve the economic conditions of the martyred classes and spread new ideas amongst them," quoted from "Gli orrori del chiostro," in *Il Proletario*, August 30, 1903, (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, cit., vol. I, 37).
63. "Socialismo e movimento sociale nel secolo XIX," in *Il Proletario*, September 18, 1903, (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, cit., vol. I, 43).
64. "Il congresso dei socialisti italiani in Svizzera," in *Avanguardia socialista*, April 3, 1904, (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, cit., vol. I, 54).
65. "the expropriation of the bourgeoisie will be accompanied by a longer or shorter period of violence," quoted from "Intorno alla notte del 4 agosto," in *Avanguardia socialista*, July 30, 1904, (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, cit., vol. I, 61).
66. "Pagine rivoluzionarie, 'le parole d'un rivoltoso,'" in *Avanguardia socialista*, April 3, 1904, (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, cit., I, 51).
67. "Opinioni e documenti. La crisi risolutiva," in *Avanguardia socialista*, September 3, 1904, (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, cit., vol. I, 69).
68. D. Marucco, *Arturo Labriola e il sindacalismo rivoluzionario in Italia*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1970), 156–158.
69. The importance of the spread of education is restated in "Socialismo e socialisti," in *La Lima*, May 30, 1908, in Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, cit., vol. I, p. 142. The central role of the party in the ideological struggle is underlined in the article, "Replica a Graziadei," in *Il Giornale d'Italia*, July 6, 1914, (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, cit., vol. VI, 242).
70. Mussolini visited the library 18 times and borrowed 16 books, all in March with the exception of one borrowed on April 16. The following titles by G.D'Annunzio: *Il Piacere*, (Milan: Treves, 1900), *L'Innocente*, (Milan: Treves, 1899) and *Poesie (1881–1883). Canto Novo. Intermezzo*, (Milan: Treves, 1896). Also L. Stein, *La question sociale au point de vue philosophique*, (Paris: F. Alcan, 1900); Voltaire, *La philosophie de Voltaire*, (Paris: Ladrangé, 1848); E. Ferri, *Les criminels dans l'art et la littérature*, (Paris: F. Alcan, 1897); A. Labriola, *Essais sur la conception matérialiste de l'histoire, avec une préface de G. Sorel*, (Paris: V. Giard et E. Brière, 1897); F. Nietzsche, *Aphorismes et Fragments, traduit de l'allemand par H. Lichtenberger*, (Paris: F. Alcan, 1899); A. Fouillée, *Nietzsche et l'immoralisme*, (Paris: F. Alcan, 1902); S. Sighele, *Psychologie des sectes, traduit de l'italien*, (Paris: V. Giard & E. Brière, 1898); A. Espinas, *La Philosophie sociale du XVIIIe et la Révolution*, (Paris: F. Alcan, 1898); E. Hartmann, *La religion de l'Avenir, traduit de l'allemand*, (Paris: G. Baillièrre, 1898); P. Bourget, *Physiologie de l'amour moderne*, (Paris: A. Lemerre, 1891); H. Lichtenberger, *La Philosophie de Nietzsche*, (Paris: F. Alcan, 1899); E. Denis-Dumont, *De la*

syphilis: unité d'origine, incurabilité, traitement: leçons faites à Hôtel-Dieu de Caen, (Paris: V.A. Delahaye, 1880); P. Regnard, *Sorcellerie, magnétisme, morphinisme, délire des grandeurs*, (Paris: E. Plon Nourrit, 1887). Cf. Bibliothèque de Genève, Département des manuscrits (henceforth, BGE, ms), *Archives de la Bibliothèque Publique Universitaire (BPU), Service Publique, Registres des ouvrages consultés en Salle de Lecture, et statistiques, 1839-1960, Cc 59, années 1903-1904*.

71. The Catholic mission, founded by Mons. Bonomelli (1831-1914) in May 1900 was active in various European countries as well as in Southwest Asia and had been started to help Italian emigrants. On its activities in Switzerland cf. De Michelis, *L'emigrazione italiana nella Svizzera*, cit., 140-142.
72. In Geneva a "Libero Pensiero" group was founded in 1890 by Charles Fulpius who in March 1900 founded the first magazine, *Lumière*, which was linked to the anticlerical movement; cf. C. Cantini, "La fédération intercantonale de la Libre Pensée (1901-1939)," in *Le libre penseur*, 119, December 12, 2003, pp. 1-2. In the world of Italian socialism, A.O. Olivetti founded in August 1904 an Italian section of *Libero Pensiero* which Mussolini joined. See Gianinazzi, *Intellettuali in bilico*, cit., p. 145. Mussolini also delivered a lecture during a demonstration by the French Swiss contingent of *Libero Pensiero*; cf. G.H., "Une fête de la Libre Pensée à Neuchâte," in *Lumière*, April 4, 1904, 69-70.
73. Rosada, *Giacinto Menotti Serrati nell'emigrazione*, cit., pp. 79-80. On A.O. Olivetti's relationship with *Libero Pensiero* cf. Gianinazzi, *Intellettuali in bilico*, cit., 142-149.
74. BGE, ms, Archives de la BPU, Cc 59, Registre des années 1903-1904.
75. On the influence of Nietzsche's ideas on Italian socialism cf. V. Pinto, *Volontà di potenza. Percorsi del «superuomo» nietzscheano nella cultura socialista italiana (1895-1915)*, (Milan: M&B Publishing, 2008).
76. "Vogliamo giustizia!" *Memoria della Colonia italiana di Ginevra*, (Florence: L'Elzeviriana, 1903), 14-15.
77. N. Tikhonov, "Les étudiants russes dans les universités suisses à la fin du XIXe siècle et au début du XXe siècle: les raisons d'un choix," in A.L. Head-König e L. Mottu-Weber (eds.), *Les femmes dans la société européenne*, (Geneva: Droz, 2000), 91-103.
78. Eleonora Horochowsky-Shéviakoff, born on April 4, 1875, Archives de l'Université de Genève (henceforth, AUG), Feuille de contrôle 410 e/55, e Diplômes 410 z/6.
79. Teneff Panaïote Tomoff, born on May 27, 1877 in Osman-Pazar, ACV, KXIII, RMS 6, 197.109, Inscritptions aux cours 1903-1904.
80. Barni Bontcheff, born on January 12, 1877 in Razgrad, AUG, 410e/16.
81. Maurizio Eisen, born on November 28, 1884 in Jassi, ACV, KVII, h, 482/63.

82. In Musiedlak's view Mussolini's reading was largely connected to social Darwinism; cf. Musiedlak, *Mussolini*, cit., 189 ff.
83. Fouillée, *Nietzsche et l'immoralisme*, cit., 275.
84. Musiedlak, *Mussolini*, cit., 192–193.
85. Fouillée, *Nietzsche et l'immoralisme*, cit., 275.
86. F. Worms, "Bergson et ses contemporains: le problème de l'homme entre vie et connaissance," in Id., ed., *Le moment 1900 en philosophie*, (Paris: Presses Univ. Septentrion, 2004), 23–41.
87. D. Becquémont e L. Mucchielli, *Le cas Spencer: religion, science et politique*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), 273.
88. Espinas, *La philosophie sociale du XVIIIe siècle et la Révolution*, cit., 14.
89. *Ibid.*, 6.
90. *Ibid.*, 5.
91. *Ibid.*, 11.
92. *Ibid.*, 7.
93. *Ibid.*, 16.
94. "Noi che apparteniamo alla derisa ala evangelica del partito socialista [We who belong to the derided evangelical wing of the Socialist Party]," quoted from "Socialismo e movimento sociale nel secolo XIX," in *Il Proletario*, September 18, 1903, (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, cit., vol. I, 43).
95. "L'uomo e la divinità" (Contraddittorio del 26 marzo 1904), (Lugano, Cooperativa Tipografia Sociale, July 2, 1904), (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, cit., vol. XXXIII, 4–37).
96. O. Robert, *Matériaux pour servir à l'histoire du doctorat h.c. décerné à Benito Mussolini en 1937* (Lausanne: Université de Lausanne, 1987), 34–35.
97. F. Mornati, *Pasquale Boninsegni e la Scuola di Losanna*, (Turin: UTET, 1999), 30–31.
98. According to Professor Millioud, Mussolini's appearances in university lecture theaters "étaient du domaine de la contrebande [were very clandestine]." Cf. A. Fonjallaz, *Energie et volonté. Un chef: Mussolini*, (Paris: Ed. de la Revue mondiale, 1933), 19.
99. F. Mornati, "Mussolini e Losanna", in *Nuova Antologia*, April-June 1993, 472–483.
100. *Ibid.*, *Pasquale Boninsegni e la Scuola di Losanna*, cit., 301–302, note 33.
101. "Just as in the capitalist system, the proletarian Élite can snatch partial gains," quoted from "Intorno alla notte del 4 agosto," in *Avanguardia socialista*, July 30, 1904, (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, cit., vol. I, 62).
102. "Uomini e idee. 'L'individuel et le social,'" in *Avanguardia socialista*, October 14, 1904, (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, I, cit., 73).
103. Bibliothèque Cantonale Universitaire de Lausanne, Département des manuscrits (Henceforth, BCU, Ms), Fonds Maurice Millioud, IS, 1912, V, Notes des cours du semestre d'été 1904.

104. Volume 1; he borrowed the second volume on Monday, July 11. BCU, Ms, Archives BCU, Registre des prêts à domicile 1903–1905.
105. The lectures were held on Mondays and Wednesdays.
106. This work was loaned on December 12, 1904, BCU, Ms, Archives BCU, Registre des prêts à domicile 1903–1905.
107. Professor Millioud revealed this in one of his articles; cf. M. Millioud, “Le mot malheureux de M. Mussolini,” in *Gazette de Lausanne*, June 25, 1921. On the death of Millioud in January 1925, Mussolini had a wreath of flowers placed on his tomb; cf. “La mort du Professeur Millioud,” in *Feuille d’Avis de Lausanne*, January 12, 1925.
108. Cf. A. Rasmussen, “Critique du progrès, ‘crise de la science’: débats et représentations du tournant du siècle,” in *Mil neuf cent*, 1, 1996, 89–113.
109. L’uomo e la divinità, cit., (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, cit. XXXIII, 15).
110. Ibid.

A Revolutionary in Trentino

Stefano Biguzzi

To understand fully the importance of the period that Mussolini spent in Trentino between February 6 and September 26, 1909, it is essential to have a general picture of that area from both a historical and sociopolitical standpoint. Solidly Italian both linguistically and culturally, Trentino had been an episcopal principality until 1796. In the next five years, it changed hands three times between France and Austria. Trentino was ruled as part of the Tyrol until 1803. After the Battle of Austerlitz (December 2, 1805), it was ceded to Bavaria until 1810 when Napoleon united it to the Kingdom of Italy, creating the “Department of Alto Adige.”

The Napoleonic experience came to an end on October 31, 1813. On June 9, 1815, the Congress of Vienna ratified the annexation of Trentino by Austria; recognition of any link with Italy was denied and the region was joined not to the provinces of Lombardy and Veneto but to the County of the Tyrol (1816) and later to the German Confederation (1818).

The rural population, which for the most part had opposed the new model of society introduced by Franco-Bavarian forces, looked more positively on transition to Austrian rule for it signified not only a return

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to feudal forms of government similar to those in force for generations but above all because of the unshakeable bond between church and state.

However, for those individuals, who for three brief years had experienced the realization of a national unity predicted by followers of the Enlightenment and had tested a path that might lead ultimately to union with Italy, submission to Hapsburg rule was of a completely different significance. After the fall of the Roman Empire, some outposts of Latin civilization had survived and these had been strengthened rather than destroyed under pressure from the German population. In like manner, renewed submission to a foreign power that was perceived as an increasingly anachronistic, heavy-handed and censorial police State was decisive in maintaining and reinforcing a sense of national belonging. Moreover, this sentiment became more widespread.¹

Hapsburg rule also produced a third factor in the political makeup of Trentino: it defined and strengthened two camps that had formed during the Napoleonic period. The first was a Catholic counterrevolutionary (“Sanfedista”) reaction led in 1809 by Andreas Hofer; the second represented the first elements of a national reawakening that later came together during the Risorgimento.

Trentino assumed a humiliating position in the Tyrolean Diet, being allocated only 7 out of the 52 representatives while in terms of population the ratio was 320,000 to 400,000. This, combined with the arrogant behavior of Innsbruck’s ruling class, led to a rise in calls for autonomy and although there was no question regarding Hapsburg rule, these requests tried to gain some sovereign space that at least reflected the dignity of a State that had been self-governing for almost eight centuries.

After being influenced in 1848 by the First War of Independence, during which some had fought in the struggle for national liberation, Trentino narrowly missed the chance of unity with Italy in 1866 when Garibaldi, victorious at the Battle of Bezzecca, was already on his way to Trento. The diplomatic settlement did not provide for that part of the Austrian Empire to be ceded to Italy; so, when Garibaldi obeyed the order to halt his advance, the hopes of those who had glimpsed unification with Italy were also dashed. The final blow came in 1882 with the death of Garibaldi, the martyrdom of Guglielmo Oberdan, the irredentist from Trieste, and the formation of the Triple Alliance between Italy, Austria and Germany. The Trentino in which Mussolini spent a large part of 1909 was a poor region. It was dominated by agriculture and traditional crafts with the beginnings of industrial development in the urban centers. With its 28,000

inhabitants, Trento was a small but prosperous city that reaped advantage from its geographical position bestriding two ethnic groups. Familiarity with a state machinery that was strongly supported by the church was helped along by use of the Italian language and a particularly efficient civil service composed mainly of officials from the Trentino. The Germanic element was represented largely by the army that was garrisoned heavily in the area. The influence of the Hapsburgs could be noted in negative and less obvious ways. The high level of emigration was testament to the economic depression caused by the administration in Innsbruck. There was an increase in the imposition of military obligations and in the support given to aggressive pan-germanic groups. The press was heavily censored and, importantly, the citizens of Trentino, like other speakers of Italian in Austria, were unable to follow university courses in their mother tongue and thus were denied the possibility of forming a homegrown ruling class.

The political landscape of Trentino was dominated by three groups. The Liberal-Nationalist Party, both moderate and middle class, had seen its support diminish with the electoral reforms that culminated in the granting of universal suffrage. Although the Liberal-Nationalists considered themselves the sole heirs of the Risorgimento tradition and the original champions of the nationalist cause, they maintained a quiet relationship with the Austrian government in order not to damage their own status as the economically dominant class. They tried to extract concessions through obedience rather than by struggle and in extreme cases, limited themselves to symbolic gestures such as their fruitless refusal to participate in the Diet of Innsbruck.

The Socialists were much more active in seeking to defend the autonomy and Italian nature of the Trentino. Founded in 1895 thanks to the decisive efforts of Cesare Battisti, a young geographer from the Trentino who had studied in Florence, the local section of the "Social-Democratic Party of Austria" had immediately made a name for itself due to the battles it fought in the defense of the poor; it also maintained links with both Austrian Marxists and Italian left-wing groups. At the heart of these struggles, Battisti established a strong democratic movement that campaigned for self-government (it was thanks to the Socialists that the boycott of the Diet of Innsbruck came to an end). The Socialists also fought for the foundation of an Italian university and against the growing weight of militarism and Pan-Germanism. For Battisti, in contrast to other Socialists, it was inconceivable to talk of an independent homeland to those who were in a condition of economic slavery, just as one could

not talk of class struggle to those who were not free enough to have their own cultural identity. Over a period of 20 years, this stance gathered much support and led to a breakaway of the more progressive wing of the Liberal-Nationalists. However, on many occasions, it also led to clashes with the more hard-line internationalist section of the party; two splits occurred although these were later resolved.²

The Catholic Popolari took up an ideological position that was anti-theoretical to those of the Liberal-Nationalists and the Socialists. This party had clerical roots and was directed by the young and campaign-hardened Alcide De Gaspari³ from the pages of the *Il Trentino* newspaper. It was the strongest party and enjoyed the greatest percentage of the vote, having its territorial structure guaranteed by the network of parishes. Its financial position was assured by a wealthy amalgam of banks, cooperatives and newspapers but, above all, it owed its strength to the protection of the authorities who guaranteed the loyalty of a peasantry that made up most of the population.

One must also highlight another subject which, alongside those of the economy and self-rule, occupied the theater of political debate, that of fascism. This was the movement that aimed at the reunification of Trentino and Venezia Giulia with Italy, in other words, the return of those areas from under the Hapsburg yoke. Until new possibilities were revealed by the Great War, all the parties of Trentino viewed reunification in different ways: on the one hand it was claimed as a birthright and seen as a key element of democracy; on the other hand it was fought against as if it were a subversion the constituted order. These positions were taken up in a geopolitical climate which from the beginning of the twentieth century saw a progressive weakening of the bonds of the Triple Alliance (crucial in this respect were the accession to the throne of Victor Emmanuel III, the surprise formal annexation of Bosnia by Austria in 1908 and the revelation of plans for a preemptive war against Italy). Simultaneously, this period was marked by the growth of increasingly aggressive pan-germanic movements (Deutscher Schulverein, Süd-Mark, Volksbund) which had as their aim the Germanization of a Trentino that was seen merely and exclusively as the extreme southern part of the Tyrol, the last outpost of German civilization before the abhorrent Latin world.

From its beginnings, Socialism in Trentino had maintained close links with the Socialist movement in Italy, which had offered, together with interesting political ideas, valuable organizational support to compensate for a severe lack of political leaders. This problem came to the fore

again when in March 1908, the person in charge of the Trentino Labor Secretariat, Domenico Gasparini, ended his term of office.⁴ His exit from the scene and the difficulty in finding a suitable replacement was evidenced by a string of new secretaries and by long periods during which the position remained unfilled. This ultimately weakened the work of the union and gave extra support to the idea of linking the labor movement to the Socialist Party. In November 1908, the quest for a new secretary was begun yet again, but by early 1909, still no one had been found who in return for a modest salary was prepared to take on a job that required considerable organizational, journalistic and propaganda skills. However, in response to a request for a secretary cum director of the newspaper *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore* (The Worker's Future), a 25-year-old from Romagna stepped forward. This young man had spent a fraught period in Switzerland that had ended with his deportation, had worked briefly as a primary school teacher and had made his name organizing strikes among the peasants of Forlì in the summer of 1908:

I arrived in Trento on February 6, at 9 o'clock in the evening. It was snowing. To meet me at the station were some of my comrades, amongst whom were the Honorable Avancini and Ernesto Ambrosi with whom I formed a strong friendship... The next morning I went with Gasperini [Gasparini] Domenico to a meeting in Merano, to the *Kurort* spa, the most famous in the Lower Tyrol. In the following days I took control of my office.⁵

With these words, Benito Mussolini recalled his first encounter with the Socialist movement in the Trentino. Even although his stay in Trento totaled a mere seven months in all, this period represented a particularly important moment as it helped to “define further his own particular ideology” and to throw down “the foundations of his commitment to Italian Socialism.”⁶

With regard to the reasons that encouraged Mussolini to undertake this new task, toward which he had been prompted both by Angelica Balabanoff (who had come into contact with Trentino's Socialist movement during a famous series of conferences in 1908) and by Giacinto Menotti Serrati, Renzo De Felice has noted: “Psychologically, Mussolini went to Trento as he had gone everywhere else, a little due to his taste for adventure and change, and a little because he needed the money.”⁷ As evidence of a state of mind controlled by instinct, of a man trying to find his own way day by day, *homme qui cherche*, to quote his youthful pseudonym, rather than *homme qui va*, we have two letters, one written

at the beginning and one at the end of his time in Trentino. In the first, addressed to his friend Torquato Nanni on February 26, 1909, Mussolini wrote:

You understand full well that I am in no way happy with my current position. I am not going to grow old as a salaried official of the Austrian Socialist Party. Oh, no! When I've learned to scrape out a tune on the violin I'm going to travel the world rather than remain at the beck and call of the latest set of bosses. I'm writing subversive articles in *Il Popolo*, a Socialist newspaper. Doctor Battisti is the owner and it's likely they'll offer me the editorship. I'd accept it. As far as my future goes, I've got no fixed plans. I live, as always, from day to day.⁸

In the second letter written a few weeks after he had returned to Forlì, he made clear his complete dissatisfaction to another friend, Rino Alessi, and toyed again with his old idea of going to America: "I am tired of living in Forlì, I'm tired of living in Italy, I'm tired of living in this world (you understand that I mean The Old World, not the Earthly Vale of Tears). I want to be on my way again."⁹

Notwithstanding these inner thoughts, or perhaps in a direct attempt to counteract them, and although his revolutionary character was in stark contrast to the political reality of Trentino,¹⁰ Mussolini had within weeks thrown himself into his new role and his life "took on, for the whole time that he spent in Trentino, a febrile pace that at times approached a state of frenzy."¹¹ This metamorphosis is crystallized in a passage of a letter sent to Nanni on June 26: "I live by waging war bitterly against everything and everyone. *I have made my mark.*"¹² When Mussolini arrived "very badly dressed and without a penny in his pocket" to be presented officially to the Workers' Association "there were many who looked on with some perplexity at this shabby man who had been given such an important role. However, Mussolini had arrived in Trento with a reputation as an energetic agitator and propagandist and with an inflated estimation of his professional and political training. He understood well how to take full advantage of this."¹³

On the day before Mussolini took office at the Trentino Labor Secretariat, the *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore* newspaper described him in enthusiastic terms: "The choice could not be better, for not only is Benito Mussolini a seasoned campaigner but is also a fervent propagandist who specializes in anticlericalism. He is an educated young man and, what is more, to the great advantage of our movement, speaks perfect German."¹⁴

Even the *Il Popolo* newspaper, when reporting on a lecture on Giordano Bruno, held at the Workers' Association on February 17, did not hesitate to express its enthusiasm: "It has to be said that this first meeting of Mussolini with our workers could not have been more agreeable nor have had a better outcome. He was listened to with rapt attention and knew straight away how to make himself understood by his listeners, who realized in turn that they had before them not only an excellent speaker and persuasive propagandist, but above all an erudite man."¹⁵

Mussolini held greatly to being considered an intellectual and cultivated this image with studious care; in the aforementioned letter to Nanni, he wrote: "My intellectual life here is more intense than in Forlì. Apart from the excellent Public Library there is a magnificent reading room available to everyone. It is open from nine in the morning until ten at night. It has 40 newspapers and 80 magazines in Italian, German, French and English. I spend much of my spare time here and have the rare pleasure of reading in their original language the best works of foreign writers." In an interview given in 1923, Cesare Berti, secretary of the local Cultural Society, confirmed Mussolini's constant visits to the library and how he often made great sacrifices to buy books:

He spent hours in the library and often did without to buy books which he literally devoured... He lived frugally on little more than a hundred crowns a month. He ate his meals in the Workers' Association cheap canteen and slept in a bare room at Cervara. Above his bed he had a motto: Live Free. He dressed in worn-out, threadbare clothes and didn't care about how he looked.¹⁶

Into this rather bohemian lifestyle, Mussolini also managed to squeeze his passion for classical music; he was a fairly good musician and took his violin everywhere.¹⁷

Apart from his reputation for studying, the lively cultural nature of the period of his life that Mussolini spent in Trentino is demonstrated by the extraordinary amount of writing that he either completed or drafted in these few months. First we might note his essays of a historical or literary nature, like those on August Von Platen,¹⁸ The Paris Comune,¹⁹ the *Rodolfo of Austria*,²⁰ the tragedy of Mayerling, and the obviously anti-clerical work on *Giovanni Huss the Truthful*.²¹ To these one must add translations from German and French,²² various short stories and literary vignettes, among which those on Alessandro Vittoria²³ and the Castello del Buon Consiglio²⁴ stand out. Also of particular note are the seven

Medaglioni Borghesi (Bourgeois Medallions), published in *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*. Here was drawn a mercilessly caustic portrait of the Trentino's ruling class, and in this work Mussolini revealed his idea of a Socialism dripping with "idealism and activism" in which:

there was always little space for materialism and determinism but in which key roles were given to the criticism of parliamentarianism, of reformism and of the bourgeois character. Mussolini saw this character embodied typically in the figures of the Speculator, "a true product of bourgeois society," of the Moneylender, "the crow that picks over the corpses of bourgeois society," the Bon Viver, the Magistrate, the Aristocrat, the Honest Woman and the Respectable Man, this last being the real "dead wood of society" given that "Civilization is the work of so-called madmen."²⁵

Despite the town's excellent library and active cultural life, Mussolini, for reasons of snobism, contradicts in a letter to Prezzolini what he had written to Nanni and describes Trento as a city whose intellectual life is one of "depressing misery."²⁶ However, even if one accepts this uncomplicated judgment and Mussolini's annoyance with its provincial atmosphere, Trento did not lack remarkable exceptions. The relationship that Mussolini had with the "Pro Cultura" association,²⁷ Cesare Battisti, whom he saw almost on a daily basis, Battisti's wife, Ernesta Bittanti,²⁸ and the lawyer, Antonio Piscel provided him with great intellectual distraction. Indeed, it was in Trento that one of the most significant and formative moments in Mussolini's intellectual development took place—his link with *La Voce* (The Voice). Not only did Mussolini become an assiduous reader of this Florentine review, which both widened and developed his interests, but he also made efforts to spread its distribution and offered himself as a contributor with an expertise on irredentist regions that were so little understood in Italy: "in reality it is difficult to understand Trentino if one looks at its institutions, its political parties and the character of its inhabitants. It makes me laugh when certain Italian journalists come up here to "study" Trentino and stay only a day or a couple of hours."²⁹ Through these reviews, Mussolini's political views, which already leaned toward anarcho-syndicalism, came into contact with the theories of the French thinker, Georges Sorel. These theories were to have great influence on the development of Mussolini's political ideas. Reviewing a book by Giuseppe Prezzolini (editor of *La Voce*) which set out Sorel's theories, Mussolini wrote in *Il Popolo* in the May 27, 1909 issue:

Socialism is a “human” problem. Trades unionism is an exclusively “proletarian” problem. Socialism means bringing about its historic reality through the democratization of the State. Trades unionism is against the State and aims at achieving the emancipation of the working class by means of workers’ associations...the dedicated organization of the proletariat. The Socialist ethic is guided for the most part from a Christian, indeed, an evangelical, standpoint (love of the poor, redemption of the oppressed) with the addition of positivist utilitarianism; the morality of trade unionism—at least, as far as it is defining itself—tends towards the creation of new characters and values, of *homines novi*.³⁰

This was a deliberate stance against reformism and it was not by chance that the article went on to refer to a passage in which Sorel spelled out the fundamental role of violence, “The physical, concrete and muscular display” that was essential in “transforming an idea into reality.”³¹ In practice, Mussolini concerned himself principally with “activities of journalism and agitation, which he usually preferred to those of a more political and organizational nature. He found the latter less to his liking and regarded them, as we shall see, as less crucial than the former, since for him the problem consisted “above all in the moral ‘training’ of militants.”³² While Mussolini achieved successes in some disputes (railway workers, carpenters and embroiderers), his period of tenure as secretary was marked by a certain stagnation as far as action by the unions and the Workers’ Association was concerned (“He neither expanded nor strengthened the labor organizations; rather, he gave little time to them.”³³). On the other hand, with Mussolini, one saw a renewed effort to gain converts and to help emigrants. He also began a campaign to rid the *Lega per la cultura sociale* (League for Social Education) of “apathetic and uncommitted [members]”³⁴ and set up a School of Socialist Propaganda.

Mussolini’s main area of activity was the press. Having taken control of the *L’Avvenire del Lavoratore* newspaper, he immediately demonstrated his talent as a journalist, and in three weeks enlarged its format as a weekly publication, improved the quality of its paper and print, as well as that of its articles, and thereby increasing its circulation from 1600 to 2400 copies. Thus he transformed it into a truly “effective weapon of combat.”³⁵ Mussolini’s “bold self-confidence and his energetic nature displayed themselves, both in speech and in print, in a style that will remain ever his: graven, brusque, incisive and effective. In this sense his articles have an unmistakable stamp and tower above the forced and labored writing” of

his various colleagues from Trentino. Even Battisti, who was accustomed to using his pen as a saber rather than a flower, was deeply impressed by the impetuosity of the man from Romagna and straightaway invited him to work on *Il Popolo*. On August 2, Mussolini became its editor-in-chief with his own weekly supplement, *Vita Trentina*. He used every opportunity to flaunt his particularly aggressive style and within three issues of the newspaper, “Mussolini had immediately made his presence felt in a decisive way ... In a little more than six months he wrote over one hundred articles of different lengths, commentaries, letters, sketches and short stories of an ever more violent nature.”³⁶

The favorite target of Mussolini’s tirades was Trentino’s religious establishment and its political pronouncements. He made this the object of a particularly violent offensive and in this way complemented the campaign already begun and tenaciously fought by Battisti to free the weakest classes from the control of the Catholic church by combatting religious superstition, political ignorance and illiteracy. With the coming of Mussolini, “the terms of the conflict did not change, they were merely exacerbated, and rapidly rose to new heights never to be reached again.”³⁷ Furthermore, anticlericalism was the only area where Mussolini’s revolutionary beliefs and the reformist path followed by Socialism in Austria and Trentino could effectively come together. However, if it is true that the level of political struggle declined significantly, it is also true that the violence of the language with which this struggle was expressed by the Socialists, even in an atmosphere of white-hot political debate, never transformed itself into violence against enemies. On the other hand, the Catholic press ever more frequently exhorted the faithful to remain on the side of those “against the charlatans of Socialism who live by spreading amongst working people irreligious and anticlerical theories.”³⁸ The scabby dogs won’t have their way,” declared the *Squilla* (The Bell, the church’s magazine) and made a passionate call to fathers to prevent the “work of some mad rabble-rouser” from creating “a debauched, inept, rude and sacrilegious generation of young people.”³⁹ To bear the brunt of this call was in fact the most hated and feared of the “scabby dogs,” Cesare Battisti. In February 1909, he traveled to Val di Fassa to deliver two lectures and only narrowly escaped being lynched by a mob of peasants stirred up by “the big guns of Fassa’s church movement.”⁴⁰

This was the background against which Mussolini’s “argumentative fury”⁴¹ came to the fore and which saw his rise as the “bete noire” of Trentino clericalism. He used commemorations celebrating Giordano

Bruno and the 100th anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth to gain publicity and liked to sign himself with the initials VE (Vero Eretico or Real Heretic). Of the many attacks launched against the Catholic hierarchy, the article entitled "Il sacro' ovile" (The Sacred' Fold), in which Mussolini denounced the scandals of Trentino's clergy, gives us a useful example of his style:

After ten years of existence the Socialist Party of Trentino can hold its head high in the face of its adversaries. Its newspaper columns have had to busy themselves with a certain Father Felicetti, found guilty of obscene acts and sentenced to three years in prison, with a priest called Pinè who disappeared with money stolen from some idiots who had paid for a Scala Santa indulgence, with a Father Sonetti from Levico who disappeared to shores unknown due to "irregularities"...But enough of this, my friends! I'm not going to rake up a hundred thousand cubic metres of Catholic muck.⁴²

However, the biggest shock was caused by an interview with the "Saint of Susà," a tragic figure from a Boccaccio type story. In 1874, a peasant, Rosa Broll, had been seduced by and secretly married to a Father Prudel, a young priest who justified the relationship to his devout, if gullible, parishioners by passing her off as a saint. Of this union were born two children who were then abandoned to avoid a scandal and died soon after. When this came to light, the courts questioned the priest but acquitted him despite Broll's testimony. Introducing the story Mussolini wrote:

The process and circumstances by which the poor peasant from Susà received the honor of sainthood, are perhaps analogous to those of other female saints that the Catholic Church has placed on the altar. Superstition, poverty and gullibility on one side; trickery, abuse and slyness on the other, and a solemn, official commitment to a life of chastity that cannot be maintained without distorting human nature.⁴³

One can imagine the church's reaction to articles of this kind, as one can to those which made fun of Father Romolo Murri's excommunication and of the Eucharist. (Murri, an early Christian Democrat who began a conversation with Socialist reformists, was excommunicated for insubordination in 1909; the excommunication was lifted in 1943.) Mussolini, for his part, was not put off at all by the church's pronouncement of Anathema against the *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, an "impious and cannibalistically antireligious rag,"⁴⁴ and was not slow in handing out insults and threats, as he had the clear intention of building up the amount of

clamor caused by his scandalous interventions and of raising its pitch. Father Costantino Dallabrida, editor of the church's *Squilla* newspaper was labeled "a stupid, illiterate cleric ... a priest with the tiny brain of a kaffir," while a Father Giovanni Chelodi was at the sharp end of this kind of ultimatum: "If you haven't got the shame to put things right, I promise myself and I promise you that before leaving Trentino behind me I shall leave on your bald head the almost indelible imprint of my fists."⁴⁵

Among Mussolini's main enemies was Catholic leader and post-World War II Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi. Their first argument of note took place on March 7, during a debate on a union dispute that was held at Untermais in the Merano area.⁴⁶ On this occasion, however, the young, popular leader beat a hasty retreat claiming that he had a train to catch. In the following weeks, "the argument became incandescent" and in a short time "it changed from accusations and attacks of a political nature to those of a personal one. In turn these led to libel actions and trials that resounded around all Trentino."⁴⁷ De Gasperi accused Mussolini and his friends of behaving like bullies "treating public life as if it were a tournament of insults and blows, where their impudence and thuggery could claim an easy victory."⁴⁸ The director of *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore* replied by making fun of De Gasperi's "chronic intellectual constipation." With a biting reminder of the anti-Semitism that brought shame to the church's cause⁴⁹ and of which De Gasperi was also guilty,⁵⁰ Mussolini observed:

The usual stupid accusations are made against us: we Socialists, and we alone, are the violent ones. The spiritual descendants of that bishop in charge of Trentino who had Carlo Pilati⁵¹ beaten up and blinded, the defenders of the religious sect that lit up the darkness of the Middle Ages with its fiery executions at the stake, the descendants of the executioners who killed San Simonino⁵² and sacrificed dozens of innocent Jews are the tender, harmless little lambs that know how to 'bleat' but are incapable of offending.⁵³

Furthermore, Mussolini had denounced the attempt to cut the state subsidy given to the Workers' Association, as well as the pressure placed by the clergy on the Public Prosecutor's Office to throw him out of Trentino. He also denounced efforts to try to strangle the Socialist press by seizing its already limited financial assets.

In reality, the violent reaction of the judicial authorities was due, not to pressure from the church but to the excesses of Mussolini's campaigning which, after its early burst of enthusiasm, was beginning to have ever

more serious consequences. Moreover, Battisti was determined to follow the same path despite the ideological differences that separated his reformism from Mussolini's revolutionary ideas and despite the dangerous reaction caused by Mussolini's increasingly bitter fight with the clergy. From Battisti's political standpoint, anticlericalism was not only a valid weapon against the main opponents of Socialism and supporters of Hapsburg rule, it was also a good ideological position from which to strengthen links with Trentino's more progressive liberals.

The political repercussions of Mussolini's violent campaign against Catholic circles did not escape the notice of the Public Prosecutor, Carlo Tranquillini, who expressed his concern in a report to Vienna. In this, he also made clear his worry that the *Alto Adige* newspaper had been forced to strengthen its antigovernment stance so as not to lose support to the Socialists among those sections of the middle class that were openly anti-Austrian and anticlerical. What caused disquiet for the authorities was the rise of a common front of Socialists and Liberals which, brought together by the cause of anticlericalism would, without doubt, turn rapidly into a new and vigorous force in favor of the national struggle. The report in which Mussolini was singled out as an Irredentist who advocated incorporation of the region into Italy was clear proof of this fear; although this accusation was without foundation, it was evidence of the fact that the judicial authorities, via a crude analysis of cause and effect, saw how anticlericalism aided, more or less indirectly, the cause of those who were campaigning for the unification of the Trentino with Italy.⁵⁴

For his part, Mussolini himself had more than once called on Mario Scotoni, editor of *Alto Adige* for his newspaper's support against the state's steady stream of legal charges and sequestrations; by doing so, he gave substance to the idea that he supported Irredentism. In all probability, it was this supposition that finally led the authorities to issue the order for his deportation, an order that had long been requested by the clergy and by Public Prosecutor Tranquillini. Indeed, since June, the magistrate had been asking for Mussolini's expulsion from the Austrian Empire as well as the suppression of *L'Avvenire del lavoratore*, which he considered Trentino's most dangerous newspaper, accusing it of promoting anarchism via its promotion of atheism and its battle cries against the clergy, the institution of the family, private property and the authorities. Initially, Vienna had been unwilling to agree to Tranquillini's request in order to avoid disorder and increased tension, but with the worsening of the situation, the Prosecutor finally obtained the agreement of his superiors. Mussolini's

deportation was authorized on July 10 by the Minister of Internal Affairs, Baron Guido Haerdtl. He included the recommendation that a valid pretext emphasizing the seditious nature of Mussolini's activities should be found. However, nothing was done until September as demonstrations to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Tyrolean hero, Andreas Hofer, as well as the planned visit of the Emperor Franz-Joseph to Innsbruck on August 29 convinced the authorities that they should avoid doing anything that might promote civil unrest.

The truth was that the situation was anything but tranquil. Two sides were ranged against each other. On one side were the authorities who promoted participation in the celebrations and who looked to the clergy for support in mobilizing the people (especially its rural component). On the other side Socialists and Liberals were making efforts to convince the Italian part of the population that the celebrations had nothing to do with them. Antonio Piscal, in a letter, addressed to Victor Adler, the leader of the Austrian Social-Democrats, described the situation in these terms:

For the last couple of years government circles and the clerical, or Christian-Social, parties in the Tyrol and in Trentino have been working to make the hundredth anniversary of Tyrol's rural insurrection ... a successful popular display of dynastic loyalty. We Socialists, both Germans and Italians, have simply decided to abstain completely from the festivities. In Trentino even the rural population has shown itself less willing to get involved in these displays of loyalty than the backers of this clerical and pro-dynasty enthusiasm might have expected. So people are being paid off with offers made by the police...free board and travel and 70 Crowns as compensation (one doesn't know which public funds are footing the bill for these 'patriotic' handouts!) for anyone who goes to Innsbruck to take part in the procession in honor of the Emperor and in commemoration of Andrea [sic] Hofer.⁵⁵

The church's ideological contribution that complemented the government's "incentives" was demonstrated by a colorful, if grim, ditty that was sung in the oratories ("With the skin of Garibaldi / We'll make many a drum / Tyroleans, rest assured / Garibaldi again will never come."⁵⁶). In *Il Popolo* of August 14, in a *corsivo* (a short piece, usually ironic, printed in Italic script) entitled: *Pagnottisti, avanti!* (Time-Servers, Forward!), Mussolini did not miss the opportunity to denounce the role the clergy was playing in patriotic Austrian propaganda. On the eve of the celebrations, the whistles of derision blown at veterans and groups of Tyrolean *bersaglieri* who had gathered in Trento on their way to Innsbruck: the

imperial eagles spattered with mud, eggs thrown at the bishop's residence, and the hanging of a dummy representing Hofer from one of the feet of Dante's statue were expressions of those citizens of Trentino who were conscious of their own national identity, one that governmental propaganda rejected and derided.

The events that led to Mussolini's deportation came to a head the day after the Emperor's arrival in Innsbruck, when it was revealed that 300,000 Crowns had gone missing from the Banca Cooperativa di Trento. Suspicion fell on one of the bank's employees, Giuseppe Colpi, a well-known irredentist, who, on further investigation, turned out to be an informer for the Italian military. With the hypothesis that the theft of the money aimed at funding subversive activities it was then linked with a plot, discovered by chance, to blow up the police barracks in Trento. According to some witnesses, it was Colpi's idea. Others claimed that the idea came from Mussolini himself⁵⁷ and that later, when the explosives had already been brought from a quarry in Mezzolombardo and hidden at the Workers' Association, he had convinced the plotters to abandon the idea. A third version excluded completely Mussolini's participation but did confirm his part in dissuading the conspirators.⁵⁸

The police carried out a number of raids on the houses of many suspects as well as on the Workers' Association and the newspaper offices of *L'Avvenire del lavoratore*, *Il Popolo* and *L'Alto Adige*. No evidence of Mussolini's involvement in the plot was found during the raid on his house on September 10:

They took away loads of my papers, books and manuscripts. They even chucked into their bags one of my translations of Beethoven's will that I had got from Romain Rolland, some old exercise books full of notes...and one of the usual set of graphic drafts of the Divine Comedy. Maybe they thought it was a symbolic, pre-arranged plan for the S[ocial] Revolution.⁵⁹

However, many banned copies of *Il Popolo* and *L'Avvenire del lavoratore* were found in addition to a letter to Scotoni that requested support in a campaign against Tranquillini and the Vice Prosecutor, Tessadri the people responsible for the confiscations at the *L'Avvenire del lavoratore* offices. These discoveries were enough to secure Mussolini's immediate arrest. Decisive in this respect was a passage from a letter in which Mussolini stated: "You'll see free will and violence in action. Tessadri deserves our attack. Personally I have still not forgotten the stupid words that he said,

although they mean little: ‘Italy ends at Ala.’”⁶⁰ Mussolini was taken to the prison in Rovereto, a city considered more peaceful. The next day, he was charged with incitement to commit immoral and illegal acts as well as the promotion of contempt for and hatred of state authorities. Then, on September 14, while investigations were still under way, Mussolini was served with a notice of deportation. Both Mussolini’s appeal against the order, as well as that of Augusto Avancini, who at the request of Battisti had referred the matter to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Vienna and to the Lieutenancy of Innsbruck, failed.

Likewise, the involvement of Victor Adler, Austrian Socialist leader, and Valentino Pittoni, a Socialist from Trieste, who had contacted various government representatives, and an added Socialist threat of a general strike, came to nothing. In the trial, which was conducted behind closed doors on September 24, Mussolini was acquitted but remained in jail at the request of the Public Prosecutor and because he had failed to pay an outstanding fine.⁶¹

The authorities in Vienna did their utmost to avoid being perceived as sentencing an innocent man to deportation but when on September 25 Mussolini decided to begin a hunger strike, it was resolved to settle the matter once and for all and Mussolini was deported. Previously, Mussolini had expressed a positive judgment on the machinery of Hapsburg repression:

I forgot to tell you about the Austrian police...In Italy it is much worse. [In Trentino] my passport has not been seized and no one has asked me for any explanations...I live undisturbed. There is the danger of being expelled but that will be at the hands of the Church and it can always be revoked by Vienna. As someone thrown out by two cantons of the Free Republic of Pork Product Salesmen [Switzerland] I can’t complain about the reactionary, Catholic and feudal Austrian Empire.⁶²

Now the gloves were off and it was Mussolini’s turn to feel the iron fist of the Empire’s authorities.

In Trentino, Mussolini’s comrades reacted by organizing a general strike that led to an almost total labor abstention across the region. Battisti and Piscel held rallies in Trento and Rovereto, but there was no violent unrest and the cavalry unit sent as a reinforcement was not needed. On September 28, *Il Popolo* published only a single-page issue featuring a hard-hitting article by Battisti:

We do not have the time to comment. We shall limit ourselves to one observation. Yesterday's protest was solemn, dignified and powerful. It will remain as a testament to the spirit of independence that is at the heart of the proletariat of our two largest cities. The Socialist Party has achieved its aim: that of letting the government know that here are people who are prepared to say at the right time that enough is enough, and who are ready to go to extreme lengths when the defense of basic freedoms is at stake. The government should learn its lessons and recognize once and for all that, despite, despite clerical predominance, this is not a land to be ruled by means of the gallows and hunger but, rather, with liberty and work.⁶³

The following month, Battisti returned to the subject of Mussolini's deportation and displayed all his regret for the loss of:

a brave [...] colleague and militant publicist who, because of a crime of conscience and thanks to the outdated laws of the ruling police force, was thrown out of Austrian territory. We cannot say what we should like to about his pride as a citizen of Romagna, about his lively mind and about his high level of erudition while censorship persists in seeing everywhere in our newspapers a rebellion against public order and against the present government. We shall say only this: to have been deported was not a disgrace for us, it was an honor for him; for him to have been taken from us by force is a reason for greater friendship and stronger fraternal ties.⁶⁴

News of Mussolini's expulsion was not slow in causing a reaction in Italy, where a long article by Piscel was published by "Avanti!" and various questions were asked in the Chamber of Deputies by the deputies Pietro Chiesa, Oddino Morgari and Elia Cesare Musatti clearly without any result. In the meantime, Mussolini had stopped in Verona from where he sent another three articles to *Il Popolo* and a message of thanks for the solidarity that he had received. However, when it was clear that the decision of the Austrian government was not going to be reversed, he decided to return to Forlì, but not until after a final meeting with some of his companions from Trento and Rovereto who had come to say goodbye at the border. It was here that a famous photograph was taken: "In a procession we left the village for the station, singing Socialist songs as we went. There are handshakes, kisses and best wishes. It is the inner emotion that makes our souls tremble...Mussolini, the eternal sceptic, is visibly shaken by the touching display of solidarity, affection and respect."⁶⁵

In reality, the deportation that put an end to Mussolini's stay in Trentino did not mean an end to his ties with the region. His time in Trentino gave rise to "Idea, subject and genesis"⁶⁶ are linked two works written in the period immediately after his return to Italy: a novel entitled *Claudia Particella, l'amante del cardinale*, translated into English as *The Cardinal's Mistress*, and an essay, *Il Trentino veduto da un socialista* (The Trentino Seen as a Socialist). The idea for *The Cardinal's Mistress* came perhaps from one of the Trentino Sketches entitled The Castle's Pit which included references to the tragic love affair between Cardinal Madruzzo and Claudia Particella. Very probably encouraged by Battisti, who provided him with material for one of the chapters, Mussolini produced a novel that he himself classed as "a novel for seamstresses and scandal"⁶⁷ and "a nasty book."⁶⁸ The story lent itself excellently to fueling and further highlighting the bitter anticlerical campaign that *Il Popolo* had been waging for some time. Published in installments in Battisti's newspaper, "this story of two lovers, a story of violence and shameful acts, would certainly have struck the imagination of its readers far more than any serious and detailed analysis of working class politics and the interference of the church in Trentino society."⁶⁹

Written "in the style of Dumas,"⁷⁰ the novel enjoyed massive success, to the point of being translated into at least ten languages.⁷¹ It surpassed all expectations, so much indeed, that a bemused Battisti commented "he [Mussolini] risks having his own statue in Piazza del Duomo."⁷² The public remained spellbound by this dark reminder of Trentino in the 1600s: "the seamstresses, the workmen, the shop assistants of the lovely town at the foot of the mountains rushed every morning to open the newspaper, ready to weep a river of tears over the new floods of ink."⁷³ The creation of this large and devoted audience also led to an increase in the sales of *Il Popolo*; so from a financial point of view, Claudia Particella turned out to be a successful project that helped alleviate the newspaper's difficult funding problems: "Every so often the father [Mussolini], impatient and unpredictable, threatened to finish it off, that child created as a joke and which now constantly holds his hand! Then the notes from Cesare Battisti arrived, telling him and pleading with him not to do so. 'For goodness sake don't kill me! It's time for the subscriptions to be renewed. Just a bit more breathing space: the quarter's almost up!'"⁷⁴

The essay on Trentino, published in 1911 for the readers of *La Voce*, was a completely different piece of work. It was described by some as "one of the best pieces of writing of Mussolini's entire life"⁷⁵ and "one the most

deeply thought out studies of Irredentism.”⁷⁶ On the other hand some saw it as a product typical “of the militant literature churned out by Trentino Socialism that, through its heavily critical views of Catholic and Liberal opinion, of the people of the valleys and of the urban bourgeoisie, ended up by throwing into the air the whole country, its history and its aspirations.”⁷⁷ Despite these opposing views, what is undeniable is “the commitment with which Mussolini tried to give an exhaustive picture of the situation in Trentino.”⁷⁸ By doing so, he helped fulfill the aim of *La Voce*, that of “telling the Italians about Trentino.”⁷⁹

The essay was divided into three sections. The first analyzed the doctrines and activities of the pan-germanic associations (this section relied mainly on work by other authors⁸⁰).

The second described the Italian groups that opposed penetration by this Pan-Germanism, as well as the lineup of political parties in Trentino. The essay stands out for its harsh words on the patriotic spirit and Irredentist mettle of the people of Trentino. Mussolini writes of the pro-Austrian clergy, of the peasants and inhabitants of the mountains who sang the praises of Franz Joseph. He criticized the apathy of the bourgeoisie who preferred to remain under the yoke of a strong, feudal State in order to protect their own interests, just like the workers who, as Austrian citizens, had won some important social reforms (universal suffrage, sick pay, invalidity and old-age pensions and the right to unionize). These criticisms led Mussolini to this damning judgment: “Trentino is resigned to accepting its fate and does not think about ‘freeing itself’ ... Its soul is not revolutionary [but] conservative and is averse to anything new. It submits, but it does not create [...] The immediate future of Trentino is the status quo with its inevitable ups and downs of political reaction and calls for freedom that characterize a politically bourgeois regime.”⁸¹

In many ways, Mussolini was very close to the truth, but in order to demonstrate his own anti-Irredentist theorem, he could not tell the whole truth. In his attempt to square the circle of the complex political situation, he recognized that “the campaign for autonomy” was “the most beautiful page in the history of the Socialist Party of Trentino”⁸² but was forced to pass over the figure of Battisti and his political activities and to push into the shadows the desire for freedom and the hopes of those who saw in Italy their only homeland. It is certainly true that the Hapsburg government knew how to gain the consensus of large sections of the population by guaranteeing maintenance of the social order and a reassuring status quo. If one adds together the number of those individuals more or less in

favor of Austrian rule and the large passive mass of citizens that were indifferent, it is also true that those who had a spirit of national consciousness, were intent on defending their own cultural identity and wanted the right to choose unification with Italy did not represent a crushing majority. However, Mussolini failed to remember that this was not very different from the situation that existed in Italy before unification. Purposefully overlooking this fact with the aim of building up the image of a population that was resigned to its fate, he accused the people of never having spawned any movement of insurrection:

All political agitation [for autonomy] is within the law. No violence, no sacrifice, no martyrs. If only the supporters of unification could tell us that a country that fights so weakly for its autonomy is capable of mounting an insurrection that might lead to unification with Italy. But we doubt it. In the words of that Christian maxim: "Forgive them, for they know neither what they say nor do." If the whole population of Trentino had really wanted autonomy and had been capable of any of the individual or collective sacrifices that have made, for example, the recent history of Finland so glorious, then autonomy would already have been granted to them. However, the Austrian government knew that the Socialists in favor of autonomy represented a tiny minority with hardly any following and that, as such, were not a threat. The government held firm and won.⁸³

In this case too, Mussolini's line of reasoning was incorrect and the evidence that he used, when taken out of context, provided a distorted picture of political reality, one that he adapted to the needs of a preformulated dialectical argument. What was the point of talking about barricades that had never been built without considering all the elements that would have led to the easy repression of any revolt or without remembering that, as long as Italy remained an ally of Austria in the Triple Alliance, none of "our Italian friends" would have come to support the insurrection? These flaws were common features of the argument at the heart Mussolini's thinking and at the heart of the strong anti-Irredentist message that he wanted to give to the Italian public. However, by contrast, the more vehemently this intention was expressed the more significant are those passages and patriotic "slips" in which the agitator from Romagna let it be known, more or less unconsciously, that he had a firm concept of nationhood within his political ideal. In other words, Mussolini's attack on Irredentism was above all an attack on the bourgeoisie that had made the cause its own rather than on the spirit of nationalism that lay at its heart.

From this point of view, Mussolini's encounter with *La Voce*, an encounter that happened during his time in Trento, was of some significance given that the Florentine journal, although not aligned with the nationalist movement and often at odds with it, nevertheless had "a strong sense of nationhood and, in line with Mazzini's ideas, a belief in the spiritual mission of Italy in the modern world, a mission for which Italians had to be educated and prepared."⁸⁴ Only in the light of these considerations is it possible to explain the veiled regret and absence of triumphalist tones with which Trentino was "veduto da un socialista" (seen by a Socialist) in a paradoxical way. It is in this same way that one must explain the cry of alarm over the racist core of Pan-Germanism and its intended violent treatment of Italians. Neither can one explain otherwise the passage in which the Italian population is described with satisfaction as "a conqueror that advances relentlessly [northward] sending its scouts ahead of it," or the very significant passage in which Mussolini set out the prospect of a synthesis between homeland ("the highest collective body to which adhere ethnic groups of citizens"⁸⁵) and Socialism, this synthesis standing in antithesis to the bourgeois concept of "patriotism":

Organized workers do not repudiate their own nationality. The following example is proof of this. The Italian carpenters of Bolzano, united in a local group with Germans, ask to be able to express themselves in Italian during union meetings. The union's managing group, composed mainly of Germans, rejected the request so the Italians set up their own autonomous group, justifying their separation from the Germans in the union's minutes: this is worth detailing in full. In it the Italian workers claimed the right to speak in Italian "since the Workers' International neither excludes nor oppresses but rather protects those of all nationalities." A good lesson for certain Liberal Nationalists that at election time publish their manifestos in Slavic in Trieste and in German in Trento! From my own personal observations I can say that of the Italian workers living in German territories the easiest to break up ethnically are the disinterested and the strike-breakers, while the politically organized, Socialists or not, remain true to the nationality to which they belong.⁸⁶

These opinions, when considered together, show how perspicacious Giuseppe Prezzolini was years later when he expressed his view on *Il Trentino veduto da un socialista*, a work that he himself published: "You can see here a Socialist that was not Socialist enough to like the Germans; you can see that he is opposed to them in character and sees political

campaigning in a more Italian way, that he understands the validity of the national struggle and reproaches Trentino's Italian bourgeoisie for not taking Irredentism seriously."⁸⁷ These patriotic cracks in the apparently unbreakable façade of internationalism as practiced by Mussolini at the time introduce a particularly interesting aspect to the period that he spent in Trentino. If these months were important in helping him to gain valuable experience in politics and journalism, as well as in broadening his cultural knowledge, they were, the ideological point of view, emerges as the key to the most stimulating way of reading the essay.

Historical judgment and written memoirs on this subject have long been divided into two opposing camps. In the first are those hagiographic supporters of Mussolini's later regime,⁸⁸ intent on describing his activity in Trentino as a fateful sign of the nationalism and Irredentism that in 1914 would lead to his break with the Partito Socialista Italiano (Italian Socialist Party [PSI]) and his support for interventionism. In the opposing camp are those who deny any display by Mussolini of nationalist sentiment or sympathy for Irredentism and have as their more or less stated objective the branding of his about-turn in 1914 as a selfish and cynical choice made both without any reference to political logic and with the sole aim of personal advantage.⁸⁹

In this regard, a big step forward was made by Renzo De Felice. While acknowledging the internationalism then professed by Mussolini and his deep hostility toward bourgeois "patriotism,"⁹⁰ De Felice observed that "in contact with Trentino's political reality, a reality dominated by the pressure of Pan-Germanism, and in contact with men like Battisti, for whom the struggle for autonomy was paramount," Mussolini had begun "realize that some values had often been ignored by the majority of Italian Socialists and especially by those who, like him, belonged to the more revolutionary wing of the party."⁹¹ Basically, De Felice maintains that, if one examines the events of 1914, Mussolini's experience in Trento had fostered in him an understanding of the problems of those Italians who were still subject to Austro-Hungarian rule. Although he considered "naïve" the irredentists and those who hoped to escape from German political and economic control, he "understood the problem that lay at the heart of Irredentism" and that was that if the day came when "it genuinely could become a reality," its character would be "defined not by some abstract internationalism but by a full understanding of its limits."⁹²

This analysis can in fact be taken further if one considers how the political education of Mussolini, "the most Romagnol of the citizens of Romagna,"⁹³ was influenced by his regional roots. In some ways, De Felice

wanted to reduce the importance of this factor and yet, conversely, it is fundamental to an understanding of Mussolini's experience in Trentino. One should not undervalue the fact that the Romagna of revolutionary rabble-rousers imbued with an explosive mixture of anarchism, Marxism of various kinds, Mazzini-style republican radicalism, Garibaldinism, "Blanquism, utopian Communism, Internationalism, revolutionary patriotism and maximalist Jacobinism"⁹⁴ had made a deep impression on Mussolini. All these "-isms" left their mark, coexisting in his political thinking, and these "-isms" included (although it was denied or unknowingly discounted) the patriotism of the Risorgimento.

In Trento, in 1909, this patriotic sentiment which flowed more or less unmistakably through the life of the young Mussolini like an underground river, was able to return to the surface, albeit obscured behind an apparently iron veil of internationalist orthodoxy and a branch of Socialism that was devoid of any sympathy for Irredentism or, more generally, for that collection of ideals, symbols and traditions that might be included in the concept of homeland. Mussolini's writing at that time offers us many examples of this: the appeal for the patriotism that inspired the Parisian communards,⁹⁵ praise of *La Voce* for its manifesto calling for the creation of "The Third Great Italy",⁹⁶ the harkening back to when Ferrara stiffened the resolve of its citizens to fight for national independence.⁹⁷ He penned an attack on "warmongering, threatening Austria" that was linked to his indignation that "the beautiful Italian language was being reduced to the Italian of the Tyroleans or the Tyrolean of the Italian."⁹⁸ Mussolini denounced the "Pan-Germanism or, worse, the linguistic imperialism" practiced by German-speaking political comrades.⁹⁹ He praised Italian language that was "despised," and noted with irony the offer of "a few cents' tip" to anyone who knew the name of "Austria's greatest poet."¹⁰⁰ He admitted that the homeland is "the highest collective body to which adhere ethnic groups of citizens" and that the "love of one's homeland, when considered as a feeling, is beyond discussion."¹⁰¹

However, there are also passages of great significance from the "Quadretto trentino" about "La Fossa del Castello" (The Castle Pit).¹⁰² Here Mussolini describes with a sense of nostalgia the great tower "in which the window facing Italy is no longer lit" and how, during Cardinal Madruzzo's reign, the Trentini, patriots before their time, "often struggled fiercely" against the many Germans and Spaniards present in the city. One must also consider the essay on August von Platen. Here Mussolini speaks of "the reverent pilgrimage of all the great geniuses of the North"

and proudly claims that Italy is the “homeland of genius,” that Italy is no longer the “geographical expression” of Metternich, nor Lamartine’s “land of the dead.” He describes with pride the Italian who is intent on “quicken[ing] the pace into the stadium where Nations run the great Marathon for world supremacy.”¹⁰³ Finally, one must recall the dreamlike conversation with Alessandro Vittoria, in which this famous sculptor, having noted that a certain building “does not seem Italian” because it is “too imperial and royal” and doubtful about the land in which his own monument stands remarks: “Sometimes my ears have been hurt by the sounds of a language that was not spoken in Italy, at least in my time... Explain this to me.” Mussolini replies and the pause at the end of his speech is worth a thousand words: “I beg you, don’t ask me these questions.” No less eloquent is the end of the dialogue when Vittoria declares himself happy because “Dante protects us... And as long as his arm reaches northwards I shall never feel that I am in a foreign land.”¹⁰⁴

Another area to study with particular attention is Mussolini’s favorite subject of argument while in Trentino, and that is the savage anticlerical campaign launched from the pages of *L’Avvenire del lavoratore* and *Il Popolo*. In this regard, it is interesting to note that alongside his usual targets (obscurantism, material greed, racism and sexual scandals), Mussolini turns openly to the subject of homeland and does not pass by the chance of using it as a weapon with which to attack the church in Trentino, accusing it of denying completely any feeling of national belonging and of being the “long arm” of Hapsburg rule. The “stench of a Tyrolean pipe full of the Vatican’s cigar butts” was conjured up with disgust in one of the many set-tos with his adversary, Don Chelodi, “a Catholic, papal and Austrophile priest” heaped in, alongside his “papal” colleagues of *Voce Cattolica*, with “volkbundists” and “Austrophiles.”¹⁰⁵ Some days later, another ferocious attack on the clergy concluded with an invective by Giosué Carducci that accused them of being the party “that in Italy repudiates the Homeland.”¹⁰⁶ However, it is in his sarcastic commentary on the celebrations for Hofer’s centenary that Mussolini expresses to the full the patriotic element of his attack on the church in Trentino:

Timeservers, your hour has come! Whoever wants to pocket 70 Crowns (yes, that’s seventy crowns), have a free ride down to Innsbruck and eat knodeln and sauerkraut paid for by someone else, then just sign up for your part in the Hofer celebrations. Every city, every village has its own representative who’ll sort out the expenses of anyone who’ll go to Innsbruck and be

“a good Tyrolean patriot.” It’s true, there’s not enough money for roads and aqueducts. But there is cash to send to Innsbruck idiots who are ready to call themselves Tyrolean. So, forward then, you timeservers. Have a good sniff. Wherever you smell the stink of the sacristy and of Pan-Germanism, you’ll find the trader willing to give you the seventy Crowns and send you off to the Tyrol’s capital. The fun and the handouts are all there for you. But this is nothing compared to the blessing you’ll get from Bishop Celestino of Trento who has sung the praises of the innkeeper from Passiria [Andreas Hofer]. So, come on then, timeservers! For God, for the Bishop, for the Homeland. Let’s get that loaf of bread!¹⁰⁷

When one considers all these references, his familiarity with Irredentist groups linked to Cesare Bertì and the use of the cutting word “stupid” to describe the phrase “Italy finishes at Ala!,” a phrase used by the Public Prosecutor, Tranquillini, one may easily understand why the Austrian authorities considered Mussolini an Irredentist. This definition of Mussolini by the Austrians was certainly mistaken as the political concept of Irredentism in its truest form and its link with bourgeois nationalism were as far as one could get from the young Mussolini’s thinking, but it explains, in an excellent manner, the effect that Mussolini’s political activities in Trento were having.

Mussolini’s appointment on August 1¹⁰⁸ as editor-in-chief of *Il Popolo* marks the culmination of his friendly collaboration with Battisti and his involuntary or “guilty” Irredentism has a bearing on how this appointment may be viewed. The common ground that existed between the reformism of Battisti and the extremism of Mussolini, in fact, was not simply the campaign against the clergy. This common ground included the battle for the defense of national identity, a battle which Battisti, as a Socialist, had been fighting for the previous 15 years and which must have struck a chord in the patriotic heart of the revolutionary from Romagna.

The proof of this thesis comes from a fact that historical writing has not considered. In his political activity at the forefront of the Socialist movement in Trentino, Battisti had constantly to defend himself from the attacks of political allies who accused him of deviating from Socialist orthodoxy by concentrating too much effort on the defense of the region’s Italian identity. At the beginning of 1903, the trade-unionist wing which had proclaimed itself the sole custodian “of rigorous Internationalism, of tactical intransigence [and] of unitary class-consciousness”¹⁰⁹ had caused a dramatic schism which led to Battisti’s temporary exit from the Socialist Party two years later.

Mussolini the revolutionary, on the other hand, was an exponent of the most extreme wing of Socialism and fascinated by Sorel's theories of anarcho-syndicalism. For nine months, he stood at the head of both the Trentino Workers' Association and *L'Avvenire del lavoratore*. He could have mobilized the party's wing that had fought so hard against Battisti; but what did he do? Nothing. One could say, perhaps, that with the passage of time, tensions had weakened, that sharp edges had been sanded down or that the necessary forces to start a fight no longer existed. Not so. On the contrary, further proof of Mussolini's determination to side more or less consciously with Battisti's irredentist brand of Socialism comes from the figure appointed as Mussolini's successor, Giulio Barni. Within days of his appointment, ratified officially on January 21, 1910, the 26-year-old Florentine trade unionist, who had come to take over the various roles performed by his friend, Mussolini, oversaw a rapid deterioration of relationships within the party. This led to a clash between its trade union and political wings, and by November, the party had split for a second time. Targets singled out for attack included Battisti himself and the struggle that he had fought over the years to establish an Italian university in Austria:

Let them take it [the university] wherever they wish: to Pelagosa, to Aquileia, to Trieste, to Trento, to Hell! Why don't they have done with it once and for all? The university question is nonsense! What use can an Italian university be when other more important civil issues are still to be sorted? Without doubt: no use at all...It will only produce the usual doctors, the usual pedagogues, the usual worshippers of gods, the nation, the states and everything else that's been catalogued and legalized, the usual members of a society that exploits [the proletariat] and crushes it both materially and intellectually.¹¹⁰

When Mussolini was Director of *L'Avvenire del lavoratore*, such articles were never published. From this perspective, Mussolini's Trentino experience throws a different light on the choices that he made at the outbreak of the Great War. Mussolini's decision to break with the PSI and to come down on the side of Intervention at the end of this troubled period was the result of various motivating factors; among these, political calculation and personal ambition certainly played an important part. However, one must also note that Mussolini's decision was taken at a time marked by the resurgence of a spirit of revolutionary patriotism that harkened back to the Risorgimento and which displayed itself with particular vigor in Trento.

The final point to make in this examination of Mussolini's time in Trentino is that among the suggestions and influences that affected him during the months he spent on the frontier, in the midst of Trentino's political life, and subsequently contributed to his political development, there existed neither the depth of Battisti's thinking nor that sense of linking a sense of national belonging and Socialist struggle for a system of democratic values while maintaining justice and freedom as a link that could not be disregarded.

NOTES

1. See S. Benvenuti, *Storia del Trentino*, vol. II (Trento: Edizioni Panorama, 1995).
2. See R. Monteleone, *Il movimento socialista nel Trentino, 1894-1914* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1977) and S. Biguzzi *Cesare Battisti* (Turin: UTET, 2008).
3. See P. Pombeni, *Il primo De Gasperi* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007) and P. Craveri *De Gasperi* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006).
4. Gasparini resigned in autumn 1908 but agreed to stay on until the nomination of a new secretary: "He claimed health reasons, the need to return to his trade as a carpenter and cabinet maker and, significantly, the problems he faced through not understanding German, something that had become indispensable given the ever closer ties that were being forged with the large federations of Austrian trade unions." R. Monteleone, *Adriano Gasparini*, in F. Andreucci, T. Detti *Il movimento operaio italiano: dizionario biografico: 1853-1943* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1975-1979), vol. 2, p. 448.
5. B. Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, edited by E. and D. Susmel (Florence: La Fenice) 1951-1963, vol. XXXIII, p. 265.
6. R. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario 1883-1920* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995), p. 62. On this subject, see also S. Mattei, *Il socialista Mussolini a Trento (1909)*, 'Letture trentine altoatesine', 33, 1983, pp. 83-107.
7. R. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, p. 61.
8. B. Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. II, p. 263.
9. Mussolini, *Opera omnia*, p. 268.
10. Mussolini will speak of a region "without revolutionary tradition," of "citizens of the Trentino who are perhaps too peace-loving" and of their blood which, according to him, gave them "no desire to wage war." These quotations are taken from B. Mussolini *Il Trentino veduto da un socialista. Note e notizie*, (Florence: 1911. Reprinted by Centro di studi atesini, Bolzano, 1983).
11. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, p. 69.
12. B. Mussolini, *Opera omnia*, vol. II, p. 267.
13. R. Monteleone, *Il movimento socialista*, p. 292.

14. *L'Avvenire del lavoratore*, January 29, 1909.
15. *Il Popolo*, February 18, 1909.
16. D. Emer, "Mussolini a Trento. (Conversando con Cesare Berti)," *Il Giornale di Trento*, March 17, 1923.
17. In Trento, Mussolini also endeavored to improve his playing by taking several lessons from maestro Giuseppe Conci. See S. Biguzzi, *L'orchestra del duce. Mussolini, la musica e il mito del capo*, (Turin: UTET, 2003).
18. "Un grande amico dell'Italia. Augusto von Platen" (*Il Popolo*, July 3, 1909). (All the quotations taken from *Il Popolo, L'Avvenire del Lavoratore and Vita Trentina* are also in Mussolini *Opera Omnia*, vol. II.) This work is in essence "the summary of a wider study published by Guglielmo Bertagnolli in the *Bolletino della Società Studenti Trentini*, in that year that is, February 1909," F. Olász, *Benito Mussolini a Trento (1909)*, (Milan: Bravetta, 1958), p. 7. Also of note is the article of literary criticism on *Figure di donne nel Wilhelm Tell* by Schiller. This critical essay together with that on the poetry of Klopstock, which Francesco Chiesa had included in *Pagine Libere*, was to have been part of a volume of works of literary criticism on German literature. However, this was never published. Mussolini also wrote a critical essay on *Les Villes Tentaculaires* by the Belgian, Émile Verhaeren, therein also expressing his views on Charles Baudelaire and Sándor Petöfi.
19. "La Comune di Parigi. 18 marzo-24 maggio 1871," (*L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, March 27, 1909).
20. Having escaped confiscation by the police when Mussolini was expelled from Trento, this work appeared in 1973 in *Il Borghese* and in 2005 in *Gente*. The original manuscript is in the Stanford University Library.
21. Podrecca and Galantara, (Rome, 1913).
22. *La mia giovinezza* (My Youth), the anonymous memoirs of a female worker from Germany, the preface of the book *L'Homme et la terre* (Man and the Earth) by Élisée Reclus; a dialogue between two workers by Paul Lafargue, *L'ultima coppia* (The Last Couple) by Edmond Haraucourt, a passage from *Beethoven* by Romain Rolland, *Lo Spettro* (The Ghost) by Fritz Sänger, *I bravi cavalli* (The Fine Horses) by Erbert Nadler, a rhythmic version of *Canto della Libertà* by Robert Seidel and of *Elegia* (Elegy) by Ernest Raynaud.
23. "Notturmo in 're' minore," *Il Popolo*, August 8, 1909. Alessandro Vittoria, born in Trento, was one of the most important sculptors working in Veneto in the sixteenth century. The story was one of a series of four that owed their inspiration to the nightmarish visions of E.A. Poe (*Convegno supremo, Nulla è vero, tutto è permesso, Corsa di nozze*) and were to be published together in a book entitled *Novellette perverse*.
24. La fossa del Castello, *Il Popolo*, August 3, 1909. This short story was part of a planned series of *Quadretti trentini* (Pictures of Trentino).
25. A. Campi, *Mussolini* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), pp. 105–106.

26. G. Prezzolini, *L'italiano inutile* (Milan: Longanesi, 1954), p. 135.
27. Active in arranging cultural events and organizing conferences and public lectures, the "Pro Cultura" association was inspired by ideas of the Enlightenment and founded in 1900 "through the enthusiasm and work of Cesare Battisti. In its early years it was run in collaboration with the Società degli Studenti Trentini as the most suitable and appropriate way of promoting popular civic understanding of political (and by this one would say now, 'ideological') struggle. It also actively promoted public works." E. Bittanti Battisti, *Le origini della "Pro Cultura"* in *La Pro Cultura di Trento nel suo cinquantennio* (Trento: 1956), pp. 3-4.
28. Mussolini held her in the highest consideration, to the point where he defined her as "the only person in Trento worth talking to." This quote comes from the unedited notebooks of Ugo Ojetti cit. in G. Pini, D. Susmel, *Mussolini, L'uomo e l'opera*, vol. I (Florence: La Fenice, 1953), p. 135. Returning the compliment, Bittanti declared that Mussolini's "fiery pen" could "set the pages (of the *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore* newspaper) ablaze" given "the youthful enthusiasm with which he warms it and the pure and steady faith that he kindles." G. Megaro, *Mussolini dal mito alla realtà* (Milan: Istituto Editoriale Italiano, 1947), p. 163.
29. E. Gentile, *Mussolini e "La Voce"* (Florence: Sansoni, 1976).
30. *Il Popolo*, March 27, 1909.
31. *Il Popolo*, March 27, 1909.
32. De Felice *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, p. 63.
33. G. Barni, "Dal Trentino," *La conquista* November 15, 1910.
34. Monteleone, *Il movimento socialista*, p. 294.
35. *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, February 11, 1909. This achievement was accompanied by a series of raids on the newspaper that left it with a hefty debt of 1300 Crowns. Monteleone *Il movimento socialista*, p. 295.
36. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, p. 69.
37. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, p. 71.
38. Sardi, *Battisti, De Gasperi, Mussolini. Tre giornalisti all'alba del Novecento* (Trento: Curcu & Genovese, 2004), pp. 318-319.
39. Sardi, *Battisti, De Gasperi, Mussolini*, pp. 318-319.
40. *Il Popolo*, February 3, 1909.
41. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, p. 71.
42. *Il Popolo*, June 5, 1909.
43. Mussolini, *Opera omnia*, vol. II, p. 159.
44. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, p. 72.
45. *Il Popolo*, June 1, 1909.
46. See R.A. Webster, "Il primo incontro tra Mussolini e De Gasperi (marzo 1909)," (*Il Mulino*, January 1, 1958), pp. 51-54.
47. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, p. 72.
48. *Il Trentino*, August 3, 1909.

49. Although this anti-Semitism did not contain any “biological” elements, for centuries it reached such a level of violence and intolerance that it became, particularly in an Austro-German setting, an inexorable antecedent of the theory that led to the wiping out of Jews as “inferior beings.” In Trento, the *Voce Cattolica* (Catholic Voice) and *Fede e Lavoro* (Faith and Work) newspapers systematically fomented a hatred of the “deicides,” describing them as disgusting and armed with evil; they claimed that Jews were intent on taking over banks, businesses, schools and newspapers, that they were “untrustworthy and threatening, born traitors, as they are an international phenomenon and, therefore, foreigners in whichever country they settle. They are not interested in that country’s development but are ready to betray it. They stoke up divorce and the break-up of families.” The connection between Jews and Socialists, “the ringleaders of the Reds who work for Jewish Liberals” was, of course, underlined. See Sardi, Battisti, De Gasperi, Mussolini. *Tre giornalisti all’alba del Novecento*, pp. 203, 18.
50. The argument, which made light of its gravity with questionable leniency and which failed to highlight some of its particularly thorny aspects, is taken from Pombeni, *Il primo De Gasperi* and Craveri, *De Gasperi*.
51. Carlo Antonio Pilati (1733–1802), Trentino jurist, champion of the Enlightenment’s antifeudal and anticlerical humanitarian theories.
52. In Trento, in 1475, in a climate of frenzied hatred whipped up by the anti-Semitic sermons of Bernadino da Feltre, the accidental death of a child, Simone Unferdorben, was claimed to be a crime committed by Jews; they were accused of killing the boy to extract blood that was to be mixed into the dough of Passover bread. Under extreme torture, 18 people confessed and those who survived it were burned at the stake. The small Jewish community was then broken up and scattered. “San Simonino” remained a saint until 1965 when the church recognized its terrible error of judgment. Already in 1955, the custom of carrying in religious procession the fake weapons involved in the “martyrdom” was abandoned.
53. *Il Popolo*, June 4, 1909.
54. “Mussolini in his articles tended to go easy on the National-Liberals although they belonged to the hated bourgeoisie [...] The Public Prosecutor, Tranquillini, blamed Mussolini for the fact that the outspoken tone of his [anticlerical] articles in *L’Avvenire del lavoratore* and in *Il Popolo* forced the National-Liberal newspaper, *L’Alto Adige*, to take up a more extreme anti-government position so as not to lose support in anti-Austrian circles and be surpassed by the Socialists.” H. Kramer “Benito Mussolini in Trient und die osterreichischen Behörden im Jahre 1909. Nach neu gefundenen Akten,” *Sudost-Forschungen*, XIV, 1955, p. 191.
55. Museo Storico Trentino, Archivio Battisti, b. 5, f. 7, c. 8.
56. B. Mussolini, p. 53.

57. On Mussolini's role as the head of the group of conspirators, see the testimony of Vittorio Detassis as detailed in Monteleone *Il movimento socialista nel Trentino*, p. 309.
58. In the 1923, interview given to a Fascist daily newspaper, Cesare Berti, head of the group that had planned the attack claimed that Mussolini would have taken part by receiving "the last six kilograms" of dynamite taken from the quarry. Emer, "*Mussolini a Trento (Conversando con Cesare Berti)*." Later, Berti changed his story by stating that: "Not only did Mussolini not take part in the plot to blow up the Austrian police but, when everything was ready and the bomb had been tested, it was Mussolini himself who dissuaded me from doing it by saying that politically it was not the right moment." According to this version, the explosive was not to be left in Mussolini's office at the Workers' Association but in Via San Pietro. C. Berti *L'irredentista*, in *Mussolini* (Rome, Centro Editoriale Nazionale, 1958).
59. "Mussolini e 'La Voce'. Lettere a Giuseppe Prezzolini" *Il Borghese*, 24 (1964), p. 271.
60. Pini, Susmel, *Mussolini, l'uomo e l'opera*, vol. I, p. 142.
61. Before his deportation, Mussolini had received six court sentences: two of three days in prison, one of six days in prison and a 100 Crown fine, one of three days in prison and a 30 Crown fine and one sentence of seven days in prison and a 100 Crown fine. In the same period, *L'Avvenire del lavoratore* was raided 11 times.
62. From a letter to Torquato Nanni, February 26, 1909 in Mussolini *Opera omnia*, vol. II, p. 264.
63. *Il Popolo*, September 28, 1909.
64. *Vita Trentina*, 42, 1909, p. 307.
65. *Il Popolo*, October 5, 1909.
66. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, p. 75.
67. Mussolini, *Opera omnia*, vol. XXXIII, p. 267.
68. E. Ludwig, *Colloqui con Mussolini* (Milan: Mondadori, 1932), p. 186.
69. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, p. 76.
70. M. Sarfatti, *DVX* (Milan: Mondadori, 1926), p. 112.
71. Translations published in English (1928, 1929, 1930), Russian and Dutch (1929), Polish, Spanish, German and Bulgarian (1930), Portuguese and Lithuanian (1931).
72. Battisti, *Epistolario*, vol. I, p. 288.
73. Sarfatti, *DVX*, p. 112.
74. Sarfatti, *DVX*, p. 112.
75. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, p. 76.
76. Megaro, *Mussolini dal mito alla realtà*, p. 173.
77. U. Corsini, (1972) "Di Mussolini, di Trento e dell'operetta di uno scrittore francese," *Studi trentini di scienze storiche*, pp. 230-247.

78. Mattei, *Il socialista Mussolini a Trento*, p. 96.
79. In a letter dated October 1, Mussolini wrote to Prezzolini from Verona: "The latest idea of *La Voce* to tell Italians about Trentino is excellent. Along with the principle of political unification, which is slowly but surely growing stronger, it's necessary to bring Italians together as a spiritual unit." In Prezzolini, *L'italiano inutile*, p. 137.
80. Mussolini took entire passages from an article published in France: E. Seilliere, "Une école d'impérialisme mystique. Les plus récents théoriciens du pangermanisme," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, a. LXXIX (1909) March-April, pp. 196–228. Other texts referred to were Trento's magazine *Pro Culture* (Issue 1, 1910), Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Die Grundlagen des XIX Jahrhunderts*, Ludwig Woltmann *Die Germanen und italiensche Renaissance*, D. Musiedlak *Il mito di Mussolini* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2009), p. 158.
81. Mussolini, *Il Trentino veduto da un socialista*, pp. 74–75. The publication of a draft of one of the chapters (*La Voce*, December 15, 1910) evoked bitter criticism that was taken up by *Alto Adige* and led to a stiff rebuke from the newspaper's editor, Giuseppe Stefenelli, against Mussolini and Prezzolini. These criticisms were certainly not without reason when we note that the teacher from Predappio (Mussolini), in addition to his failure to recognize the contribution made by the people of Trentino during the wars of independence, had written that: "The temperament of Trentino's citizens is not revolutionary, but conservative," and that "Through the veins of Trentino's bourgeoisie, a bourgeoisie that ought to provide Irredentists, just as the Italian bourgeoisie provided patriots, there flows too much German and too much church blood." Mussolini replied tersely to these criticisms on December 31, returning to the same argument and adopting the caustic tone that was all his: "Dear Sirs! You are as ever the same bigots made cowardly by the sanctimonious blood that runs through your veins. You're the usual pack of snarling dogs that are powerless and lick the German stick ... Instead of hurling insults, reply and *La Voce* will publish your comments. What on earth did I say in that article? Why all this anger for no reason? What's needed is honesty and, above all, documents. But as long as there aren't any, no one has to take you seriously. And I'm wasting five cents on a stamp. However, as you want to force the issue I'll carefully make a list of all the spies, interrogators and policemen that Trentino provided for Austria between 1848 and 1866 and I'll remind you that the interrogator of Guglielmo Oberdan, the man who was able to resist without flinching the appalling seven minute agony of his martyrdom, was in fact from Trento [underlined in the original]. And that's it. Benito Mussolini. Forlì December 31, 1910." V. Cali, "Mussolini, Prezzolini e la trentinità. Una voce polemica d'inizio secolo", in *Bollettino del Museo del Trentino del Risorgimento*, 1, (1986), pp. 33–47.

82. Mussolini, *Il Trentino veduto da un socialista*, p. 60.
83. Mussolini, *Il Trentino veduto da un socialista*, p. 65.
84. A. Ragazzoni, Introduction to Mussolini *Il Trentino veduto da un socialista*, p. 5.
85. This definition was given by Mussolini during a conference held on June 25, 1909 at the offices of the Trento Workers' Association. Mussolini, *Opera omnia*, vol. II, p. 169.
86. Mussolini, *Il Trentino veduto da un socialista*, p. 83.
87. G. Prezzolini, *Benito Mussolini* (Rome: Formiggini, 1924), later in *Quattro scoperte. Croce, Papini, Mussolini, Amendola* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1964), p. 157.
88. One may think of *DVX* by Margherita Sarfatti, Yvon de Begnac *Vita di Mussolini* (Milan: Mondadori, 1937) and the memoirs of Cesare Berti.
89. See Gaudens Megaro, *Mussolini dal mito alla realtà*, Angelica Balabanoff, *Il traditore Mussolini* (Rome-Milan: Casa Editrice 'Avanti', 1945), Leda Rafanelli *Una donna e Mussolini* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1975) and Renato Monteleone *Il movimento socialista nel Trentino*.
90. "Patriotism is a fetish. The first fetish that the bourgeoisie offered up to the admiration of the masses was parliamentarianism. Now that this god has waned, here is another fetish: patriotism. But now this is to no avail as the proletariat is, both by definition and by necessity, against patriotism." Mussolini, *Opera omnia*, vol. II, p. 169.
91. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 67–68.
92. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, p. 68.
93. G. Dorso, *Mussolini alla conquista del potere* (Milan: Mondadori, 1963), p. 61.
94. A. Campi, *Mussolini* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001) pp. 102–103.
95. "La comune di Parigi," op. cit., *L'Avvenire del lavoratore*.
96. "La Voce," *Vita Trentina*, 13, 1909.
97. "Una città di silenzio. Ferrara," *Il Popolo*, April 12, 1909.
98. "Il monello risponde," *L'Avvenire del lavoratore*, April 15, 1909.
99. On the same subject see also 'L'Internazionale e la Patria', *L'Avvenire del lavoratore*, August 12, 1909.
100. "Corrispondenze. Bolzano," *L'Avvenire del lavoratore*, March 19, 1909.
101. "Il proletario ha un interesse alla conservazione delle patrie attuali," *L'Avvenire del lavoratore*, July 1, 1909.
102. "La fossa del castello," *Il Popolo*, August 3, 1909.
103. "Un grande amico dell'Italia," *Il Popolo*, July 3, 1909.
104. "Notturmo in "re" minore," *Il Popolo*, August 18, 1909.
105. "Ciccaiulo!" *Il Popolo*, August 4, 1909.
106. "Vecchia vaticana lupa cruenta," *Il Popolo*, August 9, 1909.
107. "Pagnottisti, avanti!" *Il Popolo*, August 14, 1909.

108. Sources generally say August 2; it is Mussolini himself who moves the date of his appointment back one day in his article “Vecchia vaticana lupa cruenta.”
109. Monteleone, *Il movimento socialista nel Trentino*, p. 221.
110. *L'Avvenire del lavoratore*, June 16, 1910.

Mussolini and Revolutionary Syndicalism

Marco Gervasoni

A PERSISTENT LEGEND

Observers have always thought of revolutionary syndicalism as an obvious factor—if not by far the most important—in the formation of Mussolini’s political thought, and not only when he was young. His adversaries in the Partito Socialista Italiano (Italian Socialist Party, PSI) were convinced of it and accused him of having introduced into the party something that was seen as alien to Italian socialism: “Sorelism” (from Georges Sorel, father of revolutionary syndicalism). Even in the historiography on Mussolini, the link between Sorelism and “Mussolinism” was taken as a given as much by the first biographers of Mussolini, such as Gaudens Megaro,¹ as by Sorel scholars. It was indeed the transformation of Mussolini from Socialist leader to duce that confirmed a view of Sorel’s thought and of Sorelism as an inevitable step along the way toward fascism. According to James Meisel, one of the first academics to study Sorel, Mussolini used “Sorel’s terminology” to elevate the theory of violence from a “vernacular belief” to a “literary idiom,” while for Jack Roth, “fascism needed Sorelism.”² Renzo De Felice also wrote that “the ideological and personal influence” of revolutionary syndicalism on Mussolini was “very considerable,” to the

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point where he believes it explains Mussolini's "conversion" of 1914 and "the origins of fascism": syndicalism was a "red thread" that ran all the way through a long "political evolution" and even through "his (Mussolini's) personality."³ Similarly, Ernst Nolte, in his study of the young Mussolini as a Socialist, while not emphasizing his relationship with syndicalism, claims that Mussolini had borrowed from Sorel "the celebration of heroes and saints and the lament for past greatness" which were "the most important indication of his subsequent fascism."⁴

The American scholar A. James Gregor was the first to produce a work dedicated specifically to Mussolini's revolutionary syndicalism. According to Gregor, Mussolini worked until 1909 in an "intellectual environment characterized by analyses and by syndicalist ideals." It was a legacy that Mussolini subsequently kept intact, "giving substance to the thought" of the Duce. However, Gregor concentrated not so much on the influence of Sorel as on that of Paolo Orano and Robert Michels (then close to French and Italian revolutionary syndicalists) in providing Mussolini with suggestions on the use of techniques to influence the masses and on the struggles of the *élites* within the unions and political parties.⁵

For Israeli scholar Zeev Sternhell, Mussolini's encounter with revolutionary syndicalism was very revealing, because Sorelism was an "anti-materialist revision of Marxism" at the beginning of a "national socialism" that could already be defined ideologically as "fascism" well before the outbreak of the Great War, Mussolini was nothing more than its most consistent adherent. This was a position shared by Sternhell's tutor, Jacob Talmon, in the last work he wrote before his death: according to Talmon, the future Duce was "the perfect heir to continue the Sorelian legacy founded on the cult of heroes, on the break with politics, and on the celebration of force, terror and nihilism."⁶ These positions can also be found in more recent literature: for academics such as Richard Drake, Richard Wolin and Mark Antliff, who are very different from each other, Mussolini was the main interpreter of the Sorelian theory of violence.⁷ Jan-Werner Müller, in his recent and successful history of twentieth-century political ideas, writes that the ideas of the anti-Enlightenment and "the necessity of manipulating the masses" influenced Mussolini the Socialist, who then transferred them to his role as Duce, directly from Sorel.⁸

In what seems to be the classic "night when every cow is black," one may single out (apart from the first volume of the Mussolini biography published by Renzo De Felice, which even today is unsurpassed) Emilio Gentile and his pioneering study of the origins of fascist ideology. Gentile maintains

that if the influence of revolutionary syndicalism on the young Mussolini is undeniable, some precise distinctions must, however, be made: first, that one should talk of a “syndicalist idea of socialism” rather than of syndicalism itself and, second, that one must not exaggerate Sorel’s influence on Mussolini as it was above all “theoretical” and “linguistic”; Mussolini’s later “dissociation” from syndicalism, a “dissociation” that was both clear-cut and precise from a specific moment in time, can be considered as revealing with regard to the subsequent events of his life’s history.⁹

Although one may cite academics of various periods and nationalities as well as followers of different disciplines and methodologies (not all of whom may be deeply familiar with Sorel and revolutionary syndicalism), all are linked by the fact that they recognize one obvious point, that is, that many of Mussolini’s ideas, even when as a Fascist, were derived from Sorelism and revolutionary syndicalism. In the pages that follow, I shall not try to reject this academic genealogy but shall subject it to careful examination without thereby considering in the same manner of proof. I shall look at the subject analytically with the aim of dismantling its various parts and employ a methodology that pays particular attention to the language, the semantics of ideas and to the way in which a political culture, in this case Mussolini’s, developed during what may be defined as the *career of an agitator*.

WHAT EXACTLY WAS REVOLUTIONARY SYNDICALISM?

Many academics consider revolutionary syndicalism a movement that is difficult to define, given its complex position within the political, intellectual and social system of its time. This lack of definition explains why for many years this phenomenon has been rarely investigated and has been judged using *idées reçues* (secondhand ideas) which, on investigation, reveal themselves as such.

Since the 1970s, the increase in the number of studies has helped to reduce a series of commonplaces on the subject, while more recent works have shown that revolutionary syndicalism, far from being a phenomenon restricted only to southern Europe, also had some significance in Belgium, Holland, Sweden, the UK (England and Scotland) and, in a more limited way, in Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire (more so in Budapest than in Vienna). Beyond Europe, the influence of revolutionary syndicalism in the USA seems greater than one might have thought some time ago, while very recently there have been studies on the spread of

the principle of “direct action” in the Asiatic communities (Philippines, Japan, China), in Africa (South Africa), in the societies of Central and South America and in the important, though little known, history of the Australian labor movement. Moreover, the lifespan of revolutionary syndicalism was longer than one might think, stretching much further than from the beginning of the twentieth century until the First World War since, on a global scale, its period of maximum diffusion occurred during the final years of the war and the 1920s; furthermore, even in Italy the *Unione sindacale italiana* (USI—Italian Trade Union) numbered 80,000 activists in 1912 and increased to 800,000 in 1920. Therefore, syndicalism with its “direct action” was not a phenomenon restricted only to the Latin countries of Europe possessing a “backward” working class and lacking structures of mass production: on the contrary, it was a global phenomenon that could be found during the high points’ modern industrial economic development.¹⁰

Although many union organizations practiced direct action, they were, however, a minority compared to the other union bodies, except in France, where the revolutionary syndicalist CGT (*Confédération générale du travail*—General Confederation of Labor) occupied a position of primacy until the First World War. The “syndicalist” unions preached the direct involvement of workers, questioned representation by delegates and preferred strikes (and often general strikes) to mediation and agreements; they also favored sabotage and even the occupation of factories. This was a more radical and undoubtedly more violent approach than that of other unions inspired by collectivism and linked to Socialist parties. This approach contributed to the modernization of unions, to shifting other unions away from a preoccupation with income, and to challenging entrepreneurs on their ability to invest and produce. So, the direct action of syndicalism was not purely a movement of destruction and protest, as previously thought. One must not forget that, at least in Italy, revolutionary syndicalism professed itself a supporter of *laissez-faire* and fought against state intervention, not only in labor conflicts but also in all areas of the economy, thereby attracting the attention of Vilfredo Pareto and Maffeo Pantaleoni, who maintained contact with various exponents of syndicalism.¹¹

Then there was syndicalist ideology and theory. Hubert Lagardelle, the founder of the magazine *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, was the first to coin the term “revolutionary syndicalism,” although Sorel himself preferred “*la nouvelle école*” (the new school). This school was composed of Lagardelle,

Édouard Berth, a section of the *Mouvement Socialiste*, and various followers of the magazine *Pages libres* (Free Pages).¹² However, if Lagardelle was one of the faces of syndicalist ideology, he was not unique: in France it was influenced by others, from Proudhon to Blanqui to Bakunin to socialism favoring the mutual aid movement; elsewhere it was inspired by other homegrown political traditions.¹³ Therefore, it is necessary to differentiate between *Sorelism* and *revolutionary syndicalism*; at various moments the two universes overlapped but without ever coinciding completely, while at other times they drew apart from each other, to perhaps approach each other again. Notwithstanding this feature, one must not think that the writings of Sorel, Lagardelle or Berth did not circulate within union groups or Workers' Associations. Moreover, even if Sorel never set foot in a CGT office, nor participated in a strike, it would be a limiting factor to syndicalism into "doers" (i.e., the organizers) and "theoreticians." If anything, there was a difference in function between union organizers, "intellectual" pioneers and "politicians" who used syndicalism as a political formula within the Socialist parties.

In fact, syndicalism did not present itself as merely a new theory and a new kind of union practice but as an updating of the politics of revolutionary socialism; in fact, a number of figures, Aristide Briand until 1904, Gustave Hervé, and then Lagardelle, were to a different extent followers of syndicalism and, at the same time, leaders of French socialism. The political component was even more marked in Italy where, until the schism of 1907, syndicalism occupied a position within socialism and represented one of the wings of the PSI; its main exponents were party leaders (Arturo Labriola, Ernesto Cesare Longobardi and Guido Marangoni). They held editorial posts on the party newspaper (Enrico Leone) or were regular contributors to it (Paulo Orano).¹⁴ In Italy, the theoreticians were also political figures for a period of time. Furthermore, as far as theoreticians were concerned, Italy from the start made an important contribution to the ideological evolution of revolutionary syndicalism. Arturo Labriola, Leone and Panunzio were writing in *Mouvement Socialiste* during the same months in which a theory of syndicalism was being developed. Sorel's *Reflections on Violence*, although in an unrefined version, first saw the light of day in Italy in *Divenire sociale* (Future Society) edited by Leone: in France it appeared only later in *Mouvement Socialiste* to be then published in book form.

In Giuseppe Prezzolini's opinion, Italy was Sorel's "spiritual homeland"¹⁵ and played a more important role in Italy than in France, especially influencing Italian culture outside of socialism in many ways. Not only did

some of his books appear only in Italian, but Sorel, who would never have been able to publish in any French daily, was for a long time a commentator for two leading Italian newspapers, *Il Giornale d'Italia* and *Il Resto del Carlino*. The importance of Italy in the topography of international syndicalism was not limited, however, to culture: in no other European Socialist party did syndicalist ideas have as great an influence as in Italy, while in the second decade of the twentieth century, Italy became, with USI, the homeland of “practical” revolutionary socialism, while in France, the CGT seemed to be declining.

Syndicalism was also the subject of study by the most progressive representatives of German sociology, including by Robert Michels, who remained a part of it up to a certain point, and above all by Werner Sombart.¹⁶ It was a movement that could appreciate the first signs of the *aestheticisation of politics*. Indeed, syndicalists were in frequent contact with the avant-gardes of Paris, Berlin, London and Vienna, and presented themselves as supporters of a *new aesthetic*, a break with the late-romantic or naturalist aesthetic that was supported more or less officially by the Socialists. In this case too, the pivotal role of Italy was important when one considers the achievement of Prezzolini's *La Voce*, one of the largest planets in the Sorelian galaxy, in spreading the message of the avant-garde. Furthermore, if James Joyce, during his brief stay in Rome in 1906, showed himself in his own way to be a follower of Labriola's syndicalism,¹⁷ contact between syndicalists and futurists was not infrequent. Already in 1905, in the pages of *Avanti!*, Labriola reviewed Marinetti's *Le Roi Bombace* (King Cotton), while two syndicalist magazines, Tomaso Monicelli's *Il Viandante* (The Wayfarer) and Ottavio Dinale's *La Demolizione* (Demolition) published articles by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and poems by Anselmo Bucci and by Gian Pietro Lucini.¹⁸ The revolutionary syndicalists Maria Rygier, Alfonso de Pietri Tonelli, Livio Ciardi and Marinetti and Lucini, contributed to *Giovane Italia* (Young Italy), a Milanese subversive republican periodical, while Filippo Corridoni liked to attend shows by futurists.¹⁹ As Labriola wrote, syndicalism was above all a “state of mind” typical, according to Beatrice Webb, of “angry youth.”²⁰

If recent studies allow one to view syndicalism in a new light, the most recent on Italian and European socialism also allow observers to examine better the figure of Mussolini and the clash of the two ideological universes. Moreover, even if specific research on Mussolini the Socialist has not followed the works by Luciano Della Tana, De Felice and Gherardo Bozzetti,²¹ knowledge of the political and organizational and of

the cultural, symbolic, linguistic and ritual aspects of Italian socialism has undergone profound changes compared to that of the 1960s and 1970s. No one today could consider Mussolini as being outside Italian socialism rather, in his original form, he was the incarnation of those insurrectional, subversive and plebiscitary tendencies that always occupied a large space within the galaxy of Italian socialism.²² De Felice is therefore correct in considering Mussolini, the editor of *Avanti!*, the true leader of these revolutionary tendencies. Certainly, it was about a revolutionary socialism that kept apace with the mass society that was also beginning to assert itself in Italy, and it was this revolutionary socialism which allows us to compare Mussolini, despite obvious and understandable differences, with other leaders of the extreme left of European socialism, from Rosa Luxemburg to Karl Liebknecht to Lenin and Gustave Hervé.

THE FIRST MUSSOLINI: “SYNDICALISM” OR, INSTEAD, “SOCIALIST ORIGINS”

In examining the relationship between Mussolini and the world of syndicalism, we shall begin by distinguishing three phases in the life of Italian revolutionary syndicalism, even if these periods occurred in little more than a decade, from the beginning of the new century until its schism from the PSI in 1907, from the schism to the Libyan War and the foundation of the USI (1912) until interventionism (1914–1915). Mussolini’s encounter with the first phase of syndicalism, if not inevitable, was obvious. Indeed, syndicalism was born of a branch of socialism that exhibited features both of Marxist orthodoxy and of revisionism. With regard to the interpretation of Marxism, Sorel and his “students” were revisionists who, instead of supporting reformism, as Eduard Bernstein did in Germany and Ivanoe Bonomi and Leonida Bissolati did in Italy, sided with anti-governmental and revolutionary groups, that is, with the followers of Jules Guesde, who were orthodox in their interpretation of Marx.²³ In Italy, this situation was even more marked as Arturo Labriola and the syndicalists belonged to the revolutionary left of the party. Known as the *intransigenti* (intransigents), they allied themselves with Enrico Ferri, thus providing the Italian equivalent of the center-orthodox position (hostile to reformism) that Karl Kautsky represented in Germany and Jules Guesde in France. Furthermore, the relationship between Ferri and the syndicalists was not only tactical, given the frequency with which Labriola, Orano and Longobardi contributed to the PSI’s theoretical review, *Socialismo*, founded by and edited by Ferri.

Beyond the doctrinal element, which in the world of socialism always occupied an important place, the syndicalists were the progeny of a political culture shared by a large section of the politically active working classes, which was subversive and rebellious, hostile to the state and institutions, and attracted by the anarchistic, antimilitarist and anti-patriotic preaching that socialism had fed on during the 1880s and 1890s and which was embodied in Andrea Costa's *Partito Socialista Rivoluzionario* (Revolutionary Socialist Party) and in Constantino Lazzari's *Partito Operaio* (Workers' Party). This culture was still strong in Naples at the turn of the century, and it was the culture in which Labriola, Leone, Longobardi and Silvano Fasule had developed. It is not by chance that Filippo Turati always saw, first in Labriola and later in Mussolini, the return of the ideas of the old *Partito Operaio*. It is even less surprising, therefore, that Lazzari and the whole labor movement in Milan could be found in the opinions of Labriola's newspaper, the *Avanguardia Socialista* (Socialist Advance Guard), which was supported by the orthodox Kautsky and by the follower of Guesde, Paul LaFargue, the main French Marxist leader after Guesde.²⁴

Labriola's weekly newspaper, which carried the same name as the faction it championed, Socialist avant-garde, and in which Mussolini's first articles appeared, represented a crossroads between revolutionary socialism, "workerism," orthodox Marxism and the new, emerging, syndicalist tendencies. The meeting of minds between Mussolini and *Avanguardia Socialista* was almost expected, because Benito, through his father (who was in his time a *Partito Socialista Rivoluzionario* activist²⁵), had grown up in the subversive, fertile soil of early socialism, that is, of workerism and anarchistic socialism. The fact that Mussolini's rendezvous with revolutionary socialism occurred in his temporary home of Switzerland can probably be explained by the intervention of Giacinto Menotti Serrati. Although Serrati was somewhat younger than Lazzari, he had inherited the same workerist ideas and was Mussolini's first political mentor. Mussolini's stay in Switzerland gave him the opportunity to read Sorel's books and the first syndicalist writings that appeared in *Le Mouvement Socialiste*.

Denunciations of the "mushrooming of reformism," anti-parliamentarianism that was hostile to "penetration by and collaboration with socialism" and the call to react to the "degeneration" of socialism caused by reformism were not themes unique to syndicalism but were also shared by workerists and anarchists, and it was not by chance that Mussolini found them in Peter Kropotkin.²⁶ With regard to reformism, certainly

Sorel, Lagardelle and Labriola provided a sociological explanation which owed more than a little to the analyses of Pareto (some of whose lessons Mussolini attended in Lausanne). The parliamentary Socialists were not only feeble or treacherous, as the revolutionaries maintained, they were a different class; Mussolini wrote that they were “government employees, shop assistants and tobacconists that governed the large electoral battalion of reformers (*riformaioli*).”²⁷

For Mussolini at this point, class struggle became a battle between the *élites* that existed within the same political party and a mortal conflict with the bourgeoisie. It was a “social war” that could only end in violence, a “bloody duel between the forces of conservatism and those of the future,” an “insurrectional storm.”²⁸ This celebration of violence by the Young Socialist Mussolini seems to have had its origins in the anarchistic, insurrectional and workerist ideas of early socialism rather than in syndicalism itself. Sorel, on the other hand, always stressed the profound difference between syndicalism and Jacobinism; the working class was to achieve power not through sudden uprisings, but thanks to the slow penetration of workers “customs” in the same way that Christianity did in the Roman Empire. Thus, the anti-Jacobinism of Sorel and of his followers, Berth and Lagardelle, was very deeply rooted²⁹; conversely, Mussolini the Socialist, who would have loved to have been called the “Marat of the proletariat,” laid claim to a Jacobin tradition modernized by Blanquism, which for a time was also widespread in Italy. Also very telling is the image of the “insurrectional storm” that harkens back to the traditional language of Blanquism; it was certainly not Sorelian because Sorel despised the revolutionary from France. Instead, the myth of the insurrection and of the consequent seizure of power was always central for Mussolini. After the general strike of 1904, he praised “mob rule” and the “violence of the crowd in motion against the edifices and symbols that oppress us,” noting that, just as the bourgeoisie had acted as “hooligans” during the French Revolution, so now should the proletariat.³⁰

Certainly, everything was still rather confused. This was also true of Mussolini’s mind, as one can gather by reading one of his articles dedicated to Ferdinand Lassalle, who he viewed as drawing the blueprint for those “unions” promoting “the philosophical education of the working class conscience.” Here, notwithstanding his misinterpretation of the ideas of one of the nineteenth-century’s Socialists most in favor of state intervention, Mussolini demonstrates that he has already skimmed through the pages of Sorel’s *Avenir Socialiste des syndicats*, the seminal work on

syndicalist theory, which had been translated in *Avanguardia Socialista*. Furthermore, according to Mussolini, even Kautsky could at that moment be considered as being close to syndicalism, a tendency that would “bring up to date” both socialism and the PSI which was in need of “moral, political and religious unity.”³¹

In an analysis focusing on the history of political ideas, this superimposition of political language could seem incoherent and confused, as indeed it is. However, Mussolini, as a militant and agitator, was not seeking formal coherence in his thought. In his political activities, articles, lectures and meetings, he used phrases that were aimed at goading his audience toward mobilization for a revolution; this was an audience composed of the usual Socialist militants of the time who were familiar with this rhetoric, were it syndicalist, anarchistic, workerist, Blanquist or subversive-republican.

As further evidence of Mussolini’s inconstant syndicalism, one must note that, both as a militant and as a minor PSI leader, he was not part of Labriola’s faction and certainly did not follow it when the syndicalists left the PSI in 1907. Mussolini foresaw that, once outside the party, the political influence of the political syndicalists would be reduced to little, as in fact happened. For Mussolini, it was essential to remain inside the party; the case of Gustave Hervé in France had provided proof that theoretical and practical subversion could conquer a political party: elected at the congress of Saint-Étienne to the leadership of the SFIO (*Section Française de l’Internationale Ouvrière*—French Section of the Workers’ International), Hervé had passed from “ostracism” to “power.”³² Indeed, Mussolini felt himself closer to the editor of the “*Guerre Sociale* (Social War)” than to the leaders of the CGT. Hervé too had used a mixture of subversive language taken from French political tradition, and in this language, revolutionary syndicalism played an important part. Moreover, at this point, one does well to remember that Sorel despised Hervé who represented the quintessence of Jacobin subversion.³³

Mussolini’s distance from the syndicalists who had left the PSI naturally did not stop him from expressing his solidarity with them when they were arrested,³⁴ nor from declaring himself one of Sorel’s comrades³⁵; neither did it prompt him to tone down his denunciation of parliamentarianism, nor his call for the “ethical” lynching of deputies, including the Socialist ones.³⁶ This was an anti-parliamentarianism that, in its different tonalities, was felt by the whole party with the exclusion of the reformists (and not even all of them) who dominated the party’s political leadership but certainly did not represent the majority of party members.³⁷

So, for Mussolini, “direct action” was not the result of a doctrine, as the French postal and telegraphic workers demonstrated in 1909 when they organized a large general strike, although they were not the majority of members in the CGT and “had not been educated in Rue Grange aux Belles (the French union’s head office).³⁸ As always for Mussolini, the revolutionary, domestic and international events forced him to rethink his ideas; these thoughts always had practical, rabble-rousing ends, but were reconsiderations nonetheless. The event, in this case, was the failure of the French postal and telegraphic workers’ strike, because it represented a failure from the syndicalist viewpoint. The industrial unrest had not produced a “revolutionary storm” but had led only to an increase in wages. This was a noteworthy result for the syndicalists of the CGT, but not for Mussolini, nor for Sorel, who foresaw in it the end of syndicalism.³⁹

Some months later, Mussolini returned to the French strike, writing: “just as reality supersedes theory, so events render books useless.” In this case, those to be superseded were the “syndicalist theoreticians,” and the book in question was the one Prezzolini had written on the political doctrine from beyond the Alps. Mussolini’s review of the book by the editor of *La Voce* is often cited by academics as confirmation of the future Duce’s syndicalism. In our view, however, Mussolini’s intervention here can be divided into a *pars destruens* (destructive part) and a *pars construens* (constructive part), the former consisting of his distancing himself from syndicalism not without first defining Sorel as “notre Maître (our Master).”⁴⁰ The *pars construens*, as yet not strongly evident, regards Mussolini’s move, via his link with *La Voce* which began during his sojourn in Trentino, toward the second phase in the life of syndicalism and Sorelism in Italy, a phase which above all interested intellectual circles. This was a new examination of Sorel which began with the translation, promoted by Croce, of *Reflexions sur la violence* which, of course, Mussolini reviewed.⁴¹

It is only at this point, in our view, that there is a coming together of Mussolini and Sorel’s political thought, especially Sorel’s idea of violence. Mussolini seized fully upon the importance of Sorel’s ideas of “schism” and “catastrophe” as being necessary to respond to the decadence of the bourgeoisie and of civilization. Above all, he seized upon the importance of myths as “images of action as battles from which one’s own cause emerges triumphant.” These concepts of catastrophe, myth, decadence and violence, provided the impetus not only for syndicalism’s second phase of life based around A.O. Olivetti’s review *Pagine Libere* (Free Pages) but also for the dissemination of Sorelism in *La Voce* and in the work of Benedetto

Croce and Mario Missiroli, as well as in the nationalist pronouncements of Enrico Corradini; at the same time, these ideas did nothing to cause a split in Socialist culture, except in the case of Mussolini.⁴²

Just when Mussolini seemed to be distancing himself from political syndicalism and from the syndicalism of direct action, he took on Sorel's ideas which made them seem original and unusual (Mussolini liked to say "heretical") within the sphere of revolutionary socialism. It was an *activistic and idealistic interpretation* of both socialism and Marxism, conceived, on a level with that of Giovanni Gentile (a critic of Marx), as a "philosophy of praxis," a term coined by Antonio Labriola but developed, from a theoretical standpoint, by Gentile himself. There is no evidence that Mussolini had ever read Gentile's *La Filosofia di Marx*, but as a reader of *La Voce*, he would certainly have known of the philosopher. However, no matter what the philological evidence may be, Gentile's interpretation could be found in a political atmosphere that Gentile himself, together with Croce, Prezzolini and many others had helped to produce. The unprecedented fact was that the fledgling leader of Italian socialism breathed in this atmosphere.⁴³

MUSSOLINI'S "REVOLUTIONARY REVISIONISM"

With his return to the Romagna and the founding of the *Lotta di Classe* (Class Struggle) newspaper, Mussolini entered fully into his role as agitator and organizer. Although he saw that the Socialist movement was based on two "legs," the economic with its "workers' organization" and the political, linked to the party, he dedicated himself above all to the latter, beginning the development, even if only at a local level, of a structured body, a party of propaganda, devoted to the formation of a group of select militants and leaders.⁴⁴ Again in this case, the distances that divided the party from syndicalism seemed huge: although sentiment against political parties,⁴⁵ prevalent both in Sorelism and in French syndicalism, was less marked among Italian syndicalists as long as they remained a faction of the PSI, the advent of a second nucleus of theoretical syndicalism, which developed around the journal *Pagine Libere*, and the emergence of representatives of "practical" syndicalism, such as Alceste De Ambris and Filippo Corridoni, led to the struggle against the PSI and the very idea of a party becoming dominant.

Certainly, Mussolini and the syndicalists always shared a series of points of contention, such as the dominance by the middle classes of the leadership and the "party of lawyers."⁴⁶ However, Mussolini's solution was

very different. For Mussolini, it was necessary to “purify”⁴⁷ the party of the presence of reformists and petit bourgeoisie; for the syndicalists, on the other hand, on the basis of the analyses made by Sorel, Pareto and Michels, it was the organization itself that produced the division between the leaders and the led. For Mussolini, purification of the party might even mean leaving the PSI, a party in which reformism had triumphed at the recent congress in Milan, and creating a new, revolutionary party. Within Lazzari’s “intransigent” group, Mussolini proposed a split, but his suggestion failed even if the following year⁴⁸ Mussolini enacted his own, small, short-lived separation by taking the Federation of Romagna out of the PSI, “to save the party.”⁴⁹

For now, Mussolini avoided arguing with the syndicalists, still maintaining that syndicalism represented “a return to, or an application of, Marxism” in its original sense,⁵⁰ although he described it as “already old,” having dedicated itself in France to “electionism” which was lacking in theory (“Sorel has not provided a system from which one can draw tactical rules,” he wrote in *Lotta di classe*).⁵¹ In addition, Sorel’s reputation was even further tarnished when the French philosopher abandoned syndicalism and opened a dialogue with the nationalists of *Action Française*.⁵² This was a piece of news that caused an outcry and was, of course, emphasized by reformists to demonstrate both that Sorelism was not a part of socialism and that, by its very nature, it was deeply reactionary. Sorel was defended only by those supporters who remained outside socialism, such as the readers of *La Voce* and the theoretical syndicalists of *Pagine Libre* (some, such as Orano, even began collaborating with Enrico Corradini’s nationalists and his review *La Lupa* [The She-Wolf]).⁵³ Mussolini, however, did not defend Sorel and said that he was not surprised by Sorel’s encounter with some of the nationalists, as the ideas of “this pensioned-off mixer of libraries” were only “a movement of (political) reaction” and a “disguise.”⁵⁴

This was a very clear dissociation that, as would be seen, was dictated by the pragmatism and opportunism of a Mussolini who was a Socialist leader and wanted to clear the field of all misunderstandings and avoid weakening his own position. Hence, there followed his merciless attack on the political syndicalists, who held their congress in December 1910. He considered them “a few survivors embittered by nasty personal squabbles” and who revealed themselves to be no different from the others; “they engage in nepotism and undertake acts of favoritism”; “they set their friends up with a salary even if they are idiots or morally deficient.”⁵⁵

If the congress of Bologna marked the end of political syndicalism well before the war in Libya,⁵⁶ Mussolini's savage attack on Labriola and Orano, with whom he had been quite close, must be read in a political context: this was a Mussolini who, ideologically, was increasingly attracted by what was happening beyond the boundaries of socialism and was a supporter of "revolutionary revisionism,"⁵⁷ but who, as a local leader, was careful to appear as the most orthodox of revolutionaries. It was not by chance that, once he had put into effect the temporary schism of the Federation of Romagna from the PSI, he felt less constrained, to the point where he could eulogize the political stance of Libero Tancredi, the anarchist, syndicalist and contributor to Orano's *La Lupa*. Mussolini diverged from Tancredi only on the necessity, unavoidable for the editor of *Lotta di Classe*, of building a machine for a "disciplined and cohesive insurrection" which was able to include "the minority" of the proletariat, the only "group working for the revolution, an élite destined to lead the crowd."⁵⁸

This was the same Mussolini that soon afterwards would make his appearance on the national stage thanks to the great opportunity offered to him by the war in Libya.⁵⁹ At that point, he would not have supported the idea that the party and the union should adopt parallel courses; this was also because, with the growth of the CGL (*Confederazione Generale del Lavoro*, General Confederation of Labor), he feared that the party might be absorbed by the union, that is, by the reformist program that belonged to it. Although Mussolini did not mention Michels, he shared his idea that the union, in so far as it was an organization which stood outside his ideology (reformist, Marxist or syndicalist), was by its very nature destined to carry out a reformist program.⁶⁰ Recent developments within the French CGT demonstrated this; they were conclusions shared by both Sorel and Edouard Berth, who had been prompted to abandon syndicalism exactly for this reason.

However, the solution proposed by Mussolini was the exact antithesis of that supported by the revolutionary syndicalists of the first, second and third phases (of syndicalism) and consisted in the subordination of the union to the party—an idea that had always been supported and had been put into practice in France by the followers of Guesde and in Germany by the Kautskian centrists. The image of a party proposed by Mussolini was very different from that of the orthodox Marxists of the International: for Mussolini, a party should be "an aristocracy of intelligence and of willpower,"⁶¹ a "creative party"⁶² that was intent on expelling those "diseased" elements, as he explained some weeks later at the congress of Reggio Emilia.⁶³

It was to the ideas of Sorel that Mussolini turned to formulate his concept of the political party; this demonstrates that he had remained bound to his *maître* in his celebration of “myth” as “an act of faith by the proletariat,” in his support for the “general strike” as “the apocalypse,” in his belief that socialism should be understood as a “faith, a matter of finalistic and teleological concern,” and in his description of the Reggio Emilia congress as “an attempt at ideological rebirth” and as a sign of victory for the “religious soul of the party.”⁶⁴

However, the party was always the object that stood at the center of Mussolini’s attentions and it was for this reason that he boasted of “having fought reformism and Sorelianism, which had tried to eliminate the Party.”⁶⁵ Sorel had wanted to “ostracize political parties” and had failed; “the parties are alive.” The error of syndicalism was of a philosophical nature because it limited itself to looking on the proletariat as *homo oeconomicus* (economic man), while socialism considered man not only as “a producer and consumer of material goods” but also as something “blessed with higher visions.”⁶⁶ It was the program of “revolutionary reformism” based on a break with the philosophy of reformism, that is, “positivist evolutionism,” “which had banished catastrophes from life and from history.”⁶⁷

Thus, reformism and syndicalism had finally come together in a rigidly economic view of man. Mussolini repeated this in his famous lecture in Florence in February 1915, a lecture which enthused Prezzolini and Salvemini who had come to hear him.⁶⁸ He also added something else: if syndicalism was dead and Sorel’s theories were in a state of crisis, the notion of “myth” was still alive, and of this should be saved its “spell of fascination” in order to “strike the imagination of workers with an ideal vision of a possible reality.” Mussolini criticized Sorel for destroying the notion of political myth after he had invented it, as he had broken its “spell of fascination” by explaining its “intellectual and spiritual origin.” On the contrary, for Mussolini, this quality of enchantment had to be preserved and developed by a “Socialist and revolutionary minority that is daring enough to replace the bourgeois minority at the right moment.” Only then would “the huge masses follow it and submit to it,” even if “some violence is needed” and even if “it is necessary to make our way across (a line of) victims.”⁶⁹ So, Mussolini’s criticism of the French philosopher’s rationalism ended by transforming Sorel’s concept of myth into a tool to be used by a Blanquist (and proto-Bolshevik party): nothing could have been further from Sorel’s intentions.⁷⁰

MUSSOLINI'S CONFRONTATION WITH THE "NEW" SYNDICALISM OF DIRECT ACTION

As the editor of *Avanti!*, Mussolini found himself in the position of managing the third phase of syndicalism, that of the USI (*Unione Sindacale Italiana* [Italian Syndicalist Union]) and De Ambris and Corridoni, with whom relationships were always very confrontational. Mussolini had already viewed with disapproval the congress during which the syndicalists of direct action had left the CGL to found USI, because he judged this a mistake in the same way that he considered it a mistake to believe that the working masses should be represented by the union and not by the party.⁷¹

The idea of the general strike, which Mussolini continued to support, was no longer the prerogative of revolutionary syndicalism but was increasingly being used for political end to secure the withdrawal of government measures or to introduce new laws, as in Germany, Hungary and Belgium: "it is socialism in action" which is "claiming its right to the streets and squares."⁷² This had been understood by French Socialists leader Jean Juarès, a figure whom Mussolini praised, but not by the reformists in Italy, as they continued to see general strikes always as adventurism. Neither was it understood by the revolutionary syndicalists who were hostile to politically motivated general strikes as they saw in them an encroachment of the world of politics into working class action: according to Mussolini, this was an attitude contradicted by what he later called USI's "electionism" and by the candidacy of De Ambris to parliament, a cause of bitter argument between the two.⁷³

Those months saw both types of general strike: the "economic" kind, with Milan as their epicenter, and the "political" variety to protest against the arrest of Corridoni, organized by the USI and supported by Mussolini. However, even the left wing of the PSI remained skeptical of general strikes, and the reformists, who were by now a minority within the party, strongly opposed them.⁷⁴ Mussolini's unwavering support for the strikes organized by the USI, together with articles that appeared in *Avanti!* and the contributions made by syndicalists such as Panunzio, led again to accusations that the newspaper's editor was an anarcho-syndicalist and not a Socialist. These were accusations shared by various supporters of Mussolini's own political wing. However, Mussolini *had not re-become* what *he had never been*: "We disagree profoundly" with "syndicalist methods," but the general strike was not to be considered the prerogative of the syndicalist movement; it was socialism "understood in its 'maximalist'

sense, both in terms of scope and significance,” it was a moral gesture against “this slothful and torpid Italy.”⁷⁵ This was until, following a succession of demonstrations and the inevitable retreat from mobilization (for a revolution), Mussolini began criticizing this “mania for general strikes” that was not “syndicalism.” The USI and Italian syndicalism, “a bad copy of the French version,” should have followed the example of the CGT which had freed itself from “the dross of demagogues and charlatans.”⁷⁶ “Education, preparation and action” was Mussolini’s advice to Corridoni and De Ambris after the failure of the umpteenth demonstration.⁷⁷

To understand the controversy, one must note that the USI had become a rival of the PSI which by now had Mussolini at its head. This could be dangerous because, already at its foundation, the USI had double the number of members of the PSI. The USI did not represent an electoral threat because it did not submit lists of candidates (except at Parma with De Ambris; and if Labriola was elected to the Chamber of Deputies in 1913, it was only because he appeared in the Socialist list for Naples thanks to its local leaders and freemasons). However, for Mussolini, the electoral struggle and the number of deputies were of secondary importance; much more important for him was the party’s capacity to mobilize, and in this area the USI was decidedly more dynamic.⁷⁸

The arguments stopped with the explosion of the uprisings of “Settimana Rossa” (Red Week), during which Mussolini continued to stand alongside the USI as well the republicans, anarchists and a section of the Socialist left wing.⁷⁹ Of course, Mussolini saw in these uprisings, and in the “crowds” that assaulted the shops of “gunsmiths,” in the fires that “blazed,” in the churches taken by storm and in the cry of the Roman mob, “To the Quirinale!” (the King’s residence) the announcement of that “insurrectional storm” which was the *ubi consistam* (the foundation) of his socialism.⁸⁰ However, Mussolini maintained his distance from syndicalism and rejected the idea of forming a “party of the revolution” with syndicalists, anarchists and republicans as he continued to believe that this political body already existed and that it was the PSI. He believed that the PSI had to rid itself of the last residues of reformism (the supporters of Turati) and take control of “the proletariat and the mob, the law and what stands outside it, protest and the insurrection.” At any rate, even “Mazzini was a criminal, Garibaldi a bandit, and his soldiers the leftovers from a jail.”⁸¹

These were the words of a Mussolini who was loved by the revolutionary substratum and by the young members of the *Federazione Giovanile Socialista* (Socialist Youth Federation) such as Bordiga, Tasca,

Gramsci and Togliatti. Mussolini was the leader of a new left-wing draft that was captained by Nicola Bombacci. On the other hand, he was increasingly less popular with those men of the left who sat on the leadership of the PSI, firstly Serrati and secondly Antonio Graziadei, who made Mussolini the subject of savage criticism. Graziadei in particular repeated the accusations made by reformist leaders Claudio Treves and Giovanni Zibordi that Mussolini was an anarchist and syndicalist, but the editor of the Socialist daily defended himself by stating that he was not a syndicalist “due to my skepticism in the revolutionary abilities of economic organizations.”⁸² It is significant that Mussolini’s reply did not appear in the newspaper which he himself edited, but, indeed, in the bourgeois press, that of the “agriarians” (the same in which Sorel wrote!). As De Felice notes, this was the first indication of Mussolini’s ever more apparent dissatisfaction with his own party. This was the reason for the caution he displayed during his final months of his membership in the PSI, his skepticism about the proposal for a “red bloc,”⁸³ his commitment to the electoral campaign for the conquest of Milan City Council, and his surprising pronouncements once Emilio Caldara had been elected mayor; this was also the reason for his wavering position between the outbreak of war and his expulsion from the party.

MUSSOLINI: SOCIALIST (NOT SYNDICALIST) INTERVENTIONIST

With the foundation of Mussolini’s new daily *Il Popolo d’Italia* (The People of Italy), he again found himself alongside the syndicalists. He was not only in the company of the theoreticians such as Sergio Panunzio and Agostino Lanzillo, to whom he had already given space in *Avanti!*, and above all in his own review *Utopia*, but also alongside the robust minority of the USI that immediately supported intervention (Corridoni, De Ambris, Edmondo Rossoni, Michele Bianchi and Ottavio Dinale).⁸⁴ What part did syndicalist ideas and attitudes play in Mussolini’s “conversion” to intervention and to his militancy before and until the *radiose giornate*, the “Radiant Days” of May that led to Italian intervention in World War I? Reference has often been made to the *tòpos*, to the characteristics, of revolutionary war, that is, that a war can become the opportunity to create a crisis within the state; this was a view which Panunzio had supported during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 as well as more recently, and, indeed, Panunzio played a certain role in Mussolini’s transi-

tion to interventionism.⁸⁵ However, on reading Mussolini's articles during *Il Popolo d'Italia's* first months of life, the above-mentioned *tòpos* is given little emphasis. Rather, there is support for French civilization against its German counterpart, of Latin against Germanic culture.⁸⁶ Furthermore, syndicalist theoreticians had already gone over the same ground during the war in Libya, and then too they, like Labriola, approved of the campaign in Tripolitania, as they argued that war overseas would modernize Italy and that from that war would come the revolution.⁸⁷ Of greater interest for Mussolini was the practical example given by De Ambris and Corridoni: both had been determined opponents of the Libyan War but were among the first in the revolutionary camp to side with intervention and mobilize through their foundation of the *Fasci d'azione* (Action Groups). However, even in this case, although Mussolini had opened the pages of *Il Popolo d'Italia* to their writings and supported their campaigns, he maintained a certain autonomy on the question of intervention.

The rhetoric of Mussolini the Interventionist differed little from that of Mussolini the Revolutionary, apart from the antimilitarism, which obviously disappeared. It was the same overlay of different traditions with a greater emphasis upon the Jacobin and Blanquist variant, the celebration of patriotic war and of "the people in arms," as well as the "sacrifice" of Jaurès, who was assassinated because of his opposition to the war; this was the Jacobin myth of a revolutionary, patriotic and warlike France that was ever present in Mussolini's newspaper after May 1915.⁸⁸ On the other hand, the France of syndicalism disappeared from Mussolini's political horizon. If the French pacifist Gustave Hervé's decision immediately to support the war had an effect on Mussolini, the majority of the CGT supported the war through necessity more than anything else. As Léon Jouhaux, the secretary of the union (which was still formally "revolutionary"), explained: it was not a war of revolution but of defense and, therefore, the *union sacrée* (the "sacred union," a political truce with the government) was an obligation. As far as Sorel was concerned, Mussolini had for some time stopped following him as he felt he no longer had anything in common with the French philosopher: Sorel had immediately opposed the war, although for reasons which were far from pacifist, as in the war between French *Civilization* and German *Kultur* he seemed to favor the latter.⁸⁹

Panunzio and Lanzillo launched, including in the pages of *Il Popolo d'Italia*, a discussion of the relationship between syndicalism and the nation; they finished by elaborating a theory of national syndicalism (socialism), which Mussolini examined with interest.⁹⁰ However, the support,

even partial, of *Il Popolo d'Italia*'s editor for the idea of national syndicalism began only after he had abandoned the Socialist camp, that is, after Italy's entry into the war. During the months that stretched between the foundation of his new newspaper until Italian intervention in May 1915, Mussolini continued to call himself a Socialist ("dormant," in the words of De Felice). He made efforts to win over to his side not only the proletariat but also the Socialists; he tried to divide their ranks, flattering reformists such as Caldara, Rinaldo Rigola and Turati in a deliberate attempt to split them. Conversely, he launched savage attacks on Serrati and Lazzari, ex-comrades of his political faction.

Therefore, one can say that Mussolini decided to support the war not because of his "syndicalism" (which was nonexistent, as has been seen) but because he believed himself a Socialist, because all the leaders of European socialism, from Guesde to Vandervelde and Kautsky, had done likewise. When Italy entered the war and the PSI, including its reformist wing, opposed the decision, Mussolini realized that he had lost his final, definitive battle with his former party. From that moment onwards, the Socialists became his main enemies.

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The Battle Within: Benito Mussolini, the Reformists and the Great War

Spencer M. Di Scala

Benito Mussolini's dedication to violence since his early youth has always struck historians, and violence characterized him as a theoretician and practitioner of revolutionary socialism. Nevertheless, while his violent streak as the founder of fascism has been well documented, his early career as a fierce opponent of a gradual, non-violent approach to socialism—its phases up to the outbreak of World War I and its impact—is less familiar but just as significant. In his struggle against the older and well-established reformist founders of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) led by Filippo Turati may be found the key to Mussolini's attitudes as a radical Socialist and of revolutionary socialism.¹ If Mussolini's radical socialism is to be understood, the documentation of the different phases of Mussolini's strategy and action to gain control of the PSI up to the outbreak of World War I, and his expulsion from the Party must be examined.

ORIGINS OF THE GREAT SCHISM

The PSI never outgrew the “original sin” of its foundation, which, at least in the beginning, might be attributed to the lack of Italy's industrial development. In the 1880s and 1890s, Marxist-influenced Socialist parties

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proliferated in Europe. According to Marxist theory, in countries such as Italy, the development of a modern Socialist party was not possible until the growth of modern industry. In addition, three political factors hindered the establishment of a Marxist Socialist party.

The first handicap was a strong Anarchist movement that had its origins in the ideas and action of Anarchist theoretician Mikhail Bakunin, designated by the First International to introduce modern Socialist ideas into Italy. Bakunin converted noted Italian intellectuals to his brand of socialism, which advocated the immediate overthrow of the state by violent revolution. Italian Anarchism and its revolutionary doctrine had considerable influence on Italian leftists into the 1920s and beyond, including on the PSI's revolutionary wing.²

In the 1880s, the beginnings of Italian industry that appeared in Milan signaled the birth of a modern proletariat. In 1882, expansion of the franchise favored the establishment of a new party, the Partito Operaio Italiano (POI, Italian Workers' Party), but this organization failed to qualify as a modern Marxist party because it limited membership to salaried workers, focused exclusively on working conditions, distrusted the middle-class origins of intellectuals who tried to help them, and excluded them from the party.³ After reaching a membership of 40,000, its ideological confusion, bumbling tactics and failure to adjust to changing conditions, the government dissolved it in June 1886.⁴ The POI reestablished itself and its exclusionist principles had deleterious effects on the Marxist party that was founded in August 1892, impeding the Socialists' ability to draft a modern constitution and structure and creating continual mistrust between rank-and-file party members and their leaders.⁵

"Orthodox" Marxist intellectuals constituted the third impediment to the formation and development of the PSI. Antonio Labriola, a respected Marxist thinker on the European, not only Italian, scene opposed the founding of a mass Socialist party during the economic and social phase in which Italy found itself. In order to combat Labriola's "doctrinaire" Socialists, Filippo Turati and his partner Anna Kuliscioff—who led the drive for a modern party—had to call in Friedrich Engels to overcome his objections to the new party's policies.⁶ Over the years, the party's right ("reformist") wing worked to create the conditions that would bring socialism about while the left ("revolutionary") wing denounced its rivals by trivializing attempts at reforms that would improve the conditions of the working class and make it into a more powerful voting bloc, while proclaiming violence as the primary instrument of change. Despite this

rhetoric, in practice, the left wing emphasized “intransigence,” the refusal to cooperate with any bourgeois group, rather than preparing for violent revolution. Nevertheless, the desire for revolution remained strong, creating considerable ideological confusion. While in general, left-wing leaders never matched the reformists in either influence, organization, or ideological consistency, the rise of a ruthless leftist leader with a flair for rhetoric and propaganda who was able to run with the idea of violence-as-a-necessity-for-socialism, changed the political equation in the party. That leader was Benito Mussolini.

In attempting to reconcile the contrasting elements among Socialist-oriented groups before the foundation of the PSI in August 1892, Turati became de facto editor of an existing review, *Cuore e Critica*, transforming it into a journal for the diffusion of Marxism and changing its name to *Critica Sociale* in 1891.⁷ This journal remained the focus for Socialist ideas in Italy and had an important international presence, particularly among German and French Socialists.⁸ In June 1892, in order to reach out to ordinary workers and to prepare for the elections of that year, Turati and Kuliscioff published a newspaper, the *Numero Unico of Lotta di Classe*.⁹

Turati and Kuliscioff utilized these publications and the *Lega Socialista Milanese*, founded in 1891, to encourage the formation of a modern Socialist party and to advocate for their own ideas of how it should be organized in the struggle for socialism. At the National Workers’ Congress in Milan on August 2 and 3, 1891, Turati secured a declaration that the organizations represented there constituted a party. The congress established a commission to produce a draft program and that would continue as a provisional Central Committee until the summer of 1892, when a national congress would establish the new organization on a permanent basis.¹⁰

Turati and Kuliscioff also founded—with a platform inspired by the German Socialists—the *Lega Socialista Milanese* that has been called a “cell” for the future PSI and its principles.¹¹ The *Lega* advocated gradualist methods to achieve socialism, stating that the “revolution” would require an epoch to compete and would be the culmination of a great evolutionary movement that would prepare the proletariat for power. Socialism would not be the result of decrees from above or revolts from below but had to be realistic and practical, as in other advanced countries; in other words, parliamentarian.¹²

Unlike Benito Mussolini whose world revolved around violence, Filippo Turati spent his life opposing it. He denied that violence was an integral part of Marxist ideology and argued that revolutions were

made *despite* violence.¹³ He denounced the violence associated with the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” asserting that those who believed in it deluded themselves. Socialism would come about only when it had evolved from bourgeois society, as Marx had predicted. Contrary to leftist Socialist leaders, Turati never imagined that capitalism would collapse in a short time, or that violence could revolutionize the workers, because they had incorporated bourgeois values within themselves. To promise immediate and total satisfaction through violence showed either fraud or ignorance, he insisted. Worse, the dictatorship of the proletariat led to an oligarchic principle within socialism in which leaders would impose their ideas on the masses and lead to their dictatorship *against* the masses.¹⁴

During the summer of 1892, Turati ramped up the campaign to establish a modern Socialist party according to his vision, that is, what later became known as “reformist” or “revisionist.” On June 18, in an unsigned article, Turati in the pilot *Numero Unico* of *Lotta di Classe* denounced violence because it could only bring about “simple” political change; only the vote could achieve socialism because of its value as a means of recruitment and training for the workers. Therefore, the workers had decided to organize themselves to achieve political power by means of the franchise.¹⁵ Moreover, the newspaper invited white-collar workers, former aristocrats, bourgeois and even small businessmen into the Socialist ranks.¹⁶

The foundation of the new Socialist party unfolded in several phases during which Turati struggled to shape the organization to his ideas. Because of the strong *operaista* (“workerist”) influence on the committee charged with drafting a program, this document practically reproduced the POI platform of 1887.¹⁷ Turati denounced it in remarks reminiscent of Marx’s critique of the German Socialist party’s Gotha Program.¹⁸ The program was too vague, using hackneyed words that no longer meant anything and to which anyone could subscribe¹⁹; and the draft constitution was too specific because it limited party membership to proletarian workers. Excluding white-collar workers, professionals or anyone else who accepted the program would recreate an old-fashioned political organization and meant suicide.²⁰

At the Congress of Genoa of August 14, 1892, the *operaisti* allied with the Anarchists to stop Turati from founding the new party. They disrupted the meeting, forcing Turati and his supporters to “dissolve” the congress and to call a new “Socialist” congress that excluded them for the next day in a different location.²¹

At that meeting, Turati was still unable to frame the policies of the new party in the way he would have wanted because of the continued presence of *operaista* representatives. However, he achieved his major aim of endowing the new organization with reformist principles in two amendments. These specified that the party's policies would have a "double aspect," economic and political. A wider struggle of the occupations for the immediate improvement of working-class conditions under the guidance of labor organizations would constitute the economic phase. The political aspect entailed a struggle for taking control of the organs of political power. That meant transforming state institutions from tools of oppression into tools for the expropriation of the ruling class.²² These clear objectives characterized reformist policies after 1892, which Mussolini dedicated his efforts to destroying.

The policies adopted at Genoa had important implications for the new party. The crucial question was: should it ally with progressive bourgeois political groups or should it go alone? In September 1893, a new congress met in Reggio Emilia to provide an answer to this question and to a correlated one: what would be the relationship between the party and its elected deputies? A surprisingly strong majority emerged in favor of complete political intransigence—no collaboration with bourgeois political groups. This vote found Turati in the minority, but he accepted the decision for tactical reasons. That is, political intransigence should be a temporary phase, to distinguish Socialists from other leftists, but only while the party was establishing itself. On the issue of elected Socialist deputies, the congress agreed that they should be under the command of the Party's Central Committee. These principles were quickly violated because of government repression of the new organization, but, even more, because they did not fit in with Turati's ideas. When the government tried to dissolve the party, it voted a temporary exemption for the Milanese Socialists led by Turati, but he conceived of class collaboration as a permanent feature of Socialist policy and saw the Socialist deputies as a power center better equipped than the Central Committee or the party congresses to make policy.²³ The revolutionaries—and, in an exasperated way, Mussolini—would fight him on all these counts.

The period between 1894 and 1901 witnessed a fierce government reaction against the Socialists. Turati fostered a policy of alliances with radical democrats who disapproved of government policies, but the new party's resistance to political alliances was so fierce that Turati and Kuliscioff had to enlist the help of Friedrich Engels to endorse their policy and ideology.

The Party gave the Milanese a temporary waiver, but refused to accept alliances as normal method. In 1898, serious riots broke out and the government cracked down by calling out the army, killing a large number of demonstrators, arresting prominent opponents and attempting to alter the Italian constitution in an illiberal direction. These events culminated in the assassination of King Umberto I in 1900, and a general strike against the antilabor policy of Giuseppe Saracco's cabinet. In February 1901, Giuseppe Zanardelli came to power at the head of a Liberal government that included a progressive Minister of the Interior, Giovanni Giolitti.²⁴

This cabinet could remain in power only if it achieved a majority in the Chamber of Deputies, and it could do this only if the Socialists and the other parties of the Extreme Left voted confidence in it. On March 7, 1901, culminating a series of discussions, Turati convinced the Socialist deputies to vote confidence in the government, but on May 29, the Directorate informed the deputies that while they could vote for single pieces of legislation presented by the cabinet, they could not vote confidence in the government.²⁵ Turati led the opposition to the Directorate's order, explaining that it was urgent that the Socialists vote to keep the government in power to prevent a reactionary one from replacing it. At the end of a furious debate, the Socialist deputies violated the Directorate's order and voted confidence in the government. This action touched off a state of continuous warfare in the party.²⁶

YOUNG SOCIALIST MUSSOLINI

When the Socialist deputies cast their historic vote for the Italian cabinet, Benito Mussolini was 18 years old, but he had already been attracted to socialism because of his family background. As the debates about the vote raged, the young man was teaching second and third graders and having a hard time maintaining discipline. After June 1902, his teaching contract was not renewed because of a scandalous love affair and he went off to Switzerland. There he threw himself into Socialist politics among Italian emigrants, wrote articles, traveled, gave lectures, supposedly studied with Italian sociologist Vilfredo Pareto, had love affairs and was arrested for vagrancy. He contributed to *Avanguardia Socialista*, a newspaper of the Milanese revolutionary syndicalist faction headed by Walter Mocchi and Arturo Labriola that spearheaded the drive against Filippo Turati's policies.

Even as a young man, Mussolini favored extreme measures and political intransigence. Reporting on the congress of the Italian Socialists in Switzerland, for example, Mussolini praised *Avanguardia Socialista* for its

fight against the reformists, who, he said, collaborated with the capitalists who wished to prevent their own expropriation.²⁷ Mussolini declared total war on the reformists, on parliamentary government, and on democracy—principles that he never abandoned. Why is Italian democracy sick, he asked rhetorically in one article? “*In Italy democracy is too parliamentary.*” Like other left-wing PSI members, Mussolini believed that Giolitti had ensnared the Socialists: “It was exactly with the Giolitti government that Italian democracy was absorbed by parliamentarism.” Then he explained the process by which, according to him, the deputies governed the PSI and other “subversive parties.” Having no policy of its own, “democracy” was compelled to follow the policy of the party deputies. In order to distract the proletariat from the real work of organizing a revolution, and feigning democracy, the Socialist deputies had projects to legislate on everything:

The Socialist deputies proclaimed: let’s work, because the country awaits! But they really meant to say: let’s legislate! In this way they substituted for the Socialist tasks of criticism, stimulus, and control the Bourgeois work of reform, in the attempt to give Italy “social legislation.” This “legislation mania” became epidemic. Each Socialist deputy had his “legislative program.”...And all this to the complete indifference of the proletariat.

In other words, reformist policy stirred up the workers by focusing on peripheral reforms and useless campaigns that did not correspond to the real needs of the Italian people but originated in ideas “that have their origins in the idle discussions of Montecitorio [the Italian Chamber of Deputies]...and cut the nerves of the proletariat’s direct initiative.” In later years, Mussolini would oppose universal suffrage on the grounds that it prolonged the agony of the parliamentary state. The revolutionaries, Mussolini demanded, must put an end to such tactics.²⁸

Even after he returned to Italy and militated in the Socialist ranks of his native region after September 1904, Mussolini was a bit player in the Great Socialist War among the different PSI factions. He served in the army, after initially refusing to return to Italy when called up for military service, and then went back to teaching. When his teaching contract expired in July 1908, he returned to Dovia, where the area around Forlì was undergoing a harsh political struggle because of the introduction of new machinery that increased unemployment in agriculture. Mussolini jumped into the troubled fight and took a prominent part in the agitation that resulted in a general strike and provoked the

government into calling out the army. At one point, a manager rode by Mussolini on his bicycle. Mussolini approached him with a club in his hand and yelled out: "I'll cut you!" The manager went to the police, who arrested Mussolini. The local court sentenced him to three months in jail, reduced on appeal to 12 days.

Mussolini aspired to more than politics and hoped to become a political journalist. He dedicated himself to several research projects, including an essay on Nietzsche, published in the *Pensiero Romagnuolo*, on "The Philosophy of Force." This was Mussolini's retort to a lecture by reformist Socialist leader Claudio Treves. While Treves believed that the "Superman" symbolized adolescence and that there was a psychological identification between the Superman and the child, Mussolini argued that the Superman was Nietzsche's greatest creation, the man of tomorrow. It was the tedium of life that had spurred Nietzsche to create this figure who triumphed above the mediocrity of everyday life, Mussolini thought. Nietzsche had elaborated a new ideal, which would require a new species of "free spirits" to understand. These would be strengthened by war, by loneliness and by danger.

In February 1909, Mussolini went to Trent and remained in that city until September 26—a brief but important period—during which he worked for Socialist Cesare Battisti's newspaper, *Il Popolo*, and participated in the local Italian politics of the city, then under Austrian control. The Austrian police closely followed Mussolini's activities and in late September had him expelled. The Socialists of Trent proclaimed a general strike and Mussolini's case made the headlines in local and some Italian newspapers, including the PSI's official organ *Avanti!*.

By the time he returned to Italy, Mussolini had achieved a certain notoriety among the Socialists of his native Romagna, and the Socialists of the Forlì region offered him the editorship of their new newspaper, *La Lotta di Classe*. Mussolini revealed himself to be a top-notch editor. He led the Forlì Socialists against the opposing Republicans and rejected collaboration with non-Socialist leftist groups. His career in Forlì politics may be divided into two phases. From 1909 to 1910, he solidified his control as secretary of the local Socialist federation and led the fight against the introduction of the new agricultural machinery that the peasants opposed. Between 1910 and 1912, he affirmed himself on the national stage. He made a short speech at the 1910 national congress and afterward was asked to represent his area in a new revolutionary faction formed to retake control of the PSI from the reformists.²⁹

Reorganization of the left wing began following the Socialist national congress of 1910, the height of Turati's power. A major weakness of the leftist faction had been the lack of a coherent leader, but now one seemed to emerge: Giovanni Lerda.³⁰ Originally from Turin and prominent as a publisher, Lerda and his Swedish wife Oda Lerda Olberg created a Central Committee to coordinate the campaign against reformist dominance and established a nationwide network of correspondents, in which Mussolini represented Forlì.

This event marks the beginning of a strange relationship between Lerda and Mussolini. Lerda's ideology centered on political intransigence rather than violence. When the reformist wing split into "left" and "right" reformists during this period, Lerda considered collaborating with Turati, "left reformist" leader, while Mussolini responded by leading the Forlì Federation out of the party because he opposed all forms of compromise. Lerda was also a prominent Masonic leader while Mussolini hated the Masons. In the national congress of Ancona in 1914, Mussolini succeeded in getting the delegates to accept incompatibility between being a Mason and a party member. At that point, Lerda left the party. Lerda opposed the Libyan War but favored entering World War I with the "democratic interventionists" to defend European democracy.

The story of the Lerda faction is one of those unfortunate missed opportunities (*incontri mancati*) that litter Italian history. As reformist leader, Filippo Turati believed that there could have been a meeting of the minds with the ideology Lerda espoused: political intransigence and not violence. Between 1905 and 1912, the reformists had divided into "reformists of the left," led by Turati, and "reformists of the right" led by his friend Leonida Bissolati. The major reason for the split was Bissolati's conviction that a European war loomed and that Socialist ideology on wars was antiquated. Armies were made up of workers, Socialist policy maintained. The workers would greet any call for general mobilization with general strikes and, in any case, they would not fire on their fellow workers who made up the rival armies but would instead turn their weapons on their bourgeois officers. In May 1905, Bissolati led a delegation to Vienna to coordinate the practical reaction of the Italian and Austrian Socialist parties in case of war between their two countries, which seemed increasingly likely despite their membership in the Triple Alliance. The Italians were shocked when they pledged to call a general strike and to sabotage mobilization in case of a war but their Austrian colleagues refused to make a commitment to do the same.³¹ This episode convinced

Bissolati and his friends that they had to support the strengthening of their country and government because Italy's support would be crucial to save democracy when war finally came.

Bissolati's positions on the various diplomatic crises that shook the continent before World War I stunned Turati, and the two reformist leaders engaged in a debate about Italian foreign policy. Turati disagreed with Bissolati and suggested different ways in which the question could be approached that would be in line with Socialist ideology. The two old friends could not agree on the issue, which necessarily impacted Socialist policy toward supporting Italian governments and increasing military readiness.³² The divisions between the reformist groups thus intensified, with Bissolati supporting, for strategic reasons, the Libyan War that broke out in 1911, sustaining "bourgeois" cabinets, and even participating in the consultations for the formation of governments by speaking to the King—all of which scandalized the Socialists.³³

Pouring fuel on the fire, Benito Mussolini preached an antimilitarist, antiwar and violent form of socialism, and his point of reference for the time being was the left wing as organized by Lerda. However, at the time, Lerda opposed wars and considered the reformist relationship with government too cozy, but he did not advocate violence, nor did he sanction political intransigence on principle. Turati was strongly antiwar and, and, while he affirmed that Socialists could cooperate with the bourgeoisie, he was not ready to do so under any and all circumstances, despite accusations to the contrary. In sum, the possibility of a historic compromise between Turati and Lerda existed—and Turati proposed it. The reason it never came off was the opposition of leaders like Mussolini—who became increasingly influential after the outbreak of the Libyan War—and the ideological confusion within the left wing that Lerda was never able to clear up. At any rate, the left wing remained predominantly intransigent, not revolutionary.³⁴

On May 1, 1911, the Central Committee of the revolutionary faction began publishing a biweekly newspaper, *La Soffitta*, run by Lerda and his wife and billed as the "Organo della frazione rivoluzionario intransigente," that became the focus of left-wing activity. In his first editorial, Lerda complained about the "depression, discomfort, and confusion" into which the reformists had led the party and predicted that they would endorse joining cabinets at the upcoming national congress to be held at Modena. The *Soffitta* group, however, was ambivalent toward Turati and his "left reformist" faction, especially after he strongly opposed Italy's war for Libya that began on September 29, 1911. In turn, Turati hoped that an accommodation could be made between the two groups because

the Lerda-led faction opposed violence, believed in social legislation, and conceded that parliamentary action could have an important role in the proletariat's elevation. This closeness to reformist ideology caused a rift within the leftist faction between groups that seemed softer toward reformism and those that advocated a clean break, with Lerda drawing prominent foreign Socialists into the debate.³⁵

As the Congress of Modena approached in October 1911, the Central Committee of the "revolutionary intransigents" managed to block a move of leftists in the faction to leave the party.³⁶ However, the most radical of these opponents of a softer line, Benito Mussolini, openly revolted against the Central Committee. Mussolini urged the left wing to abandon the party. He argued that the PSI was dead and insisted that it was better for leftists to establish a revolutionary Socialist party rather than try to revive the existing organization. Mussolini continued his criticism of the reformist Directorate elected in 1910, but his rhetoric became more strident after March 1911 when Bissolati consulted with the King after the government of Luigi Luzzatti fell. "Liquidate the Giolittian, monarchical, realist Bissolati or fifty sections of the Forlì federation will abandon the Party," he telegraphed the Directorate. When the Directorate rejected his ultimatum, Mussolini had no choice but to "leave" the party with his loyal Forlì Federation. On April 11, the Federation unanimously adopted Mussolini's position and declared its "autonomy" from the Socialist Party. Mussolini's victory, however, meant little, given his scarce influence on the national scene. On April 23, the revolutionary intransigent faction's Central Committee expressed sympathy for the attitude of the Forlì Socialists but invited other Socialist federations not to follow Mussolini's example so as to prevent the splintering of left-wing strength at the upcoming congress. Other Socialist federations listened to the Central Committee's advice and Mussolini—who had hopes of becoming the leader of the revolutionary wing—was isolated.³⁷ It is estimated that Mussolini's action cost the leftist faction a loss of 2000 votes at the national congress held at Modena.

Mussolini's lack of success mirrored his later failures to change PSI policy to one of pure revolution, even within the context of significant personal successes. Nevertheless, the inability of the revolutionary intransigent faction to develop a clear ideology—even following a debate following the uninspiring reformist victory at Modena—left the road wide open for someone with a strong personality and a simplistic position, such as Mussolini's, to make headway in the Socialist Party—and he was just waiting for the opportunity to do so.³⁸

After a summer preparing the political terrain, on September 29, 1911, the Italians began a war to take Libya from the Ottoman Empire. The reformist leadership organized popular opposition to the conflict, but it proved inadequate. The left wing denounced the lukewarm support they charged the Party organs had given to antiwar activities and contrasted it to its own.³⁹ The reformist protest had been limited to sending a telegram to the headquarters of the Second International supporting the protests of Socialists in European cities, the Lerda group charged, and publication of a pamphlet when the enraged Roman Socialists protested the Directorate's inaction.⁴⁰ In short, the revolutionaries alleged that reformism had made a major contribution to the war by its policies, even if Turati opposed the war, broke with Prime Minister Giolitti, and shifted to political intransigence.⁴¹

Turati's actions failed to counter the rapid growth of the left wing, fueled by popular opposition the Libyan War. In the North, credit restrictions blocked industrial growth, while on the land, cuts in public works projects produced unemployment, especially in the Po Valley. An incomplete recovery from the severe recession of 1907 and the interruption of trade with Turkey and the Middle East made the economic situation worse. Turati estimated that 40,000 persons were unemployed in Milan, and an additional 20,000 had no work in its province. In the province of Ferrara, according to Turati, half of the day laborers lacked employment during the height of the harvest season. In a process analogous to what was happening in industry, landowners were introducing more sophisticated machinery that reduced employment. Prices increased and real wages declined, producing strikes and brutal police repression. All over the country, conditions as a result of the war provoked demonstrations by workers who objected to the squandering of resources for a war to conquer the "Libyan desert." The government responded by imposing censorship and increasing arrests. These events alienated the workers from the PSI because they perceived the reformists as being too close to the government as a result of the support of the right reformists for the war.⁴²

THE WAR OVER WAR

In the run-up to the next national congress at Reggio Emilia, scheduled for July 7, 1912, the left wing forcefully addressed the relationship between the reformists and the government and the war. The Central Committee blamed the Socialist deputies for the Party's closeness to the

government and pledged to bring them under the Party's centralized control and—accepting one of Mussolini's cherished goals—to expel the Bissolati group.⁴³ The reformist response was surprisingly passive and ineffective as splits emerged in the Turati group.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, Turati's lieutenant Claudio Treves made an effort to reach a compromise with Lerda because he felt that Lerda's opinions were moderate. With exceptional clarity, Treves wrote that the left wing was divided into two groups, Lerda's "revolutionary-reformists" and Mussolini's "revolutionary-revolutionaries." According to Treves, Mussolini propagated the old-fashioned concept of revolution as the overthrow of capitalism through violence while Lerda, like the Turatians, believed that socialism could be attained through reforms. The disagreement between the two groups centered on whether reforms should be obtained by cooperation or intransigence, but this issue could be discussed.⁴⁵ In fact, Lerda himself accepted the idea of political alliances under certain conditions, but, more importantly, focused on intransigence as a tactic that would unify the Socialist Party.⁴⁶ In 1912, anticipating a vote against political alliances by the national congress at Reggio Emilia, Lerda turned down Treves' offer to compromise.

When the congress convened, reformist weakness immediately became clear with the hostile reception accorded to speakers who tried to defend the position of the Socialist deputies.⁴⁷ Giovanni Montemartini, the Party expert on social legislation, made things worse by arguing that the deputies could not have an "organic" policy because only four or five of them could be in Rome at any one time.⁴⁸

Speaking for the left wing, Mussolini denounced what he labeled as parliamentary "cretinism." According to him, Parliament was a bourgeois instrument designed to maintain the supremacy of the ruling class; for the proletariat, it was useless. He believed that universal suffrage, which the deputies extolled, merely extended the life of the pernicious institution. Mussolini dismissed the arguments of the Socialist deputies: they were not supposed to have any political autonomy, only "technical" autonomy. They had to execute the will of the Party sections, as transmitted through the Directorate, period. Mussolini then denounced the specific activities of the deputies, accusing them of indifference and indiscipline. The main culprit, Bissolati, and his comrades Ivanoe Bonomi and Angiolo Cabrini, had dared to congratulate the King on his escape from an assassination attempt, whereas he deserved the guillotine. Mussolini directed the main brunt of his vicious attack on the deputies' supposed support for the

Libyan War, although he spared one deputy in homage to his consistent opposition to the war that had made him the object of hostile public demonstrations: “There was only one man...who remained at his post, who resisted the verbal and idiotic violence of the majority, and that man is Filippo Turati.” Mussolini then proposed the expulsion of all three seasoned veterans from the Party, adding Guido Podrecca when his name was shouted out from the floor.⁴⁹ Mussolini’s motion received a clear majority,⁵⁰ the four prestigious experts were expelled, and they went on to form their separate reformist party.

Bissolati defended himself ably, but it was not a time for reasonable discourse. He defended gradual change. Socialists recognized it as necessary, and, therefore, so was participation in cabinets. To the contention that the German Socialists opposed this policy, Bissolati responded that he understood their position—in a country where democracy and a true representative system did not exist because the Emperor named chancellors and ministers—but this was not the case in Italy. He went to consult with the King, Bissolati explained, in order to discuss Socialist demands for reforms with him. The King had offered him a cabinet portfolio, but he had refused. Bissolati complained about the view commonly held in the Party that he had supported the Libyan War and argued that if the Socialists had been in the government, perhaps the war would not have occurred. When he argued that Giovanni Giolitti was the least interested in starting the war and had a track record of reform, the delegates staged a demonstration.⁵¹

Turati attempted to reconcile the different camps and, predictably, failed. Prescient as ever, Turati predicted that if the party no longer had room for persons with different opinions, it would put itself in mortal danger: “We are not a church, and this is not an ecumenical council. Heretics and rebels, we know the value of heresies... in the Party.” Turati explained that opinion in the PSI shifted right or left in different congresses, but this did not justify splits. He begged the delegates not to tear the Party apart on questions that belonged to the past, citing excommunication as a Catholic tactic unsuited to Socialists. He admitted that the “reformists of the right” had been too optimistic about “class collaboration,” that is, cooperation with the government. In effect, he confessed that he had been guilty about this himself, but that he had backed off from this position a year earlier. Most importantly, he again condemned the Libyan War. No excuse could justify war to the proletariat, he insisted, and criticized his old friend Bissolati for making excuses for it.

However, these were not reasons for splitting the Party. A split would result in two Socialist parties, each fighting the other. It would mean dividing the functions of socialism into two, one party representing idealism, the other labor, whereas these functions should remain unified in one organization. The question before the congress was still the false choice of “revolution or reform”; the real choice was between the impossible and a tempered democratic nationalism. Two parties meant the death of socialism. Therefore, Turati concluded: “I remain in favor of unity because I want to remain a Socialist.”⁵²

Turati could not know that in the next two years Mussolini would radically alter the course of Italian Socialism by substituting violent revolution through mass action for the political intransigence the Lerda faction stood for, and which had been the traditional struggle in the PSI.

In order to capitalize on his transformation into a national figure after his performance in the 1912 Party congress, and to secure a national platform from which to publicize his ideas and establish constant contact with the Party rank and file, Mussolini set his sights on becoming editor of the official Socialist newspaper, *Avanti!*. Founded on Christmas Day, 1896, and with Bissolati as its editor, the newspaper played a crucial role in Socialist history even if it lately had fallen on hard times. Its current editor, Treves, had to take drastic action by prodding the Directorate to transform it, on April 9, 1911, into a joint stock company and issue a million lire in stock. Having put the newspaper on solid financial ground, he moved it from Rome to less politically volatile Milan in October 1911 to give it stability.⁵³

Despite its problems, *Avanti!* enjoyed enormous prestige as a daily newspaper and the official organ of the Party. Before the Reggio Emilia Congress, Treves was convinced that the revolutionaries would take over the newspaper and the reformists were preparing its defense.⁵⁴ Mussolini coveted the position of editor, but the clamorous role he had had at the Congress of Reggio Emilia was insufficient to outweigh the profound distrust that the leaders of his own faction had for Mussolini's ideas, his personality and his parvenu status. They refused to name him editor and chose instead Giovanni Bacci. A journalist with a radical background, Bacci had joined the Socialist Party only in 1903, suffered from poor health, a modest reputation, and an inability to fulfill the duties as editor.

The choice of Bacci as editor and the ideological closeness of the Lerda faction to Turati's brand of reformism meant that Treves kept effective control of the newspaper following the Reggio Emilia congress. Some

articles by Mussolini appeared in *Avanti!*, but with increasing rarity as he was edged out. He then turned for support to a person he had known since his days in Trent, Paolo Valera, editor of the radical review *La Folla*. Mussolini's byline appeared increasingly in *La Folla*, shaping his continuing campaign for the editorship of *Avanti!*.⁵⁵

The new Party leaders, concerned for the newspaper's state, had offered the editor's job to Gaetano Salvemini, a critic of the reformists. Salvemini refused, saying that he had criticized the reformists only because they were not reformist enough. Salvemini's refusal put the Directorate in a difficult position:

The revolutionary faction had never had effective responsibility in governing the party, had little political experience, was poorly prepared technically, its press organs had never approached the high level attained and consistently sustained by *Critica Sociale*, or to play an analogous function in the formation of its cadres.

Given the desolate internal situation of the faction that had just won control of the PSI, the new national secretary, Costantino Lazzari—concerned about the lack of development of the Socialist left—offered the editorship to Mussolini because “Mussolini's verbal aggressiveness seemed...to be revolutionary.”⁵⁶ A worker of humble origins, Lazzari's outsize role in the party symbolizes the limits of the left wing.⁵⁷

After officially taking charge of *Avanti!*, Mussolini could communicate directly with the masses instead of going through the Party structure, which, controlled by the reformists, resisted him. Mussolini's first move was to begin edging Treves out.⁵⁸ Contemporaneously, he got rid of the remaining reformists on the newspaper's staff, replaced them with loyal supporters, published violent articles against reformism, brought in big foreign names to write articles in order to increase circulation (which doubled to about 60,000), advocated violence and general strikes and allied with radical groups outside the Socialist Party—revolutionary syndicalists, Anarchists and revolutionary republicans.⁵⁹ By December 1912, Mussolini's extremist style permeated the newspaper, to Anna Kuliscioff's chagrin: “I don't know if you read *Avanti!* sometimes, but I assure you that it has become illegibile. Boring, empty, wordy—it is a weekly that comes out daily.”⁶⁰ Of course, Kuliscioff was careful not to tell this to Mussolini, who frequently dropped by to ask her what she thought of the newspaper! She was convinced that Mussolini should be replaced as editor,

but then concluded that it would make little difference as Mussolini was sure to lose the position as he got into more legal trouble for his extremist articles and as left-wing leaders started quarreling among themselves.⁶¹

Kuliscioff and the reformist camp had misunderstood the changed situation. Under reformist direction, *Avanti!* had been an instrument of education and elevation, but Mussolini transformed it into a powerful propaganda tool for the propagation of revolution among the masses. This change explains Mussolini's tone in his articles, and his modern style: clear, direct and hard-hitting, they successfully spurred the masses to action. *Avanti!*'s new aggressiveness culminated after January 6, 1913, when a demonstration at Roccagorga (Frosinone) resulted in a conflict with the police and seven deaths. Mussolini initiated a violent campaign against the government, accusing it of "state assassination" and "massacre politics." The people, he wrote, had "the right to kill." A state of war existed between the people and the government: "Ours is a war cry. He who massacres should know that he can be massacred."⁶² He was tried for slandering the army, but was acquitted and the incident increased his popularity. Mussolini stuck to his position that the proletariat had an innate right to revolt, to employ violence, and to kill anyone who murdered workers.

The reformists launched a heavy counterattack against Mussolini. They condemned the violence he preached because it took the Socialists back to the method of their origins; his ideas smacked of romanticism, discarded Socialist doctrine, and were old, useless and absurd.⁶³ Violence led to the glorification of the dissatisfied souls of some Socialists while instigating rank-and-file violence and producing death. Thus, Mussolini's conception of the class struggle was particularly dismal and un-Socialist, and blatantly Nietzschean, because instead of consistent workers, it required warriors "Who know about *great loves* and are ready for *great sacrifices*.' We recognize very well in these expressions the brilliant and useless lingo of the Nietzschean 'superman'—the individualistic and violently aristocratic doctrine whose only practical results are, on the one hand, to gratify the elegant sloth of those who are intolerant of the *small sacrifices*, but daily ones, that impose organization; and, on the other, consecrates the working class to the systemic impoverishment of its best elements, who are instigated to allow themselves to be massacred along the way in the many 'massacres' that anticipate the supreme...bloodletting."⁶⁴

Mussolini fought back employing his most passionate rhetoric. He argued that "beggarly" reformism nauseated Socialists. Instead of deluding the proletariat on the possibility of eliminating the causes of "massacres,"

like the reformists, he wrote, “We want, instead, to prepare and train it for the day of ‘the greatest massacre’ when the two enemy classes clash in the supreme test.” For “us,” he claimed, life was not the supreme good but a means to an end. Treves had condemned Nietzsche, but Mussolini accused Treves of aiming to destroy Socialist heroism and imposing the dull liberalism of Frédéric Bastiat and Félicité Lammenais on the proletariat. A new socialism was at hand, Mussolini predicted—one that consisted of faith and daring, precisely the one that “the practical and the pusillanimous believed that they had buried forever.” In just a month, one historian has observed, the reformists suddenly found themselves confronting the destruction of a myth—revolution as simple political intransigence—and, because of the reaction to the “massacres” that periodically shook Italian society, found themselves unable successfully to contest a Mussolini who had become the personification of this backlash and of “revolution.”⁶⁵

After the initial debate over the massacre at Roccagorga, attention shifted to the upcoming battle to win the national congress to be held at Ancona from April 26 to 29, 1914. The reformists maintained that they had remained loyal to the new majority that had emerged from the Congress of Reggio Emilia, which was *in practice* not so different from theirs, “except for particular moments and particular reservations notably linked to the opinions of the Party newspaper.” There was no contradiction here because, the reformists argued, both political collaboration and intransigence were tactics that could be adopted at different times, and because they had resisted Giolitti’s blandishments after the Libyan War began. They insisted on the value of reformist methodology, proven by recently achieved reforms (nationalization of life insurance and universal suffrage) and believed that it was time that the period of “revolutionary” (i.e., intransigent) control of the Party come to an end.

Because of Turati’s illness lasting several months, reformist leader Giovanni Zibordi took the lead in the crucial period leading up the congress. Zibordi criticized the Directorate that had been put into place following the 1912 congress because it had failed to save the party from slipping into indiscipline, indistinctiveness, opportunism, sentimentalism and romanticism. Reformists professed to believe that Mussolini was a sincere Socialist even as they denounced his tactics: “He is sincerely that way, and he sincerely lives a second life when he thrills during a political assembly, becomes elated because of the ardor of the crowd, deludes himself and gets high if he sees a hundred people in the piazza. Then he writes *ab irato* [in anger] those articles or those sentences, about which he forgets during other moments

of his career, or when someone takes him to account for those impulses.” In his revolutionary obsession, Mussolini confused socialism with republicanism and revolutionary syndicalism, returning socialism to its prehistory, “when socialism, republic, humanitarianism, anti-clericalism, and democracy together formed a mixed salad (*insalata russa*), topped with a spicy sauce of barricades that were always dreamt of but never constructed.”

What did reformists want? They asked only that the Socialists return to being themselves, that “intransigence” did not mean ending relationships with every part of the bourgeoisie, even with that part to which they attributed great value. The Party needed to stand by itself in the clear manner that the masses needed, and to lead them during a period in which normal politics had been upended by war and reaction and fed revolutionary ferments. During this period immediately preceding World War I, a conservative involution marked Italy, and was cited by Zibordi as a cause for the reformist shift to political intransigence.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, reformists denounced Mussolini for his assertions that a victorious revolution could come about if led by a “conscious Socialist minority.” His reliance on élites was a “dangerous theory” favored by conservatives and other enemies of socialism.⁶⁷

As Mussolini’s struggle against the reformists intensified, and as he led *Avanti!* into increasingly extremist territory, the deep divisions within his own “revolutionary intransigent” faction came to a head. The Party Directorate sought to intervene against him, but Mussolini resigned as Editor of *Avanti!* and the Directorate backtracked, whereupon he withdrew his resignation.⁶⁸ Mussolini then aimed at taking control of the left faction at the upcoming national congress scheduled for Ancona in April 1914. By then, the “revolutionary intransigent” faction had split into two parts, with Mussolini seemingly having the majority. The reformists, dispirited by their defeat at the Reggio Emilia congress and by Turati’s long illness, proved unable to make a comeback. At Ancona, Mussolini championed the expulsion of the Freemasons from the organization, which resulted in the exit of Giovanni Lerda, patient organizer of the “revolutionary intransigent” faction, allowing him to emerge from the national congress as the clear winner.⁶⁹ According to *Avanti!*, the Ancona Congress continued the process of making Italian Socialism ever more proletarian.⁷⁰ Mussolini had parlayed his editorship into control of the Socialist Party. The reformists took a long-range view, pronouncing the congress as one of “transition, of pause” and announcing their continuing opposition to Mussolini. For them, excluding the Masons

who represented “the politics of secrets,” was positive but a sideshow. Socialists remained split between two poles, “*rebelism* (lets accept this word) and *possibilism*,” Zibordi concluded, and most zigzagged between the two. The major questions confronting Socialist action persisted and the struggle continued.⁷¹

WAR AGAINST WAR: “RED WEEK” AND BEYOND

In his search for issues capable of galvanizing the masses, Mussolini focused on antimilitarism, which soon became his organizing principle. He himself had a well-documented history as an antiwar activist. During the Libyan conflict, as leader of the Forlì Socialists, he participated in a general strike against the war in conjunction with radical republicans, especially their leader Pietro Nenni who after World War I became a revered Socialist leader until his death in 1980. During this period, the two men and their wives were very good friends, even though their political discussions frequently ended in fistfights. In 1911, the police arrested both men for their activities in opposing the Libyan War and threw them into the same cell. Mussolini’s arrest led to demonstrations and creation of a defense committee that included two parliamentary deputies.⁷² At his trial, Mussolini admitted responsibility for his antiwar actions and for his antiwar articles, and stated that he supported sabotaging the war effort. The court found him guilty and sentenced him to a year in prison, reduced on appeal to five-and-a-half months. By the time of his release in March 1912, he had achieved national notoriety. In fact, it was his arrest and liberation that brought him to the attention of *La Soffitta* and of the “revolutionary intransigent” faction and eventually made him a major player in the activities leading to the downfall of the reformist faction at the Congress of Reggio Emilia. His opposition to the Libyan War opened the road to his becoming the real leader of the Socialist Party.⁷³

In 1914, Mussolini’s *Avanti!* denounced the army by raising the touchy issue of military expenses and highlighting the theme of antimilitarism. In the recent past, excellent analyses on military spending and the army’s role in Italian society had generally not had a major impact at Socialist national congresses, but now *Avanti!* brought them to the fore.⁷⁴ Giovanni Martinelli, an army colonel writing under the well-known pseudonym Sylva Viviani, had specialized in producing antimilitarist pieces for Socialist publications, but the reformist leadership had downplayed them. Now he emerged as the point man of *Avanti!*’s

campaign, publishing biting editorials on military questions that became a fixture of Mussolini's newspaper. Viviani's editorials condemned imperialistic tendencies in the Mediterranean, denounced Italian participation in the European arms race, claimed that the country ground down its poor by spending proportionately more than any other major power on its armed forces, and hauled the reformists over the coals for allegedly contributing to the situation. Viviani accused the cabinet of plotting to increase the standing army by a third and planning to lengthen draftees' terms of service to three years. These provisions, he argued, would place an intolerable burden on the peasants and workers who provided the bulk of the nation's soldiers. Viviani fulminated against the army's brutality in assigning its recruits to "disciplinary companies" for the slightest infraction of the military code.⁷⁵ Bolstering their increased use of antimilitarist propaganda, the Socialists called out their youth organizations to protest against the military more often than had been the case previously; these boasted a membership of about 10,000.⁷⁶ At the same time, antimilitarist groups published independent newspapers such as *Rompete le righe* and *La Volontà* that outdid *Avanti!*'s rhetoric.

Antimilitarist feeling particularly permeated the city of Ancona, capital of the Marche region, where the latest Socialist National Congress had met in April 1914. Despite their differences, the Republicans guided by Pietro Nenni, the Anarchists led by Errico Malatesta, and Mussolini all had strong antimilitarist sentiments. In the context of spiraling antimilitarism, these three groups united to mount a demonstration to protest the case of two soldiers assigned to "disciplinary companies" for having written a letter to an antimilitarist newspaper. The Ancona Chamber of Labor chose June 7 for the protest—the anniversary of the *Statuto* that supposedly protected civil rights. It also took a novel and bold step by coordinating its action with the chambers of labor in other Italian cities, asking them to organize public protests on the same day. Stunned by this plan to incite Italian soldiers to shun their duty and stimulate citizens to hate the army, as he put it, Prime Minister Antonio Salandra instructed the prefects to ban all antimilitarist demonstrations on June 7.⁷⁷

Prevented from meeting in public, the Ancona Socialists, Republicans and Anarchists organized a "private" meeting attended by 600 persons. When the participants left their hall, the Carabinieri surrounded them and blocked the road to the city's main square in an attempt to prevent them ruining a public celebration commemorating the *Statuto*. Unaware of the police's intentions, the grumbling protestors retreated to the "Villa

Rossa,” Republican headquarters, while their leaders negotiated with the lieutenant in charge. Suddenly shots rang out. Three demonstrators died and five were wounded. “Red Week” had begun.⁷⁸

Mussolini led the charge. He claimed in *Avanti!* that the shootings had been unprovoked and accused the authorities of “state assassination.” Considering Ancona a rebel to be punished, he wrote, the government had manufactured a tense atmosphere among the soldiers and had provoked the massacre. Mussolini considered it his sacred duty to support to the utmost the violent worker reaction to this intolerable provocation. From *Avanti!*’s columns, he thundered that the workers accepted the challenge hurled by the Italian state that mowed them down.⁷⁹ The Socialist Directorate and the reformist-led trade union, the Confederazione Generale del Lavoro (CGL), immediately called for a general strike and *Avanti!* screamed in large type for the workers of Italy to strike.⁸⁰

While the strike followed the normal course of such actions in most areas of the country, in Mussolini’s region of Emilia-Romagna, it turned insurrectionary. Socialists, Republicans, and Anarchists dropped long-held differences and organized action committees. Strikers attacked troops, invaded gun shops, sacked churches and government offices, and burned trains in the stations. Disturbances occurred in the major and minor centers of the province. Revolutionaries on bicycles and motorcycles created a network linking the rebel centers. Strikers by the tens of thousands gathered in the streets, listening to the exhortations of their leaders, occupying sensitive points with military precision, raising barricades and sealing off the province from the rest of the country.⁸¹

Despite this high level of coordination in a single province, “Red Week” failed to develop into a revolution. The movement lacked planning and had clearly surprised leftist national leaders.⁸² Railway workers, crucial elements in any revolutionary design, remained aloof, and CGL leaders called a quick halt to the strike—prompting Mussolini to denounce the action as a felony. The government held back the army to reduce loss of life among civilians, but when it marched in, it encountered little resistance.

Publicly, Mussolini put an optimistic face on developments. It had been Italy’s greatest strike, he claimed, involving two million persons. Moreover, he insisted, two essential differences distinguished Red Week from all previous rebellions. First, it had spread all over Italy and to all categories of workers. Second, the strike had been an offensive, not a defensive, event, and intensity had been its hallmark. The strike was “beautiful,” Mussolini roared as he exalted his own role and that of *Avanti!* and took all the credit.⁸³

The reformists countered by citing Red Week as proof that Socialists had to substitute parliamentary means (even obstructionism) for mob violence if they wished to attain their goals: liberty, anti-imperialism, anti-militarism—not coincidentally what Mussolini preached. Hooligan mobs had been necessary for past revolutions led by élites—minorities that utilized them as cannon fodder; this concept was still valid for Anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists, but not Socialists. International socialism had agreed that general strikes easily slipped into violence of the Anarchist kind, thus giving the bourgeoisie a reason to call out the forces of order and suffocate the uprising. Consequently, “The class struggle in Italy must necessarily tend to culminate in parliamentary action rather than in *direct action*. For that reason, neither [revolutionary] syndicalists nor anarchists, and (even less so) the *mob* (*teppa*), seem currently to serve the cause of the Socialist revolution.”⁸⁴

In response to objections against what seemed to be a harsh critique of the masses that had participated in Red Week, the reformists asserted that their interpretation of leaders exploiting mobs for their own ends was rigorously Marxist. Almost without the Party noticing, Mussolini’s revolutionaries had reversed the progress Marx’s thought had allowed Socialists to make. The Party now believed “in the thaumaturgy of the *Idea*, in the miracle-working of the *will*.” Facts, nature, context—these no longer counted: “It is preached that, with the *idea* and with the *will to revolution*, even with the most perfect illiteracy of the masses and with the most ancestral georgic patriarchy, *the Socialist revolution can be achieved*.” For the current revolutionary leadership of the Party, it was no longer true that decrees cannot abolish the natural phases of development of a nation, and Marx was stupid to emphasize history.⁸⁵

Mussolini rejected these charges, but privately he acknowledged reality. He had vilified CGL leader Rinaldo Rigola as a felon for having called an end to the strike, but he admitted that Rigola had responded to urgent requests coming from numerous chambers of labor, and that he had acted to head off a humiliating defeat. In fact, meeting on June 16–17, the CGL’s National Council voted confidence in its leaders and deplored the charges of betrayal that had been launched by Mussolini.⁸⁶ Even leaders on the left had understood that the insurrection was doomed and had attempted to halt it. In fact, those leaders were so incensed at Mussolini’s demagogic behavior that they rallied around him only because the reformists unloosed a bitter offensive against their best-known representative.⁸⁷

Exhibiting a tactical flexibility that always served him well, Mussolini admitted that the criticisms were true: “the revolution” was not imminent. He demanded ideological changes to work out the details of revolutionary action—“revolutionary revisionism.” In an astounding assertion, he maintained that the revolution needed the support of at least part of the army to succeed. However, even if Red Week had failed, it had demonstrated the profoundly revolutionary mentality of the masses. In his review *Utopia*, he wrote that Italy needed a revolution and would have it. What kind of revolution would it be? Significantly, he answered that it did not matter; all revolutions were social revolutions. From this point on, for Mussolini, revolution in itself became the ultimate goal, and revolutionary method had become paramount: “His revolution is a revolution without adjectives, it is *his* revolution.”⁸⁸ All that mattered was that the proletariat must arm itself and revolt.⁸⁹

By the time the outbreak of a great European war loomed, the reformist Italian Socialist view of revolution as the gradual elevation of the masses and the left-wing concept of rapid improvement driven by political intransigence—enshrined in the policies of alliances and resistance that the Socialists had debated from the beginnings of their movement—became irrelevant. The most important result of Red Week was that in Mussolini’s mind, revolution as the radical and violent overthrow of the existing power structure replaced those concepts, because, compared to the drive for revolution, the shape of the future society hardly mattered. “The Revolution” had been reduced to a power struggle that the masses could win if they were unified (even, previous debates had made clear, with non-Socialist elements), organized, armed and ruthless. In fact, after June 1914, Mussolini worked hard to strengthen the unity of Socialists with the other revolutionary groups that had participated in Red Week with the sole aim of preparing a revolution. From now on, revolution and power were synonymous for Mussolini—and the new society could be improvised later. Mussolini believed that Revolution had become an absolute before which ideology was relative.⁹⁰ Reaction to the Libyan War had persuaded Mussolini that antimilitarism, with its corollaries anti-imperialism, and anti-nationalism, would be the organizing principle of revolution. The failure of Red Week and the outbreak of Great War would convince him that, instead, the opposing concepts were the key to revolution. Did Mussolini’s policies really interpret the “crowd,” or a part of it, or its consciousness, reformist leader Giovanni Zibordi asked? Surveying the Party’s representatives, not one of the 50 deputies agreed with Mussolini,

nor did the great majority of the editors of Socialist publications, elected by the regional congresses. If the Directorate elected at the Congress of Ancona had the courage to take a roll call vote, its word would not be that of Mussolini: “not that *of his passionate explosions*, and not that of his far-fetched doctrinal gyrations with which he tries to support the former.”⁹¹

THE “CONVERSION”

Mussolini would shift his position on antimilitarism, but not on revolution. On June 28, 1914, two weeks after Red Week ended, the assassination of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife touched off the crisis that produced the Great War. The Socialist masses’ antimilitarism that Mussolini himself had intensified, along with the Socialist Party’s traditional antiwar positions, induced him to advocate a neutralist course for the country. When the Great War began, Italy declared its neutrality, refusing to follow its Triple Alliance partners because, the government argued, they had transformed the treaty from a defensive into an offensive instrument.⁹² Mussolini had demanded that the country keep out of the war when a debate ensued on whether Italy should intervene or not, and he espoused the customary Socialist position that the conflict was one between “bourgeois” countries. As war seemed imminent, on July 25, he published a violent article in *Avanti!* entitled “Down with war!” Italy must work for a rapid solution to the European crisis, he wrote. In case war broke out, the Italian proletariat must rip up the existing treaties linking Italy to Germany and Austria-Hungary and impose a policy of absolute neutrality. Italy had to be stopped from entering the conflict by employing all possible means, which was the majority Socialist position on the war. In his early moves during the escalating crisis, it appeared clear that Mussolini favored taking drastic action to keep Italy out of the conflict, including calling a general strike. However, as the fighting unfolded and the Germans invaded Belgium, his “absolute neutrality” position began to crumble as influential leftist leaders denounced German atrocities and argued that a German victory would end democracy in Europe.⁹³

Mussolini began reflecting on his strong antiwar position for several reasons. Initially, many Italian conservatives favored the German-Austrian side, but they were split. Since leftist opposition had been successful in helping attain the declaration of neutrality, Mussolini thought the war provided revolutionary Socialists with a good opportunity for the seizure of power.⁹⁴ In Italy, the idea of the war leading to a revolution had been put

on the table thanks to the revolutionary syndicalists—with whom Mussolini was close—especially in an August 18, 1914 speech by Revolutionary Syndicalist leader Alceste De Ambris.⁹⁵ In short, the possibility of Italian intervention agitated the left, Socialists began criticizing the Party's policy of absolute neutrality, and young Socialists even discussed formation of a volunteer legion to fight for France.

While publicly sticking to his antiwar position, Mussolini tergiversated. In September 1914, he allowed publication of an article by Sergio Panunzio arguing that a neutralist policy was antisocialist because to advocate peace signified supporting the conservatives and the capitalists.⁹⁶ Reports about Mussolini's doubts about the wisdom of continued neutrality, stories about private conversations expressing them, and articles discussing his possible change of heart appeared in the newspapers.⁹⁷

On October 18, 1914, while the Party Directorate prepared to discuss the volatile situation, Mussolini published in *Avanti!* one of the most trenchant articles of his career: "Dalla neutralità assoluta alla neutralità attiva ed operante" (From absolute neutrality to an active and operative neutrality). "Absolute neutrality" was a way of refusing to face the issue, the article argued. The PSI's neutrality was simply not "absolute" because most of the Party favored France over Germany. He asked: did the Socialists think that, had the revolution come, the future Socialist state would not have been involved in wars? Not even if the conservative powers tried to restore the old regime? National issues existed and it was useless to deny their existence, Mussolini wrote, citing the problem of the Italian speaking parts of Austria (the *Irredenta*) as an example. He quoted the many foreign and Italian Socialists of undoubted loyalty to the Socialist cause who had come out in defense of democracy and the war to save it. Mussolini concluded that the Socialists could not stand idly by, watching and allowing developments to lead them. Rather, they must guide the dramatic events taking place.⁹⁸

Ironically, the Directorate had commissioned Mussolini, Turati and another reformist leader, Camillo Prampolini, to draft a manifesto against the war. This group met on September 21, and, with his customary energy, Mussolini had a draft ready the next day. Turati and Prampolini accepted it with minor modifications; Anna Kuliscioff praised its moderate language and pronounced it a good job.⁹⁹ When the Directorate met on October 20, two days after the appearance of Mussolini's clamorous article, however, he repudiated his own manifesto and presented a motion asking that the Party oppose neutrality; it received only one positive vote, his own.

Mussolini thereupon resigned as editor of *Avanti!* and returned to Milan. Because he had been deprived of a platform allowing him to talk directly to the people, Mussolini now aimed to establish his own newspaper. He succeeded, but the dubious source of the funds, including industrialists who hoped to profit from the conflict, turned his comrades against him. His new daily, *Il Popolo d'Italia*, claimed to be Socialist and advocated Italian intervention. Mussolini's Socialist comrades accused him of betrayal and clamored for his expulsion on moral grounds. In a dramatic meeting on November 29, 1914, the Directorate ratified a previous decision by the Milan Socialist federation and expelled him from the Party.

Unlike Mussolini, the reformists he had reviled for warmongering remained consistent in their opposition to the conflict. Their reasoning was based not only on the traditional Socialist view of war as a conflict within the bourgeoisie, therefore inimical to the proletariat, and their condemnation of violence, but they also opposed it on practical grounds. Turati had already spelled out his views on the country's foreign policy and the Triple Alliance during his debate with Bissolati in 1909 on military expenses and the Bosnian crisis. Accusing the government of exploiting that crisis to increase military expenses, Turati called for reformists to unite and organize a campaign to fight against the increases. Bissolati objected, stating that the attitude of the Austrian Socialists had demonstrated that Socialist interpretations that the international proletariat would unite to oppose a war had been proven false. Given that situation, Bissolati argued, the Italians should support an increase in military spending in order to protect their stake in the liberal state.¹⁰⁰ Turati answered that no one threatened vital Italian interests and that the country could stay out of a European conflict because its geographical position allowed it to do so, but it had to renounce its expansionist goals. The risks of war for Italy stemmed from its participation in intrigues, plots and alliances that exposed it to reprisals that were directly proportional to this participation. Withdrawing from the arms race then taking place would strengthen the country because the funds spent on arms could be spent for domestic reforms, thus favoring more prosperity and a society in which its people had a greater stake and would be more willing to defend. War would make impossible the reforms that were the best defense against internal violence and foreign attack.¹⁰¹

Thus, in 1914, Turati and Kuliscioff's *Critica Sociale* fought on the front lines in arguing against war as the crises that led to the Great War increased in number and intensity. On the eve of conflict, it predicted that a new war would not be a quick one, but an unprecedented catastrophe.

The proletariat must take immediate action centering around two major principles. First, by exercising its civil rights and directing them toward the implementation of its class interests, that is, peace. Socialist parties in all countries should do their best to assure the absolute neutrality of their respective countries; obscure pacts must not be allowed to deprive the workers of their right to determine their own destiny. Second, the proletariat must demand—through coordinated action—an international conference to stop the march toward the “madness” (*follia*).¹⁰²

After the fighting began and Italy declared its neutrality, *Critica Sociale* consistently made powerful arguments in favor of continued Italian neutrality. The economist Attilio Cabiati described Italy’s current position as an “oasis, where one can breathe and reason.” He methodically examined all the reasons given by the interventionists in their argument that Italy should enter the conflict. They argued that militarism would disappear, since Germany was the cause of it. Cabiati debunked militarism as specifically German, describing it as a worldwide phenomenon originating in the current capitalist phase of society. The arms race and the foreign policies of France and Russia also gave the lie to those observers who believed that the war had been caused by Germany. Germany had long known about the vast amounts that the French and Russians had been spending on arms, and that between 1917 and 1920, when preparations were complete, these two countries would have attacked it. To speak of an offensive or a defensive war meant discussing long-range issues, not just the last act that produced a conflict.

As far as Italy was concerned, the terms of the Triple Alliance had allowed for neutrality, and the treaty was still in force. This point and Austria’s military situation meant that diplomacy could work in settling the *Irredenta* issue (the Italian-inhabited territories still held by Austria), and, contrary to what nationalists asserted, war with Austria was not necessary to reach an eventual accommodation. To those who argued that a victory against Austria in the war would lead to fulfillment of the dream of Italian expansion in the Mediterranean, Cabiati responded that it was the British and the French who controlled the areas that would favor this dream: Nice, Corsica and Malta (he cited the works of Admiral Alfred Mahan). These countries would never give up their possessions to Italy. Moreover, the war might lead to the breakup of Austria, and Italian intervention would hasten this. Would the enfeeblement or disappearance of Austria favor Italy? If the Austrian Empire emerged unduly weakened, it would come under German influence; if it disappeared, the result might be unification of Austria with

Germany. If a Slavic state replaced Austria, it would try to retake Trieste and Istria. In sum, any solution resulting from an Italian attempt to take Trieste and its hinterland by force would mean the postwar establishment of a state that would be Italy's enemy. In a prophetic passage, Cabiati wrote: "The possession of Istria, therefore, could mean for us the necessity to increase and strengthen our armaments and to prepare for a dangerous war that will not be far into the future. This would nullify the economic advantage of possessing Trieste, an advantage that, already for other reasons, is problematical and, above all, will be short-lived" (*vantaggio già per altre ragioni problematico e sopra tutto di problematica durata*). Cabiati's article demonstrated in detail that Italian intervention in the conflict would result in the loss of all the benefits of neutrality, economic disaster and the prospect of a new war within a short time.¹⁰³

The well-reasoned arguments for neutrality in *Critica Sociale* contrasted with Mussolini's strident demands for Italian entrance into the war based on the vague idea that it would spark a revolution. Mussolini's clamorous conversion to "revolutionary interventionism" seemed to his comrades of the Party's left wing to be a sudden betrayal. The reformists made clear their dissension even while seizing the occasion to emphasize the irony of Mussolini's switch. However, Zibordi contended that Mussolini's behavior was no surprise and no betrayal. Mussolini genuinely represented a part of Italian socialism, and his position on the war was a logical extension of his position on violence. In fact, he was more logical than the complaining comrades of his own faction: "who totter between an intransigence that is purely electoral and parliamentary, and revolutionary action." The reformists did not believe in building socialism on the ruins caused by catastrophes, and, because of their consistency, they were the ones who could seriously fight against the war.¹⁰⁴

Zibordi's incisive judgment of Mussolini and his comrades proved correct. In fact, Mussolini aimed at establishing socialism first through violence and then through war, the ultimate violent act, and he never hid his intentions or methods. He was no aberration: "Mussolini is part of the history of Marxist-inspired socialism."¹⁰⁵

NOTES

1. On Turati's thought and action up to World War I, see Spencer Di Scala, *Dilemmas of Italian Socialism: The Politics of Filippo Turati* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980). This book was translated into

- Italian, with a long preface by Giuliano Amato and a new introduction by the author, as *Filippo Turati: Le origini della democrazia in Italia* (Milan: Critica Sociale, 2007). While the two best-known full biographies of Turati, one friendly, the other less so, are good on the details of his life, neither fully captures his importance and influence: Franco Livorsi, *Turati* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1984) and Renato Monteleone, *Filippo Turati* (Turin: UTET, 1987).
2. On Anarchist thought, see Gianpietro Berti, *Il pensiero anarchico dal Settecento al Novecento* (Rome: Laicata, 1998). On the history of Italian Anarchism, see Richard Hostetter, *The Italian Socialist Movement. Vol. 1: Origins (1860–1882)* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1958); Franco della Peruta, “il socialismo italiano dal 1875 al 1882,” Istituto Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, *Annali 1958* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1958), pp. 15–104; Aldo Romano, *Storia del movimento socialista in Italia*, 3 vols. (Bari: Laterza, 1966–1967); Piercarlo Masini, *Storia degli anarchici italiani da Bakunin a Malatesta* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1969) and *Storia degli anarchici nell’epoca degli attentati* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1981); Enzo Santarelli, *Il socialismo anarchico in Italia* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1969); and Nunzio Pernicone’s *Italian Anarchism: 1864–1892* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).
 3. “Chi siamo e cosa vogliamo,” *Fascio Operaio* (Milan), July 29, 1883. Gastone Manacorda, *Il movimento operaio italiano attraverso i suoi congressi (1853–1892)* (Rome: Riuniti, 1953), pp. 158–163, discusses the party’s origins.
 4. Giorgio Candeloro, *Storia dell’Italia moderna, Vol. 6: Lo sviluppo del capitalismo e del movimento operaio* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1970), pp. 175–176; Manacorda, *Il movimento operaio*, pp. 224–227; *Fascio Operaio*, October 30–31, 1886.
 5. The term PSI is used here for convenience. The party went through several name changes and restructuring before adopting this title, by which it was known for a 100 years, in 1895.
 6. “The relevant material includes a letter by Turati to Engels in Istituto Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, *Corrispondenza Friedrich Engels-Filippo Turati, 1891–1895*,” *Annali 1958*, pp. 268–269; see also pp. 253–258; Kuliscioff’s letter to Engels and a postscript by Turati, are in Gianni Bosio, ed., *Karl Marx-Friedrich Engels: scritti italiani* (Milan: Avanti!, 1955), pp. 164–166, and Engels’ letter to Turati on pp. 170–171. See F. Engels, “La futura rivoluzione italiana e il partito socialista,” *Critica Sociale* February 1, 1894, and the comment by “Noi” (Turati and Kuliscioff) in the same issue. See also the interpretation of this correspondence by Lorenzo Strik Lievers, “Turati, la politica delle alleanze e una celebre lettera di Engels,” *Nuova Rivista Storica* 57 (January–April, 1973).
 7. See the declarations of Arcangelo Ghisleri and Filippo Turati in *Cuore e Critica*, December 24, 1890. *Critica Sociale* was revived after World War II and continued publishing into the twenty-first century. On Anna Kuliscioff,

see Maria Addis Saba, *Anna Kuliscioff: vita privata e passione politica* (Milan: Mondadori, 1993) and Maria Casalini, *Anna Kuliscioff: la signora del socialismo italiano* (Rome: Riuniti, 2013).

8. Benedetto Croce, *Storia d'Italia dal 1871 al 1915* (Bari: Laterza, 1962), p. 162.
9. Luigi Cortese, *La costituzione del Partito socialista italiano* (Milan: Avanti!, 1962), pp. 49–54.
10. *Congresso Operaio Italiano tenutosi in Milano nei giorni 2–3 agosto 1891: Riassunto delle discussioni e deliberazioni* (Milan: tip. degli operai, n.d.), pp. 5–15; and La Critica Sociale, “Congresso operaio,” *Critica Sociale*, August 16, 1891.
11. Cortesi, *La costituzione*, pp. 163–167 and Ernesto Ragionieri, *Socialdemocrazia tedesca e socialisti italiani* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1961), pp. 177–184.
12. *Programma socialista discusso e approvato dalla Lega socialista milanese nelle adunanze del 28 febbraio, 11, 12 marzo e 1 aprile 1891* (Milan: tip. Degli operai, 1891). La Critica Sociale, “Necessità di un programma pratico,” *Critica Sociale*, August 1, 1892; Filippo Turati, “L’azione parlamentare dei socialisti in Italia,” and La Critica Sociale, “Il momento attuale socialista in Italia,” *Critica Sociale*, September 16, 1892.
13. La Critica Sociale, “Una opinione sugli anarchici,” *Critica Sociale*, May 31, 1891.
14. La Critica Sociale, “I partiti politici e i socialisti,” *Critica Sociale*, January 15, 1891; Noi, “Per i profani,” *Critica Sociale* November 1, 1891; La Critica Sociale, “La storia di due code di cavallo, e il programma socialista,” *Critica Sociale*, July 10, 1891.
15. “La lotta di classe moderna,” *Lotta di Classe: Numero Unico*, June 18, 1892.
16. “Un nuovo contingente”; “Il voto agli esercenti”; “E le altre classi?” in *ibid.*
17. The draft program is in *Lotta di classe*, July 30–31, 1892.
18. Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (New York: International Publishers, 1933) and Antonio Labriola, *Lettere a Engels* (Rome: Rinascita, 1949).
19. La lotta di classe, “Il programma di partito,” *Lotta di Classe*, August 13–14, 1892.
20. La lotta di classe, “Lo statuto del partito,” *ibid.*
21. Cortesi, *La costituzione*, pp. 141–149; he gives a list of the organizations that joined the Socialist congress, and their names, in his appendix.
22. The stenographic report of the congress is in *Lotta di Classe*, August 20–21, 1892. The best description of the work of this “second” congress remains Cortesi, *La costituzione*, pp. 151–172.
23. For a discussion of these issues, see Di Scala, *Dilemmas*, pp. 22–24.
24. Di Scala, *Dilemmas*, pp. 25–54, examines the events and issues during this period.

25. Partito socialista italiano, *Relazione della direzione del partito* (Imola, September 6–8, 1902), pp. 16–21.
26. The details of the internal debate during on the issue of voting for the government are in Di Scala, *Dilemmas*, pp. 55–57.
27. M.B. (Mussolini Benito), “Il congresso dei socialisti italiani in Svizzera,” *Avanguardia Socialista*, April 3, 1904.
28. Mussolini Benito, Losanna, “Democrazia parlamentare,” *Avanguardia Socialista*, July 3, 1904.
29. Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario, 1883-1920* (Turin: Einaudi, 1965), pp. 22–86, describes Mussolini’s actions during this period in detail.
30. Lerda is one of many Italian Socialists of this period who deserve to be studied more than they have been. For some information on him, see Fulvio Conti, “Lerda, Giovanni,” in Volume 64 of the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 2005).
31. The relevant documentation on this affair includes “Il convegno italo-austriaco a Trieste,” *Il Tempo* (Milan), April 13, 1905. See also L’Italiano Errante, “Dissolvere, non risolvere,” in the May 6 issue and the issues of May 23 and October 23, 1906. Bissolati revealed the refusal of the Austrians to sabotage mobilization only on the latter date. Some of this material is reprinted in Leonida Bissolati, *La politica estera d’Italia dal 1897 al 1920* (Milan: Treves, 1923), pp. 111–115, 126–138, 144–148, 160–163, and 167–168. This issue is also touched upon in Ugoberto Alfassio Grimaldi and Gherardo Bozzetti, *Bissolati* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1983), p. 91. For the reaction of the Turati group, see c.t. [Claudio Treves?], “Il convegno di Trieste e il riformismo,” *Il Tempo* May 25, 1905.
32. The vigorous debate on foreign policy and military expenses can be followed in these sources: C. Braccialarghe and Leonida Bissolati, “A proposito di patria e di guerra,” *Avanti!*, April 7, 1909; Filippo Turati, “Le spese militari: lettera aperta a Leonida Bissolati,” *Critica Sociale*, April 16, 1909; Leonida Bissolati, “Le spese militari e il Partito socialista: risposta a Filippo Turati,” *Avanti!*, May 6, 1909; La critica sociale, “Il partito socialista alla prova (seguito della polemica sulle spese militari),” *Critica Sociale*, May 16, 1909; and Filippo Turati, “Militaristi senza saperlo,” *Critica Sociale*, May 1, 1909. The issue was also the subject of private correspondence between Turati and Kuliscioff. See, for example, the letters dated May 21, 22 and 25, 1908; May 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11 and June 3, 1909, in Filippo Turati-Anna Kuliscioff, *Carteggio II Tomo secondo 1900-1909. Le speranze dell’eta` giolittiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977). Leo Valiani traces the split between Turati and Bissolati to the same issue: “L’azione di Leonida Bissolati e il revisionismo,” *Rivista Storica Italiana*, (1959): 654–663.
33. For the relationship between Italy and its Triple Alliance partners during this period, see Giorgio Candeloro, *Storia dell’Italia moderna: Volume settimo. La crisi di fine secolo e l’eta` giolittiana* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1974). For a

- discussion of how the alliance was changing, see Spencer Di Scala, *Makers of the Modern World: Vittorio Orlando. Italy* (London: Haus, 2010), pp. 16–33. On the context of Bissolati's visit to the King and its impact, see Grimaldi and Bozzetti, *Bissolati*, pp. 111–116.
34. Gaetano Arfé, *Storia del socialismo italiano (1892-1926)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1965), pp. 165–166.
 35. See Angelica Balabanoff, who during these years participated in Italian Socialist politics, “Chi siamo e chi non siamo,” *La Soffitta*, May 15, 1911 and her “Una pregiudiziale,” *La Soffitta*, June 15, 2011. See also G. Plechanoff, “Il caso Bissolati,” *La Soffitta*, May 1, 1911 and Rosa Luxemburg, “Rinascita socialista,” *La Soffitta*, 15 May 1911.
 36. “Atti ufficiali del Comitato C. della frazione,” *La Soffitta*, June 15, 1911, and “Il pensiero della frazione,” May 1, 1911.
 37. Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 95–100. For the debate between the most important exponents of the revolutionary faction and Mussolini, see the articles of Francesco Ciccotti, “Per i...fuorusciti forlivesi: a Benito Mussolini,” *La Soffitta*, September 15, 1911 and Adolfo Zerbini, “Verso la scissione?” *La Soffitta*, September 15, 1911.
 38. For the debate and the continuing ideological confusion, see Giovanni Lerda, “Dichiarazione,” *La Soffitta*, October 29, 1911; Angelica Balabanoff, “Seguiamo l'esempio,” *La Soffitta*, November 19, 1911; Vittorio Badaloni, “Per il nostro programma,” *La Soffitta*, November 12, 1911; “Quel che ha detto il Congresso di Modena,” *Critica Sociale*, November 1, 1911; Oda Lerda Olberg, “Tutti d'accordo,” *La Soffitta*, November 12, and “Scarammucchie...[Risposta all'Onorevole Filippo Turati] in the December 3, 1911 issue; and Giovanni Lerda, “Per parlar chiaro,” *La Soffitta*, January 15, 1912.
 39. Il Comitato centrale della frazione rivoluzionaria intransigente del PSI, “Contro l'avventura di Tripoli: il nostro manifesto”; OL, “Eran Pronti”; A.V., “Quella Direzione del Partito!,” *La Soffitta*, 1 ottobre 1911; Alceste della Seta, “Il navarca”; Giovanni Lerda, “Vicolo cieco del...riformismo,” *La Soffitta*, October 8, 1911.
 40. a v, “L'ultimissima ‘enormita’ della direzione del partito,” *La Soffitta*, November 19, 1911; “La nostra dimostrazione contro la guerra in Campidoglio,” *La Soffitta*, December 3, 1911. In reality, the Directorate had attempted to organize a strike against the war, but it had fallen flat.
 41. Brunello Vigezzi, *Il PSI, le riforme e la rivoluzione (1898–1915). Filippo Turati e Anna Kuliscioff dai fatti del 1898 alla prima guerra mondiale* (Florence: Sansoni, 1981), pp. 82–83.
 42. Di Scala, *Dilemmas*, p. 139. For the context in the country and the general effects of the Libyan War on the Socialists and Giolitti's rule, see Maurizio Degl'Innocenti, *Il socialismo italiano e la guerra di Libia* (Rome: Riuniti, 1976).

43. Il Comitato centrale della frazione rivoluzionaria intransigente del PSI, "Ai socialisti d'Italia," *La Soffitta*, February 15, 1912; Giovanni Lerda, "L'autonomia trionfante," *La Soffitta*, February 15, 1912; and "Verso il congresso," *La Soffitta*, March 4, 1912.
44. Di Scala, *Dilemmas*, pp. 140–141, analyzes the reformist response.
45. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 116–118.
46. Giovanni Lerda, *Il socialismo e la sua tattica* (Genoa: Lib. moderna, 1902), pp. 23–24.
47. Partito Socialista Italiano, *Resoconto stenografico del XIII congresso nazionale* (Citta' di Castello: Unione arti grafiche, 1913), pp. 13–18.
48. *Resoconto stenografico del XIII congresso nazionale*, pp. 59–60. Italian deputies were not paid at the time and deputies frequently could not take off time from their jobs to travel to Rome.
49. Mussolini's speech and motion are in PSI, *Resoconto stenografico del XIII congresso nazionale*, pp. 69–72.
50. PSI, *Resoconto stenografico del XIII congresso*, pp. 111–113.
51. PSI, *Resoconto del XIII congresso*, pp. 151–165.
52. PSI, *Resoconto stenografico del XIII congresso nazionale*, pp. 187–199. Interestingly, while Turati mounted a half-hearted defense of the Socialist parliamentary group in public, he privately was very critical of it and very dispirited. See his long letter to Anna Kuliscioff of February 29, 1912 in Turati-Kuliscioff *Carteggio III tomo secondo*, but also many other letters that adopted the same tone.
53. Gaetano Arfé, *Storia dell'Avanti!, 1896–1926*, 2 vols. (Milan-Rome: Avanti!, 1956), 1, pp. 91–92.
54. See the letters of Kuliscioff to Turati, June 19 and 23, 1912 in *Carteggio III tomo secondo*.
55. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 131–135, describes Mussolini's campaign in detail.
56. Gaetano Arfé, *Storia dell'Avanti!, 1896–1926*, 2 vols. (Milan-Rome: Avanti!, 1956), 1, 102–105.
57. Arfé, *Storia del socialismo italiano*, p. 167. See this portrait of Lazzari: Fulvio Conti, "Lazzari, Costantino," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Vol. 64.
58. Kuliscioff to Turati, December 1 and 2, 1912, *Carteggio III tomo secondo*.
59. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 157–176.
60. Kuliscioff to Turati, December 11, 1912; see also the letters of December 14 and 15, 1912 in *Carteggio III tomo secondo*.
61. Brunello Vigezzi, *Giulitti e Turati: Un incontro mancato, Tomo II* (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1976), pp. 408–409.
62. Luigi Lotti, *La settimana rossa* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1965), pp. 30–31.
63. La Critica Sociale, "'Ricominciamo, sequitando.'" (a proposito di eccidi proletari)," *Critica Sociale*, January 16–February 1, 1913.

64. Claudio Treves, "La politica della protesta," *Critica Sociale*, January 16–February 1, 1913.
65. Lotti, *La settimana rossa*, pp. 37–39.
66. Giovanni Zibordi, "Verso il congresso," *Critica Sociale*, April 16–30, 1914. See also his "Quel che dovremo dire ad Ancona," *Critica Sociale* April 1–15, 1914 and other articles on the subject during the same period.
67. E. Marchioli, "Revisionismo e Rivoluzionarismo (A proposito di una conferenza di B. Mussolini)," *Critica Sociale*, March 1–15, 1914.
68. Arfé, *Storia del socialismo italiano*, p. 181.
69. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 177–192.
70. Editorial, *Avanti!*, May 1, 1914.
71. Giovanni Zibordi, "Un congresso di transizione," *Critica Sociale*, May 16–31, 1914.
72. Giuseppe Tamburrano, *Pietro Nenni* (Bari: Laterza, 1986), pp. 3–6, 10–29, 40–56.
73. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 108–111.
74. See, for example, Alceste Della Seta, *Il partito socialista e le questioni dell'antimilitarismo. Relazione sul tema spese militari ed antimilitarismo* (Rome: Cooperativa Tipografica "Avanti," 1910).
75. Editorials in *Avanti!*, April 3, 7, 8 and 4, 11, and May 15, 1914.
76. Sylva Viviani, *Antimilitarismo prima del Congresso di Reggio Emilia e dopo quello di Ancona* (Florence: Ugo Polli, 1914).
77. Antonio Salandra, Camera dei Deputati, *Atti parlamentari—Legislatura XXIV—La sessione—Discussioni—Tornata del 9 Giugno 1914*, pp. 3863–3866.
78. This version of events is *Avanti!*'s, June 8, 1914.
79. Benito Mussolini, "Un efferato assassinio di Stato ad Ancona," *Avanti!*, June 8, 1914.
80. For the strike news, see *Avanti!*, June 9, 1914.
81. Lotti, *La settimana rossa*, pp. 116–209.
82. Arfé, *Storia del socialismo italiano*, p. 182.
83. Benito Mussolini, "Tregua d'armi," *Avanti!*, June 12, 1914.
84. Il Vice, "La 'Teppa' e la rivoluzione socialista," *Critica Sociale*, July 1–15, 1914. See also Giovanni Zibordi's "Divagazioni di luglio sulle cose del Socialismo," *Critica Sociale*, July 16–31, 1914.
85. Il Vice, "Involuzione Rivoluzionario. Revisione o riaffermazione della dottrina socialista," *Critica Sociale*, July 16–31, 1914.
86. Luciana Marchetti, *La Confederazione Generale del Lavoro, negli atti, nei documenti, nei congressi 1906–1926* (Milan: Edizioni Avanti!, 1962), pp. 195–196.
87. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 210–215.
88. Arfé, *Storia del socialismo italiano*, p. 183, emphasis added.
89. Lotti, *La settimana rossa*, pp. 259–263.

90. Spencer Di Scala, "Red Week" 1914: Prelude to War and Revolution," in Frank Coppa, ed. *Studies in Modern Italian History From the Risorgimento to the Republic* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986), p. 131.
91. Giovanni Zibordi, "Continuando a discutere di cose interne di famiglia," *Critica Sociale*, August 1–15, 1914.
92. Spencer Di Scala, "Neutrality or Intervention? Italy's Long Road to War," in Alan Sharp, ed., *28 June. Sarajevo 1914-Versailles 1919. The War and Peace that Made the Modern World* (London: Haus, 2014), pp. 158–173.
93. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 241–42.
94. Vigezzi, *Il PSI, le riforme e la rivoluzione*, pp. 127–28.
95. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 235–238, analyzes the revolutionary syndicalist position.
96. Sergio Panunzio, *Guerra e socialismo, Avanti!*, September 12, 1914.
97. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 253–257.
98. *Avanti!*, October 18, 1914.
99. See the following letters: Turati to Kuliscioff, "21 settembre 1914, alle 19"; Kuliscioff to Turati, "22 settembre 1914, ore 18"; Turati to Kuliscioff, "22 settembre 1914, alle 20," in *Carteggio III tomo secondo*.
100. La Critica Sociale, "Il riformismo alla prova," *Critica Sociale*, November 1, 1908, and C. Braccialarghe and Leonida Bissolati, "A proposito di patria e di guerra," *Avanti!*, April 7, 1909.
101. La Critica Sociale, "Il partito socialista alla prova (seguito della polemica sulle spese militari)," *Critica Sociale*, May 16, 1909, and Filippo Turati, "Militaristi senza saperlo," *Critica Sociale*, May 1, 1909. See also Turati's "Momento di sosta," *Critica Sociale*, June 16, 1909.
102. Il Vice, "L'ora tragica," *Critica Sociale*, August 1–15, 1914. The following note appeared at the end of this article: "P.S. La guerra è dichiarata."
103. Attilio Cabiati, "Le ragioni della neutralità," *Critica Sociale* October 16–31, 1914.
104. Giovanni Zibordi, "La logica di una crisi," *Critica Sociale*, November 16–30, 1914.
105. Giorgio Galli, *Storia del socialismo italiano* (Rome: Laterza, 1983), p. 65.

The Enemy of My Enemy: Gaetano Salvemini, Benito Mussolini and the Politics of the Liberal State, 1910–1914

Charles Killinger

The murder of Unitary Socialist leader Giacomo Matteotti by fascists in June 1924 prompted Gaetano Salvemini to call for the resignation of Prime Minister Benito Mussolini and thrust the professor back into the midst of active politics as a leader of Florentine antifascism.¹ Arrested and then forced into exile, Salvemini became perhaps Mussolini's most ardent adversary. But there was a period before his antifascism hardened when the historian concurred with the man who would become *il Duce*, most notably in their mutual, but divergent opposition to what they separately viewed as the malignant status of both the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) and the Liberal state. In the years before World War I, Salvemini urged fundamental changes in what he saw as a moribund political system and pushed for an alternative to its longtime leader, Giovanni Giolitti, whom he labeled "Il Ministro della Malavita."² And while Salvemini promoted his democratic agenda largely (and uncomfortably) within the reformist faction of the PSI, Mussolini held democracy in contempt, opposed reforms as a subversion of the socialist revolution, and began his move to take leadership of the party and to drive it toward a revolutionary agenda.

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As radical critics of the status quo in the Giolittian era, Salvemini and Mussolini expressed a notable measure of reciprocal esteem and support, something that is easily documented, but has been given minimal consideration. In part, this lack of elucidation results from the expansive shadow of the fascist *ventennio*, which retroactively shrouded the prefascist era in an oversimplified, dualistic framework. Thus the relationship between the two has been interpreted primarily in the context of their later, well-known mutual enmity. The polarized historiographical culture of the Cold War era perpetuated this approach until the reevaluation of Mussolini's career, initiated by Renzo De Felice in 1965,³ enabled a more complete and nuanced interpretation of this relationship; for if Mussolini had been, as De Felice argued, a committed socialist, then how could his socialism be understood in context with that of this future impassioned adversary? And could such clarification illuminate the turbulent period immediately preceding the Great War? In fact, a closer look at this period reveals striking similarities in their criticisms of common adversaries and in their advocacy of radical change. These similarities are all the more remarkable in light of profound differences, especially in their fundamental political values and contrasting life experiences that made such agreement unlikely.

Furthermore, abruptly changing conditions forced the two to respond to ever more crucial issues: the war in Libya, la *settimana rossa* ("Red Week," June 1914), and the outbreak of World War I. Both agreements and differences were aired publicly at the PSI congress of 1910, authored by both in the pages of the Florentine journal *La Voce*, by Mussolini in four periodicals he edited (*La Lotta di Classe*, *Avanti!*, *Utopia* and *Il Popolo d'Italia*) and by Salvemini in his *L'Unità*. As a result, there is a clear record of the views of these two men who converged emphatically in their opposition to Giolitti, endorsed each other, and found themselves on common ground for different reasons in their support of Italian intervention in the Great War. In fact, their convergence was not fueled by agreement in principle, but was contingent on their opposition to Giolittismo and to the reformist wing of the PSI.

Clearly, Salvemini's ideas were more coherent and stable, derived from Enlightenment philosophy, sharpened by the discipline of historical study and the empirical method, and tempered by modern social analysis. On occasion, like Mussolini, he took extreme positions, most obviously in the 1890s while fascinated with Marxism as a student in Florence and in response to the constitutional crisis of 1898. Primarily a scholar, Salvemini's journalism served as the means by which he could make his

case for political change. He wrote fervently and at length about Italian politics, but neither he nor his contemporaries would have identified him first as a journalist.

In contrast, according to De Felice, Mussolini was “a major journalist, one of the most important of his time” who had “a true and profound passion for journalism that formed a coherent whole with his passion—not less true and profound—for politics.”⁴ Some have found coherence in Mussolini’s ideas during this phase, particularly with respect to an ideology that featured elements of revolutionary and national syndicalism, but the argument for coherence is unconvincing.⁵ At a minimum, his writing “[reflected] the prevailing intellectual currents” of the day.⁶ Mussolini did hold steadily to a revolutionary militancy and dismissively scorned the very same Italian constitutional system that Salvemini hoped to reinvigorate. At the same time, Mussolini’s writings also reveal dramatic changes in view.

Consistent at least in their militancy, Mussolini’s ideas can best be evaluated in the context of adaptation to rapidly changing conditions. His views—for example, about revolutionary syndicalism and a “new” cultural form of nationalism—are derivative. Thus he may be understood in these years, not as an original thinker but as a politically driven opportunist who adopted and synthesized the ideas of others—in his case, Friedrich Nietzsche, Vilfredo Pareto, Georges Sorel, Sergio Panunzio and Giuseppe Prezzolini among the more important—and applied them to what he believed to be a novel set of political conditions that would accommodate his radical agenda and his own substantial ambition. In the most general sense, admitting significant disagreements among them, these intellectuals provided Mussolini with a critique of Liberal Italy that he incorporated in his journalism, in his speeches and in his political campaigns.⁷

Although it can be argued that both Salvemini and Mussolini had established political values by their mid-20s, a series of events in the lives of both in the period preceding 1910 exercised significant influence, particularly in the personal and psychological realm. Both young men exhibited volatile personalities, although Salvemini’s fervor was merely rhetorical; he showed no evidence of a predilection to violence, personal or political, in the sense that Mussolini did. Although vocal and decisive, Mussolini’s rapid political and rhetorical transformations make him an elusive subject in this period, one De Felice refers to as a man of “complex and contradictory character.”⁸

Salvemini was neither. Most found him exceptionally transparent and consistent, although his skilled and reasoned analysis was not infrequently accompanied by passionate rhetoric and a tone of righteous indignation.

A non-conformist, he often personalized politics, holding his allies to such high standards that he repeatedly alienated them.⁹ Twice he entered electoral politics, but found them corrupt and unappealing. “Politics, my dear friend,” he wrote to Giustino Fortunato, “disgust me.”¹⁰ In contrast, Mussolini thrived in the public, power-driven, manipulative political arena.

Both men had been influenced by youthful poverty, but under markedly different familial and cultural influences that led each to become spokesman for the lower classes of their very dissimilar regions, Salvemini for the Mezzogiorno, Mussolini for the industrialized North. Translated to the politics of prewar Italy, this difference clearly delineates a fundamental clash of perspective, most dramatically illustrated by Salvemini’s claim that the South was an economic colony of the North.¹¹ Nonetheless, they managed to agree and even collaborate on a number of occasions, driven by their continuing opposition to the politics of the Liberal state and by Mussolini’s new interest in exploring the North–South agenda of the syndicalists, who hoped to ally workers with peasants.

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Gaetano Salvemini spent his early years in his birthplace, Molfetta (Bari Province), where his mother read to him from classical literature, while his *carabiniere* father regaled him with his experiences as a volunteer with Garibaldi’s Red Shirts, providing the boy with a direct connection to the radical tradition of the Risorgimento. This link, which emphasized the derailing of the Mazzinian democratic impulse by Cavour and the Piedmontese moderates, provided a persistent thread around which his politics developed. His first direct political experiences came in support of a local politician, who, among other issues, proposed tariff reform and opposed the Triple Alliance, both of which positions Salvemini would embrace. Even as a youth, Salvemini developed an awareness of the oppressive poverty of the *latifundia* system and a sense of the region’s history of exploitation by outside forces, the Piedmontese being only the latest in a long succession.¹²

Absence of opportunity in his hometown drove the young Salvemini to Florence on scholarship to seek a university education. There his political socialization broadened in response to the vibrant intellectual environment of the city and its university. Especially important were the influences of classmates and faculty, particularly Professor Pasquale Villari, who exposed him to Enlightenment thought and encouraged his political activism.¹³ As a result, Salvemini embraced the values of the *illuministi*, especially the beliefs in the social contract and individual rights that became the basis

of his political ideology. He read and briefly embraced the positivists and Marx, although drawn more to Marx's historical analysis than to his revolutionary theory. And he discussed at length with the Mondolfo brothers, Cesare Battisti and other students, Filippo Turati's *Critica Sociale* and the works of Antonio Labriola and others.¹⁴

Equally important was his own research, especially his graduate thesis on social conflict in thirteenth-century Florence, which further reinforced his belief that class disparity was a major factor in shaping Italian history.¹⁵ The PSI recruited at the university, and Salvemini, now a non-Marxist socialist, began to engage in political activities including public protests against the government of Francesco Crispi.¹⁶

The result of these youthful influences was that Salvemini became, by his mid-20s, settled in his political values, tempered by the need to adapt his ideas to the demands of the new century, and especially to redress the devastating poverty of rural southerners. He argued that Giolitti was perpetuating the exploitation of the South while maintaining his power base through electoral corruption, leading Salvemini to advocate electoral reforms throughout the period. Completing his graduate degree and moving through a series of teaching jobs, he began publishing socialist polemics. When Pareto, noted professor of political economy, read one of his articles, he noted¹⁷:

[Salvemini] appears to me to have a fixation with his class movement! If it rains, it will be because of the class movement!

The "*Fatti di Maggio*" of May 1898, when Italian soldiers fired on striking workers in Milan, reaffirmed these views and led Salvemini to take one of his more extreme positions, urging Turati (who was arrested) to turn the conflict into revolution. Turati wrote to him of the futility of such an effort.¹⁸ However, even at this moment of rhetorical extremity, Salvemini focused not on class warfare but on specific political objectives.¹⁹

In 1901, Salvemini won an appointment at the University of Messina, where he initiated his drive to achieve universal suffrage, taking his case in September 1908 to the PSI congress in Florence. In an impassioned plea on behalf of disenfranchised southerners, he told the delegates²⁰:

Give us the one proof of useful solidarity you can give us, the only one ... worthy of free men. Help us to be free, to win ... universal suffrage; and the rest we will figure out for ourselves.

Once again, Turati and the PSI leadership ignored his fervent demand, believing that expanding the franchise would weaken the party in the South by enabling the Catholic church and landlords to manipulate the largely illiterate peasant vote.

In December 1908, during his holiday break from the university, Salvemini's life changed profoundly when a tragic earthquake struck Messina, virtually destroying the city and leaving his house a heap of rubble. Believing reports that Salvemini had died, Mussolini sent a telegram, lamenting the loss of "one of the most impressive protagonists of Italian socialism."²¹ Salvemini survived, but lost his wife and five children and fell into depression. Although he coped with the depression largely by plunging into politics and political commentary, many believed that he never recovered.²²

* * *

The narrative of Benito Mussolini's first quarter-century is much better known. In the years before 1910, his experiences were both traumatic and formative.²³ Born in the village of Predoppio in the "red" Romagna, Mussolini was schooled in revolutionary socialism by his father.²⁴ After a tumultuous youth, he earned a teaching certificate and became a socialist activist in his native region. He moved to Switzerland in 1902, where organizational activities among Italian émigré workers led to his arrest by Swiss authorities for revolutionary agitation. It was in Switzerland that Mussolini encountered Pareto's provocative ideas. Pareto was not a Marxist—implicit in his remarks about Salvemini's obsession with the class movement—but he zealously opposed democratic, humanitarian socialism and parliamentarianism while advocating his theory of the elite. In 1904, the 21-year-old Mussolini registered for classes and attended at least some of Pareto's lectures, but he did not know Pareto personally.²⁵

As would be the case throughout Mussolini's early years, the question exists as to the degree to which Pareto's thought shaped an emerging philosophy, or whether Pareto's ideas simply appealed to Mussolini's own rejection of bourgeois values and institutions and enabled him to select and apply Pareto's ideas—and those of others—where they fit his political needs.²⁶ In either event, Mussolini's later movement away from socialism to a form of elitism may well be attributed to the influence of Pareto's ideas.

After returning from Switzerland, Mussolini resumed teaching, which proved less than satisfying. In 1909, he spent almost eight months in the Trentino, during which he held a position in the local labor secretariat while editing *Il Popolo*, the local socialist newspaper. De Felice emphasizes the importance of this "soggiorno" in the Trentino, especially "from a

cultural and ideological point of view.”²⁷ While there, Mussolini spelled out his revolutionary views in *Il Popolo* and several other journals as he developed a friendship with Cesare Battisti, local irredentist leader (and former classmate of Salvemini at the University of Florence).²⁸

Battisti and Mussolini enjoyed a measure of mutual support, particularly in the face of Austrian sanctions. Once again, tracing Mussolini’s ideological development is difficult, because it is not clear that Battisti influenced Mussolini to advocate irredentism (the quest for Italy’s “unredeemed” territories) as some have assumed. In fact, Mussolini expressed a degree of vexation at local irredentists and the general political culture of the Trentino. In February, he wrote to Romagnolo lawyer Torquato Nanni²⁹:

As for the local socialist movement, I have not understood anything yet. There are here three daily newspapers: catholic, socialist, national-irredentist. Their journalistic activity is explained by reciprocal castigation.

And though he was familiar with the *irredentisti trentini*, Mussolini saw little potential in this small minority, pointing out that their interests were primarily limited to achieving linguistic identity and administrative autonomy.³⁰

While in the Trentino, Mussolini expressed virtually unrestrained enthusiasm for the influential Florentine journals *Il Leonardo* and *La Voce* and their editors, Giovanni Papini and Giuseppe Prezzolini. In an article entitled “La Voce,” Mussolini wrote in April³¹:

Whoever wishes to know the newest and most profound spiritual outlook of contemporary Italian culture, whoever wishes—within limits of his power—to cooperate with the renewal of the Italian soul and prepare truly the Third Italy, must read *La Voce*.

Mussolini fervently praised *La Voce*’s iconoclasm and irrationalism, its search for a new élite, and its rejection of idealism, parliamentary democracy and reformist socialism. In doing so, he conveyed his own acute opposition to nationalism and patriotism, and his continuing condemnation of Giolittismo. His invocation of phrases such as the “renewal of the Italian soul,” prominent in his writings of this period, indicate at least a shared sensibility with the *vocianti* (followers of *La Voce*) and an evolving (although unsettled and contradictory) pursuit of a political and ideological path away from socialism.

This trend in Mussolini's thought, unstable as it was, also featured many references to syndicalism, readily apparent in his long review of Prezzolini's *La Teoria Sindacalista*. "Syndicalism is not of yesterday or today: it will be of tomorrow," he proclaimed. Was Prezzolini's book an accurate representation of syndicalist ideas? "I, a syndicalist already for five years, respond affirmatively."³²

What is syndicalism? And first of all, what is the relationship between syndicalism and socialism? Syndicalism is to socialism as the son to the father. Without a period of socialism, syndicalism is not comprehensible. What is the difference? Socialism is a "human" problem; syndicalism is a problem exclusively "proletarian." Socialism intends to achieve its historical reality through the progressive democratization of the state; syndicalism is anti-state and wishes to achieve the emancipation of the working classes after becoming a (full-time) job, a specific organ of education, of defense, of conquest—a specific organ of the proletariat.

Syndicalists' moral intent was to create a new character, new values, a new man. Socialists relied on the party, syndicalists on intellectuals.

According to De Felice, the review of Prezzolini's book "demonstrates without a shadow of a doubt, how Mussolini in two years or a little more, was modifying his primitive cultural and ideological position."³³ He reinforced many of the same ideas in *La Voce* and in letters to Prezzolini.³⁴ That he was vacating his earlier socialism is clear; less clear is the significance of his claim to be a syndicalist, because what he shared were certain "attitudes not specific to syndicalism" and, like Prezzolini, he harbored doubts about their intent to shape a leadership élite from the proletariat.³⁵

Another dominant theme in Mussolini's journalism during the months in the Trentino is somewhat more predictable: his revolutionary attack on parliamentary democracy. Striking out at the futility of elections, Mussolini wrote³⁶:

The Italian people who today race to the ballot box, tomorrow will occupy the *piazze*, suspend national life, strike at the sources of bourgeois wealth with the proclamation of a general strike and will pose to the men at the head of the institutions the supreme dilemma: Either renew yourselves or die!

Elections were merely an "episode" in the life of the PSI. Italian workers, not yet powerful enough to overthrow bourgeois society, needed to continue to prepare for the social revolution.³⁷

In October 1909, having moved to Forlì to lead the local socialist party and edit its newspaper (*Lotta di Classe*), Mussolini delivered a stinging rebuke to Giolitti, referring to him as “an anachronism ... a disgrace,” a man who “has reviled the pure socialism of the International”³⁸—despite having himself disparaged Marxism only months before. Giolitti, he wrote, epitomized all the failures and inherent deficiencies of parliamentary democracy and the very reason socialists should avoid ministerialism. He blamed Giolitti for co-opting socialists and, in the process, lashed out at Arturo Labriola (“the vulgarizer of Sorel”), Camillo Prampolini and other socialist leaders, syndicalists (who had taken refuge in “belle lettere”), Masons (“omens of the grand Architect of the Universe”) and others. More than a careful censure of Giolittian methods and policies, it was a rambling and somewhat pedestrian broadside aimed at many of the political symbols of the age. Nevertheless, this anti-Giolittian view would contribute to a political bond with Salvemini that lasted into World War I.

In a May Day essay, Mussolini sounded the classic socialists’ anti-nationalist themes against the “nationalist chauvinism of the sinister warmongers.”³⁹ Emilio Gentile notes that Mussolini showed in this period “a frank aversion to nationalism,” while taking from *La Voce* a number of polemical arguments, including advocacy for a kind of “internal nationalism” of cultural renewal, the “new” nationalism.⁴⁰ De Felice found this rhetoric representative of Mussolini’s positions at the time, noting that he “remained a convinced internationalist, opposed to any form of ‘patriotism.’”⁴¹

More important than such individual journalistic thrusts as his attack on Giolitti was Mussolini’s continuing claim to be a syndicalist and to incorporate elements of syndicalist theory into his revolutionary rhetoric in the year leading up to the momentous PSI congress of 1910. These statements highlight a fundamental contrast with Salvemini, who rejected just such theory, not only on merit but also because of his pronounced pragmatism and impatience with abstraction, often described as Salvemini’s *concretismo*. He shared nothing with the syndicalists beyond condemnation of Giolittismo and advocacy of free trade. Syndicalist theorist and fellow Molfettese Sergio Panunzio made this abundantly clear⁴²:

You know what an adversary I am of universal suffrage, which will kill even more the revolutionary spirit of the proletariat, especially the agricultural one ... The Parliament with or without universal suffrage is the tomb of socialism.

Thus at the very time Mussolini was writing enthusiastically about syndicalist theory, Salvemini was advocating a socialism that was pragmatic, decentralized and democratic.⁴³ He defined socialism in the simplest terms: “whoever works has a right to enjoy the full fruit of his labor.” The rest, he wrote, was just “myth destined to fail.”⁴⁴ Thus, Salvemini consistently avoided socialist party disputes about the prevailing social theories of the day.⁴⁵

In April 1910, the socialists of Forlì invited Salvemini, then teaching at the University of Pisa, to speak to them on universal suffrage and formed a committee to pursue the issue.⁴⁶ That same month, in a decision that anticipated the impending PSI congress, and over the opposition of Turati and Anna Kuliscioff, the PSI parliamentary group agreed by a narrow vote in principle to support the government of Luigi Luzzatti, who had come to power in March 1910 when Giolitti had stepped down.⁴⁷ Salvemini was furious, believing that the socialists were again abandoning their ideals for short-term political gain, and at the same time undercutting his campaign for universal suffrage.⁴⁸ As the two men anticipated the PSI national meeting, Mussolini shared Salvemini’s opposition to ministerialism, but for the more fundamental reason that, by agreeing to join or support the bourgeois government, the party was surrendering any chance that they could lead a revolution.

As Gaetano Salvemini and Benito Mussolini separately traveled to Milan in October 1910 to attend the tenth congress of the PSI, neither understood fully the positions of the other and, in fact, there existed little apparent need to do so. Mussolini had read Salvemini’s articles in *Critica Sociale* and *La Voce*.⁴⁹ Writing in *Lotta di Classe* in March 1910, he gave a favorable review to Salvemini’s *Il Ministro della Malavita*, and particularly supported the author’s condemnation of the Giolittian machine’s electoral fraud, which Salvemini had observed while monitoring an election for the Chamber of Deputies.⁵⁰

The Italian Chamber is an illicit market. And when Gaetano Salvemini documents the case of Gioia del Colle, he gives a very bad report on the corrupt and corruptor, parliamentarianism.

In addition, Mussolini felt some vague sense of camaraderie with Salvemini in their similar complaints about the party, including the PSI parliamentary delegation, the policies of Turati and the ministerialism of Bissolati and Bonomi. Again, the bond formed around negative views of the existing state of political affairs.

Those delegates who knew of Mussolini, still relatively obscure within the PSI, identified him as a leader of a provincial socialist party and editor of its newspaper. In contrast, Salvemini was much better known, as both a maverick socialist and a passionate proponent of universal suffrage and of the *Mezzogiorno*. Salvemini knew that Mussolini had been advocating a version of revolutionary socialism and had been writing about syndicalism and a “new” nationalism, akin to the cultural ideology evident in the pages of *La Voce*, which Salvemini had criticized. Those issues aside, Salvemini’s focus was to commit the party to universal suffrage, and on that point, in spite of the invitation to Forlì, he was unsure of Mussolini’s position.

While anticipating the congress, Salvemini continued to condemn the party’s status quo. He attacked the system of patronage in socialist cooperatives, a criticism lauded by the revolutionary socialist Costantino Lazzari, who was preparing a challenge to Turati’s reformist leadership—as was Mussolini.⁵¹ In spite of the common ground he shared with Lazzari, Salvemini responded: “My participation in the work of the revolutionary group would be a deplorable misrepresentation of my ideas and of those of the revolutionaries.”⁵²

Salvemini’s expectations were high as he convinced Anna Kuliscioff to persuade Turati to give him an audience at the congress. Turati made him keynote speaker, and listened, amid shouts of approval and disapproval, as Salvemini harangued the party for its complacency. He noted that Turati, in spite of differences, agreed with many of his criticisms, but simply accepted current reality. “If we must accept things as they are,” Salvemini wrote, “why do we hold a congress?”⁵³

At the congress, Salvemini became the subject of speculation as to exactly where he fit in this divided party.⁵⁴ He occupied the left, he told a friend, with Lazzari leading the extreme left, Bissolati and Bonomi the right. Bissolati rose in rebuttal to Salvemini’s speech, arguing against universal suffrage, in favor of ministerialism, and in support of the PSI legislative delegation.⁵⁵

Also in the audience was the young Mussolini, who eventually made his way to the rostrum. He delivered a speech, somewhat rambling and without a clear theme, in which he lashed out at parliament and at various socialist factions, particularly the reformist majority and their policies.⁵⁶

To the orators who have preceded me I respond that even without deputies the Parliament would remain the same; that universal suffrage must not be considered so much a revolutionary criterion given the fact that nations with feudal clerical-militaristic structure like Germany and Austria have it in force; that social legislation is a long way from being socialism.

Mussolini's provocative speech was interrupted by repeated shouting and met mixed, although generally negative reviews.⁵⁷ However unconvincing his harangue, Mussolini had alerted the party—Salvemini included—to his presence as a fiery spokesman for the revolutionary left and had, at the same time, alarmed Lazzari. His overt rejection of social reform and of universal suffrage should have further alerted Salvemini to his anti-democratic inclinations.

Kuliscioff had previously warned Salvemini that his appeal for universal suffrage could not win the votes of northern delegates.⁵⁸ The final tally proved her correct. Both Salvemini's "dissident reformist" motion (presented by G.E. Modigliani) and Lazzari's revolutionary proposal were overwhelmed by the moderate program of Turati that played to all factions in an effort to hold the party together.⁵⁹ In response to such fragmentation, Mussolini would later describe party unity as an "absurd fetishism."⁶⁰

In the wake of the lost vote, as the revolutionary contingent met to consider future action, Mussolini again asserted himself, proposing secession from the PSI. He won only sparse support in the face of opposition from Lazzari, who successfully argued that such a move would be "premature and dangerous."⁶¹ Within months of the convention, the revolutionary faction removed Bissolati as editor of *Avanti!*, the PSI paper, and offered the position to Salvemini, whose militant voice they hoped would offset Turati's cautious reformism. In an ominous decision, Salvemini refused the offer on the grounds that he opposed Turati not from a revolutionary point of view, but because Turati was not reformist enough. When Salvemini declined, the party turned to Claudio Treves to edit its paper.

The congress of Milan clearly closed no major fissures in the party. Like other points of disagreement, the dispute over ministerialism persisted after the delegates dispersed. This issue resurfaced when Luzzatti reached out to the divided socialists with a pledge to pursue electoral reform, and it intensified when Giolitti returned in March 1911, offered a cabinet position to Bissolati, and recruited other moderates, including Bonomi and Treves.⁶²

While Mussolini opposed ministerialism as diverting the party's focus from his revolutionary agenda, Salvemini joined in opposition, but for different reasons. He continued to express disapproval of the Bissolati–Bonomi position on ministerialism on the grounds that any reforms they achieved would be in support of a "privileged oligarchy" of northern industrial workers at the expense of southerners. In an interview that reiterated a point he had made at the Milan congress, Salvemini expressed his *meridionalismo* (advocacy of the South) in fervent terms⁶³:

These groups of privileged workers move to becoming the freeloaders of the proletariat and the bodyguards of Italian parasitism against the entire working class and against the country.

Given the intensity of Salvemini's commitment to the South, the degree to which he resented control of the PSI by northerners, and Mussolini's equally intense advocacy of his own evolving revolutionary agenda, any fundamental, continuing cooperation between the two seemed, in the wake of the congress, improbable. But as Mussolini came progressively under the influence of syndicalists and their attempt to unify northern and southern proletariats, this tension eased.

Shortly thereafter, Mussolini expressed another major difference with Salvemini who, not an advocate of integralism (which embraced class cooperation), had nevertheless cooperated with Modigliani and other "integralists" at the congress. Mussolini wrote in *Lotta di Classe* that integralism ("il fritto misto con patate [an incoherent mess]") was incompatible with socialism.⁶⁴ He had earlier written in defense of Marx that economic disequilibrium between the rich and the poor could never be changed by cooperation of the classes, but only by the class movement.⁶⁵ However, Giolitti's return to power once again provided a measure of temporary agreement between his two antagonists, especially when the Prime Minister signaled that he would pursue Italian colonial interests in North Africa.

By midsummer, the issue of Italian military action against the Ottoman Empire in Tripolitania was raging in the press and realigning factions across the political spectrum, including the socialists. In an August article in *Lotta di Classe*, Mussolini endorsed a general strike based on a revolutionary rationale that would soon be widely recognized⁶⁶:

The proletariat that follows the socialist directive will respond with a general strike. The war among the nations will become then a war among the classes.

As the Italian assault on Tripoli continued, Mussolini intensified his public opposition in a series of speeches and articles that drew the attention of Italian authorities. In September, at an antiwar rally in Forlì, Mussolini invoked the names of Salvemini and other "expert scholars" in calling for protests against the war.⁶⁷ His continuing agitation and the subsequent damage done by demonstrators led to his arrest, conviction and incarceration.

During this period when Mussolini was imprisoned, Salvemini, having declined the editorship of *Avanti!*, was withdrawing from active politics to a more comfortable role as independent critic. Throughout the period of Mussolini's political agitation and incarceration, Salvemini published his own opposition to Giolitti's Libyan initiative.⁶⁸ Having campaigned against foreign adventurism for over a decade, he predicated his opposition largely on the belief that expansionism was not only diplomatically unwise but would drain the budget and undercut the possibilities for domestic reform.⁶⁹ Through August and September 1911, Salvemini warned that North Africa was not the "fabulously rich territory" the war's advocates expected, but his voice was overwhelmed by support for the Libyan incursion by the *Associazione Nazionalista Italiana* (ANI) and the press, particularly *L'Idea Nazionale*.⁷⁰ When Giolitti declared war and Italian forces bombarded and occupied Tripoli in November, Salvemini was furious with the PSI for its "indifference" and "silence," and quit the party.⁷¹

In another respect, in spite of their mutual antiwar positions, the Libyan War exposed differences. Indirectly, Salvemini aimed at Mussolini by ridiculing the revolutionary socialists, who,⁷²

lacking in culture ... and deprived of a sense of reality, wish to protest, to bluster... They are good children, destined to make a good impression beside the republicans in the museum of Italian political fossils.

And, although not readily apparent at the time, there were underlying factors that revealed the probability of long-term, fundamental disagreement. One was Mussolini's sense of opportunity to utilize the general strike to fuel a revolution and, released from prison, to leverage his position in the revolutionary wing to win power within the party—at the very time Salvemini was disengaging from party politics.

A second disparity was inherent in their very different relationships with *La Voce* and its leadership during this period that also revealed fundamental differences over the intellectual culture of the *vocianti*. Mussolini corresponded regularly with Prezzolini, noting, for example, that he had followed *La Voce* while incarcerated.⁷³ And while he opposed the conservative nationalism of the ANI, he supported "*un nazionalismo all'interno* (internal nationalism)" that would bring "spiritual unity" and create "the Italian soul," familiar themes in *La Voce*.⁷⁴ In turn, Prezzolini, who clearly admired Mussolini, had defended him since his expulsion from the Trentino, and published his articles.⁷⁵

The idea of a new cultural nationalism, endorsed by Mussolini, irritated Salvemini, and as Mussolini embraced *La Voce*, Salvemini moved toward his final break with the journal and its editor. Salvemini had been contributing to *La Voce* for several years, and although he, too, occasionally corresponded with Prezzolini, the rapport had never been as comfortable or mutually affectionate as Mussolini's. This triangular relationship is nonetheless revealing, particularly because it demonstrates Mussolini's rhetorical adroitness and political acumen in being able to balance these two intellectual and political opposites, skills that would later serve Mussolini well in balancing a very disparate fascist movement.

As Salvemini published his antiwar polemics in *La Voce*, his relationship with Prezzolini further deteriorated. In September 1911, he complained to Prezzolini in typically direct words⁷⁶:

[Your friends at *Voce*] find that it is not "culture" to occupy themselves with Tripoli, and it *is* culture to occupy themselves with Picasso. For me, true culture today consists of speaking of Tripoli.

Prezzolini forced the issue in two ultimatums to Salvemini, the first delivered that same month: About Tripoli, "enough now." And in October: "As for politics, we are saying: be quiet for now."⁷⁷ Salvemini announced his departure the next day.⁷⁸

By the end of the year, with the financial backing of several prominent southerners, Salvemini published the first issue of *L'Unità*.⁷⁹ For the next nine years, his journal addressed a range of issues that reflected his *radicalismo concreto*: universal suffrage and reform of elections, taxes, education and the tariff.⁸⁰ *L'Unità*, he wrote, was to be "a school and a guide for the discontented and for the renewal of all democratic groups."⁸¹ Again, Salvemini's emphasis on "democratic groups" set him apart significantly from Mussolini's rejection of same, although Salvemini admitted that it required great courage to declare oneself democratic "when democracy is reduced to what it is today in Italy."⁸²

Salvemini's rift with Prezzolini was significant, not only in the philosophical differences it revealed but also in Salvemini's awareness of what he viewed as a growing nationalist threat, particularly among Prezzolini's Florentine associates, whose nationalism was not confined to the cultural nationalism of *La Voce*. He described this group as "our *clerico-estero-sindacal-nazionalisti*."⁸³ And later, he complained that Luigi Federzoni, a founder of the nationalist movement, had not written "even a single word in *L'Idea Nazionale* to oppose the Libyan deceit."⁸⁴

In March 1912, after five-and-a-half months of incarceration, Mussolini returned to resume publication of *Lotta di Classe* and leadership of the Forlì socialists, now more firmly than ever convinced of the value of the general strike in what he now viewed as a new opportunity in a new era.⁸⁵

Italy begins today a new period in its history, a period uncertain and grave having many extraordinary unknowns. We confidently await the events. Nearly always war heralds revolution.

More important, with another PSI congress looming, Mussolini was now poised to become, according to De Felice, “the true leader of the Socialist Party.”⁸⁶

The July 1912 congress at Reggio Emilia was destined to be the Italian socialists’ most fateful meeting and Mussolini’s triumph. Aided by the rise of the revolutionaries Lazzari, G.M. Serrati, Angelica Balabanoff and Francesco Cicotti, Mussolini was now poised to develop a strategy that catapulted him to leadership of an intransigent revolutionary group that would, in turn, take control of the party. In a powerful keynote speech, he attacked Turati and Bonomi by name, the reformists for considering to support the Giolitti government, and the “treachery” of Bissolati for visiting the king for the same reason. His resolution to expel Bissolati, Bonomi and Angiolo Cabrini passed, purging the party of three prominent reformists. He was then elected to the PSI executive committee. In November, Mussolini was named editor of *Avanti!*, which gave him the exposure to exploit his new national prominence.⁸⁷ The congress produced a flurry of responses, both in the press and within European socialist parties. Among the critical observers was Salvemini, who, although hopeful, saw no clear program of action evident within the leadership group of the revolutionaries.⁸⁸

Shortly after the Reggio Emilia Congress, Prezzolini introduced the two, and Salvemini’s first impressions of Mussolini were largely positive. Observing Mussolini’s rapid rise to the top of the PSI in 1912, Salvemini and his collaborators in *L’Unità* cautiously welcomed him as a fresh voice that might move the party away from its reformist stagnation.⁸⁹ His polemics gave him notoriety and provoked continuing discussion among the Unitari, some of whom, including Salvemini, contributed to *Avanti!* and communicated with Mussolini, whose recent trip to Puglia heightened his awareness of *L’Unità*’s *meridionalismo* and also of the syndicalist position of unifying southern peasants with northern laborers.⁹⁰

An initiative of critical importance to the Unitari—especially to Salvemini—and at least acceptable to Mussolini, was the anti-protectionist campaign, which also coincided with the syndicalists' position. On this issue, a natural affinity existed with Mussolini, since high tariffs increased cost of living in both North and South.⁹¹ At this point, although Mussolini was not interested primarily in incremental reforms, he did exchange favorable views with the Unitari on opposing the protective tariff. At the same time, Salvemini found that the reformist socialists Bissolati and Bonomi, in their newspaper *L'Azione Socialista*, were now defending the tariff on imported sugar, and revolutionary philosophy aside, Mussolini expressed opposition to such bourgeois favoritism.⁹²

At every opportunity, Salvemini persisted in his tireless campaign for universal suffrage, the reform he valued most. On this issue, Mussolini expressed some agreement, although his support was inconsistent. Salvemini had argued unsuccessfully in the two previous PSI congresses that “pure and simple universal suffrage” must be achieved only as the product of proletarian demand, not as a tainted gift from Giolitti.⁹³

When Giolitti returned to power in 1911, he appealed to the left in an effort to split the socialists. In the process, he outmaneuvered Salvemini by announcing in March his support for universal suffrage, which ultimately became law in June 1912. Salvemini wrote that his mistrust of Giolitti's partial enfranchisement led him to continue his campaign for simple and full universal suffrage for both sexes. Echoing the *meridionalismo* of Salvemini, Mussolini ridiculed Giolitti's “exquisitely reactionary motive” that fueled his push for “quasi-universal suffrage.”⁹⁴

It was not for an improvised love of the agricultural masses of the Mezzogiorno ... nor for a rapid, inexplicable acceptance of the principles of popular sovereignty that Giolitti decided to expand suffrage. Whoever believes this is a victim, in one way or another, of a grand illusion.

As editor of *Avanti!*, Mussolini continued to support universal suffrage, but he did so more for its potential to energize a mass revolutionary movement than as a law that would empower a vast new electorate and alter the balance of power.⁹⁵ “Expanded suffrage,” he wrote, “will be for us alone a magnificent and brilliant weapon of the proletarian movement against the bourgeoisie.”⁹⁶

More important than the ongoing dialogue about specific policies were more fundamental matters. Mussolini's *Avanti!* and Salvemini's *L'Unità* addressed the core principles of socialism, and in doing so—along with

Prezzolini's *Voce*—they influenced the political culture of prewar Italy, especially the ideas of a young generation of Italians including Antonio Gramsci and the Torinesi of *Ordine Nuovo*.⁹⁷ Both Mussolini and Salvemini expressed interest in socialist renewal, but Mussolini was now the most important man in the PSI and Salvemini had left the party. Thus their roles and perspectives contrasted dramatically, and although there was common ground that masked deeply held differences, the differences would eventually become apparent. While Mussolini wrote about socialism in broad, philosophical context, Salvemini took no part in the theoretical dispute. Socialists, he wrote, had the obligation to organize, not just northern workers but the entire proletariat.⁹⁸ And as Mussolini was praising the party as a great force for the “transformation of current society,” Salvemini was pronouncing the party dead.⁹⁹ Mussolini's view of the PSI would soon change dramatically.

Meanwhile, as editor of *Avanti!*, Mussolini continued to pursue the debate about the theoretical nature of socialism. In February 1913, Serrati (who remained a potential threat to Mussolini's leadership of the revolutionary left) published an article in *Avanti!* that began a polemic with Mussolini about the need to specify a PSI program of action that could motivate the masses. Mussolini, understanding the challenge, explained that the problems had arisen over the past decade when the reformists' specific proposals were unfocused, overly ambitious, and thus destined to fail.¹⁰⁰

We said yesterday, in the brief comment on the speech of our comrade Serrati, that *concretismo*, the new and also respectable obsession whose major exponent is Gaetano Salvemini and those of *L'Unità*, is now making its victims among the revolutionaries.

“You revolutionaries,” he continued, “who hold your head in the bag of your theoretical prejudices ... do not see reality.”

To the proletariat ... we need to be practical, to confront concrete problems, to offer something to the masses... Enough of your doctrinal scruples! It is the present that interests us, not yet the future.

Was this the Mussolini who in July 1910 praised a true socialism that was “rude, rugged, made ... of violence” and “must remain something terrible, grave, sublime”; and who wrote: “socialism is war, woe to the merciful!”¹⁰¹

The sense that he shared with Salvemini a certain independent, radical attack and a new awareness of the South and its revolutionary potential led Mussolini twice to endorse Salvemini as a PSI candidate for the Chamber of Deputies from Turin. He wrote in February 1913¹⁰²:

The secretary of the socialist section of Turin spoke to me about your candidacy. ... I immediately declared enthusiasm for it for these reasons. 1) Giolitti detests you ...; 2) for your highest cultural, political, moral qualities you will be well fit for the Parliament 3) (the most important) Turin would provide a magnificent proof of civil and political solidarity with your poor and genuine plebes of Puglia.

If Salvemini accepted, Mussolini vowed: “*L’Avanti!* will do the rest.” Mussolini’s final rationale, acknowledging Salvemini’s well-known criticism of the PSI for ignoring the South and its latent revolutionary potential, is as revealing as his endorsement. When, instead of accepting Mussolini’s offer, Salvemini ran for the Chamber from Molfetta, Mussolini again promised support, including a general strike.¹⁰³ In the same campaign in which Salvemini was defeated, Mussolini lost to the local republican candidate in his own attempt to win a seat from Forlì.¹⁰⁴

The next year, a group of Torinesi socialists invited Salvemini to run for a vacant seat in the Chamber, explaining that, once elected, he could become an advocate for the South and ignore the PSI parliamentary delegation.¹⁰⁵ Salvemini declined, explaining that he had left the PSI and did not want the Molfettesi to think that he had abandoned them in favor of northern political connections.¹⁰⁶ A controversy arose much later when in a posthumous publication of *La Questione Meridionale*, Gramsci alleged¹⁰⁷:

Salvemini did not want to accept candidacy...; he proposed Mussolini as candidate and made the effort to come to Turin to support the Socialist Party in the election campaign.

When in February 1914 Mussolini traveled to Florence to deliver a lecture on the historical importance of socialism, Salvemini joined a crowd of 3000 and was favorably impressed.¹⁰⁸ Shortly thereafter, in a May 1914 article called “*Rinascita socialista*,” Salvemini relied on his traditional idealism in addressing the fundamental mission of Italian socialists¹⁰⁹:

The historical function of the socialist party must be to create among the disinherited of life the sense of injustice of their destiny, to educate in them a pugnacious class conscience, and to organize them for the effective exercise of the old rights and for the conquest of new rights.

Mussolini, he continued, was the man to articulate “the need for a sincerely revolutionary movement in our country.”¹¹⁰ The emphatic endorsement did not go unnoticed, leading Gramsci to respond that “Salvemini did not conceal his sympathy for Mussolini.”¹¹¹

Salvemini's enthusiasm sprang from the hope that in Mussolini he had found an organizational socialist who could boldly overcome the party's timid reformism of the past decade by renewing its elemental commitment to social justice. Clearly, however, Salvemini was continuing to write as a reformer, now from outside the party, whose "revolution" would be achieved at the polls—and without addressing Mussolini's anti-democratic commitment to force and violence. Just months before, Mussolini had written in praise of Nietzsche, and he later boasted of having had a fascination with Nietzschean thought, particularly the German philosopher's contempt for democracy and universal suffrage and his celebration of discipline, force, and of "living dangerously."¹¹² For Salvemini, who for the moment placed great hope in this audacious socialist leader, such ideas were destined to create a breach. But at present, the two militant voices could remain more or less in harmony. These socialist polemics were, however, overwhelmed by events.

The deaths of seven demonstrators in a conflict with police at Rocca Gorga in January 1913 marked a noticeable spike in confrontation with authority that ultimately would lead to "Red Week" in June 1914 and force both Mussolini and Salvemini once again to respond to dynamic national crises. The primary difference was that, while Salvemini reacted from a distance, withdrawn from organized politics, Mussolini actively seized on the events to strengthen his hold on the party and pursue a revolutionary path. As the insurgency escalated, Mussolini's bombast became more militant and violent and more reflective of syndicalist rhetoric. He labeled the events at Rocca Gorga "Assassination by the state!": "After a year of foreign war," he wrote, "we will have a year of internal war."¹¹³ And the next day: "No violence is more legitimate than that which comes from below as a human reaction to the political crime of the massacre."¹¹⁴ Mussolini continued his popular revolutionary campaign in *Avanti!*, so that when the PSI congress assembled in the spring of 1914, he was able to strengthen his hand at the expense of challenges from both left and right. On May 1, he wrote¹¹⁵:

The deliberation at Ancona means that ... Italian socialism becomes always more proletarian and always less popular, always more classist and always less democratic.

Even after Salvemini had declined the offer of candidacy from the Torinesi, the 1914 administrative elections that followed the PSI congress offered another opportunity for Mussolini and Salvemini to cooperate.

Their respective supporters campaigned jointly in municipal elections in Milan, in part as a symbol of North–South solidarity.¹¹⁶ But as they focused on elections, an even more serious insurgency was intensifying among anarchists, republicans and socialists in the Emilia-Romagna that would spread and, for the first time, create the specter of real revolution in Italy. “Red Week” would force the hand of Mussolini and the revolutionary socialists while inviting Salvemini’s scorn.

When three were killed and five wounded on June 7, Mussolini lashed out against the “premeditated murder.”¹¹⁷ The following day he demanded: “General Strike! This is our cry!”¹¹⁸ All through the Romagna, strikers assaulted troops as the violent insurgency spread. However, when the Camera Generale del Lavoro ended the strike four days after Mussolini’s “cry,” the army reestablished order. Mussolini was furious, labeling the union leaders’ decision “a true felony.”¹¹⁹

Like Mussolini, Salvemini voiced his disapproval, but from a very different viewpoint. To Salvemini, “Red Week”—“the result of more than ten years of Giolittismo” was a counterproductive series of incidents of “vandalism without purpose.” He blamed the revolutionary socialist leadership, now as culpable as the reformist leaders, for not focusing on such issues as the widely unpopular duty on grain that might have lent focus and purpose to the insurrection. However, his condemnation did not extend to Mussolini.¹²⁰

Those revolutionary socialists, like Benito Mussolini, are serious and speak what they think and work as they speak, and for this reason carry the most part of the future destiny of Italy.

Although Mussolini at least temporarily regretted the failure of “Red Week,” he found encouraging signs: the strike had been unprecedented, both in “expansion and intensity,” and had been not “a strike of defense, but of offense.”¹²¹ Based on this experience, Mussolini wrote: “Italy needs a revolution and will have it.”¹²² He now refocused his efforts away from the theory of revolution to the exhilaration and intrinsic value of revolution itself. But before he could move to mobilize revolutionary groups, the assassination at Sarajevo changed Mussolini’s entire calculus and, at the same time, refocused Salvemini’s efforts.¹²³

In the wake of “Red Week,” the advent of World War I fused the insurgency, the press and partisan politics with foreign policy. As European diplomats scrambled to strengthen alliances, Mussolini held the PSI anti-war position into early October 1914,¹²⁴ while Salvemini thrust *L’Unità*

into the storm on the side of the Entente powers.¹²⁵ Since 1900, he had argued that the Triple Alliance contradicted Italy's interests and that withdrawal was an urgent necessity.

While Italian diplomats negotiated, Salvemini called for opposition to Germanic autocracy and militarism. This argument, the basis of his democratic interventionism, put him on a collision course with socialists, nationalists and pacifists.¹²⁶ As if lecturing in the classroom, he laid out a coherent and detailed argument calculated on realistic diplomatic factors: support for the Entente would free France to move regiments to its German border and require Austria to dispatch troops to the Russian front, thus strengthening the Entente powers and serving Italy's long-range interests.¹²⁷ In advocating Italy's acquisition of Trieste and the Trentino, he actually agreed with nationalists and irredentists, although largely for reasons of linguistic self-determination, and in opposition to postwar territorial aggrandizement.¹²⁸ He scolded pacifists for the sentimentality of their "peace at any price" ideology and their indifference to the outcome. "A pacifist," he wrote, "will never understand the difference between a German peace and an English peace."¹²⁹ However, it was his Mazzinian idealism that inspired his case.¹³⁰

An Austro-German victory would not resolve any of the problems that exhaust the old Europe; but would indeed embitter them with the bullying of the winners. One great league of nations in which would participate England, France, Russia, Italy, and all or nearly all minor nations, will be a grand practical experiment of the federation of peoples in the principle of substituting for offensive and defensive alliances the daily practice of juridical society among the nations.

This same idealistic premise for intervention would set Salvemini dramatically apart from Mussolini, for whom the war would soon provide a path to revolution. On October 18, Mussolini moved toward intervention by publishing a bold, front-page editorial in *Avanti!* that called for "active neutrality" in direct contradiction of the official PSI position of "absolute neutrality."

Our neutrality has been ever since "partial". It made distinctions. It is a neutrality distinctly Austro-Germanophobic and, conversely, Francophile.

It could not remain solely a middle-class war, he wrote, but must become a war of the proletariat, which must convert the conflict into a revolution under the leadership of a truly revolutionary socialist party.¹³¹ The same day, Salvemini responded with a telegram that Mussolini published¹³²:

While on the train I read your magnificent article on non-absolute neutrality, and I feel the need to send my congratulations. Once again your sound and strong instincts have led you in the right direction. It is no small act of courage to violate the letter, in order to salvage the spirit, of internationalism in this country.

For violating PSI doctrine, Mussolini was immediately suspended as editor of *Avanti!*. He then resigned. The day the party suspended him, he said in a published interview that he favored only “passive participation.”¹³³ Three weeks later, Mussolini shocked the party by launching *Il Popolo d’Italia* and continuing his campaign to abandon “absolute neutrality.” In his first issue, in another significant *volte face*, he called for war¹³⁴:

This cry is a word that I have never pronounced in normal times, and that today I elevate strongly, at the top of my voice, without pretense, with secure faith: a word both terrifying and fascinating: *war!*

By the end of November, expelled from the PSI, he overtly merged his call for intervention with a call for revolution.¹³⁵ He had come full circle in a mere six weeks.

Young socialists of Italy, to you! Each of you gather and be prepared. Each one of you put himself in the front row. In every city, in every village, in any other part of Italy where are found souls believing in the living force of Revolutionary Socialism, all the old and new comrades, all the adherents, all free men, constitute the “Autonomous *Fasci* of Revolutionary Action” and begin to propagandize and publicize our principle: the necessity of intervention. ... It is necessary that this youth is a vigorous force. Insurmountable. Let’s close the ranks, then: Let’s establish our “Revolutionary *Fasci*” ... No hesitation. No tentativeness. Either with us or against us. Inexorably.

Two months later, Mussolini, never a fully committed Marxist, framed his position in cohesive ideological terms: “Marxism teaches ... that war can be a means to revolution.”¹³⁶

As Salvemini welcomed this urgent and highly visible move away from socialist pacifism, he hoped that Mussolini would build support for the interventionist cause. However, he found Mussolini’s expulsion from the PSI—and especially his resignation as editor—to be a setback and questioned, in a letter to Prezzolini, if *L’Unità* could be as successful.¹³⁷ Prezzolini, anticipating the same loss of a protégé and powerful ally, signed a telegram to Mussolini from a group of *vocianti*: “The Socialist Party expels you. Italy welcomes you.”¹³⁸

For the moment, as the interventionist crisis spread, Salvemini and Mussolini could agree, both on the need to intervene and that the results of intervention would bring a profound and positive—if completely dissimilar—impact on postwar Italy. *Il Popolo d'Italia* astutely observed that the interventionists had boarded the same train but were bound for different destinations.¹³⁹

One week after *Il Popolo's* prescient observation, Foreign Minister Sidney Sonnino signed the secret Pact of London, while in the *piazze*, the interventionist crisis escalated and became more violent in what came to be known as “Radiant May.” On May 23, the Italian government declared war on the Austro-Hungarian Empire and ordered mobilization of its forces. Mussolini responded emphatically: “Viva l'Italia! . . ., How long has it been since the day Metternich defined Italy as a ‘simple geographic expression?’”¹⁴⁰ Five days later, Salvemini suspended publication of *L'Unità*, proclaiming in the final issue that to continue criticizing policy would interfere with Italy's focus on military victory. However, once “a systematic work of concrete discussion” appeared useful, he would resume publication.¹⁴¹

Both men who so vigorously favored intervention served in the conflict, Salvemini, now 42, only with great difficulty.

* * *

The rise of fascism, Mussolini's consolidation of power and Salvemini's vocal opposition would dramatically terminate what had been a somewhat productive prewar association. In retrospect, the surprise is not that they became the most hostile of adversaries but that they were able to sustain a degree of cooperation during the prewar period. The best explanation for their early collaboration surely rests in their intense opposition to the status quo and their separate searches for radical alternatives to Giolittismo. The surprise lies in the fact that they did so while maintaining such fundamentally conflicting values, Salvemini holding firmly to his commitment to humanitarian socialism and radical, though legal, democratic reforms, at the very time Mussolini was calling for violent insurrection and a syndicalist national revolution, expressing contempt for democracy, and instead embracing a form of Pareto's elitism and exalting Nietzschean force. That the two found common ground, therefore, is less a product of shared values than a testament to the complexity and volatility in political organization among the forces of opposition to the Giolittian Liberal state, and a near desperate search for allies within that same opposition. It is even possible, although evidence is lacking, that each of them realized the

differences more than they admitted and indulged in a form of wishful thinking. Citing another intellectual who “agreed” with him augmented Mussolini’s credibility, while conversely, finding a political activist of Mussolini’s capacity enhanced the chances that the historian might have some greater impact.

This awareness of shared defiance sustained their cooperation, but only until Mussolini’s authoritarian instincts, penchant for violence, and willingness to turn that violence against his Italian adversaries became manifest. Salvemini remembered that he “began to be hostile to the fascist movement in 1917” when he first noticed “in the writings of Mussolini the first references to that alliance between him and the nationalists.”¹⁴² However, the magnetism of mutual opposition continued to pull so strongly that even as late as 1922, when Mussolini formed his first cabinet, Salvemini, now more skeptical, saw him as a preferable, if flawed alternative¹⁴³:

Better Mussolini than Bonomi, Facta, Orlando, Salandra, Turati, Baldesi, D’Aragona, Nitti. Until there is a series of new leaders ..., we must prevent a return to the old leadership and let Mussolini continue to misgovern. ... Mussolini serves the useful function of crushing the old oligarchies. These old oligarchies must never regain power.

Within three years, Mussolini had begun to consolidate power while dismantling constitutional protections. A generation later, reflecting on this period, Salvemini acknowledged the excesses of his campaigns and perhaps admitted to a role in accommodating the rise of fascism: “I would have been wiser had I been more moderate in my criticism of the Giolittian system.”¹⁴⁴

NOTES

1. Salvemini, *Memorie di un fuoriuscito*, (Milan, 1965), 10–11.
2. *Opere*, IV (1) (Milan, 1962), 73–141.
3. De Felice, *Mussolini il Rivoluzionario, 1893–1920* (Turin, 1965).
4. *Mussolini Giornalista, 1912–1922*, R. De Felice, ed., (Milan, 2001), v.
5. A.J. Gregor, *Young Mussolini and the Intellectual Origins of Fascism* (Berkeley, 1979), 124, 237–251. For contrasting views, see the following reviews of Gregor’s *Young Mussolini*: R. Sarti, *The American Historical Review*, February 1981, 170; C. F. Delzell, *The American Political Science Review*, December 1980, 74–75.
6. P. Corner, review of D.D. Roberts, *The Syndicalist tradition and Italian Fascism* and Gregor’s *Young Mussolini*, *European History Quarterly*,

- November 1981, 409–412. For a careful analysis of the issue or rhetoric, see W. Adamson, “The Language of Opposition in Early Twentieth-Century Italy,” *The Journal of Modern History*, March 1992, 22–51.
7. Adamson, “The Language of Opposition,” 24–26.
 8. De Felice, *il Riv*, 63.
 9. A.W. Salomone “Momenti di storia, frammenti di ricordi con Salvemini tra Stati Uniti e Italia,” *Archivio Trimestrale*, 8 (July–December 1982); E. Rossi, “Il non conformista,” *Il Mondo* (Rome), September 17, 1957; 1794–1795; G. Spadolini, “Quattro ricordi di Salvemini,” *Archivio Trimestrale*, July–December 1982, 606 ff.; E. Tagliacozzo, “Ricordo di Salvemini,” *Rassegna Storia Toscana* 4 (April–June 1958), 179–196; C. Killinger, *Gaetano Salvemini*, (Westport, CT, 2002).
 10. Salvemini to Fortunato, October 29, 1910, *Opere* IX, 469.
 11. G. Giarizzo, “Gaetano Salvemini, la politica” in *Gaetano Salvemini tra politica e storia*, G. Cingari, ed., (Bari, 1986), 29.
 12. Tagliacozzo, *Gaetano Salvemini nel cinquantennio liberale* (Florence, 1959), 5; N. Bobbio, “Perché Salvemini,” in Bobbio et al., *Salvemini: Una vita per la libertà* (Rome, 1971), 3; Salvemini, preface to *Scritti sulla questione meridionale (1896–1955) (SSQM)* (Turin, 1958), xv; Salvemini, “Un commune dell’Italia meridionale,” *SSQM*, 3–22; Salvemini, “Una pagina di storia antica,” *Opere* VIII, 32–45; M. L. Salvadori, *Gaetano Salvemini* (Turin, 1973), 16–17; E. Rota, “Una pagina di storia contemporanea,” *Nuova Rivista Storica*, III (May–August 1919), 327.
 13. A. Galante Garrone, Preface to Salvemini, *Opere* VIII, 10.; Interview with Michele and Hélène Cantarella, Leeds, Mass., 1979; Salvemini, “I miei maestri,” *Scritti vari, 1900–57* (Milan, 1978), 47–48; Salvemini, “Pasquale Villari,” *Opere* VIII, 58–66. See also E. Garin, *La cultura italiana tra ‘800 e ‘900* (Bari, 1963), 106–109.
 14. Salvemini, “Una pagina,” *Opere* VIII, 45–46; Tagliacozzo, *Salvemini*, 11 ff.; A. Saitta, “L’ideologia e la politica,” in Garin, *Salvemini*, 42–43. See also H. S. Hughes, *The Sea Change* (New York, 1975), 86.
 15. The thesis was published as *Magnati e Popolani in Firenze dal 1280 al 1295* (Florence, 1899); See also Salvemini, “Una pagina,” *Opere* VIII, 32–45. 55–56; *Salvemini e i Battisti: Carteggio, 1894–1957*, V. Calì, ed. (1987), 7. Tagliacozzo, *Salvemini*, 1–20; M. L. Salvadori, *Salvemini*, 16–17; Rota, “Una pagina di storia contemporanea,” 327.
 16. Tagliacozzo, *Salvemini*, 18–19.
 17. C. Placci to Salvemini, February 9, 1897, Salvemini *Opere* IX (1), 44.
 18. Turati to Salvemini, May 4, 1898, 71; Salvemini to Placci, May 27, 1898, 71–73, Salvemini, *Opere* IX.
 19. Salvemini to Placci, May 27, 1898, 71–73; Turati to Salvemini, May 4, 1898, 71, *Opere* IX.
 20. “Suffragio universale, questione meridionale e riformismo,” *Opere* IV (2) (Milan, 1963), 350.

21. L. Minervini, "Amico e Maestro, Ricordi di Salvemini" *Il Mondo*, September 22, 1957, 11–12; M. D'Angelo, "Salvemini a Messina (1901–1908)" in *Salvemini tra politica e storia*, 300 n.
22. M. L. Salvadori, *Salvemini*, 22.
23. According to De Felice, the death of Mussolini's father and financial difficulties had thrust him into a "quasi miserable state" in 1909. *Riv*, 79.
24. "Mio Padre," *Lotta di Classe*, November 26, 1910, *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini (OO)*, E. e D. Susmel, eds, (Florence, 1951–1980) 2, 274–276.
25. De Felice, *Riv*, 38.
26. In a review of Gaudens Megaro, *Mussolini in the Making*, (Boston, 1938), Salvemini dismissed any influence Sorel or Pareto may have exercised on Mussolini. "From Propaganda to History," *The Nation*, July 2, 1938, 19–21.
27. De Felice, *Riv*, 64.
28. De Felice, *Riv*, 70.
29. Mussolini to T. Nanni, February 26, 1909, *OO* 2, 264. A. J. Gregor, *Young Mussolini*, 81, cites Mussolini's 1911 monograph *Il Trentino veduto da un socialista* in stating that Mussolini "all but fully accepted Battisti's political convictions."
30. Mussolini to Prezzolini, August 1909, *Mussolini e La Voce*, E. Gentile, ed. (Florence, 1976). 41–42.
31. "La Voce," *Vita Trentina*, April 3, 1909, *OO* 2, 53–56; De Felice, *Riv*, 65.
32. "La Teoria sindacalista," *Il Popolo*, May 27, 1909, *OO* 2, 123–128.
33. De Felice, *Riv*, 67.
34. *Mussolini e La Voce*; De Felice, *Riv*, 65 ff.
35. Adamson, "The Language of Opposition," 49–50.
36. "La Lotta Elettorale italiana," *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, March 4, 1909, *OO* 2, 24.
37. "Il Risultato delle Elezioni Generali in Italia," *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, March 11, 1909, *OO* 2, 28.
38. "Giovanni Giolitti," *Il Popolo*, October 12, 1909, *OO* 2, 258–260.
39. "Primo Maggio 1909," *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, May 1, 1909, *OO* 2, 101.
40. *Mussolini e La Voce*, 10; Mussolini, "Nazionalismo," *Lotta di Classe*, December 10, 1910, *OO* III, 280–281.
41. De Felice, *Riv*, 67–68.
42. Panunzio a Salvemini, October 25, 1913, *Carteggio 1912–1914* (Bari: Laterza, 1984), 425–426.
43. "Sempre polemiche meridionali!," *SSQM*, 175–182; Salvemini a A. Ghisleri, January 30, 1900, 136–138, *Opere*, IX (1); S. DiScala, *Dilemmas of Italian Socialism* (Amherst, 1980), 114.
44. Salvemini a R. Savelli, July 26, 1913, Salvemini, (*Cart 1912*) 357. Ventura in *Salvemini tra politica e storia*, 47.

45. L. Valiani, "Salvemini e il socialismo," in *Gaetano Salvemini nella cultura e nella politica italiana* (Rome: 1968), 81; Salvemini, "Quel che ci mancà," *L'Unità*, December 26, 1913.
46. "Note Forlivesi," *OO III*, 215.
47. J. Miller, *From Elite to Mass Politics* (Kent, Ohio, 1990), 116.
48. "Nord e Sud nel partito socialista italiano," *Opere IV (2)*, 239–248. "In tema di riforma elettorale," I–VI, *Critica Sociale*, January 16, and February 16, 1911; "La nuova crisi del partito socialista mentre si prepara il Congresso di Milano," *Opere IV (2)*, 354–358.; G. De Caro, *Gaetano Salvemini* (Turin, 1970), 169.
49. De Felice, *Riv*, 87–88.
50. "Il Parlamento della Malavita," *Lotta di Classe*, March 5, 1910, *OO III*, 43–44.
51. Lazzari to Salvemini, June 24 and 29, 1910, *Opere IX*, 450–452; Arfe, *Storia del socialismo italiano*, 138–148; DiScala, *Dilemmas*, 112–119.
52. June 26, 1910, Istituto Storico per la Resistenza in Toscana (Florence), Archivio Gaetano Salvemini (AGS).
53. *Resoconto stenografico dell'XI Congresso Nazionale del Partito Socialista Italiano* (Rome, 1911), 59–70; Salvemini, *Suffragio universale* (Rome, 1910), Widener Library, Harvard University; L. Basso, *Gaetano Salvemini, socialista e meridionalista* (Manduria, 1959), 113 ff.
54. F. Pagliari to Salvemini, July 2, 1910, *Opere IX (1)*, 452–453. G. Lombardo Radice to Salvemini, June 11, 1910, *Opere IX*, 445.
55. *Resoconto dell'XI Congresso (PSI)*, 174–189; Arfe, *Storia del socialismo*, 133 ff.; A. De Grand, *The Italian Left in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington, 1989), 22–24.
56. "Il Mio Discorso al Congresso di Milano," *OO 3*, 256–258.
57. Salomone, *Italy in the Giolittian Era* (Philadelphia, 1960), 70–71; Megaro, *Mussolini*, 288–301.
58. Kuliscioff to Salvemini, September 16, 1910, Salvemini, *Opere IX*, 466.
59. Arfe, *Storia del socialismo italiano*, 143–146; Basso, *Salvemini*, 126–127.
60. "Gli Unitari," *Lotta di Classe*, April 8, 1911, *OO 3*, 341–342; De Felice, *Riv*, 98–99.
61. "Dopo al Voto," *Lotta di Classe*, October 29, 1910, *OO 3*, 260–261; De Felice, *Riv*, 96.
62. De Grand, *The Hunchback's Tailor* (Westport, CT, 2001), 164–166.
63. "La nuova crisi del partito socialista," *Opere IV (2)*, 356.
64. "Dopo il Congresso di Milano," *Lotta di Classe*, October 19, 1910, *OO 3*, 254.
65. "La Concentrazione della Ricchezza e il 'Profeta Fallito,'" *Lotta di Classe*, January 8, 1911, *OO 3*, 308; De Felice, *Riv*, 87.
66. "Messaggio di Pace," *Lotta di Classe*, August 5, 1911, *OO 4*, 54–55.
67. "Lo Sciopero Generale a Forlì," *Lotta di Classe*, September 30, 1911, *OO 4*, 67.

68. *L'Unità di Gaetano Salvemini*, B. Finocchiaro, ed., (Venice, 1958), 14–15, Salvadori, *Salvemini*, 79–81, 14–15.
69. “L’irredentismo,” “A proposito di ‘irredentismo,’” *Opere* III (1), 3–16.
70. *Storia dell’Avanti!*, 1896–1926, G. Arfe, ed. (Milan, 1956), 93; De Grand, *The Italian Nationalist Association and the Rise of Fascism* (Lincoln, 1978); F. Gaeta, *Il nazionalismo italiano* (Naples, 1965); Salvemini to P. Silva, August 9 and September 29, 1912, Salvemini, *Cart 1912*, 190–191 and 218–219.
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72. “Socialismo e tripolismo,” *Opere* IV (2), 502.
73. Mussolini to Prezzolini, March 16, 1912, *Mussolini e La Voce*, 55.
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75. Mussolini to Prezzolini, October 1, 1909 and January 11, 1911, *Mussolini e La Voce*, 43, 48.
76. Salvemini to Prezzolini, September 28, 1911, Salvemini, *Opere* IX, 506–507.
77. Prezzolini to Salvemini, September 26 and October 20, 1911 in Salvemini *Opere* IX, 504, 539; Tagliacozzo, *Salvemini*, 138.
78. Salvemini declared: “My decision to leave *Voce* is by now definitive. The contents of these last four issues reveals among the others of *Voce* a state of mind that is absolutely not mine.” Salvemini to Fortunato, October 21, 1911 in Salvemini, *Opere* IX, 541; Salvemini to Fortunato, Salvemini, *Cart 1912*, 88.
79. Salvemini to Fortunato, October 21 and 29, 1911, in Salvemini, *Opere* IX, 542–543; Tagliacozzo, *Salvemini*, 138; Finocchiaro, *L’Unità*, 15.
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81. Salvemini to G. Zagari, September 2, 1913, Salvemini, *Cart 1912*, 380.
82. “Che cosa vogliamo,” *L’Unità*, 9 March 1912.
83. Salvemini to Silva, August 9, 1912, Salvemini, *Cart 1912*, 190.
84. Salvemini to Silva, September 29, 1912, Salvemini, *Cart 1912*, 218–219.
85. “La Guerra?” *Lotta di Classe*, September 30, 1911, *OO* 4, 74.
86. De Felice, *Riv*, 110–111.
87. Megaro, *Mussolini*, 306–313; De Felice, *Riv*, 123–127, 135.
88. De Felice, *Riv*, 129.
89. Tagliacozzo, *Salvemini*, 163; De Felice, *Riv*, 129. See also Mondolfo to Salvemini, November 25 and 28, 1912, Salvemini, *Cart 1912*, 271–272 and 274–275; Mondolfo to Salvemini, July 21 and September 6, 1913, Salvemini, *Cart 1912*, 352 and 386–387.
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93. *Resoconto dell'XI Congresso* (PSI), 59–70; Salomone, *Italy*, 56.
94. "Allarme Conservatore," *Avanti!*, December 22, 1912 in De Felice, *Giornalista*, 11–14.
95. De Felice, *Riv*, 123.
96. "Fine D'Anno," *Avanti!*, January 1, 1913, in De Felice, *Giornalista*, 16.
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99. De Felice, *Giornalista*, 24; *L'Unità*, May 2, 1913, 291; Salomone, *Italy*, 85.
100. "Concretiamo il partito: Risposta a G. M. Serrati," *Avanti!*, February 16, 1913, *OO* 5, 98–102.
101. "Sensibilità," *Lotta di Classe*, July 9, 1910, *OO* 3 139–140; "La sensibilità socialista," *Lotta di Classe*, July 16, 1910, *OO* 3 146–149.
102. Mussolini to Salvemini, February 18, 1913 *AGS*, "Mussolini."
103. U.G. Mondolfo to Salvemini, September 6, 1913, 386–387; Serrati to Salvemini, March 10, 1913, 314; Mondolfo to Salvemini, July 21, 1913, 352; A. Lanzillo to Salvemini, September 20, 1913, Salvemini, *Cart 1912*, 400.
104. De Felice, *Riv*, 175.
105. U. Formentini to Salvemini, February 2, 1914, Salvemini, *Cart 1912*, 463–464; Gramsci, *Questione meridionale*, 15; P. Spriano, *Torino operaia e socialista*, 270–273; O. Pastore to editor, "Salvemini candidato," *Il Contemporaneo* (Bari), 1955, n. 41, Biblioteca Comunale, Molfetta; Mondolfo to Salvemini, February 20, 1914, Salvemini, *Cart 1912*, 471; De Grand, *Angelo Tasca* (Milan, 1985), 30–31.
106. Salvemini to Formentini, February 4, 1914, cited in De Felice, *Riv*, 199; Pastore to Spriano, June 16, 1958, cited in Spriano, *Storia di Torino operaia e socialista*, 271; Salvemini, *SSQM*, xxiii; Salomone, *Italy*, 24.
107. Gramsci, *Questione meridionale*, 40; Salvemini, *SSQM*, xxiv–xiv.
108. Placci to Salvemini, July 5, 1914, *AGS*; Salvemini to G. Zagari, December 16, 1913, *Cart 1912*, 456–457.
109. De Felice, *Riv*, 161 citing Salvemini, "Rinascità socialista" *L'Unità*, May 1, 1914.
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111. Gramsci, *La Questione Meridionale*, 43.
112. Megaro, *Mussolini*, 138–141, 313; De Felice, *Riv*, 58–61.
113. "Assassinio di stato!" *Avanti!*, January 7, 1913, *OO* V, 53.
114. "La Politica della Strage," *Avanti!*, January 8, 1913, *OO* V, 55.
115. "Il Congresso di Ancona," *Avanti!*, May 1, 1914, *OO* VI, 179.
116. De Felice, *Riv*, 199.

117. "I Fatti di Ancona," *Avanti!*, June 8, 1914, OO VI, 207–208.
118. "Lavoratori d'Italia, Scioperate!" *Avanti!*, June 9, 1914, OO VI, 209.
119. "Per la Cessazione dello Sciopero Generale!" *Avanti!*, June 11, 1914, OO VI, 215.
120. "Una rivoluzione senza programma," *L'Unità*, June 19, 1914.
121. "Tregua d'armi," *Avanti!*, June 12, 1914, OO 6, 218–221.
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128. "La nuova Albania," *Opere* III (1), 340; "Per la nuova Albania," *Opere* III (1), 336–338.
129. "La politica estera dell'Italia e il pacifismo," *Opere* III (1), 60.
130. "La Guerra per la pace," *L'Unità*, August 28, 1914.
131. "Dalla Neutralità Assoluta alla Neutralità Attiva ed Operante," *Avanti!*, October 18, 1914, OO 6, 393–403.
132. "Una lettera di Salvemini," *Avanti!*, October 21, 1914, OO 6, 416.
133. "Le ragioni del dissidio e le dimissioni," *Il Secolo*, October 21, 1914 in OO 6, 410.
134. "Audacia," *Il Popolo d'Italia*, November 15, 1914, OO 7, 7.
135. "Per L'intervento Adesioini e Solidarietà," *Il Popolo d'Italia*, November 29, 1914 in OO 7, 57–8. "Lo Statuto programma dei 'Fasci d'Azioine rivoluzionaria,'" OO 7, 461–462.
136. "Il partito del 'ni,'" *Il Popolo*, February 7, 1915, 182.
137. De Caro, *Salvemini*, 248.
138. Quoted in De Felice, *Riv*, 283.
139. *Il Popolo d'Italia*, April 19, 1915; J. Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism* (Palo Alto, 1967), 37.
140. *Il Popolo d'Italia*, May 24, 1915.
141. "Oportet studuisse," *L'Unità*, May 28, 1915.
142. *Socialismo, Riformismo, Democrazia*, E. Tagliacozzo e S. Bucchi, eds. (Bari, 1990), 157.
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The Style of a Revolutionary Journalist

Pierluigi Allotti

THE JOURNALISTIC STYLE OF THE YOUNG MUSSOLINI

In his famous lecture on *Politics as a Profession*, Max Weber observed that while employment as a journalist at the beginning of the twentieth century represented one of the most important ways to become a full-time politician, it was, however, difficult for a journalist to become the leader of a political party. Without any form of private wealth or additional income, a journalist would have remained tightly bound to his job, especially given the tremendous increase in the demands placed upon the profession of journalism at the time: a lack of personal funds would certainly have been an obstacle to any individual's political ambitions. As Weber stated "The necessity of earning a living by writing articles on a daily or weekly basis hampers politicians like a ball and chain, (...) I know examples of born leaders who precisely due to such constraints were permanently stymied in their rise to power both with regard to what they could achieve in their public lives and, above all, by the effect that these financial needs had on their beliefs and attitudes."¹

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The case of the young Mussolini was, therefore, completely exceptional. He claimed that journalism for him was “not a job, but a mission” and he added, “we are not journalists for the money.”² Indeed, it was due to his remarkable talent as a journalist that at the age of 29 he succeeded in becoming editor-in-chief of *Avanti!* and, from that position, the full-time leader of the Italian Socialist Party.³

“He is a natural journalist. He has the instinct, professional skill and soul of a journalist.” So wrote Mussolini’s friend, Torquato Nanni,⁴ in 1915. Mussolini made his debut at just 19 years old, writing for *L’Avvenire del Lavoratore*, the newspaper of the Italian Socialist Party in Switzerland. Immediately, he exhibited a style that was both clear and sharp.⁵ It was an original style, popular with readers, that had nothing in common with the more refined literary manner of writing so much in vogue in Italy at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁶ Likewise, Mussolini’s journalism also distinguished itself from the equally clear and vigorous writing of Luigi Barzini, the talented young war correspondent of the *Corriere della Sera*, who at the time was emerging as the rising star of Italian journalism. As has been written of Barzini: “He knew how to relate facts with immediacy and simplicity, relying on his skill as a good observer, on his brilliant memory and on his direct contact with the people who had actually been there.”⁷ It was for this reason that Barzini enjoyed such enormous success and why droves of journalists tried to imitate him, giving rise to the phenomenon of “barzinismo.” Mussolini poured scorn on this. For example, in 1912, commenting on the attitude of Italian correspondents toward the war in Libya, he wrote:

The followers of Barzini, germinating in the hothouse of warmongering journalism, are legion. It is a tropical growth. Italian journalism is infected with “barzinismo”. However, these newcomers are not adventurers of any great journalistic style. They have ruined their original by making it cheap, common and obliging. They have devalued it by introducing it into the circulation of every mediocre newspaper.⁸

Barzini was above all a newspaper columnist, a reporter whose primary concern was to recount the events that he had witnessed. Instead, for a militant journalist like Mussolini, facts and news were of secondary importance: what counted for him was the political cause and ideas. He believed that journalism could therefore be reduced to comment and *corsivi* (brief, trenchant pieces printed in Italics) which, according to him, should endure

“only for one day, but intensely so.”⁹ As Angelica Balabanoff, whom Mussolini wanted alongside him on the editorial staff of *Avanti!* when he became its chief in December 1912, claimed, “as far as the political message and the proletarian movement are concerned, Socialist comment upon an event is more important than the story of the event itself.”¹⁰

However, like Barzini, Mussolini enjoyed considerable success, at least among militant Socialists and, as a correspondent for the *Corriere* became a role model, especially for the youngest readers who were strongly influenced by his personality. Thus, the “strong and terse” literary style of the Neapolitan revolutionary, Amadeo Bordiga (as Mussolini himself defined it¹¹), who was making his debut in journalism exactly in 1912 and 1913¹² when “mussolinismo” was spreading among the Socialist masses,¹³ reminds one of the brief, hurried writing of the charismatic director of *Avanti!*. At that time, Mussolini’s admirers included two students from Turin University, Antonio Gramsci and Palmiro Togliatti, who, like many other youthful revolutionaries from Turin, were fascinated by him because he was young, had defeated the reformists and was able to write in a way that was both clear and enthralling.¹⁴ In October 1914, both were to support Mussolini’s about-turn in support of intervention in the First World War¹⁵ and Gramsci, who at the end of 1915 began working in the editorial offices of *Avanti!* in Turin, distinguished himself during the three years that followed by writing hundreds of *corsivi* about local conditions, employing a clear and lively style that harkened back to that which Mussolini had been first to use in the Socialist newspaper.¹⁶

DIRECTOR OF *LA LOTTA DI CLASSE* (CLASS STRUGGLE)

During the two years that he spent in Switzerland, the young Mussolini, apart from writing for *L’Avvenire del lavoratore* (The Worker’s Future) also worked with *Il Proletario*, a weekly publication printed in New York and then edited by Giacinto Menotti Serrati. In addition to this, he contributed articles to *Avanguardia Socialista*, a weekly revolutionary syndicalist publication edited by Arturo Labriola and Walter Mocchi.¹⁷ In 1908, for four months, Mussolini edited a small news sheet, *La Lima* (*The File*), published by a Socialist group in Oneglia, a town in the province of Imperia, where he had found a temporary position as a teacher of French in a local school.¹⁸

However, it was only in 1909 during the time he spent in Trento¹⁹ that Mussolini displayed to the full his journalistic talents both as director of *L’Avvenire del lavoratore*, the publication of Trentino’s Socialist Party, and

as editor-in-chief of *Il Popolo*, the Socialist daily newspaper run by Cesare Battisti. In this way, Mussolini earned his stripes as a political leader “even if only as a local one,” as noted by Renzo De Felice.²⁰ Following his expulsion by the Hapsburg government, Mussolini accepted at the end of 1909 an offer made to him by the Socialists of Forlì to become the secretary of the local Socialist Federation and to take over the editorship of *La lotta di classe*, a weekly newspaper that they had set up to replace *L’Idea Socialista* which had ceased publication two years previously. These roles, taken together with his work as a correspondent for *Avanti!*, a post taken up soon afterwards, opened the way for his swift rise to the leadership of the Socialist Party.²¹

At that moment, the Forlì Federation, which included between 1300 and 1400 members, was in crisis due to internal struggles and pressure from the Partito repubblicano which enjoyed a hegemonic position in the province. Mussolini had been called upon in the belief that he was the right man to revitalize the Federation for two reasons. First, Mussolini had acquired prestige among the Socialist masses for the recent events in which he had been involved (*Avanti!*, reporting in depth the news of his expulsion from Trentino, described him to the public as “a young man of great intelligence and huge erudition, a good writer and skilled debater; a proud and wild character, devoted completely to the working class”²²). Second, Mussolini was not involved in local power struggles, having lived for a long time outside those circles.

Having accepted this new challenge with a modest salary of little more than 100 lire, Mussolini stated in the first issue of the newspaper, published on January 9, 1910, that he intended to relaunch the party via a well-planned program of education and propaganda to make ready “the human element, the new men who will throw off the moral and mental clothes handed down by the old society that is on the wane.” To this end, it was necessary to spread “education through lectures, newspapers, books and pamphlets” and to “set up schools of propaganda and libraries open to all.” He wrote: “The brain of every man has sparks that lie dormant under the grey ash of ignorance. It’s a matter of bringing to life these heavenly sparks!” Mussolini promised that with the new publication (*La lotta di classe*) he would promote “this cultivation of intelligence” and aid “this ascendancy of the workers towards more noble forms of life,” while at the same time asking for “the cooperation” and “fraternal help of comrades”:

Let everyone do their duty: let everyone make an effort, even a small one: the humble laborer who, while at work in the street or at the club in the evening, spreads the word a bit at a time to the ignorant and the insensitive is as useful to the Socialist cause as the journalist who writes an article or an orator who makes a speech.²³

On January 15, at a meeting held at Forlimpopoli Socialists' Club, Mussolini repeated that to overcome "the crisis of men" in which the party was then embroiled, it was necessary to "return to the message of basic principles to purify an atmosphere that was infected by self-interest, compromises and possibilism."²⁴ Then on February 12, in the columns of *La lotta di classe*, he wrote that to avoid being unprepared for "the probable agrarian conflicts of the coming summer," it was necessary to carry out in the months that remained "a serious campaign of propaganda" not to gain new "converts" (there were "perhaps too many of these," he observed) but to embed a true revolutionary faith in those who already claimed to be Socialists but "did not know or had never asked themselves or anyone else why":

It is Socialist propaganda aimed at Socialists that we want to start! Ours is not a paradoxical claim: since it is Socialists more than anyone else who have the duty to know how one must act if one is to call oneself a Socialist and how one must fight for the triumph of our ideas. We prefer quality to quantity. Rather than the obedient, submissive, idiotic flock that follows the shepherd and scatters at the first cry of wolves, we prefer the small, resolute, daring nucleus that understands its own beliefs, knows what it wants and marches straight towards its goal. We want the 40 sections of our Federation to be Socialist sections not just a club to meet at on Sundays. I ask comrades for just one thing: attention. I shall try to replace these words with ideas. Old fashioned oratory based on rhetoric has had its day: brevity and precision are what's needed. I believe that step by step the number of conscious Socialists will increase and that this cultivation of intelligence will not be without its harvest.²⁵

As he had announced, in the early months of the year, Mussolini, in a program that echoed clearly the words and ideas of Gustave Le Bon in *Psychologie des foules*,²⁶ embarked on an intense campaign of propaganda, traveling far and wide in the province. Between January and March, he delivered some 15 lectures on themes such as "Socialists and the Social Question," "Socialism and Socialists," "The Duty of Socialists in Today's

Society,” “Anticlericalism and Socialism,” “Why we are Socialists” as well as others commemorating figures such as Andrea Costa, Karl Marx and Giordano Bruno. He prepared his appearances with great care. As he himself explained, “to keep abreast of the modern Socialist and intellectual movements” he read “an infinite number of daily newspapers, many magazines and many books.” This required a huge effort and for this reason, in his own words, he was unable to fit more into his political campaign. “Better by far a few lectures packed with thought,” he maintained, “than a succession of chats based on reproof, superficiality and outbursts of rhetoric.”²⁷ A very effective orator, endowed with a natural magnetism, he was able through his enthusiasm and quick, incisive eloquence to “enchain” the attention of whoever went to hear him; as he did, for example, at Predappio, his native village, when he spoke for almost two hours on “The Labor Movement and Socialism” in front of an “impressive [audience] composed of both sexes and all social classes” receiving at the “end ‘deafening applause that lasted for several minutes.’”²⁸

Mussolini’s journalistic activity was also intense during these months. At the first congress of the Federazione Socialista forlivese (Socialist Federation of Forlì) in April, Mussolini outlined what he had achieved thus far and stressed how those who had made unfavorable predictions on how long *La lotta di classe* would last had been proven wrong. He claimed that not only did the newspaper, launch “with a title that did not attract readers and with an agenda that drove them away,” have an existence that was neither “strained nor uncertain” but that it had a circulation that was “more than reassuring”:

The first edition sold 1,300 copies. We kept sales at between 1,200 and 1,300 with the subsequent editions and reached 1,500 copies with edition 11. We are now stationary at between 1,300 and 1,400 copies but with a rising trend. The number sent back is small. Our newspaper is circulated widely, even outside our electoral area, and good sales have been achieved in Romagna Appenninica, in Forlimpopoli, in St. Mauro and in Rimini.

Furthermore, Mussolini maintained that *La lotta di classe* had remained faithful to its agenda: it had given “ample space to Life in the Sections and to the Movement of Economic Organizations.” It had touched on “some public matters of great importance” and it had not had any “scruples in reporting on the activity of the central leadership nor on the inactivity of the parliamentary Socialist group.” He stated that many of the articles were also reported in other Italian and foreign periodicals. Mussolini concluded, “The newspaper—I write it”:

I do it with the pen, not with scissors. In recent weeks the newspaper has had a content that is mainly controversial, but my comrades know why and it is not necessary to dwell on it. I shall say only that the newspaper will continue to be what we had planned: a platform for discussion, a weapon of argument and of battle, a knot that binds together all the Socialists of the constituency.²⁹

Mussolini took an active part in that summer's agrarian conflicts, his virulent articles spurring on the peasants of Romagna in their struggle with sharecroppers over the ownership and use of threshing machines.³⁰ By now, he had established himself as the undisputed leader of Forlì's Socialist movement and had in view the national congress of the PSI (Partito Socialista italiano—Italian Socialist Party) to be held at the end of October in Milan, the first national congress in which he was to participate. Therefore, the young revolutionary turned his attention to the problems of *Avanti!*, the PSI's newspaper, which was not in a good state of health with a circulation of some 10,000 copies; discussion had begun on its possible transfer from Rome, where it had been founded in 1896, to Milan. On one side, Mussolini noted, one group led by Filippo Turati wanted to keep the newspaper in the capital "at any cost" to "keep it at the center of political and parliamentary life." On the other side was a group of the "Committee of the Milanese Section" that wanted to move it to the capital of Lombardy to "join it naturally" with *Il Tempo*, the reformist publication. Mussolini was against both these ideas and put forward a third solution; "We are neither with Turati, nor with the others," he declared "Neither in Rome, the hub of political horse-trading, nor in Milan, the center of Masonic, radical-Socialist self-interest. Neither too far to the South, nor too far to the North. *Avanti!* must be taken to central Italy. Not to Florence, but to Bologna."³¹

Mussolini explained in a later article that Florence had no "daily journalism." "The Florentine newspapers are a disgrace, but 'the journalist must be spurred into work by copying others. In Florence this just would not happen.'" However, he believed that Bologna, on the other hand, had "many of the requirements that should be taken into consideration":

Above all it is a big city with an ever increasing population. An industrial proletariat is forming.

Tomorrow when the big industrial concerns listed diligently by the *Il Resto del Carlino* newspaper begin production, Bologna will have huge new masses of proletarians. The fact that Bologna cannot and should not be considered

a provincial town is highlighted by its own press. *Il Resto del Carlino* enjoys journalism of the highest quality, a quality none of the capital's newspapers can boast of. A newspaper in which write Sorel, Labriola, De Marinis, Papini and Prezzolini cannot be ignored by those who wish to follow the ideas of those representing the most original and strongest cultural trends of today's world. The *Avvenire d'Italia* can number itself among the great newspapers. Its clericalism is so cleverly hidden so as to upset neither the indifferent public nor atheists. Furthermore, it is full of news and has achieved a wide circulation in Bologna.

To complete this powerful triumvirate of newspapers we should like *Avanti!* in Bologna. We should like to plunge it into immediate contact with the newspapers of agriculture [*Il Resto del Carlino*] and clericalism. And this contact should mean battle.

Moreover, this city in Emilia-Romagna would, according to Mussolini, be the "most favorable center" for the distribution of the Socialist newspaper. "By coming out in the morning *Avanti!* could take on the competition of both the Bolognese and Milanese daily newspapers, as it could reach all parts of Italy either before or at the same time as them." He added that, above all, in Bologna, *Avanti!* would be at the "center of national proletarian life. It will be very close to the areas where the future economic battles that affect the whole nation will be fought. It will be even closer still to the Red lands of Romagna that count in their ranks thousands upon thousands of Socialists ready for any sacrifice as long as the newspaper merits it. The Socialist newspaper must be based where the Socialists are, not where Socialists...are a figment of the imagination."³²

At the congress in Milan, which was dominated by reformists, Mussolini's brief and thinly argued speech passed almost unnoticed and even *Avanti!* devoted few lines to it.³³ Regarding the newspaper's problems, the congress decided on a new start for the Socialist newspaper with the appointment of Claudio Treves as director. Treves was a trusted colleague of Turati and editor of *Il Tempo* in Milan, which he had taken over from Leonida Bissolati,³⁴ whom Mussolini described as "one of those most responsible for *Avanti!*'s painful problems."³⁵

Despite his lack of success in Milan, by the end of the year, the young revolutionary could, however, claim results that strengthened his position. The number of members in the Federation's 40 sections had risen to 1800 and the circulation of *La Lotta di classe* continued to rise. On December 31, Mussolini wrote:

The newspaper has broken out of the constituency's narrow boundaries: from Rimini to Faenza, from Galeata to Fusignano, there is not a village where our newspaper does not have subscribers or readers. [...] We are fully aware that *La Lotta di classe* has become a part of life for Socialists in cities, towns and villages; we know that every Saturday morning Socialists look forward to *La Lotta di classe* as one looks forward to meeting a friend who speaks to you in good and honest terms; we know that in clubs on Saturday evenings people discuss what the newspaper has written; we feel that by now Socialists consider this newspaper to be their collective soul, both vigilant and pugnacious.³⁶

Ambitious and determined to make a name for himself, during the next year, Mussolini gained a certain reputation outside his own area when in April, in open disagreement with the reformist leadership, he had the autonomy of the Forlì Federation approved by the PSI. This notoriety grew even more when he was sentenced to a year in prison (this was reduced to five-and-a-half months on appeal) for having incited workers to violence during a general strike against the war in Libya.³⁷

Mussolini left prison in March 1912 and in July took part in the 13th congress of the PSI that was held in Reggio Emilia. This time his speech made from the stage of the Ludovico Ariosto Theater had a great effect. Greeted with applause the young man from Romagna launched a savage attack on the parliamentary Socialist group. He summed up their way of working in three words "absenteeism, indifference and inaction" and both requested and secured the expulsion from the party of several right-wing reformists, among whom were Bissolati and Ivanoe Bonomi.³⁸ Mussolini's intervention made a deep impression on his audience and proved decisive for the victory of the revolutionary wing that gained control of the leadership of the party. In this way, Mussolini made his entry onto the national stage, becoming the most popular and fascinating exponent of the revolutionary movement.³⁹

EDITOR OF *AVANTI!*

In November, at the suggestion of Costantino Lazzari, Mussolini was appointed director of *Avanti!*, a post he had been coveting for a long time.⁴⁰ It came with a salary of 500 lire, Mussolini having refused the 700 lire that Treves received.⁴¹ Following a brief interlude when Giovanni Bacci was director, Mussolini's taking up of the reins proved a turning point for the Socialist publication. With Treves, *Avanti!* had enjoyed a

happy period. Under his direction, which ended at the Reggio Emilia congress, the Società Editrice Socialista (Socialist Publishing Company) had been set up and guaranteed greater financial security than the daily newspaper. The newspaper's offices were moved from Rome to Milan. New equipment had been purchased, the publication's organization had been improved, the appearance of the newspaper had been made more attractive and the variety and quality of contributors had been raised. In this way, *Avanti!* had doubled the number of subscriptions and tripled its circulation, proving itself then to be one of the best Italian daily newspapers, taking a firm and resolute stance against the war in Libya.⁴² Bacci had not introduced any significant changes, but with Mussolini the newspaper took on a new look and tone. In terms of printing, he made it look much tidier and overall his commentaries, first paragraphs and notes were more direct and stimulating for the reader.⁴³ Furthermore, for the first time he allowed onto the newspaper's pages articles that set out and defended an idealistic vision of reality. Indeed, since his time in Trentino when he was an enthusiastic reader of Prezzolini's *Voce*, Mussolini considered himself a heretical Socialist and his ambition was to "renew the concept of socialism by tearing it away from positivism and even from materialism and replacing it with a neo-idealism rooted in the Marxism of Italian socialism." However, such "idealistic infiltration" would gradually fade and it was probably for this reason, as Emilio Gentile has pointed out, that at the end of 1913 Mussolini founded the political magazine *Utopia* to carry forward his neo-idealistic changes to revolutionary socialism.⁴⁴

Mussolini believed that the daily newspaper was a fundamental weapon for any modern popular party. He claimed that "any party without a daily newspaper in the busy and quick world of today, is a party without a voice, without followers and without a future."⁴⁵ On December 1, Mussolini introduced himself to the readers and announced that *Avanti!* would adopt a more revolutionary stance, especially in view of the "great [electoral] battle" slated for the following year.⁴⁶ However, Mussolini assured them that *Avanti!* would continue to be "the organ of the party that brings together all its groups, levels and tendencies." It would remain "a free platform, open to all, to every topic of debate and to all those who have ideas to express or who want to make a contribution to our tireless fight [...] against the common enemy: the exploitative bourgeoisie."⁴⁷ It was in this manner that Mussolini set *Avanti!* on its new course, removing from the editorship journalists and contributors whose presence he judged incompatible with the new line that he wanted to impose

(including Treves, whose resignation he prompted by refusing three of his articles); in their places, he called upon as both editors and contributors not only those whom he trusted, who were in any case members of the PSI's revolutionary wing, but also trade union revolutionaries and anarchists, such as Enrico Leone, Agostino Lanzillo, Sergio Panunzio and Arturo Labriola, as well as some members of a group brought together by Gaetano Salvemini that was united around his review, *L'Unità*.⁴⁸ Mussolini wanted as the deputy editor Angelica Balabanoff, a person with whom he had been deeply involved since his time in exile in Switzerland. She accepted the post with satisfaction: "To have been selected by my comrades to make a daily contribution to our newspaper, our main political tool, is certainly for us a source of both intellectual and moral satisfaction," she wrote in *Avanti!* on December 22, "It is a task that each of us takes on with immense pride. And that is because it is our press, our Socialist press, because it gives us the chance of being able to express and spread from the newspaper's columns the ideas that are our most valuable possession."⁴⁹

The daily's new direction was already in evidence from the beginning of the New Year. Taking advantage of the deaths of some workers, the most serious of which happened on January 6, at Roccegorga, in Ciociaria (a public protest was put down by the army and seven peasants were killed), Mussolini unleashed a violent campaign against Giolitti's government. This resulted in his return to court for defending criminal actions, incitement to commit disorder and incitement of desertion in the army. He wrote in the first of a series of articles on the matter:

This year the country has given a memorable Christmas present to the Italian proletariat: a little bit of the intense machine-gun fire from which the peace treaty of Lausanne had saved the Libyan Arabs and the Bedouins! [...] Well, 800 million has been spent on bringing civilization to the Libyan Arabs, and just yesterday a ministerial report lauded the splendid condition of health services in the city of Tripoli; but when the Arabs of Rocca Gorga ask for sewers, doctors, water and electricity the Government, which has no millions left, sends the Carabinieri and drowns in blood the people's respectable, sacred and human protest.⁵⁰

In his role as editor of *Avanti!*, on January 9, Mussolini attended a large meeting against "the state assassins" held at the people's assembly hall in Milan. From the stage, he listed past killings and called on the proletariat to take revenge: "Death to the murderers of the people! Long

live the revolution!”⁵¹ In Turin on January 12, he spoke again, this time before a packed audience of workers⁵² and the same day from the pages of his newspaper he attacked the bourgeois daily publications which, in his opinion, had paid little attention to the killings by publishing only reports from the Stefani press agency and were following Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti’s order to “keep quiet.”⁵³

Mussolini was criticized by reformists who accused him of confusing revolt with revolution, and class struggle with insurrectional adventurism and of being in reality, as Anna Kuliscioff wrote to Turati in February 1913, “a perfect anarchist.”⁵⁴ He was also criticized by some hard-liners like Serrati who considered his revolutionary arguments “contradictory, exaggerated and ridiculous” if compared to “the party’s possibilist agenda.”⁵⁵ Notwithstanding these opinions, in the months that followed, Mussolini remained true to the goal that he had set himself with his “strategic objective” of strengthening the party’s organization, as Gaetano Arfé has written, even at the price of losing the support of the trade union Confederation which “continued to be a formidable bulwark of reformists and, indeed, made any transformation of the PSI’s political line impossible.”⁵⁶ So, Mussolini launched a vigorous anti-protectionist campaign to eliminate protected industries in which, as Nicolò Fancello wrote in the Socialist newspaper, a thorough class struggle could not be carried out.⁵⁷ In May, Mussolini lent his support to a strike by metalworkers in Milan called by the *Unione Sindacale Italiana* (USI), the organization of revolutionary trade unionists, and in June, to the general strike called after the arrest of the USI’s main bosses. Mussolini was again criticized for his actions by Turati and Serrati⁵⁸ and in the middle of June he threatened to resign when the leadership questioned his behavior, which was judged by some to be reckless. Mussolini withdrew his threat when he won a vote of confidence.⁵⁹

Commenting in *Avanti!* on the work of the party Directorate, Mussolini declared contentedly that a year after the congress of Reggio Emilia, the number of members had risen from 20,000 to 34,000. “We are not fixated on numbers,” he wrote, “but we do not wish to undervalue the profound significance of this ever larger following that adds new strength and new men to the party. Dead ideas do not win followers. Ideas are alive when they are fruit of a small circle of founders and supporters and touch and excite the masses.”

As for the larger question of *Avanti!*, Mussolini observed that, “in recent times it has become so much a part of proletarian and Socialist life that a discussion of its political line excites neither the PSI’s leadership

nor, to some extent, the public in general.” He noted that the distinguished comrades who had objected to the newspaper’s political agenda had “identified nothing” and had confined themselves “to expressing some wishes that are, in truth, just as vague.” “We are waiting to find out what ‘Marxist orthodoxy’ and ‘political rigidity’ mean. For there exist intelligent orthodoxy, sanctimonious orthodoxy and bigotry in Marxism too.” To those who had criticized him for his “wavering ideas,” the editor replied that this may also have been true, given that “thought is like the water of the sea: it is always in motion even when the surface seems calm.” To those who had accused him of “personalism,” he remarked that:

“personalism” in the best sense of the word is unavoidable in a newspaper of ideas and struggle. In the large, industrial newspapers this tends to disappear and the conflict of ideas is replaced by wordy news stories. In those newspapers the management has given up writing. It has things written. It orders. We, on the other hand, express our ideas. We both try to and believe that we interpret the ideas of others. But ideas cannot be depersonalized. By definition, it is absurd.⁶⁰

THE ELECTIONS OF 1913

The PSI’s leadership was busy with the coming elections scheduled to take place between the end of October and the beginning of November. In a commentary, Mussolini stressed that the Socialists were “ready” for the contest (“tomorrow we shall demonstrate the unity of our electoral program which is neither reformist nor integralist, as has been claimed”) and he announced that the party would conduct the electoral campaign “with the utmost vigor”: “Giolitti has publicly thrown down his gauntlet to the PSI and the PSI is well able to pick it up!”⁶¹

The party’s electoral campaign began officially on September 7. On that day, in an editorial entitled “Preludio” Mussolini wrote:

Today, in line with the decision of the Leadership of the Party, the Italian Socialists will officially and simultaneously begin their electoral campaign. Of course, preparations began many months ago, but in a piecemeal manner, in line with our poor Latin habit of not being able to act together in a disciplined way. Only today will the national character [of our campaign] show itself to the full. It was and is the moment to bring a little fervor, a little argument and discussion to an event of indisputable importance, no

matter what the theoretical value of parliamentarianism may be. The peasants of Puglia know this full well and are prepared to do anything, even take part in a general strike, to be able to exercise their right to vote. So the PSI enters the field with banners unfurled, with a precise agenda, with a tactical plan that is equally precise, alone against everyone.⁶²

The editor of *Avanti!* wanted Socialists to dispel any “misunderstandings” which, in his opinion, plagued Italian political life, by fighting on the principle of “alone against everyone...even against friends and comrades of the past.”⁶³ To this end, he listed the following as unassailable elements of the political program for all Socialists: a ceaseless struggle against military spending and an equally intransigent campaign against trade protectionism. Mussolini declared, “The proletariat must wake up and shout ‘Enough!’ Enough battleships, enough barracks, enough cannons, while thousands of communities in Italy do not have schools, do not have roads, do not have sewers, do not have electricity, do not have doctors and live in the wretched half-light of civilization” and “enough of the scandalous customs protection granted to a handful of speculators who enjoy a greedy stranglehold at the expense of the great mass of consumers.”⁶⁴

The electoral campaign got underway at the beginning of October after the dissolution of the Chamber and confirmation that the election would be held on October 26. *Avanti!* then intensified its propaganda campaign. It devoted considerable space to the meetings that were being held in the run-up to the vote and denounced strongly the episodes of intimidation and violence causing turmoil in Puglia and other areas in the South. Mussolini was a candidate in Forlì and the newspaper reported a comprehensive summary of the speech he made on October 18. In it he set out for his voters the Socialist electoral program and reminded them that, “this first experiment in universal suffrage” represented “the acid test for the Socialist Party,” and “the index of its vitality and strength.”⁶⁵ The published report was, however, so “crammed with blunders” that Mussolini had to intervene immediately to correct them and inform everyone that he would take no further part in “electoral speeches” because, he explained, “at this moment I am here at my post in the newspaper where my comrades have put me, so that I may speak for everybody. I know how to and I can. I shall make no exception to this rule. Not even for the Forlì constituency.”⁶⁶

The big effort paid off. The elections were a success for the PSI. It received almost one million votes and won 53 seats, doubling the size of its parliamentary group when compared the previous legislature. Even although Mussolini failed to be elected, he wrote fervently:

Sunday was for the PSI a day of triumph. A clear victory, an undeniable victory that surprised even the most optimistic among us, and that has astounded our adversaries. But, above all, the victory is “ours”, absolutely “ours.”

In 1909 *Avanti!* was pleased with the results of the general election. It praised the overall success of democratic, republican and Socialist candidates. However, that was the ill-fated era of populism. But not today. [...] Sunday’s victory belongs to only one party, to ours. The democratic newspapers cannot begin to speak of “popular triumph” to muddy the waters or, one may say, to obscure the fact that the game is up and does not fool anyone. We alone have won or, rather, crushed them. To us alone is granted the chance to pitch camp in prime, conquered locations while our exhausted enemies flee in all directions like a flock of sheep surprised by a hurricane; we shall make camp, but not for long, as we wish to continue our advance, fight on and win until the day when we shall have wiped out all those hostile to our ideals.⁶⁷

THE CONGRESS OF ANCONA

After the elections, Mussolini directed his complete attention to the Fourteenth National Socialist Congress to be held at Ancona at the end of April. He aimed to ensure the victory of the revolutionary group that depended on both him and the party secretary, Lazzari.⁶⁸

However, before this event, at the end of March, Mussolini had to attend the High Court in Milan where, together with his editors, he was put on trial for the campaign launched after the Roccagorga killings. He was found not guilty.⁶⁹ Facing the tribunal’s president, *Avanti!* reported, Mussolini defended himself by going on the attack: not only did he not deny that his article entitled *L’assassinio di Stato* (Murder by the state), published the day after the event, was “very vivid” but also that 16 months later, he had come to believe that he had the right to write it in a way that was even “more vivid, because the details that had come to light justified any violence of style or of language.”⁷⁰

The Congress of Ancona approved Mussolini’s intransigent, integralist line⁷¹ and he drew up a balance sheet of his first 17 months as *Avanti!*’s editor saying first that his account would be brief because his “moral” report had already been published some weeks earlier in the newspaper. He thanked his predecessor, Giovanni Bacci, whom he recognized as responsible for reuniting the party, and then confessed to delegates that, after leaving the Congress of Reggio Emilia in a battered state, he had accepted “with great trepidation” the role of editor of the PSI’s official newspaper:

“A party newspaper is a newspaper of ideas, a paper of war. Therefore it is not a newspaper that can be compared to any other, neither to business journalism, journalism of information nor to the so-called journalism of ideas, as they represent changing currents that include everything but understand nothing (Laughter).”⁷²

Mussolini recalled that in those 17 months of “frenzied activity,” many things had taken place that were “important and memorable: war in Libya (which is still going on), war in the Balkan peninsula, killings, major strikes and political elections.” He stressed that the newspaper had continued its “tenacious” opposition to the war in Libya, had sought to explain (“together with the aid of foreign Socialists who are always well informed on international matters, especially the Germans”) to Italian Socialists the background to the Balkan War which had been “sung of as a war of liberation but is in fact a war of pillage and conquest launched by criminal monarchies that are greedy for territorial expansion.” It was a war that had left “unresolved, or almost, the Balkan question,” so much so that, in his opinion, there could be “possible new and serious surprises.”

With regard to the domestic killings, “which is, unfortunately, an Italian specialty (laughter),” Mussolini announced that in the case of the “classic” massacre of Roccaporga, instead of “taking the bull by the horns,” as the party had tried to do in the past, he had followed a different line of action by maintaining that it should not be the Socialists to tell the people to suffer state violence in silence:

I have said this quite happily: if it is the Government that encourages the police, then it [the Government] is directly responsible and continues to be complicit in its policy of killings and of these systematic massacres. Therefore the people, the proletariat and the Socialists cannot preach tolerance and calm, neither humanly nor legally (applause), come what may. It is we Socialists who must be ready for any test, even those that put our personal safety at risk. We cannot spread pacifist propaganda, because this provides our enemies with a weapon and depresses the spirit of the masses. And education? A wonderful thing: let’s see the others try it too (Laughter, shouts of “bravo”).⁷³

Mussolini repeated that, although the general strikes held in Milan were organized by trade unionists, *Avanti!* had stood by the proletariat in its struggle and he observed that if it had not done this “it would have been suicide for the newspaper.”⁷⁴ Finally, in mentioning the political elections, he claimed to have followed “a precise and coherent line of conduct”:

“intransigence the whole way, opposition to similar Parties, especially the democrats... Clarity and opposition to ambiguity, even against Socialist ambiguity.” *Avanti!*, he explained, had begun the electoral campaign a year before the polls opened. He had also tried to carry out “a survey of constituencies” which was, however, not “particularly interesting due to the usual lack of journalists” belonging to the party. Notwithstanding, he was able to state, “even if this seems a little proud,” that during the elections, the newspaper had been “up to the task.”⁷⁵

During his period as editor, there had been other events: “the political campaign against Spingardi’s plans; the campaign against customs and other duties.” *Avanti!* had concerned itself with all international questions such as that of Trieste, which had been “highlighted fully” by the newspaper. There had been no lack of “differences of opinion” and “disagreements” due to “material and mechanical reasons”; Mussolini explained: “For example, the fact that the newspaper is printed in Milan but the parliamentary group and the [newspaper’s] management are in Rome means that they cannot always consult with each other.” It was necessary to remember that even from a technical standpoint, a Socialist newspaper could not be compared in any way to a bourgeois newspaper; Mussolini noted, “technology is a question of money and as long as we do not have millions, our technology will be wanting.” He continued by saying that, on the other hand, as the party’s publication, *Avanti!* “has to meet needs that cannot be written down [...] it must give life to the party [and] devote a large part of its space to workers’ groups”; indeed, he had tried to “strengthen this proletarian character and create a newspaper that belongs to the Italian proletariat.” To Mussolini, it seemed “pointless, as far as information is concerned, to take on the giants of bourgeois journalism.”⁷⁶

Concluding his speech, Mussolini declared with satisfaction that he was presenting to the party a newspaper whose circulation, which had reached 60,000 daily copies on average and at times up to 100,000, had “quintupled” since the time when it was published in Rome. He added that, if things continued to “go well, even too well” then, in his opinion, *Avanti!* could increase its distribution still further. He declared that the newspaper was “unitary” because “every voice” had free access and because “all the workers of Italy [...] from the drivers of Turin to the exploited sulphur miners of Sicily” had found in the PSI’s newspaper “their unselfish defender.” He added, “I have given no respite to the enemies of socialism, I have always chased them; I am not boasting, as the enemies of the Party

[PSI] in Italy, when they are not attacking us with slander and lies, use weapons that are so rusty, so old that rather than inspiring a feeling for struggle, inspire one of pity and compassion.”⁷⁷

“DOWN WITH THE WAR!”

After Mussolini’s success at the congress, on May 1, he made a call for new printing “machines” at *Avanti!* to strengthen “one of the most powerful tools that the Italian Socialists use in their destruction of capitalist society” and to make “more agile, more prepared, more effective and more explosive this piece of paper that for the last 18 years has united, heartened and consolidated the proletarian masses, and which goes on the offensive and causes the bourgeois world to crumble.”⁷⁸

The following month, the popular unrest that shook the country during the “Red Week” seemed to confirm in his eyes the effectiveness of the new revolutionary direction followed by the party, which by now had 45,000 members. Mussolini supported and encouraged the popular uprisings that took place after the massacre of Ancona on June 7, and which for several days set the squares of northern Italy’s main cities ablaze. The general strike proclaimed by the Confederazione generale del lavoro (and called off to Mussolini’s disappointment two days later) paralyzed “almost completely the life of Italian society.” In his opinion, it was “the most serious uprising to have shaken the Third Italy.” It was to *Avanti!* that he gave the merit of having developed in the consciousness of the proletariat a sense of intolerance of injustice and a willingness to rebel⁷⁹ as “on a daily basis it carries its message to the exploited [people] of Italy and to the complex work of the entire Socialist Party.”⁸⁰

At the end of the month, Mussolini underestimated the importance of the assassination in Sarajevo of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and that of his wife at the hands of the Serbian nationalist, Gavrilo Prinzip. Commenting on the assassination, he limited himself to judging it as a “distressing but understandable” event and saw it as simply the result of the struggle between “nationalism and the central power” inside the Hapsburg Empire. However, as Pierre Milza⁸¹ has also observed, Mussolini did not entertain in any way the idea that war was near, nor did he consider the possibility of Italian participation in a conflict that he believed would be limited to the Balkans.

Even during the first weeks of July, *Avanti!* gave little importance to the Balkan crisis. Only on July 25, after the presentation of an ultimatum made by Austria to Serbia seeking to impose on it Austrian participation

in an enquiry into the assassination, and only when the situation was already worsening, did the Socialist newspaper publish an article entitled *Nubi minacciose all'orizzonte balcanico* (Menacing Clouds on the Balkan Horizon). Mussolini wrote: "The presentation of the Austro-Hungarian Note to Serbia is the most important factor in international politics. This 'step' by the Government of the Danubian Monarchy is, in reality, the beginning of a dangerous duel between Serbia and Austria. The gravity of the Note escapes no one. It carries an obvious tone of imposition. Austria gives orders, 'instructions' to Serbia. So much so, in fact, that it is legitimate for us to ask ourselves whether we have before us a diplomatic Note or a pure and simple 'ultimatum.'"⁸² The next day, after Serbia's negative reply, in a leading article entitled *Abbasso la Guerra!* (Down with the War!), Mussolini wrote: "The terrible hypothesis, a hypothesis that we did not want to formulate yesterday as a last glimmer of hope encouraged us, has become reality. The deadline set by Austria has passed and Serbia's reply has been found 'insufficient' by the Austrian government. Diplomacy has nothing more to say or do: now armies enter the scene. It is war."

In Mussolini's eyes, the blame for the catastrophe that was taking shape was clear. It belonged to Austria-Hungary as "the Note delivered to Serbia was an 'ultimatum.'" As far as Italy's position was concerned, *Avanti!*'s editor had no doubts that it should maintain a position of "absolute neutrality" if the conflict were to remain solely between Austria and Serbia. However, if Russia were to enter the fray, then the Austro-Serbian war would become a European war: "Austria will be supported by Germany [...] and Russia by France. England's attitude is unclear. Since it has a 'formal obligation' neither with Russia nor with France. [...] And Italy? In the appalling case of a European conflagration what is its position? Alongside Austria against France?"⁸³

Avanti! followed the development of the crisis with increasing apprehension. On July 29, it carried the full-page headline: *Ora di ansia e di trepidazione in Europa* (Time of anxiety and trepidation in Europe). The following day, it reported with alarm Austria's declaration of war on Serbia; as Mussolini wrote: "It is a piece of news that will cast millions and millions of hearts into the bitterest anguish. It is the play's first act. What will happen next?"⁸⁴ The same day, *Avanti!* reported in depth the large pacifist demonstrations that had taken place in Paris and Berlin, as well as in Milan, in previous days. According to Mussolini, these challenged the "bourgeois press" and the line that it was following with an "insistence

that [was] idiotic and in bad faith.” Indeed, since it was only the Italian Socialists who were protesting against war, it placed in doubt “the antiwar feelings of the proletariat of other countries.”⁸⁵

“FROM ABSOLUTE NEUTRALITY TO ACTIVE AND WORKING NEUTRALITY”

The explosion of the “great European war,” as *Avanti!* headlined on August 3, produced, as an immediate consequence, a crisis for international socialism. In an atmosphere of *unione sacra* (governments of national unity) that enveloped those countries involved in the conflict, the greater part of the international Socialist movement adopted positions that were overwhelmingly patriotic. French Socialists did not take to the streets after the murder on July 31 of their leader, Jean Jaurès, at the hands of a nationalist fanatic and joined the government shortly afterwards. Social-Democrat leaders in Germany likewise voted for war loans in Parliament, basing their decision on the danger of a Czarist victory. Social-Democrats in Austria behaved in the same way.

For his part, on August 4, in an obituary for Jaurès, Mussolini stressed how Italian Socialists had immediately adopted an antiwar stance and wrote that it was “premature and inappropriate” to judge the behavior of the proletariat of other countries.⁸⁶ However, on the same day, in a short article written for *Utopia*, he was much more concise: “Internationalism is dead. Was it ever alive? It was an aspiration, not a reality. It had an office in Brussels and published a soporific report in three languages once or twice a year. Nothing more.”⁸⁷

The next day in *Avanti!*, Mussolini went back to doing battle with the bourgeois newspapers whom he accused of writing in an “idiotic” way about the actions of the French Socialist, Gustave Hervé, a typical antimilitarist and internationalist who had immediately changed sides, thrown in his lot behind a defensive war and enlisted in the French army. Mussolini wrote: “That Hervé, whom until yesterday the bourgeois press treated as a scoundrel, a madman and a traitor [has now become] a Hervé to hold up as an incontrovertible example of desperate and devoted love of mother country to those anti-patriotic Italian Socialists.” He recalled how the French pacifist had been “until the last moment an implacable opponent of the war” which he, like Italian Socialists, had defined as “filthy.” Mussolini defended Hervé’s action, arguing that he could not in any way be labeled a “warmonger,” even if he had gone to the front, “in the same way that a

peace-loving citizen cannot be classed a criminal if suddenly he has to pick up a gun to defend himself against a bandit...and [he concluded] Prussian and pan-German militarism is today, and has been since 1870, the bandit laying in ambush on the roads of European civilization!"⁸⁸

The aggression of Germany against neutral Belgium had profoundly shaken public opinion. Mussolini's *Avanti!* did not hesitate in siding against the empires of Central Europe, voicing its sympathy for those people under attack even though Italian Socialists were against war in all its forms and called loudly for the absolute neutrality of Italy. The whole page headlines of those days were explicit: *The Teutonic horde unleashed on all Europe* (August 4); *Brutal militarism begins its bloody exploits* (August 5); *The German challenge to the Latin people, Slavs and Anglo-Saxons* (August 6) and *The proud resistance of the Belgians halts the German advance* (August 7). According to Mussolini, among the victims of militarism were also the German Socialists whom he thought were accused unjustly, always by the bourgeois Italian newspapers, of not having been able to stop the war despite the means at their disposal: "daily newspapers, government deputies, [and] trade unions." Mussolini maintained that these resources had been insufficient to stop the war, as what would have been necessary was "to demolish the state's power with a revolution." However, had the Socialists "themselves had the strength" to do this, there would have been "need to wait for a war to start the revolution." If they had not had the strength, a war would certainly not have "conjured it up" for them. In his opinion, the problem was different: "Have or haven't the German Socialists protested against the war? Have or haven't they opposed it?" With the evidence at hand, argued Mussolini, the German Socialists had unarguably done their duty: "They have worked for peace, they have protested against the war. Then began the rule by saber, the Prussian saber: rule by terror."⁸⁹

In fact, uncorroborated stories of arbitrary arrests and summary executions of Socialists that had taken place in Germany after the outbreak of war were circulating. For example, on August 15, *Avanti!* published an in-depth news story on the execution of the "famous" German Socialist leader, Karl Leibknecht. This story had been reported the day before in the *Secolo* of Milan and were it true, commented Angelica Balabanoff, "militarism would have carried out an ignominious, calculated and vindictive act. It would have taken advantage of a moment of terror and bloodletting to rid itself of one of its most implacable enemies."⁹⁰ Subsequently, the story proved untrue, but the same day, *Avanti!* reported other "serious

events” that had taken place in Berlin. These too were uncertain: one had understood from some German refugees who had fled to Switzerland that a “real, popular revolt against the state and against ferocious military discipline” had broken out in the German capital and that the local government had “of course” covered it up “to let it be known that all Germany” was “of one mind around the throne.”⁹¹

For more than a month in his newspaper, Mussolini defended strenuously the principle of absolute neutrality.⁹² Besides reporting the situation from the various fronts and from inside the countries at war, *Avanti!* devoted much space to the demonstrations and antiwar meetings organized by Socialists throughout Italy and denounced the behavior of speculators who were trying to grow rich by exploiting the situation, even if the country was not at war. These were “crows,” claimed the Socialist newspaper, “the true enemies of society” who “at times of grave, public disasters” made money from them; just like the “alarmists” who spread “their panic through the mass of citizens.” *Avanti!* added, “Of course...the crows are to be found among the big industrialists who perhaps are popular at election times. In the same way, the alarmists are those polished members of the bourgeoisie who grow pale with fear at the thought of not being able to enjoy the pleasures of a lavish cuisine.”⁹³

In his newspaper, Mussolini then hosted a debate on the theme of neutrality.⁹⁴ Among those who took part were Balabanoff, Giovanni Zibordi and Mussolini himself, and he reiterated his deep aversion to war. On September 1, Mussolini published an article, which he described as “wavering,” by the Honorable Antonio Graziadei. In this article, Graziadei on the one hand recognized “the enormous merit [of the PSI] in having proclaimed first and from the very beginning of the terrible crisis the absolute necessity for our country to declare its neutrality,” but on the other maintained that neutrality had also to be “armed” and that Socialists ought to join in the defense of the country were it to be attacked.⁹⁵ Mussolini did not agree with this second point but observed that it was in any case “a good thing” that in the current difficult situation all voices be heard as “problems [were] complex.”⁹⁶ On September 12, *Avanti!* also published an article by Sergio Panunzio who wrote that there was no incompatibility between socialism and war and that war, indeed, would have been a revolutionary act.⁹⁷ Mussolini replied the next day insisting that war represented instead “an enormous violation of liberty and human self-determination.”⁹⁸ On September 21, the editor of *Avanti!* published another manifesto against the war and on September 25 called for a

referendum on the question and invited the Italian proletariat to make its decision known after two months of discussion. In reality, goaded both by democratic interventionists and by revolutionary interventionists who supported a war against the militarism and authoritarianism of the Central European Empires, Mussolini himself developed a growing skepticism of the idea of absolute neutrality,⁹⁹ which he finally repudiated publicly on October 18 with a long article entitled *From absolute neutrality to active and working neutrality*. In this, he maintained that Socialists could no longer stand by and watch while a war was being fought that would determine the fate of both Europe and Italy.¹⁰⁰

“WHO PAYS?”

The leadership of the PSI met in Bologna and on October 20 rejected almost unanimously the about-turn of *Avanti!*'s editor, who then resigned his post. The following day in a short article, Mussolini explained his decision:

Following the decisions of the Party's Leadership I have resigned from my post as editor of *Avanti!*. Having been appointed by a national congress it is only before another national congress that I should have to justify my position; but, whatever the precedents may be, I am not going to bring up points of procedure. I shall go. With serenity, with pride and with my faith unchanged!¹⁰¹

Mussolini received various telegrams and letters of solidarity, among which was one from Gaetano Salvemini, the historian from Molfetta, who celebrated the fact that Mussolini's "healthy and strong instinct" had induced him to follow "yet again the right line of conduct."¹⁰² On the evening of October 21, Mussolini took part in a meeting of Milan's Socialist section stating again that his "faith" had remained "unchanged"¹⁰³ and in the days that followed, he set about starting his own newspaper as a vehicle for his interventionist crusade. He made contact with the director of the *Resto del Carlino* newspaper, Filippo Naldi, a right-winger who was linked with the world of big business. Naldi had met Mussolini some months before and helped him both financially and logistically with the launching of his new paper. On October 25, *Il Resto del Carlino* leaked news of the project: Mussolini was quick to deny it.¹⁰⁴ However, on November 10, after laying low for a few days, it was Mussolini himself

who announced in an interview with the Bolognese newspaper that his own newspaper, *Il Popolo d'Italia*, would start publication on November 15. He said, "Many thought that I had retired into private life, that I was ready to keep quiet. Instead, I was making the weapon ready, my weapon, with which to continue without respite and with renewed ardor the battle against absolute neutrality."¹⁰⁵

However, the new publication was not a simple "cheap little propaganda sheet for the proletariat" as some expected; rather, it was a daily newspaper of six pages (two more than *Avanti!*) with wide and rich news coverage, varied and well-written headlines, a serialized story and big advertisers. Moreover, its appearance represented a "painful surprise" for Socialist militants¹⁰⁶ who felt betrayed by their ex-leader who, until a few weeks previously, had from the pages of *Avanti!* warned them, "Whoever pushes you towards war is betraying you" and now in the first edition of *Il Popolo d'Italia* wrote instead, "My cry of greeting...is a fearful and fascinating word: war!"¹⁰⁷

Straightaway, a violent argument erupted between *Avanti!* and Mussolini, with the Socialist newspaper asking its former editor for an explanation of the new publication's source of funds. It wrote: "While everyone knows that the PSI's press lives by very clear and pure means, the resources into which Benito Mussolini has tapped for the publication of his newspaper remain as yet unknown and obscure. Various newspapers, both bourgeois and Socialist, have already asked Benito Mussolini explicitly who is providing him with the money. Up to now there has been no reply...Benito Mussolini has not yet explained why, to start his newspaper, he has linked up with men and journalistic groups that were and are notoriously the most wicked enemies of the proletariat and of socialism."¹⁰⁸

The next day, Mussolini replied energetically to the attack which he labeled both "underhanded and sinister." He declared that he was ready to show how the newspaper had been set up even if, he noted, "the workings of any business organization are not put on public display. Even *Avanti!* does not do it, notwithstanding its 'very clear and pure means.' However, I am willing, if necessary, to publish, to everyone's mortification, the 'agreement' by which the newspaper was set up."¹⁰⁹ Two days later, in reply to Lazzari, who had criticized him, *Il Popolo d'Italia's* founder restated that as a rule "no enterprise" placed "its interior workings under the general public's unqualified gaze" and on November 23, in an interview given to the *Giornale d'Italia*, he said that he felt in no way "upset" by the many attacks being made upon him by almost all the large and small publications representing Italian socialism.

Mussolini declared: "Let them shout, let them roar, let them all gang up against me...but as long as I have a pen in my hand and a revolver in my pocket, I'm not afraid of anyone. I'm strong, despite being almost alone: I'd say, rather, that I'm strong exactly for that reason."¹¹⁰

Mussolini was now considered a "traitor" and an "impure element" by his ex-comrades and as the argument became ever more bitter, he was finally expelled from the PSI on November 24 at a meeting of the Milan Section; on November 29, this was ratified by the leadership¹¹¹ which in so doing considered the matter closed. On December 1, *Avanti!* wrote:

The Leadership of the Party has acted promptly and forcefully in accordance with justice and in accordance with the interests of the Socialist movement. All our Italian comrades, all the sections were awaiting from us the decision that would put to a clear end to this sad event in the life of the party. We have cut it off, chopped away the evil with no going back.¹¹²

THE MUSSOLINI–TREVES DUEL

Beyond the polemics, *Il Popolo d'Italia* achieved notable success from the start. Its pages included articles by journalists and intellectuals such as Prezzolini, the newspaper's Rome correspondent, Antonio Lanzillo, Giovanni Papini, Lido Cajani, Arturo Rossato, Giuseppe De Falco, Torquato Nanni, Maria Rygier, Silvano Fasulo, Manlio Morgagni, Arturo Fasciolo, Francesco Paoloni, Ottavio Dinale, Alessandro Chiavolini, Cesare Rossi and many others. In short, it became the vehicle for revolutionary and democratic interventionism and within a few months, its daily circulation had grown from 30,000 to 80,000 copies.¹¹³ Despite this success, at the beginning of 1915, the newspaper found itself in deep financial difficulties which it managed to head off at the last moment thanks to a sum of money received from an agent of the French intelligence services.¹¹⁴ In order to make ends meet, Mussolini launched an appeal to the newspaper's readers on February 10: "I'm not asking for millions. I'm asking for the help of friends, sympathizers and readers. I'm asking for subscribers, I'm asking for supporters."¹¹⁵ However, the following month, *Il Popolo d'Italia* still had problems, as Mussolini confessed to Prezzolini on March 15: "I'll talk frankly...the newspaper is not doing well. The circulation is rising gradually and comfortably but sales are limited only to the big cities; in the smaller towns it is boycotted automatically due to the self-interested pacifism (panciafichismo) of the local population."¹¹⁶

In the meantime, in February, a commission of enquiry instituted by Mussolini himself had ascertained that the plan for his newspaper had been conceived and put into action after his departure from *Avanti!*, that is, in the very last days of October and not before, as his ex-comrades maintained. Furthermore, it found that, although Mussolini had received funding from Naldi, he had not made any personal financial gain from it.¹¹⁷ These findings did not calm the tensions between Mussolini and his former party. Already at the end of January, a bitter argument broke out between Mussolini and Giacinto Menotti Serrati, who had been given the job of editing *Avanti!* after Mussolini's resignation.¹¹⁸ At the end of March, he was even challenged to a duel by Claudio Treves who felt offended by several articles that had appeared in *Il Popolo d'Italia*, in which Mussolini had written: "Of all the supporters of Lazzari's official socialism the most repulsive is, without doubt, the lawyer, Claudio Treves. He is repulsive because of his cynicism and because of his snobbish skepticism. Finally he is repulsive because it is now clear that in the mind of this De Bellis-loving political deputy from Bologna support for neutralism and money form an equation...without unknowns." (March 19)¹¹⁹; "once he was called Claudio *Tremens*, and from now on we'll call him 'Greek Money' (*palancagrecca*). [It is a] Title that comes with a dowry" (March 24),¹²⁰ and "by punching and biting the living flesh I have been able to reveal the inner Treves, the unknown Treves, the wicked, malign, vulgar and disgusting Treves." (March 28)¹²¹

Mussolini was not new to sorting out arguments in this way. Hardly a month before, he had taken part in a duel with a lawyer using sabers from which he had received a wound to his elbow.¹²² A duel with Treves was arranged for the afternoon of March 29 in a villa just outside Milan. There they fought each other furiously in a contest that was suspended without any reconciliation only after eight rounds. It lasted 25 minutes during which the sabers had to be changed as one was bent. A statement drafted by the seconds reported that Treves had received "a wound above his right eye involving bruising, a wound to his right armpit, a wound on his forearm and numerous blows to his deltoids with the flat of a sword." Mussolini, on the other hand, had suffered "an abrasion to the right forearm, an injury to the main part of the right ear and blows with the flat of a sword."¹²³

From that day, the argument between the two was constant and had as its nub Treves' belief in neutralism; Treves' son, Piero, remembered years later how his father expressed "half-jokingly" his regret at not having "skewered" Mussolini as, perhaps, he may have been able to do.¹²⁴

NOTES

1. M. Weber, *La scienza come professione. La politica come professione* (Turin, Einaudi, 2004), pp. 75–77.
2. B. Mussolini, “Tra l’anno vecchio e l’anno nuovo,” *La Lotta di classe*, December 31, 1910 (now in *Opera Omnia*, edited by E. and D. Susmel (Florence: La Fenice, 1951–1963), vol. III, pp. 299–302).
3. On Mussolini as a journalist, see R. De Felice, ed., *Mussolini giornalista* (Milan: Bur, 2001).
4. T. Nanni, “Benito Mussolini (1915),” in E. Gentile, ed., *Mussolini e “La Voce”* (Florence, 1976), pp. 163–175, quotation p. 167.
5. See R. De Felice, *Mussolini revolutionaris, 1883–1920* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995), p. 29.
6. See A. Asor Rosa, *Il giornalista: appunti sulla fisiologia di un mestiere difficile*, in *Storia d’Italia. Annali*, vol. 4, *Intellettuali e potere*, edited by C. Vivanti (Turin, Einaudi, 1981), pp. 1227–1257 (especially pp. 1241–1242). On the relationship between journalism and literature, see also C. Bertoni, *Letteratura e giornalismo* (Rome, Carocci, 2013).
7. P. Melograni, “Barzini, Luigi,” *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 7, 1970, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/luigi-barzini_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/luigi-barzini_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)
8. L’homme qui cherche, “La guerra degli istrioni,” *La Folla*, no. 6, 1 September 1912 (now in *Opera Omnia*, vol. IV, pp. 203–205).
9. B. Mussolini to G. Prezzolini, April 1915 (in *Mussolini e «La Voce»*, p. 71).
10. A. Balabanoff, “La stampa Socialista e il dovere dei compagni,” *Avanti!*, December 22, 1912.
11. It was thus that Mussolini described the tone of one of Bordiga’s articles against the war published in *Avanti!* August 16, 1914.
12. L. Agnello, “Bordiga, Amadeo,” in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 34, (1988), [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/amadeo-bordiga/\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/amadeo-bordiga/(Dizionario-Biografico)).
13. E. Gentile, *Fascismo. Storia e interpretazione* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2002), pp. 117–119.
14. G. Bocca, *Palmiro Togliatti* (Milan: Mondadori, 1991), pp. 34–36; Aldo Agosti, *Togliatti. Un uomo di frontiera* (Turin, Utet, 2003), pp. 117–119.
15. Indeed, Gramsci made his debut in the Socialist press with an article published on October 31, 1914 in *Il Grido del popolo* (*The People’s Cry*) entitled *Neutralità attiva ed operante* (*Active and Working Neutrality*) in which, following the line of both Mussolini and Gaetano Salvemini, he

- criticized the policy of absolute neutrality adopted by the Socialist Party at the outbreak of the Great War. On the true significance of this article, which, according to Leonardo Rapone was “one of the most famous, but also one of the most controversial and enigmatic” examples from his vast journalistic output, there are many different views; on this question, see *Cinque secoli che paiono secoli. Antonio Gramsci dal socialismo al comunismo (1914-1919)*, (Rome: Carocci, 2011), pp. 11–37.
16. A. Gramsci, *Sotto la Mole 1916-1920* (Turin: Einaudi, 1960). Like Mussolini, Gramsci believed that his articles should only have a short life: indeed, he maintained that they were “written for the day” and that therefore they should “die at the end of it” (A.A. Santucci, *Antonio Gramsci 1891-1937* (Palermo, Sellerio, 2005), p. 34).
 17. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, p. 33.
 18. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 50–52.
 19. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 62 fol.
 20. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, p. 64.
 21. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 81–83. Also P. Milza, *Mussolini*, (Rome, Carocci, 2000) pp. 143–144; E. Gentile, “Mussolini, Benito,” in *Dizionario Biografico degli italiani*, vol. 77, 2012, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/benito-mussolini_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/benito-mussolini_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)
 22. A. Piscel, *La grave situazione nel Trentino in Avanti!*, September 30, 1909.
 23. B. Mussolini, *Al lavoro!*, *La La lotta di classe*, January 9, 1910 (now in *Opera Omnia*, vol. III, pp. 5–7).
 24. *L'attuale momento politico*, *La La lotta di classe*, January 22, 1910 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. III, pp. 12–13).
 25. B. Mussolini, *La nostra propaganda*, *La La lotta di classe* February 12, 1910 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. III, pp. 25–26).
 26. Mussolini did not directly cite the work of Le Bon, published in Paris in 1895, but it is highly probable that he had read it, although this is not documented. Highly probable.
 27. *Per il socialismo forlivese*, *La lotta di classe*, April 21, 1910 (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. III, pp. 69–76).
 28. La vita nelle sezioni. Predappio, *La lotta di classe*, May 21, 1910 (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. III, pp. 404–405). On the oratorical style of the young Mussolini, see M. Gervasoni, *Speranze condivise. Linguaggi e pratiche del socialismo nell'Italia liberal*, (Lungro di Cosenza: Marco Editore, 2008), pp. 146–155.
 29. *Per il socialismo forlivese*, *La lotta di classe*, April 21, 1910 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. III, pp. 69–76).
 30. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, p. 94; Milza, *Mussolini*, pp. 146–147.

31. "Il problema dell'*Avanti!*," *La lotta di classe*, September 10, 1910 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. III, p. 181).
32. "Il problema dell'*Avanti!*," *La lotta di classe*, September 24, 1910 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. III, pp. 192–196).
33. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 95–96; Milza, *Mussolini*, pp. 147–148.
34. G. Arfé, *Storia dell'Avanti! (1956-1958)*, edited by F. Assante (Naples: Giannini Editore, 2002).
35. "Il problema dell'*Avanti!*," *La lotta di classe*, September 17, 1910 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. III, pp. 187–191).
36. B. Mussolini, "Tra l'anno vecchio e l'anno nuovo," *La lotta di classe*, December 31, 1910 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. III, pp. 299–302).
37. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 98–111; Milza, *Mussolini*, pp. 149–157; Gentile, *Mussolini*.
38. "Sull'azione del gruppo parlamentare," *Opera Omnia*, vol. IV, pp. 161–170.
39. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 112–130; Milza, *Mussolini*, pp. 157–161; Gentile, *Mussolini*.
40. Since 1908 Mussolini had expressed his ambition to be editor of a daily newspaper. See Milza, *Mussolini*, pp. 115–116.
41. G. Bozzetti, *Mussolini direttore dell'Avanti!* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1979), p. 73; Milza, *Mussolini*, pp. 161–162.
42. Arfé, *Storia dell'Avanti!*, pp. 86–99.
43. Bozzetti, *Mussolini direttore*, pp. 75–76.
44. E. Gentile, *Il mito dello stato nuovo. Dal radicalismo nazionale al fascismo* (Rome-Bari, 1999), pp. 120–121.
45. "Il problema dell'*Avanti!*."
46. "*Avanti!* per le elezioni generali politiche," *Avanti!*, December 15, 1912.
47. "Alla direzione dell'*Avanti!*," *Avanti!*, December 1, 1912 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. V, pp. 5–7).
48. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 139–140.
49. A. Balabanoff, "La stampa Socialista e il dovere dei compagni," Balabanoff resigned the following July due to various disagreements with Mussolini; Milza, *Mussolini*, pp. 167–168.
50. "Assassinio di Stato!" *Avanti!*, January 7, 1913 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. V, pp. 52–53).
51. "Contro gli eccidi," *Avanti!*, January 10, 1913 (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. V, pp. 56–58).
52. "La magnifica protesta del proletariato torinese," *Avanti!*, January 13, 1913.
53. "Il silenzio della vergogna," *Avanti!*, January 12, 1913 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. V, pp. 59–61).
54. Quoted in Milza, *Mussolini*, p. 165.
55. G. M. Serrati, "Valorizzare o concretare?" *Avanti!*, February 15, 1913.

56. Arfé, *Storia dell'Avanti!*, p. 106.
57. Arfé, *Storia dell'Avanti!*, pp. 110–111.
58. Milza, *Mussolini*, pp. 175–176.
59. Arfé, *Storia dell'Avanti!*, pp. 112–113.
60. “Dopo i lavori della Direzione del Partito. Primo commento,” *Avanti!*, July 18, 1913.
61. “Dopo i lavori della Direzione del Partito. Primo commento,” *Avanti!*, July 18, 1913.
62. “Preludio,” *Avanti!*, September 7, 1913 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. V, pp. 284–286).
63. “Socialisti, a voi!” *Avanti!*, October 9, 1913 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. V, pp. 315–317).
64. “Preludio,” *Avanti!*, September 7, 1913 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. V, pp. 315–317).
65. “Benito Mussolini illustra a Forlì il programma del Partito Socialista,” *Avanti!*, October 19, 1913 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. V, pp. 322–328).
66. *Avanti!*, October 20, 1913, (*Opera Omnia*, vol. V, pp. 322–328).
67. “Oh che bel camposanto da far invidia ai vivi!” *Avanti!*, October 28, 1913 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. V, pp. 338–341).
68. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 177 ff.
69. “La giuria milanese ha fatto giustizia: l'Avanti! assolto,” *Avanti!*, April 2, 1914.
70. “Gli eccidi e le miserie del Mezzogiorno d'Italia davanti alla Corte d'Assise di Milano nel processo contro la redazione dell'Avanti!,” *Avanti!*, 27 Marzo 1914.
71. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 188–192; Milza, *Mussolini*, pp. 178–179; Gentile, *Mussolini*.
72. “Per l'Avanti!,” *Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, pp. 163–168, quotation p. 163.
73. “Per l'Avanti!,” *Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, p. 164.
74. “Per l'Avanti!,” *Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, p. 164.
75. “Per l'Avanti!,” *Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, pp. 165–166.
76. “Per l'Avanti!,” *Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, pp. 166–167.
77. “Per l'Avanti!,” *Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, pp. 166–167.
78. “Date macchine all'Avanti!,” *Avanti!*, May 1, 1914.
79. Arfé, *Storia dell'Avanti!*.
80. “Tregua d'armi,” «*Avanti!*», June 12, 1914 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, pp. 218–221).
81. Milza, *Mussolini*, p. 183.
82. “Austria e Serbia,” *Avanti!*, July 25, 1914 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, pp. 285–286).
83. “Abbasso la guerra?” *Avanti!*, July 26, 1914 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, pp. 287–288).

84. "Grido d'allarme!" *Avanti!*, July 29, 1914 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, p. 289).
85. "Le dimostrazioni contro la guerra a Parigi," *Avanti!*, July 30, 1914.
86. *Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, pp. 302–304.
87. *Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, pp. 321–322.
88. "Hervé 'la guerra immonda,'" *Avanti!*, August 5, 1914 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, pp. 307–308).
89. "Accuse e accusatori," *Avanti!*, August 7, 1914.
90. A. Balabanoff, "Liebknecht sarebbe stato fucilato," *Avanti!*, August 15, 1914.
91. "Gravi avvenimenti a Berlino?" *Avanti!*, August 15, 1914.
92. See De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, p. 243.
93. "I corvi e gli allarmisti," *Avanti!*, August 7, 1914.
94. See Arfé, *Storia dell'Avanti!*, pp. 121–123; De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 243–246.
95. A. Graziadei, "In tema di 'neutralità italiana,'" *Avanti!*, September 1, 1914.
96. "La 'subordinata,'" *Avanti!*, September 2, 1914.
97. S. Panunzio, "Guerra e socialismo," *Avanti!*, September 12, 1914.
98. "Guerra, Rivoluzione e Socialismo. Contro le 'inversioni' del sovversivismo guerrafondaio," *Avanti!*, September 13, 1914.
99. On Mussolini's conversion to interventionism see E. Gentile, *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista (1918–1925)*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 1996), pp. 83–96; De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 221 ff.; Milza, *Mussolini*, pp. 190–195.
100. B. Mussolini, "Dalla neutralità assoluta alla neutralità attiva ed operante," *Avanti!*, 18 ottobre 1914 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, pp. 393–403).
101. "Congedo," *Avanti!*, October 21, 1914 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, p. 416).
102. "Una lettera di Salvemini," *Avanti!*, October 21, 1914 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, p. 416).
103. "La mia fede è immutata," *Avanti!*, October 22, 1914 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, p. 417).
104. "Per una fantasia," *Avanti!*, October 26, 1914.
105. "Mussolini riconferma la sua avversione alla neutralità. Il nuovo giornale sta per uscire," *La Patria-Il Resto del Carlino*, November 11, 1914 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. VII, pp. 430–432).
106. "Chi paga?" *La Giustizia*, November 22, 1914 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. VII, pp. 430–432).
107. "Il tradimento," *Avanti!*, November 22, 1914.
108. "[Chi paga?]" *Avanti!*, November 19, 1914 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. VII, p. 431).
109. Mussolini, "Chiodi e croce," November 20, 1914 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. VII, pp. 18–19).

110. “[Finché mi resta una penna in mano, e un ‘revolver’ in tasca, io non temo alcuno],” *Il Giornale d’Italia*, November 25, 1914 (*Opera Omnia*, vol. VII, pp. 32–33).
111. “La Direzione del Partito ratifica unanime l’espulsione di Benito Mussolini,” *Avanti!*, November 30, 1914.
112. “L’incidente è chiuso,” *Avanti!*, December 1, 1914.
113. See De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 288 fol.
114. See L. Nemeth, “Dolci corrispondenze. La Francia e i finanziamenti a ‘Il Popolo d’Italia’ 1914–1917,” *Italia contemporanea*, n. 212, September 1998, pp. 605–615 (in particular pp. 608–609).
115. Mussolini, “Agli amici,” *Il Popolo d’Italia*, February 10, 1915.
116. B. Mussolini a G. Prezzeroli, March 15, 1915 (in *Mussolini e «La Voce»*, pp. 70–71).
117. See Milza, *Mussolini*, p. 198.
118. See Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. VII, pp. 154–216.
119. “Palancagrega!” *Il Popolo d’Italia*, March 19, 1915 (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. VII, pp. 268–269).
120. “L’on. Palancagrega,” *Il Popolo d’Italia*, March 24, 1915 (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. VII, p. 278).
121. B. Mussolini, “L’on. Palancagrega e... compari,” *Il Popolo d’Italia*, March 28, 1915 (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. VII, pp. 287–289).
122. “La vertenza Mussolini-Merlino risolta con un duello,” *Il Popolo d’Italia*, February 26, 1915 (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. VII, pp. 474–475).
123. A. Giuliani, “Il duello Mussolini-Treves,” *Il Popolo d’Italia*, March 30, 1915 (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. VII, pp. 487–489). See also “Un duello tra l’onorevole Treves e il professor Mussolini,” *Avanti!*, March 30, 1915 (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. VII, pp. 489–490).
124. See S. Gerbi, “L’ultima intervista a Piero Treves. ‘Papà e Mussolini,’” in P. Treves, *Scritti novecenteschi*, edited by A. Cavaglion, S. Gerbi (Bologna: il Mulino, 2006), pp. 181–184.

A Revolution for the Third Italy

Emilio Gentile

Benito Mussolini had still not reached 29 years of age when, almost suddenly, at the Congress of the Italian Socialist Party (Partito Socialista Italiano, [PSI]) held at Reggio Emilia between July 8 and 12, 1912,¹ he was transformed from the secretary of Forlì's Socialist Federation to a figure of national political significance. When Mussolini arrived at the Congress he had already gained some notoriety within his own party. As a supporter of the party's revolutionary wing and in constant disagreement with the reformist national leadership, he had led a revolt by Forlì's Socialists in April 1911.² Furthermore, in Romagna he had been one of the organizers of demonstrations against the war in Libya and for this had spent from October 14, 1911 to March 12, 1912 in jail.³ The originality of his public speaking and his youth compared with that of the older leaders of the party (Filippo Turati, the leader of the reformists, and Constantino Lazzari, the party's new secretary, were both 55 years old) were important factors in his success.⁴

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BIRTH OF A MYTH

Amilcare Cipriani was an old Socialist revolutionary. He was a legendary figure from the time of Garibaldi's exploits between 1859 and 1866; he had taken part in the Commune in 1871, had been convicted in Italy and had lived in exile in Paris for many years. On the day after the congress of Reggio Emilia, speaking about Mussolini in the newspaper, *Humanité*, he declared: "I like this man a lot. His belief in revolution is the same as mine or, should I say, ours. It is what I call classic. This valiant Mussolini lacks only one simple thing—being a Socialist and a syndicalist at the same time."⁵ Another old revolutionary Socialist, Paolo Valera, described him as "a thinker for revolutionary socialism. He has character... He will not deviate. He is like [a statue] of bronze. He is a man of ideas. He is laden with experience."⁶ The Neapolitan trade union newspaper, *La Propaganda*, valued his "personal eloquence" which was "as sharp as a blade and deeply averse to all vulgarity."⁷ The young revolutionary also fascinated the old reformist and Milanese Socialist, Cesare Sarfatti, who wrote to his wife, Margherita, also a militant Socialist and writer, that at Reggio Emilia he had heard, "a marvelous, thin young man [who spoke] in fits and starts, in a clear, fiery and original way; a man with a great future; we shall hear more of him; he will be the future leader of the party."⁸

The national press took note of him for the first time. The *Corriere della Sera* newspaper wrote that "the Congress likes the thin, tough orator who speaks jerkily and with sincerity, and feels that they have in him a representative of their own feelings."⁹ *Il Secolo*, the democrat newspaper in Milan, defined him as, "a real agitator from Romagna, [one] who does not dip into the old arsenal of his political comrades to seek justification for his own revolutionary beliefs. He engages in intensive study to support his extensive education and likewise, in his unremitting work with the laboring masses of Romagna's rich countryside, he adds the enthusiasm of his faith and his indomitable instinct as a rebel."¹⁰ For Florence's *Il Nuovo Giornale* Mussolini's revolutionary way of thinking had "something wild about it. However, it is defended by a man who argues keenly, is disdainful and is full of ideas: a true original thinker who wants to find a new way forward by whatever means possible and secure its imposition by introducing it with style and rendering it more attractive both through the benefit of his intelligence and his rugged way of speaking, a way of speaking that the rugged people of Romagna appreciate."¹¹

However, when in September 1913 Mussolini stood as a candidate at Forlì for the Chamber of Deputies, Rino Alessi, a journalist who had known him since his youth, predicted, when writing in Bologna's democrat newspaper, that he would not be elected and added, "he must be more than persuaded of this truth":

He is not an anti-parliamentarian, but he is a man of character, a haughty man whose mind stands above the ugly political intrigue of every day ... he has no personal ambition ... He was born with his moral habits already in place: at 18 years of age he was, as he is today, a typical example of spiritual intransigence... In his way of working he remains a loner: indeed, the crowds love him but do not understand him. His ideas, his unequivocal speeches and his doctrinaire statements carry with them the vigor of an intellectual freshness that one but rarely encounters in other Socialist writers. This explains the contempt that many felt for him the day when, almost as a complete unknown and from the platform of the Congress of Modena [actually that of Emilia Romagna], he had the opportunity to express his own thoughts, thoughts that were without a trace of anything old or redundant.¹²

At the end of 1913, on announcing the publication of Mussolini's magazine, *Utopia*, Giuseppe Prezzolini introduced him thus in his own magazine, *La Voce*: "This man is a real man who stands out all the more in a world of lesser figures and consciences that are as worn out as elastic bands that have been overused. [Mussolini has] an untainted strength of character that can run the party's newspaper fairly. However, he also has a great need to be himself and to have his own publication."¹³ The anarchist Leda Rafanelli had the same impression. On March 18, having heard his commemoration of the Milan Commune, she wrote: Mussolini "is a Socialist of the age of heroism. He still feels and still believes with a force that is packed with virility and strength. He is a Man.... I am pleased to find at last a true Socialist. He has not undergone the alterations of the majority of his party. Young, he has remained with the young and with those who believe in and hope for the Revolution."¹⁴

So, hardly a year after his appearance on the national stage, a mythical halo began to form around the figure of the young editor of the *Avanti!* newspaper. It was a halo that seemed to consolidate itself further the following year when Mussolini registered a new personal success at the national congress of the PSI held at Ancona in April 1914. Even among the reformists, who had always been fiercely attacked by Mussolini,

and whom he continued to attack after 1912, there were those, like the reformist Giovanni Zibordi who paid tribute to his personality. In his speech at the congress of Ancona, even though he opposed Mussolini, he applauded, “all the work of Mussolini and Avanti! that you rightly celebrate with such enthusiasm, even though one might not agree with every sentence that he writes,” making it clear that, through this distinction, he meant “to elevate the work itself” of Mussolini: “it means that you appreciate in Mussolini something more than tactics and political leanings: you appreciate his mind and his spirit, the sincerity of his belief, the honesty of a man who here, this morning, from this very platform argued with himself to find a higher truth.”¹⁵ Gaetano Salvemini expressed himself in a similar way two months later when, in a comment on the “settimana rossa” (Red Week) he affirmed his faith in “those revolutionary Socialists who, like Benito Mussolini, are serious revolutionaries who say what they think and do what they say and therefore carry with them a large part of Italy’s future destiny.”¹⁶

However, in other comments on Mussolini as a political figure, published on August 15, 1914, Zibordi asked himself whether Mussolini “in some aspects and in some moments during his work—aspects and moments that may be occasional and rare, but nonetheless decisive and of great importance—did not represent the whole [Socialist] Party but rather the group that was dominant in Reggio and Ancona and had nominated and appointed him as Avanti!’s editor.” The question that Zibordi asked himself contained no element of personal rancor: as he repeated, “Benito Mussolini possesses both levels of ability and merit that are recognized by everyone. The problem is a different one: does he represent at least his own political faction?”¹⁷

A PRIMITIVE WITHIN SOCIALISM

On August 11, 1912 Mussolini wrote of himself and his socialism:

I am a primitive. In socialism too. I wander around today’s society of businessmen like an exile. . . . Now that socialism is becoming a business for both individuals and for groups, I do not understand it any more. I live in a different atmosphere. I am a citizen of another epoch. There was a time in which socialism was not practical, it was not industrial, it was not co-operative, there were no banks; there was a time when socialism meant selflessness, faith, sacrifice and heroism. I speak of 30, 40 years ago. Then there were

Socialists who had fallen in love with an ideal; today there are Socialists—a lot of them, even the majority—who have fallen in love with money. Italian Socialism has now become a huge accounting ledger of giving and getting.¹⁸

Taking his lead from a request for compensation made by the ex-secretary of the Socialist Party, an *Avanti!* journalist, Mussolini accused the Socialist Party of having repudiated its original, revolutionary idealism and of becoming “a vast zone of financial speculation.”¹⁹ In Reggio Emilia, Mussolini had pointed toward the new path of intransigence and purity that the Socialist Party had to follow to regain its revolutionary role and to rekindle in the proletariat “faith” the eventual coming of socialism. He wrote in *Avanti!* on July 18:

The Socialist congress of Reggio Emilia must instead be seen as an attempt at the rebirth of idealism. The religious soul of the Party (ecclesia) has again come up against the realistic pragmatism of representatives of the business world who do not have the same interests. It is about the opposing sides of the eternal conflict between idealism and utilitarianism, between faith and necessity. What does the proletariat care about understanding socialism in the same way that one understands a theorem? Can socialism perhaps be reduced to a theorem? We want to believe in it, we must believe in it, humanity needs a credo. It is faith that moves mountains because it gives the illusion that mountains can be moved. Illusion is perhaps life's only reality.²⁰

For Mussolini those principally responsible for the party's decadence were the reformists who for more than a decade had dominated the party's political and trade union policy with their positivist, evolutionist and gradualist agenda. Basing their program on an evolutionist interpretation of socialism, the reformists favored parliamentary action, economic demands and the co-operative movement and ignored the education and preparation of the proletariat for social revolution. This had led to the decline of the party as a revolutionary organization and a loss of militants, to the advantage of big business.²¹ To this end, after his triumph at the congress of Reggio Emilia and the confirmation of his appointment as editor of *Avanti!* at the end of 1912, Mussolini continued his battle against the reformists. However, as he confided on July 20, 1912 to *La Voce's* director, Giuseppe Prezzolini, who had invited him to write an article on the congress of Reggio Emilia, he felt “stateless” even among his comrades of the revolutionary wing:

I find myself in a most curious personal and spiritual position that is holding me back. I feel a little at sea even amongst the revolutionaries. No later than yesterday a contributor to the magazine *Critica Sociale* and founder of the reformist party in Reggio Emilia prophesied my imminent departure from the official ranks. It is true that my religious concept of socialism is very distant from the Philistine revolutionary beliefs of many of my friends; revolutionary beliefs that are barely and not always about electioneering. May be I shall request the kindness of *La Voce* in hosting my efforts at revolutionary revisionism, but not now. I need to think carefully and work on my ideas.²²

Mussolini had developed his “religious” concept of socialism over the previous decade, gaining his political education from the main works of Marx, Engels, Kautsky and Antonio Labriola, whom he described in 1908 as “the most faithful interpreter of Marxist thought, and without doubt the most profound of Italy’s Socialist thinkers,”²³ as well as from other exponents of European socialism. To this framework of his Socialist education—constantly updated through his study of European Marxist literature—the young Socialist added ideas, themes and arguments that came from Italy’s new culture of idealism, from various “life philosophies,” from Nietzsche’s pagan vitalism, from Pareto’s theory of élites and from Sorel’s idea of myth.²⁴

REVOLUTIONARY IDEALISM

For Mussolini socialism was a “movement of ideas that has at its root the conditions prevalent in today’s society and in its opposition represents a higher level of society, a movement of ideas that in its breadth and depth can only be compared to Christianity.”²⁵ This rallying call to the ideas and to the ideal of socialism featured frequently in the political rhetoric of the young revolutionary. As he wrote on April 18, 1908 in commemoration of the famous writer Edmondo de Amicis, he was convinced that “in life there is also an intangible reality, the reality of the ideal.”²⁶ This represented what Mussolini called “the revolutionary idealism” of the party.²⁷

For Mussolini “the ideal” was analogous to Sorel’s myth: the vision of a future Socialist society and faith in its advent brought about through action. Marxism for Mussolini was “a doctrine of will and of conquest: otherwise it would be very difficult to explain the nonsensical contradiction between the alleged doctrinaire fatalism and actual achievements of Marx’s whole life.” Socialism seen in this way was idealistic because it

was not limited to “a simple problem of the creation and distribution of wealth” but was “an entire concept of a civilization that is superior to that of capitalism.” This implied “the necessity of a people’s organization—beyond trades organizations—that keeps alive the spirit of revolt, waves the torch of distant ideals, shows the way and tackles the problems—political, moral, cultural, religious and legal—which transcend the pure and simple question of bread.”²⁸

Mussolini expounded the primacy of the party from the very beginning: “the proletariat’s watchful avant-garde”²⁹ as he had defined it in 1904, that is, a revolutionary organization whose action was above all political and which, through its propaganda and work, was to focus mainly on the building of a revolutionary consciousness in the working masses and which in turn would lead those masses to put an end to bourgeois society. In 1909, Mussolini confessed that his temperament and his convictions “lead me to prefer a small resolute, audacious nucleus [of activists] rather than a mass that may be numerous but is chaotic, amorphous and without value.”³⁰ He had supported the idea of a directing minority group in line with Pareto’s theory of élites, “perhaps the most brilliant sociological theory of modern times,” as he defined it in 1908, and claimed that it was wholly compatible with his revolutionary idea of socialism and human progress:

History is nothing but a succession of dominant élites. Just as the bourgeoisie has taken the place of the clergy and nobility in its possession of wealth and political supremacy, so the bourgeoisie will be replaced by the proletariat, the new élite that is taking shape today in its trade unions, its associations, and its local labor groups, the nuclei of the future economy based on communist principles. While the bourgeois revolution has kept the different classes in existence, the proletarian revolution will do away with them.³¹

The young revolutionary also borrowed some ideas to support his concept of revolutionary socialism from the philosophy of Nietzsche whom he called the “the cleverest mind of the last quarter of last century.” Mussolini wrote at the end of 1908 that the proletariat’s avant-garde was the manifestation of a “desire for power which is expressed in the creation of new values which may be moral, artistic or social” and seeks “the greater expansion of a life ... lived using all one’s energies and under constant tension, reaching towards something higher, something finer, something more enticing.”³² Mussolini considered that the contribution made by revolutionary syndicalism was also

of value in the “formation of a kind of man who is new both economically and socially,” as he wrote on May 27, 1909.³³ It was for this reason that Mussolini gave “importance to the theoretical-doctrinaire element in the life of socialism.” On May 30, 1908 he declared:

It is education and its maximum diffusion that must make the new mind ready. It is education that will provide the human element that is able to rise above brutish, every day life and is able to understand the beauty of an idea and occupy itself with the big problems of existence. The influence of Socialist literature will be even greater when workers turn to books as to trusted friends, try to improve their own intelligence and are able to free themselves from the slavery of the spirit. It is with this deliberate and conscious effort that the working class will signal a new and shining epoch in the history of humanity.³⁴

A HERETIC OF ORTHODOXY

Mussolini’s mix of Marxism and of idealism, of Pareto and of Nietzsche, represented something original in the ideological tradition of Italian socialism. Mussolini claimed the right to be heretical as he saw it as a quest to give new vitality to Marxism, basing it upon current events and the new requirements of new situations.

Having reached the leadership of the party and after a decade of expounding a consistent policy of revolution, Mussolini believed that it was the right moment to “bring up to date” the concept of socialism and the party’s policies through a theoretical and practical revision based upon the concept of revolutionary idealism that he himself had developed over the previous ten years. However, at the end of 1913—owing to his position as a member of the revolutionary leadership that had taken control of the party and, above all, due to his role as *Avanti!*’s editor—Mussolini did not feel sufficiently free to engage in this work of theoretical revision. This explains why he founded the magazine *Utopia*, which defined itself in its subtitle as “The fortnightly journal of Italian Revolutionary Socialism.” He wrote to Prezzolini on March 25, 1914, “I did not found it so much for myself as to discover amongst today’s young people—both Socialists and non-Socialists—minds that have been overlooked and are able to rejuvenate theory with a new interpretation, be it orthodox or heterodox.”³⁵

In its first edition on November 22, 1913, Mussolini outlined the aims of the new review. He stressed above all that the magazine had been founded “in neither hidden nor open opposition to the Socialist Party,

nor in opposition to the men of one wing or another, nor to [the Party's] current aims; rather it has come to life 'for' the Party and as such claims full right of citizenship within the Party... Nothing schismatic, therefore; rather, orthodoxy, pure orthodoxy which is honestly, as far as current times allow, sectarian." Mussolini exalted the value of Marxism as "the most organized system of Socialist doctrine," where "everything is up for discussion and nothing is ruled out. Nothing, we say; neither the theory of increasing poverty, nor that of the concentration of capital, nor the apocalyptic forewarning of catastrophe. All this has not only historical value, but a current value." By "current" Mussolini meant above all the prediction of catastrophe that is the idea of social revolution as the inevitable final battle in the class struggle fought by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. Therefore, what was "urgent" was a "reworking of socialism from a revolutionary point of view" that "is helped currently by a range of factors amongst which two, in our opinion, stand out: the failure of political reformism and the problems of positivist philosophical thought." By being both positivist and evolutionist Italian reformism "excluded the power of will and violence from the world and renounced Revolution" by visualizing gradual, peaceful change without upheaval and sudden leaps from the bourgeois state to a state without classes; it imagined that the building of the new Socialist society would come about through parliamentary democracy. However, the results delivered by this "law-abiding and reformist policy which dominates the Socialist parties of Europe and has done here for twenty years" were, in Mussolini's eyes, for the most part negative. Reformists had believed in "a dilution of the state and of capitalism to create a democracy, a bridge on the way to socialism. However, the state is and remains, by its standard Marxist definition, a business organization run by the bourgeoisie that has, in its own interests, left company niceties to the ingenuous, and in all countries follows a hard, violent and 'classist' policy. The classes, rather than 'mixing together,' become ever more 'differentiated' from each other. In this stands the proof of the complete bankruptcy of reformism."³⁶

THE REVOLUTION IS NOT A COUP

In response to Mussolini's attack upon them, the reformists in turn accused him of romanticism, irrationality, political militancy, anarchism, adventurism, individualism and superman attitudes to the point where they maintained that his idea of socialism had nothing to do with socialism. The

reformists' dislike of Mussolini was heightened further after his renewed personal success at the national Socialist congress held at Ancona between April 26 and 29, 1914, and at which the revolutionary wing took over the leadership of the party; this dislike was exacerbated still more and, in particular, after his celebration of the insurrections of the Red Week in June 1914.³⁷ On this occasion Claudio Treves maintained that Mussolini's desire for revolution was "the revival of an anarchic verbalism, the mocking of any call to responsibility and the illusory and puerile belief that the world could be controlled by...Ideas."³⁸ Treves likened the concept of revolution put forward by Mussolini to a tragedy "in which the crowd plays its usual and eternal 'role' of chorus and, as a chorus, is led to the slaughter. Militants, on the other hand have a different role, both brilliant and dramatic, that of protagonists, of path finders who, through intuition," believe that the soul and the will of the organized masses is embodied in and manifests itself "in the conscience of the hero, of the saint, of the duce."³⁹

In the face of these accusations Mussolini replied by accusing the reformists of promoting a caricature of his ideas: "I have the reputation of being impulsive and fanatical... No, no. I am merely a cold calculator," he said in Milan on June 17, 1913 during a meeting in support of the general strike.⁴⁰ In an earlier speech given on April 22 to the Milanese Socialist Section, Mussolini said that it was time "to put an end to labeling as anarchists all those who do not think like Turati. Maybe the desire for revolution is mistaken, but it does not mean that reformism is the whole truth and nothing but the truth":

By revolution none of us mean a simple brawl with the police or a bit of crime. For us it is a big thing, a colossal move that can and will take place perhaps sooner than one might think. The war seemed far away and it happened. Revolution is in the past but also in the future. Reformism has not managed to do away with the possibility of revolution as we understand it.⁴¹

A similar clarification was not an expedient required by the circumstances. In effect, ever since his political debut Mussolini had maintained that revolution required that the proletariat undergo long preparation, as the existing order could not be changed overnight through violence: "The order of things as they stand today will not be changed by a surprise attack, as certain utopian thinkers might wish. The rest of us would like this too, were we not humanly sure of this being merely in our dreams"

he had written on August 9, 1902 in one of his first articles. The young revolutionary advised workers not “embark on campaigns which, when they lead to defeat, dishearten not only those who have had to surrender, but likewise those others who were awaiting the outcome of the battle,” rather he warned them not to give in “to impulsive ideas, especially those which come from a mistaken notion of how conflict between today’s armed classes ought to take place,” and he urged them to “form groups that were strong both numerically and in belief” because “victory smiles only upon the well-prepared.”⁴² To whoever accused him of being an instigator of continuous violence, Mussolini replied in 1908 that his writings did not allow “anyone who can read to believe that I am a wild prophet of revolutions, bloodshed and slaughter.”⁴³

THE REVOLUTION TO COME

Twelve years of militancy and political experience did not alter Mussolini’s idea of revolution as the final act of class struggle, an act that would take place only after a lengthy organizational, institutional and moral preparation. On February 8, 1914 Mussolini declared while speaking in Florence on the historical value of socialism: “To say today that the revolution is nigh is absurd: however, to say that the revolution is far away is likewise absurd, as history is full of the unexpected.” In any case, he reiterated that the revolution would not take place through surprise attacks as the revolutionaries of 1848 had believed: “no one believes any more in sudden attacks ... in Europe no one thinks any more about sudden attacks.” The task of Socialists was to build up “new forces within society and to demolish while building” because “socialism will not come like a thief in the night, to use Owen’s phrase, but rather will be the result of our conscious efforts.” Mussolini maintained that to prepare for the Socialist revolution it was necessary “to create within the heart of the proletariat a minority that is sufficiently numerous, sufficiently aware and sufficiently daring that at the right moment it will be able to substitute itself for the bourgeois minority” and, since the bourgeoisie would not give in straight away, a period of violence would be required. However, Mussolini stressed that, “Our violence will not be like that of the Jacobins. We shall not create revolutionary committees. We shall not imitate 1793.” He added that if “one can foresee a period of history that is eventful, it is on the other hand entirely possible to foresee that the revolutionary act itself will be extremely short, otherwise it will not succeed.”⁴⁴

Therefore, although Mussolini maintained that the Socialist Party could not withdraw its support from workers involved in a general strike, even when he did not approve of it, and he criticized those trade union revolutionaries who promoted general strikes so regularly. On June 8, 1913, during a general strike of metal workers in Milan, Mussolini wrote in *Avanti!*: “We believe in general strikes. However, it is exactly for this reason that we complain and object every time one is called at the drop of a hat as it condemns the strike to failure and ridicule. In Italy revolutionary syndicalists are always talking about calling general strikes for any reason. It seems to be a sport.”⁴⁵ However, for Mussolini the sheer number of strikes called after the war in Libya was an indication that, “Italy has entered a revolutionary situation.” As he wrote in *Avanti!* on July 1, 1913: “The Socialist Party must either act bravely in the face of this worrying historic situation or commit political suicide.”⁴⁶ A year later, on July 6, 1914, in reply to criticism that he had an anarchic view of socialism, Mussolini denied that he was “a partisan in favor of systematic revolt.”⁴⁷ Indeed, nine days later, when commenting on Red Week, Mussolini stated that this still was not the “historic moment” that he foresaw, but nonetheless defined it as an event that had a “decidedly revolutionary character” without precedent in Italian history:

No one among the Socialists thinks that great civil and social changes are due to the “outbursts” of disorganized crowds. I reject surprise attacks, ‘I am not going to theorize on outbursts’... In the meantime, one thing is clear: in Italy there exists a revolutionary state of mind. June’s revolts have proved it. Society’s scaffolding is creaking in a frightening way... The danger is that revolution takes us by surprise, that it is “precipitated” by the weight of events rather than by human design. But revolution there will be... Might it not be the social revolution? What does it matter! Karl Marx said that every political revolution is a social revolution. Today this Marxist maxim is even truer, given the very close links between the economy and politics. Italy needs a revolution and it will get it.⁴⁸

FOR A GREAT THIRD ITALY

The absolute insistence on the need for revolution in Italy reflected not only Mussolini’s belief in social revolution but also revealed his vision of a Third Italy, an expression that he had often used to describe a united Italy, its origins and its history. A Third Italy which was both monarchical

and liberal seemed to Mussolini a wretched country, governed by an inept and corrupt ruling class that controlled with unscrupulous self-interest, a population mainly composed of a poor, exploited proletariat subject to slaughter when it dared to rebel and protest against injustice. On July 11, 1908 Mussolini declared, "We are ashamed to be Italian citizens [and this] not because of the memory of a glorious past that has made us a great people, immortal in history, and not because of magnificent nature which smiles upon this sweet land of ours. [We are ashamed] because of the criminality that is in charge in Italy, the gang of thieves that infest it and the dreadful things that are carried out in its [Italy's] name!"⁴⁹

The young Mussolini had an altogether positive view of the democratic and republican Risorgimento, a view he had probably gained from the interpretation of Italian history made by the intellectual from his home region of Romagna, Alfredo Oriani.⁵⁰ Mussolini declared himself a federalist and a supporter of local government; he admired Garibaldi, Mazzini and the revolutionary patriots. At the end of 1913 in supporting the candidacy of Amilcare Cipriani for the Chamber of Deputies Mussolini recalled "the life of sacrifices, heroic actions and selflessness" of the man "who had given his arm and his heart to Italy when it came to unifying the country and to fighting, rather than just chattering in clubs that were more or less working class."⁵¹ On the other hand, Mussolini despised the Savoy monarchy and the successive governments of the Kingdom of Italy. On April 30, 1903, he wrote that the House of Savoy had at the beginning widened the borders of its rule through "assassination and fraud" and had then extended it to include all Italy through its "wise policy of stupidity." Thus, "The Third Italy, which should have been republican, became a monarchy": "From [18]70 to the present day the history of the monarchy has been one long history of shame."⁵²

Mussolini's disdain for monarchical Italy was not lessened after the arrival of Giovanni Giolitti's government, hailed by reformists as liberal and sensitive to the needs of the proletariat. For Mussolini, Giolitti embodied the monarchical Third Italy: "There is nothing great about him," he proclaimed on October 12, 1909. The young revolutionary blamed Giolitti for having seduced and weakened the Socialist Party without understanding the development of a new Italy which was both productive and culturally renewed: "While Italy is renewing itself and accelerating the pace of its economic and spiritual development, a minister like Giolitti is an anachronism, a disgrace. Perhaps a timely gust of wind will blow away Giolitti, Giolittismo and the spineless Socialist-like ideology that has sullied the

pure socialism of the International.”⁵³ Giolitti was “the ideal minister” for “a country where nothing serious is done and the government lives from one day to the next”; where there was “a real, deep and insurmountable abyss that separates those who represent and those who are represented, those in Parliament and the nation,” those corrupt members of government and the country “which is working and evolving ... and is trying via the political underworld of the ruling classes to improve itself and to make the atmosphere more pure. The new nation, free, conscious of the destiny of a people which looks back to the events of its history, and the proletariat which through struggle and pain laboriously raises the standard of its spiritual and physical life: these cannot feel themselves represented by that gathering of old fogies and their moldy ideas that make up the world of Montecitorio.”⁵⁴

Mussolini stressed the juxtaposition of “two Italies” within the same bourgeois society. On January 15, 1910 he compared on the one hand “the estate owning, slothful, politically narrow minded bourgeoisie that sees in the monarchy its ideal institutional body and [on the other] the new Italy that is moving forward, toils and feels keenly the need for a national life which is more honest and free.”⁵⁵ The Socialist revolutionary did not hide his admiration for “a new bourgeoisie which is now taking shape,” as he described it on December 27, 1908, “a modern bourgeoisie that is fully developed, eager for trade, full of initiative, enthusiastic for anything that is new in the world of technology, a bourgeoisie that will have no scruples in snapping off the structure of monarchic rule if it finds it an obstacle to the expansion of its own efforts to renew. This bourgeoisie yells at those who control so badly the helm of our national boat: ‘Wake up and, above all, modernize.’” From this new, enterprising bourgeoisie, the young revolutionary wrote, arose “a cry of battle and hope: let’s get Italy’s future ready.”⁵⁶

So, in contrast to his negative vision of an Italy that was both monarchical and liberal, Mussolini put forward his ideal of a new Italy which “is preparing to fulfill by itself a new epoch in the story of humanity,” as he wrote on July 3, 1909 in an article on the poet August von Platen whom he described as “a great friend of Italy,” on a level with the great foreigners of every European nation. He declared, “From Byron to Goethe, from de Musset to Lamartine, from Klopstock to Schiller, from Shelley to Wagner, from Nietzsche to Ibsen...the common homeland of genius was and is Italy.”⁵⁷

Written during his stay in Trento, the article on von Platen was a rhetorical anthem for Italy which “having been for the barbarian hordes the coveted destination of conquest for so many centuries” had become “the destination of reverent pilgrimage for all the great geniuses of the North” just as “the creators of the other nations of Europe have turned towards ‘Mother Mediterranean,’ drawn by an irresistible feeling of homesickness.” Mussolini followed up this anthem to the Italy of history by a panegyric on the Italy of new producers:

Contemporary Italy is losing the characteristics of a cemetery. Where once lovers dreamed and nightingales sang, today there sound workshop sirens. The Italian speeds up the pace into the stadium where the Nations run the Marathon for world supremacy. The heroes of old have made way for producers. One having fought, the other works. The plough enriches the land and the pickaxe clears away the old cities.

Italy is preparing to fulfill by itself a new epoch in the story of humanity.

The words with which Mussolini eulogized Italy of the past and present were certainly unusual for a Socialist, as were those of hope for the coming of a great Third Italy written on April 3, 1909 in an article in which Mussolini presented to readers from the Trentino in Prezzolini’s review, *La Voce*. He stated that, “anyone who wishes to know the newest and most profound spiritual attitudes in modern Italian culture and anyone who wants, within the limits of their own abilities, to take part in the renewal of the Italian soul and make ready the Third Italy, must read *La Voce*.”⁵⁸ At the same time, Mussolini agreed with *La Voce*’s campaign for cultural renewal:

Education is not enough to form a culture. A plan, even a huge one, is not enough to create a party. A glorious past is insufficient to justify a present that contains any base or vulgar behavior. The political unity of a nation is not enough to assign to it a mission in world history if there is no psychological unity that binds together its wishes and directs its efforts. Italian intellectual life lacks courage. *La Voce* will try to instill this; it will help to resolve “the terrible problem” that stands before the soul of the nation: “either to have the courage to build the Third Great Italy, not the Italy of popes or emperors, but the Italy of thinkers, the Italy which so far has not existed, or to leave behind it a wake of mediocrity that will vanish with a gust of wind.” This is *La Voce*’s plan.

During the same period Mussolini wrote to Prezzolini that an “Italy transformed into a Switzerland of larger proportions does not seem to me the ideal of a youthful spirit that wants to conquer the future.”⁵⁹

AGAINST THE NATION AS AN IDOL

In the mind of Mussolini, the internationalist Socialist, there was a real fervor for the myth of Italianism, a myth shared by many young people of his generation.⁶⁰ Some followers of *La Voce* labeled their movement as “nationalist” as it placed at the center of its program the Italian nation without cultivating dreams of grandeur or imperialist ambitions. It was to this that Mussolini probably referred in the review on December 10, 1910. When commenting on the constitution of the *Associazione Nazionalista Italiana* (Italian Nationalist Association), which proposed a program of imperialist expansion and the authoritarian reform of the state to reaffirm the dominant role of the bourgeoisie against socialism, he wrote:

We would have understood and perhaps viewed with sympathy an internal nationalism, a democratic and cultural movement for the improvement, attention and renewal of the Italian people. We should have wished that these nationalists who dream of taking Italian arms across Europe did not abandon themselves in such a feminine way to the nationalist lyricism imported from beyond the Alps. They should think that, before conquering Trento and Trieste or Tripolitania, there is Italy to conquer, there is fresh water to be taken to Puglia, there is the drainage of the Agro Romano, justice to be given to the South and illiteracy everywhere! If they had thought about this, if they had directed their energies towards this, these scholars of dubious repute would have retracted their words.⁶¹

Although he gazed with longing upon a “Great Third Italy,” Mussolini detested the nationalist movement that had been developing in Italy since the beginning of the century. On April 8, 1909, he railed against the nationalists defining them “*morbus sacer* (a moral illness) ... your nationalist tripe, your patriotism, lame and wheezing just like your eloquence, your ideological parades that conceal social climbing and money making.”⁶² Italian nationalism is an “exotic flower that has bloomed in Italian greenhouses. Brought into the sunshine and exposed to the winds it will lose its leaves and its perfume.” The various nationalisms that were asserting themselves in Europe were merely “the bourgeoisie’s efforts and

distractions to hold back by a year, by a day, the great event that will signal the end of humanity's prehistory." He exclaimed: "The world is heading towards the Socialist International, towards the Federation of countries that are no longer enemies but sisters."⁶³

The Socialist Mussolini considered the homeland an anachronistic ideal in modern society, a society that tended to overcome the idea of nations in a world that was increasingly cosmopolitan and interdependent. In a speech given in Trento on June 25, 1909 on the question "Does the proletariat have an interest in the preservation of today's nations?" Mussolini admitted that, "the question of the homeland is today one of the most serious and agonizing problems that present themselves to the Socialist conscience. But here too we must pluck up courage and come to drastic contradictory conclusions that allow no misunderstandings."⁶⁴

After recognizing that the homeland is "the highest collective body to which adhere ethnic groups of citizens" and that the "love of one's homeland, when considered as a feeling, is beyond discussion," Mussolini deliberated "upon the concept of the homeland strictly from a Socialist point of view," starting from the premise that the bourgeoisie itself did not have a homeland because, "in the field of business capitalist activity has broken down borders and imposed its method of production everywhere—in the field of culture it has already and for a long time achieved internationalism of thought." Political frontiers existed only "because a caste of parasites needs to move about its weapons of destruction. The first to abolish the homeland was the bourgeoisie. Patriotism is a fetish. The bourgeoisie has offered up to the adoration of the crowd a first fetish: parliamentarianism. Now that this heavenly vision is on the wane, here is another fetish: patriotism. But this is in vane now because the proletariat is antipatriotic by definition and by necessity." If war were to come, concluded Mussolini, Socialists "have but one duty: war on the borders must be a signal for a general strike, an uprising and civil war in the country. All the worse for bourgeois institutions. Socialists must not worry in the least [...] To overcome it is necessary to reject. The nation rejected rule by lords, lords rejected the city state, the city state fiefdoms, fiefdoms and the church the empire; humanity rejects the nation, pushing it to the very edges of the world."⁶⁵

In the years that followed Mussolini hardened his antipatriotic stance. At the Socialist congress in Milan on October 21, 1910 he said, "the business about the homeland, this old cliché that the country is in danger, is the ideological cliché of all the bourgeois democracies, and with

this cliché they have been pumping the blood [of others] away around here for the last 30 years, to the detriment of the proletariat.”⁶⁶ Then on October 7, 1911 when the war in Libya had already begun and against which he fomented agitation and ran an intense newspaper campaign, Mussolini condemned the nationalistic propaganda that was firing up public opinion with pro-war enthusiasm. “Self-esteem, national pride, a sense of homeland are all commonplaces, rhetorical devices for intoxicating the public, but if we do not tear away this rosy veil of ideology, we shall find that it means defending economic interests with the brutal use of armed force.”⁶⁷

Further elaborating on this argument, Mussolini wrote on August 31, 1912 that, besides the financial interests that it hid, the bellicose propaganda was a ridiculous rhetorical exhibition made by “the poets, short story writers, dandies, pimps and card sharps” of a kind of nationalism that had “arisen in Italy as a caricature of French nationalism. Its home is the farce or, rather, of the brief sketch.”⁶⁸ At the same time, Mussolini condemned the revolutionary syndicalists and subversives who backed the colonial adventure and justified the war along with nationalist scholars who sang the praises of the conflict, “the lovely war, the sacred war, the good war.”⁶⁹ Italy, he wrote on August 18, 1912 “has now become a large fairground ride for distorted minds of all faiths, ideas and parties. Not a day passes without someone abandoning the ranks of protest to join those of conservatism... I am ashamed to live in this country of acrobats, wimps and jugglers of every political persuasion and people that put up with them with an idiotically evangelical sense of submission.”⁷⁰

Some right-wing reformists favored the war in Libya and in June 1912 waged war on Mussolini, calling his antipatriotic socialism an “aberration.” To this the young revolutionary replied:

The fatherland is a fiction, a hoax, a pre-arranged lie. We are not Italians. We feel, at least, European. The Humanists with their *Ubi bene, ibi patria* (wherever one feels good, there is one’s homeland), as well as the stoics proclaimed “Man the citizen of the Universe” and “Christ the antipatriot par excellence.” There are no patriotic frontiers for science, art, the economy, fashion and sport, so why should there be for socialism? A country identifies itself with its militarism. They are inseparable. Whoever says homeland says militarism. We are overtaking the concept of homeland with another concept: that of class. And we are straightforward Socialists. When Marx launched his cry: “Workers of the world, unite!” he destroyed the old ideology of patriotism.⁷¹

In the face of pro-war enthusiasm produced by propaganda, Mussolini repeated the necessity of intensifying the antiwar campaign to “create an anti-war mentality” and demonstrate with examples from history that “wars are a disaster for nations.”⁷²

DOWN WITH THE WAR!

After the war in Libya came two wars in the Balkans, in 1912 and 1913, while everywhere in Europe, according to Mussolini, bourgeois society was strengthening itself by turning to militarism. “Militarism” he declared in 1913, “is on the rise, and with it are on the rise all the anti-societal, anti-humanitarian and, above all, anti-Socialist ideologies. We are returning to the rule of the sword ... Militarism is the nightmare of modern Europe. Disarmament or international war? This is the tragic dilemma of a tomorrow that is nearer than you think.”⁷³

On January 1, 1914, Mussolini repeated that there was in course “the great resurgence of militarism... After a brief pause the states of Europe have restarted their arms race... One is already talking of a new war.” He maintained:

In the face of this all-powerful and menacing militarism the only force of opposition is socialism. In all the countries of Europe Socialists are trying to bar the way to militarism, but the forces at their disposal are not enough for this huge task. Militarism has become the typical, fundamental and necessary expression of bourgeois society. Capitalism and militarism are two parts of the same phenomenon; they depend on each other. One is unthinkable without the other. As soon as capitalism completed its primitive phase of formation it spawned militarism. To strike at this is to strike at capitalism. 1914 will see a sharpening of this conflict between militarism and socialism. With 1914 we are nearing the achievement of our ideals by another year. Something will be mixed in with the straw, as Heinrich Heine said, something ripe in the earth of society, something is beginning. The fourth estate that was nothing yesterday will be everything tomorrow. *Ça ira* (it will happen).⁷⁴

Foreseeing realistically the possibility of a European war, Mussolini considered the antimilitarist struggle a decisive factor in the affirmation of revolutionary socialism. Through his calls for action in the struggle against militarism, such as that which led to the explosion of Red Week at the beginning of June, Mussolini resolved to prepare the proletariat for revolution.

When the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo occurred on June 28, 1914, Mussolini saw it as “an explosion of national hatred” against an Austria which was “hateful and hated.” Austria was “the ugly force that crushes the yearnings and aspirations of a people towards its own betterment, while exploiting its energy and strength.”⁷⁵ Two weeks later, on July 13, when the echo of the Sarajevo assassination seemed to be growing weaker, Mussolini considered the possibility of a new war in the Balkans a “European danger” and concluded: “A new war in the Balkans could mean a European war.”⁷⁶ When news of the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum arrived, Mussolini predicted on July 25 that the government of Serbia would not accept the demands made by Austria because “Serbia is counting on Russia’s support.” However, he hoped for a “conciliatory solution” renouncing any “formulation of catastrophic hypotheses.”⁷⁷ The next day, on learning that the Austrian government had found Serbia’s response “inadequate,” Mussolini understood immediately that “diplomacy has nothing more to say or do: now armies enter the scene. It’s war!”, and the responsibility for it fell “for the most part on Austria-Hungary.” Foreseeing the transformation of an Austro-Serbian war into a European conflict, with the intervention of Russia, Germany, France and probably England, Mussolini asked this question about Italy:

In the terrible case of a European conflagration, what is its role? To be next to Austria against France?

Even in the case of a European conflict Italy has only one path to take if it does not want to bring about its own destruction: absolute neutrality.

Either the Government recognizes this necessity or the proletariat will impose it with all the means at its disposal.

Then let a single cry rise up from the political clubs, from the union organizations, from the local councils and provincial bodies where our Party has representatives, let it rise up from the countless multitudes of the proletariat, and may it be repeated in all the squares and streets of Italy: “Down with the War!”⁷⁸

BETWEEN THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE AND THE TRIPLE ENTENTE

On July 29, after Austria’s declaration of war on Serbia, Mussolini predicted “a European war that would outdo both in extent and significance those of the Napoleonic era” and bring “catastrophe to that very European

civilization.”⁷⁹ Therefore, Mussolini greeted favorably Italy’s neutrality decided upon by the Italian government: “So it is neutrality, today and tomorrow. The attitude of the Government is providing—through a strange ironical twist of fate—the proletariat with its rallying cry.”⁸⁰

Mussolini had a clear idea of who was responsible for the war: “It is upon Germany that the responsibility for the war falls,” because it violated Belgium’s neutrality with its “unprecedented and criminal behavior,” wrote Mussolini on August 5.⁸¹ Four days later he repeated: “The truth is that Germany wanted the war and had found in the Sarajevo assassination an excuse for starting it.”⁸² Consequently Mussolini believed that Italy should not intervene in any way alongside the Empires of Central Europe. He observed on August 4: “We must not hide from ourselves [the fact] that the neutrality of Italy means the end of the Triple Alliance” and that, therefore, Italian neutrality “results at this point in a significant advantage for the Triple Entente.”⁸³ On August 6, Mussolini again stressed that Italy should maintain its policy of neutrality until the end of the war and should never abandon that neutrality to help the Central Empires as, in this case, “the duty of the Italian proletariat, and let’s say it loud from now on, is but one: rebel!”⁸⁴

Between August and October, as war spread in Europe, Mussolini, as *Avanti!*’s editor, was the spokesperson of the Socialist Party which had rediscovered its unity in unanimity for absolute neutrality. In an argument with Gaetano Salvemini’s *L’Unità* Mussolini wrote on August 13 that neutrality “can only be ‘absolute.’ It can be unarmed or armed but a neutrality which is ‘partial or relative’ is no longer neutrality and could truly become a huge deception and a huge danger.” *Avanti!*’s editor rejected the possibility, put forward by Salvemini’s newspaper, of intervention against the Austro-Germanic bloc as, given Italy’s lack of military preparation and the enormous cost of war, it would be “the greatest of follies,” all the more so as “bourgeois public opinion itself is, in a thousand ways, showing itself hostile to any war.” Furthermore, he concluded, “a victorious war against Austria means the strengthening of the monarchy and of pro-military groups within the country; a disastrous war could bring the most unpredictable and catastrophic consequences, including those to our territory.”⁸⁵

Neither did Mussolini accept Italian intervention alongside the Triple Entente because, as he wrote on August 23, he could see neither its point nor its “modest moral, political and also territorial” objectives. He saw no justification in Italian intervention “to offer help to the western

democracies or to conquer land subject to irredentism [the desire to annex the Italian-speaking areas of Austria].” He maintained that the Triple Entente “has absolutely no need for Italian help” but added, however, “our neutrality, perhaps, more than direct intervention, has and is helping the Triple Entente,” while such intervention “could facilitate victory for the Triple Entente, but not guarantee it.”⁸⁶

As far as waging war on the Central Empires to gain Trento and Trieste was concerned, Mussolini noted that, “one would have to find a good reason to declare war on countries with which Italy was allied for over 30 years until yesterday,” as “the Italian conscience would find the use of [Austrian Chief of the General Staff] Conrad’s political methods, that is, a stab in the back, repulsive.” Moreover Mussolini questioned the lumping together of Trento and Trieste as the two Italian cities found themselves in “completely different positions”: a victorious war was necessary to conquer Trento, while Mussolini doubted that Trieste, even if it were conquered, would stay “Italian for a long time, crushed as it is by the wave of Slavs that a Russian and Serbian victory would make even more overwhelming than it already is.” Mussolini excluded an offensive against Austria for the Trentino as it was “difficult, if not impossible.” In the case of Trieste Mussolini hoped for “the internationalization of the city,” a solution which did not require Italy to enter an armed conflict. In conclusion, Mussolini believed that “all the arguments that are in favor of Italy’s intervention are so weak that it is not worth restating them.”⁸⁷

Finally, on August 26, *Avanti!*’s editor labeled as “dishonorable” any territorial gain that might be made by the exchange of land with either one or other of the other warring sides: “Italy cannot abandon neutrality. It cannot ‘sell itself’ to the highest bidder” while “any intervention—even if it is the only possible one, against Austria—would be seen in an ominous and cowardly light.”⁸⁸

Mussolini made no public display of any sympathy for any of the various interventionist movements. He ridiculed the “Saint Vitus’s dance of the nationalists” who wanted war at any cost, at first alongside the Central Empires and then against them; they were ready to “fight for the sake of fighting” and “head towards defeat with their eyes closed, like madmen or drunks” in order to establish Italy as a great power.⁸⁹ He made fun of the republicans who “are using all their trumpets to blow warlike fanfares and are shouting at the tops of their voices that a war against Austria is necessary to annex Trento and Trieste to Italy.”⁹⁰ Mussolini declared that the “reasons for war put forward at the moment [be they] on the theme

of irredentism, the salvation of democracy, the maintenance of ‘balances’ which are more or less well known or more or less precarious, et cetera, et cetera, leave us indifferent.”⁹¹ On 25 September, after a referendum among militants had approved the leadership’s manifesto which had been drawn up by Mussolini, *Avanti!*’s editor called upon all Socialists to mobilize themselves for neutrality “in the face of a campaign of warmongering which is being pushed along by a few renegade subversives and by groups supporting radical and reformist democracy.”⁹²

THE PANG OF DOUBT

At the end of August, Mussolini’s neutralism, reiterated in all his articles as editor of *Avanti!*’s and in the official pronouncements of the party’s leadership, began to waver privately as doubt crept in.

Probably the first crack in Mussolini’s neutralist convictions was caused by the support given to the war by the Socialist parties of all the belligerent nations, which produced the failure of the Second Socialist International. On August 14 Mussolini noted: “The Socialist International is dead... But was it ever alive? It was an aspiration, not a reality.” Its failure was due not to the fact “that the Socialists have agreed for the moment to become confused with the nation either through love or because they were forced to, but rather it is [due to] the inability demonstrated by Socialists of all nations to agree on identifying the causes that have led to the conflict” and upon which “their theoretical judgement and their mental position had to be identical.”⁹³

This led *Avanti!*’s editor to state on August 18 that in socialism’s reaction to the war it was necessary to differentiate between a “mental position” of intransigent opposition in line with its doctrinal premises, and a “historical position” which was “the result of the complex effect of different factors and circumstances,” including the fact that man “is not, or is not solely, a rational animal, but is also a sentient being: sometimes reason is overwhelmed by sentiment and logic is unable to resist the cruelty of passion.” Mussolini reaffirmed his intention “to remain to the end on the ‘logical’ ground of socialism” and declared that he was indifferent to the arguments of the democrats and the irredentists.⁹⁴

This indifference did not stop some democratic interventionists and irredentists from weakening Mussolini’s absolute neutrality. More effective was the doubt planted among his neutralist convictions by the about-turn in favor of war against the Central Empires made by important exponents of

revolutionary syndicalism, such as Filippo Corridoni, Alceste de Ambris and Sergio Panunzio, that made by subversive anarchist militants like Libero Tancredi (the pseudonym of Massimo Rocca), that of a large number of contributors to *La Voce*, such as Prezzolini and Giuseppe Lombardo Radice, and that of the Socialist irredentist Cesare Battisti, who had been his friend and political companion during his time in Trento.⁹⁵ At the beginning of October, Lombardo Radice, Tancredi and Battisti revealed that Mussolini had told them that he believed war against Austria was inevitable, that in this case the Socialists would not try to stop mobilization with strikes and that he himself would take part in the war enthusiastically.⁹⁶ Although he argued over these revelations he could not deny them. On October 8, he admitted in *Avanti!*: “I am not ashamed to confess that over the last two tragic months my mind has undergone swings, doubts and worries. And who amongst intelligent men both in and outside Italy has not endured more or less earnestly the intense suffering of this inner crisis?”⁹⁷

In fact Mussolini had for some time allowed elements of his inner suffering, of his doubts about the validity of absolute neutrality and about the ability of the Socialists to stop intervention, to seep into his categorical declarations of intransigent opposition to intervention. On August 3 in *Avanti!* he declared that in the event of “a ‘punitive expedition’ [launched by] Austria through the Veneto then...it is probable that many of those who are today accused of ...being antipatriotic would know how to fulfill their duty.”⁹⁸ The following day he repeated that in the event of “Italy being forced to abandon neutrality as a result of Austrian aggression we have already expressed yesterday our thoughts and our intentions.”⁹⁹ On August 23, while restating Socialist opposition to the war, an opposition which enjoyed “the enthusiastic approval of the working masses,” he expressed doubt on the possibility of Italy remaining neutral but stated that it was certain that “Italy will no longer take the side of the Central Empires.”¹⁰⁰ On September 1, Mussolini repeated that the Socialists were continuing their propaganda campaign for neutrality “accepting that there is but one case for war: when it is necessary to counter a possible invasion.”¹⁰¹ Then on September 9 at a meeting of the Milanese Socialist Section he defined as absurd the idea of calling a general strike in the case of mobilization to fight a defensive war because it would not in any case have avoided a war:

Either a general strike will not work and the State, which cannot compromise in time of war, will suppress it with blood; or the strike will be successful and the people will seize power. But is this the way to avoid war? To

open the borders and, in a Tolstoian way, allow the enemy to invade? And if instead it [the State] goes to war, isn't it worth it instead to stage an anti-militarist revolution? One must in addition consider the passionate elements that, in grave moments of our history, have great value.¹⁰²

With regard to the hypothesis of a war against Austria, Mussolini weakened his absolute opposition by declaring: "for now we are not saying anything precise: we shall base our attitude on the circumstances. And if war is declared under one of the usual diplomatic pretexts, we shall oppose it." He then concluded by leaving the way open to dropping the policy of absolute neutrality:

We can accept the war, but supporting it would mean crossing the barricade and mixing with those who agree with the war...the world's hygiene program!

We are on the right road, in a Socialist sense; with this affirmation, we do not mean to say that our ideas cannot change, because only the mad and the dead do not change.

If tomorrow a new eventuality takes place, we will decide.¹⁰³

THE NATION EXISTS

On October 13, when replying to the revelations of Libero Tancredi in *Il Resto del Carlino*, Mussolini declared: "I have come to evaluate the possibility of Italian intervention in the European conflict from a purely and simply national point of view."¹⁰⁴

Five days later, in an *Avanti!* article entitled "Dalla neutralità assoluta alla neutralità attiva ed operante" (From an Absolute to an Active and Operative Neutrality), Mussolini decided to leap over the barricade and overturn all the positions and arguments against Italian intervention that he had until that moment supported as *Avanti!*'s editor.¹⁰⁵ He stated that a political party "that wishes to live in history and make, as far it can, history, cannot submit, at the risk of political suicide, to a norm that is given the status of unarguable dogma or [the status] of an eternal law that is not subject to the strict constraints of space and time." Mussolini maintained that absolute neutrality should be abandoned because Socialist neutrality had always been "partial" in the sense that it had been "a neutrality [that was] markedly Austro- and Germanophobic and, in turn, Francophile." He stated that it was necessary to "distinguish—logically, historically, and

Socialistically—between one war and another because “to judge all wars in the same way would be absurd and, one might even say, ‘idiotic.’” Furthermore, he questioned whether “it is in our interests to oppose a war that might free us ‘as a preventive measure and forever’ from possible reprisals in the future.” He presented Socialists who wished to campaign for absolute neutrality with a challenge: if “you want to heighten opposition to the war, you must get ready to start the revolution.” He wrote:

To avoid a war it is necessary to break down the state by revolution. When? Certainly not on the eve of mobilization, but as soon as the danger can be made out on the horizon.

In Italy the right moment would be now. Do we want to embark on this enormous adventure in order to avoid a war? May be. But do you think that tomorrow’s Government, republican or social-republican (one cannot expect anything else) will not go to war if historic constraints, both internal and external, force them to do so? And who can promise that any post-revolutionary Government would not seek its own baptism in a war. And if (here we are talking hypothetically) the triumphant Central Empires wanted to reimpose in our land their “ancien régime,” would you then be “absolute” neutralists against a war that was to save “your,” that is, our, revolution? But in the face of these hypotheses... for the future (which have, however, ... many precedents in history), is not a refusal to distinguish between one war and another and to try to oppose all wars with the same means proof of an ‘intelligence’ that borders on imbecility?¹⁰⁶

With the same insistence that he had employed in the past to deny nationhood Mussolini now declared that those Socialists who denied “the existence of national problems” were denying reality, that “such unresolved problems are hindering the progression of the class struggle” and that “one is not sliding into the realm of irredentism by admitting the existence of a ‘national’ Italian problem beyond the current borders of Italy.” After he had cited the names of French, Belgian and English Socialists who supported war against the Central Empires, Mussolini completed his peroration with a call to abandon absolute neutrality in order to save the “spirit” of socialism, even at the cost of killing its “letter.” He concluded:

Reality is on the move and at a faster pace. We have received the most uncommon privilege of living in the most tragic hour of the world’s history. As men and as Socialists, do we want to be passive spectators of this grandiose drama? Or do we want, in some way or some sense, to be protagonists?

Socialists of Italy, take heed: sometimes it has happened that the “letter” kills the “spirit.” Let us not save the “letter” of the Party if that means killing the “spirit” of socialism!¹⁰⁷

Few Socialists were persuaded by Mussolini’s argument to follow him in his about-turn on intervention.¹⁰⁸ Consequently, on October 20 he resigned as editor of *Avanti!*. During the days that followed, Mussolini, in various interviews given to the bourgeois newspapers, began to make the case for the necessity of Italian intervention while arguing with the leadership of his own party.

LONG LIVE THE WAR!

On October 21 when speaking to the Milanese Socialist Section, Mussolini declared that his faith in socialism “is unchanged.”¹⁰⁹ In a letter to the daily *Corriere della Sera* on October 25 he explained that he had decided in a “Marxist way” to “evaluate the idea of Italian intervention in a European war from a point of view that is national (that is not nationalist but could instead be proletarian).”¹¹⁰ Finally, on November 10 at a meeting of the Milanese Socialist Section Mussolini began his speech by saying that the majority of Socialists favored neutrality but attributed “our psychological unease” to the fact that “we Socialists have not examined the problems of nations. The International never concerned itself with it: the International is dead, overwhelmed by events. It will rise again, I hope.”¹¹¹

The speech was a concise statement of the new direction in which Mussolini wanted to move Italian socialism. It took account of what had happened to the Socialist parties of the other nations involved in the conflict, which had aligned themselves with their respective nations when war broke out. “Let us see,” said Mussolini, “whether it is possible to find an area of conciliation between the nation, which is a historic reality, and class, which is a living reality” at the same time recognizing that “the nation represents a stage in human progress which has as yet not been passed... Nationalist sentiment exists, one cannot deny it! The old anti-patriotism has had its day and those Socialist luminaries themselves, Marx and Engels, wrote pages about patriotism that would cause a scandal!” The European war had posed national questions that had to be resolved and which Socialists could not ignore. Mussolini stressed that “we are not in any way nationalists and we have nothing to do with their follies! We do not want the conquest of Dalmatia where the percentage of

Italians is minimal. These same questions of Trento and Trieste must be resolved with the greatest of prudence in order to avoid creating a problem of irredentism for Italy, but the other way around.” Furthermore, Socialists could not remain indifferent “to the victory of the Central Powers just as to that of the Triple Entente” if one were to admit that “victory for the Triple Entente represents a step along the way to the political democratization of Europe.” In his final plea for choosing intervention Mussolini again touched upon the ideal of the regeneration of a new Italy: “If Italy stays out of it, it will continue to be the land of the dead, the land of cowards! I am telling you that the duty of socialism is to shake up this Italy of priests, of supporters of the Triple Alliance, and of monarchists, and I conclude by assuring you that, despite your protests and catcalls, the war will overwhelm you all.”¹¹²

It was the first time that a speech by Mussolini had provoked catcalls and protests from Socialists, especially Milanese Socialists. But Mussolini had himself foreseen this at the beginning of his speech when, greeted with applause, he said; “Listen to me, then, instead of applauding me, you will be throwing stones.” Protests and whistles exploded at the moment when the now former editor of *Avanti!* said that he would express his interventionist line with “a new newspaper” because “It will enable me to speak every day.” It was at this moment, as the Socialist *Avanti!* reported, that “the meeting began a sudden, enthusiastic demonstration in support of *Avanti!*. From all sides people shouted ‘Long live *Avanti!*. Long live our Party newspaper!’”¹¹³

On the same day in an interview given to *Il Resto del Carlino* Mussolini announced that November 15 would see the launch of his new newspaper, *Il Popolo d’Italia*, with which he would again take up “without delay and with renewed ardor the battle against absolute neutrality.” Having first observed that the Socialist International had ceased to exist, he said: “I ask myself whether internationalism is an element that is absolutely necessary for the concept of socialism. Future Socialist thought could even try to find a balance between nation and class.” As far as Mussolini was concerned, he declared that he had “resolved the problem: intervention and, possibly, immediate [intervention].”¹¹⁴

On November 15 the new newspaper founded by *Avanti!*’s former editor appeared on the newsstands of Milan and of Italy’s other main cities. It carried the subtitle: “A Socialist Daily.” Mussolini had decided to found the new newspaper following his resignation from the editorship of *Avanti!* and had obtained the initial funding necessary to set up the enterprise

through the editor of *Il Resto del Carlino*, Filippo Naldi.¹¹⁵ In the first number's editorial entitled "Audacia!" (Daring!), Mussolini explained the reasons that had prompted him to found a new publication to continue his battle against "the foolish dogma of absolute neutrality." Mussolini wrote that he had convinced himself that "the destinies of European socialism are very closely linked with the possible results of this war. Not to care means detaching oneself from history and from life, [it means] working for the [forces of] reaction and not for the Social Revolution." He believed that, "we are men, and men who wish to make our contribution, even if only modest, to the creation of history." Mussolini declared that it was time to try to take control of events rather than submit to them and act as Socialist revolutionaries who "represented—apart from during the low times of Giolitti's commercial reformism—one of the 'living' forces of the new Italy." To this end, added Mussolini, he had founded *Il Popolo d'Italia*, "an independent newspaper, very free, personal and mine. I shall answer only to my own conscience and to no one else... I am not worried about wicked people or idiots. May the former remain in the mire; may the latter perish in their intellectual void. I am on the march!" Mussolini ended the article by addressing "the young people of Italy; the young of the workshops and of the universities; the young in years and the young in spirit; the young who belong to the generation that destiny has sent 'to make history.'" He said that destiny was sending them a "cry of greeting," that "the cry is a word that I should never have pronounced in normal times, and that instead I shout loudly, at the top of my voice, without pretence, with certain faith, today: a terrifying and fascinating word: war!"¹¹⁶

Four days later Mussolini began his campaign for war by examining the problem of Italian military intervention from a point of view that he defined as Socialist. He repeated that Socialists could not ignore national problems which "exist and are profound and complex," so much so that they were being felt within the Socialist parties themselves. It was the mission of the ruling bourgeoisie to resolve the problem of the Italian nation, but it was the duty of the Socialists to push the bourgeoisie onwards and to take its place were it not up to the task. As Socialists they would have to fulfill a national role, just as the Socialist internationalists of the Commune had done when the French bourgeoisie "had shown itself incapable of saving France from invasion by the Prussians. The Commune was a revolution that was in a sense 'national' and patriotic." Mussolini argued that "the 'interventionist' campaign led by a significant section of Italian Socialism" intended to fulfill the same "national" function of contributing

not only to the resolution of the Italian national problem but also to the destruction of Prussian militarism. The Italian proletariat had to make “its sacrifice of blood to hasten the conclusion of the immense tragedy that is devastating all of Europe.” According to him, “The class struggle is suspended as long as the war between the nations continues. The proletariat’s highest interest is that the war might finish quickly and with a result that guarantees a long period of peace.” It was, therefore, “the duty of Socialists and of men” to contribute to the end of the war and to the victory of the Triple Entente, while to insist on absolute neutrality was “desertion and treachery.” Mussolini maintained that “To denationalize the proletariat is a sin, to dehumanize it is a crime. Absolute neutrality is a sin in the face of the nation: it is a crime with respect to socialism. The Italian proletariat cannot and must not isolate itself in this faint-hearted neutrality which is fit only for people unworthy of history and whom absolute neutrality will expose tomorrow to the hatred and contempt of both winners and losers.”¹¹⁷ In conclusion, intervention was, for Mussolini, a new version of revolutionary socialism which, through war, aimed at taking control of a national revolution for the Third Italy.

THE BROKEN IDOL

In his first editorial for *Il Popolo d'Italia* on November 15 Mussolini declared: “I harbor no aggressive intensions either towards the Socialist Party or towards the publications of that party in which I intend to stay, but I am ready to counter anyone who tries to deny me free criticism of a view that for various reasons I believe disastrous for the national and international interests of the proletariat.”¹¹⁸ This olive branch contrasted with the harsh language that Mussolini the interventionist employed to address those Socialists who had remained faithful to absolute neutrality, in other words, the entire revolutionary leadership of the party, the reformists, the parliamentary group and the mass of militants. For their part, the Socialist leaders were not slow to begin a violent political assault on Mussolini. They attacked him from both a moral and political standpoint and on November 19 launched a smear campaign led by *Avanti!* under the heading “Chi paga?” (Who pays?) on the funding of his new publication. Mussolini responded by calling the campaign “the lowest example of moral deceit” and “an assassination attempt” carried out by “the huge tribe of idiots.”¹¹⁹

From that moment onwards, and in the space of just a few days, an ever deepening furrow of hate was dug between the Socialist leaders and the editor of *Il Popolo d'Italia*. It finally became unbridgeable on the evening of November 24 at a tumultuous meeting of the Milanese Section of Socialists which had been called to decide on Mussolini's expulsion from the party. Mussolini resolved to attend the meeting even though he knew that the outcome was certain. He flaunted his self-confidence: "I shall fight and exchange punches to get myself listened to, and in this way I shall win new converts to my ideas. I shall try everything to gain victory for my ideal of revolutionary interventionism."¹²⁰ The meeting was riotous. Mussolini attempted to speak between the numerous interruptions, the scanty applause of a few friends and the huge broadsides of deafening catcalls:

You believe that you are losing me, but I am telling you that you are deceiving yourselves. Today you hate me because you still love me, because... (applause and catcalls again interrupt the speaker).

But you won't lose me: twelve years of my life in the party are or should be a sufficient guarantee of my faith in socialism. Socialism is something that roots itself in the blood. What separates me from you is not a small question, it is a big question that divides all socialism.¹²¹

In the end the overwhelming majority voted for his expulsion from the party for "political and moral unworthiness." The following day Mussolini commented prophetically: "The case of Mussolini is not over as you think it is. It is beginning, it is becoming more complicated. It is assuming vaster proportions. I shall raise openly the banner of schism. I shall not be appeased. I shall cry out: I shall not give in. I shall rise up".¹²²

Indeed, the expulsion of Mussolini had an enormous impact inside the Socialist Party when one considers the figure that he had become after his emergence at the congress of Reggio Emilia in 1912. Even greater was the impact upon Mussolini himself, who in a few days understood that he was alone with a meager group of friends that followed him. On the eve of his expulsion he said: "I am strong even although I am alone: I shall say, almost, that I am strong precisely because of this." He added:

I recall what a friend of mine said to me one day: "I can't understand," he said, "how you can be a Socialist given your proudly independent character." That friend of mine was right, and I expect that one day I shall

remember those words. He, my friend, judged me correctly, believing that a man like me could never adapt to being passively deferential to the wishes of those at the head of the Socialist flock.¹²³

With the use of such deprecatory language to describe the organization and the mass of people alongside whom he had fought for 12 years, Mussolini let it be known clearly that he had burnt his bridges once and for all with the Socialist party. It was a traumatic, decisive and irrevocable turning point in his political life. Mussolini's choice of intervention was not an act of impulse and still less the result of surrender to the attraction of ambition and the enticement of money. It had happened after tormented reflection upon the failure of the Socialist International and the realization of the Socialist Party's impotence in imposing absolute neutrality upon the government and in mobilizing the proletariat to stop the war. By proposing an "active and operative neutrality" Mussolini sought a way out of the dead end of absolute neutrality into which he himself had led the Party. Perhaps he genuinely thought that he would be able to convince, if not the majority, at least a sizeable part of the Party to follow him along his new path. Perhaps he had come to believe that the attempt to lead the Party to revolution had failed after the tumultuous but inconclusive experience of Red Week. Maybe after the outbreak of war in Europe, the end of the Socialist International and the strengthening of nationalism everywhere in Europe, he thought that only by changing and adopting a socialism that was national could the Socialist party aspire to become the future government of the Third Italy as he, Mussolini, had longed for.

These are all hypotheses. It is a fact that in the Autumn of 1914 the young Mussolini destroyed in a few days all that he had achieved in 12 years of dedicated Socialist militancy, and above all the success and position of prestige and power that he had won in the party and among the masses during his two years as editor of *Avanti!*. However, it was easy for him to reply to his former comrades who accused him of betrayal for personal ambition that everyone, "from the greatest to the smallest, have our ambitions and it is no less true that I also am imbued with this passion. But why, then, would I have left the party of which I was pre-eminent and the editorship of the newspaper that is its powerful tool?"¹²⁴

Since July 1912, as editor of *Avanti!*, Mussolini had become the most prestigious, the most popular and most influential figure of Italian Socialism, beloved by young Socialists and idolized by the masses. A worker from Turin, who later became a Communist remembered; "We were all enthusiastic about Mussolini: a little because he too was relatively

young, a little because he had beaten the reformists and, finally, because his articles in *Avanti!* seemed to us intense and revolutionary.”¹²⁵ In the same Socialist daily one reads in an article published on November 29: “after a long and anxious wait, Socialist youth had found [in Mussolini] not only the fine character of someone who fights with the spoken and written word, but also the heroic soul of a revolutionary of action... The man had, in other words, become a symbol.”¹²⁶

The reformists themselves recognized that Mussolini had become the idol of the masses, while at the same time disapproving of the phenomenon; on August 15, 1914 Zibordi observed:

To tell the truth, Mussolini, even unwittingly, has established a dictatorship that has individual and collective bases. They are both psychological or, rather, emotional; not rational.

With the irresistible magic of his hard but noble fighting spirit that drags the crowd along without being, in spite of the etymology, vulgarly demagogic, and with a few people as believers and footsoldiers, he gets the masses to swallow whatever he wants: even the theory of therapeutic bloodletting.

But it would be a disservice to both him and to the truth not to mention that, if he is in a dominant position today, it is not only because his persona is so overwhelming and makes people absorb his theories, it is also because these theories or, more exactly, his states of mind are responding to something that is in the crowd.

The war and the whole psychic atmosphere that, like the dust in a riot, has blown up around it, have infected people’s minds with their fever. How much nationalist psychology there is in Mussolinianism! In part it is because violence requires violence to stand up to it; in part it is caused by the pure contagion of his reasoning.¹²⁷

Mussolini was aware of the masses’ idolatry, so much so that many times he had to pour scorn upon it with real or feigned modesty, as he did at a meeting of Milanese Socialists who had come together on April 5, 1914 to celebrate his acquittal from a trial. On being welcomed with a prolonged and frenzied ovation Mussolini began: “I was undecided whether to come or go into hiding. I would not have wanted to awaken in you any feeling of idolatry which, instead, one must combat. It would not be worth demolishing one church just to build another.”¹²⁸

The clear successes that Mussolini could vaunt as editor of *Avanti!* and as leader of the revolutionary wing that had taken control of the party contributed to his mythical status and to the enthusiasm that the masses demonstrated toward him. After 1912, besides a rapid increase

in the sales of *Avanti!*, there was a significant revival of Party membership: during the period of reformist leadership Socialist Party membership had fallen from 43,700 to 28,835 in 1909, risen to 32,108 in 1910 to fell again to 28,689 in June 1912; in April 1914 membership stood at 49,148. Moreover, in the political elections of 1913, the first held with quasi-universal male suffrage, the number of Socialist deputies rose from 33 to 53.

Not all these successes could be attributed solely to Mussolini's direct influence but certainly it played a significant part in bringing a renewed vigor to the Party's work, to its organization, to its propaganda and to its following. Mussolini's reformist opponents themselves recognized this; at the moment when the break between Mussolini and the party exploded, Zibordi wrote that in the two years during which Mussolini had been *Avanti!*'s editor he had been, "the revolutionary leader, the chosen one of the rejuvenated Socialist ranks, l'excubitor domitantium (the sentinel of the advanced guard), the man who has electrified the party, the man who has renewed *Avanti!* ... the man respected by everyone in the Party."¹²⁹

Now, in the space of a few days, the proletarian masses had smashed the idol. Mussolini himself understood this. On the eve of his expulsion, which was by then a foregone conclusion, he remarked in an interview that the Breton peasants, "get angry with their saints and even come to the point of destroying them when things do not go according to their wishes. It is a way, just like any other, of venting one's own discontent. With regard to me it is the same phenomenon: a phenomenon that the brutal recklessness of the crowd justifies in the same way as is justified what happens on the shores of Brittany."¹³⁰

On November 29, 1914, the leadership of the party ratified Mussolini's expulsion. From that point onwards Mussolini was, for the Socialist masses, a mercenary, a deserter, a traitor. Prezzolini, Lombardo Radice and other supporters of *La Voce* telegraphed him; "Socialist Party expels you, Italy welcomes you."

NOTES

1. See *Il Partito Socialista italiano nei suoi Congressi*, vol. II, 1902–1907 (Milan: Edizioni Avanti!, 1961), pp. 184–213.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 99 ff.
3. Cf. R. De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario, 1883–1920* (Turin: Einaudi, 1965), pp.108 ff.

4. See A. Lyttelton, "Il linguaggio del conflitto politico nell'Italia pre-fascista," in *Problemi del socialismo*, 1 (1988), pp. 170–183; M. Ridolfi, *Il PSI e la nascita del partito di massa, 1892–1922* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1992), pp. 164–166; M. Gervasoni, *Speranze condivise. Linguaggi e pratiche del socialismo nell'Italia liberale* (Lungro di Cosenza: Marco Editore, 2008), pp. 142–153, 189–196.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 207.
6. Cited in G. Megaro, *Mussolini. Dal mito alla realtà* (Milan: Istituto Editoriale Italiano, 1947), p. 366.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 296.
8. Cited in M. Sarfatti, *Dux* (Milan: Mondadori, 1926), pp. 137–138.
9. Cited in B. Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, ed E. and D. Susmel (Florence: 1951–1963), 36 volumes, vol. IV, p. 292.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 293.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 294.
12. *Ibid.*, vol. V, p. 395.
13. *La Voce*, December 4, 1913.
14. L. Rafanelli, *Una donna e Mussolini* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1975), p. 33.
15. Cited in Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, pp. 476–477.
16. G. Salvemini, "Una rivoluzione senza programma," *L'Unità*, June 19, 1914.
17. G. Zibordi, "Continuando a discutere di cose interne di famiglia," *Critica Sociale*, August 15, 1914.
18. Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. IV, p. 182.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*, vol. IV, pp. 173–174.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
22. E. Gentile, ed., *Mussolini e La Voce* (Florence: Sansoni, 1974), 56–57. See W. Adamson, *Avant-Garde Florence. From Modernism to Fascism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993); and E. Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity. Nationalism, Futurism, and Fascism* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003).
23. Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. I, 145.
24. Cf. Megaro, *Mussolini. Dal mito alla realtà*; E. Nolte, "Il giovane Mussolini. Marx e Nietzsche" in F. Coppelotti, ed., *Mussolini Socialista* (Milan: Sugarco, 1993); A.J. Gregor, *Young Mussolini and the Intellectual Origins of Fascism* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1979); E. Gentile, *The Origins of Fascist Ideology 1918–1925* (New York: Enigma Books, 2005. p.1 ff. D. Musiedlak, *Il mito di Mussolini* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2009), 121 ff.
25. Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. I, p. 122.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

27. See De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 136 ff.
28. Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. V, pp. 175–176.
29. *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 52.
30. *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 75.
31. *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 128–129.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 174–189.
33. *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 128.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
35. Cited in Gentile, ed., *Mussolini e La Voce*, p. 62.
36. Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, pp. 5–8.
37. See De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 177 ff.
38. Il Vice [C. Treves], “1° maggio di Pangloss,” *Critica Sociale*, 1–16 May 1914.
39. Il Vice [C. Treves], “Involuzione rivoluzionaria,” *Critica Sociale*, 16–31 July 1914.
40. Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. V, p. 192.
41. *Ibid.*, vol. V, p. 154. Mussolini was referring to the war in Libya and to the two Balkan wars, in 1912 and 1913.
42. *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 11–12.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
44. *Ibid.*, vol. VI, pp. 70–82.
45. *Ibid.*, vol. V, p. 170.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 212.
47. *Ibid.*, vol. VI, pp. 242–249.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 263–264.
49. *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 161. See E. Gentile, *La Grande Italia: The Myth of the Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), Chap. 7.
50. Mussolini cites Oriani for the first time in a review of Prezzolini’s book, *La teoria sindacalista*, on May 27, 1909: “If, as Alfredo Oriani maintains in his magnificent *Rivolta Ideale*, every epoch has but one purpose: ‘to develop a human character’, do we or do we not owe to syndicalism the development of a new man both economically and morally?” (Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. II, p. 128). Mussolini cites him again in depth after his conversion to interventionism in an article, “Il monito di Oriani,” published in *Il Popolo d’Italia* on March 14, 1915, where he makes reference with quotations to the third and final volume of *La lottapolitica in Italia*, published for the first time in 1892 and reprinted by *La Voce* in three volumes in 1913.
51. Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, p. 27.
52. *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 56–57.
53. *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 258–260.
54. *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 159–160.

55. Ibid., vol. III, p. 12.
56. Ibid., vol. I, pp. 185–186.
57. Ibid., vol. II, pp. 171–175.
58. Ibid., vol. I, pp. 53–56.
59. Gentile, ed., *Mussolini e La Voce*, p. 40.
60. Gentile, See E. Gentile, *La Grande Italia: The Myth of the Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2009).
61. Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. III, pp. 280–281.
62. Ibid., vol. II, p. 60.
63. Ibid., vol. III, pp. 280–281.
64. Ibid., vol. II, pp. 169–170.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid., vol. III, p. 208.
67. Ibid., vol. IV, pp. 75–76.
68. Ibid., pp. 197–198.
69. Ibid., p. 198.
70. Ibid., pp. 191–194.
71. Ibid., p. 155.
72. Ibid., p. 199.
73. Ibid., vol. VI, p. 7.
74. Ibid., pp. 32–34.
75. Ibid., p. 240.
76. Ibid., p. 254.
77. Ibid., pp. 285–286.
78. Ibid., pp. 287–288.
79. Ibid., p. 290.
80. Ibid., p. 298.
81. Ibid., pp. 305–306.
82. Ibid., p. 312.
83. Ibid., p. 298.
84. Ibid., p. 311.
85. Ibid., p. 319.
86. Ibid., p. 336.
87. Ibid., pp. 336–337.
88. Ibid., p. 341.
89. Ibid., pp. 339–341.
90. Ibid., p. 349.
91. Ibid., p. 332.
92. Ibid., p. 368.
93. Ibid., pp. 331–332.
94. Ibid., p. 351–352.

95. See De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 230 ff.; B. Vigezzi, *L'Italiadi fronte alla prima guerra mondiale, vol. I, L'Italia neutrale* (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1966), pp. 373 ff.
96. The journalistic articles by Lombardo Radice and LiberoTancredi that reveal the private interventionist leanings of *Avanti!*'s editor are reproduced in Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, pp. 497 ff.
97. *Ibid.*, p. 282.
98. *Ibid.*, p. 295.
99. *Ibid.*, p. 301.
100. *Ibid.*, p. 335.
101. *Ibid.*, p. 349.
102. *Ibid.*, p. 361–362.
103. *Ibid.*
104. *Ibid.*, p. 392.
105. *Ibid.*, pp. 393–403.
106. *Ibid.*, p. 399.
107. *Ibid.*, pp. 402–403.
108. On the various interpretations of Mussolini's conversion to interventionism and the subsequent reaction within the Partito Socialista see L. Valiani, *Il partito Socialista italiano nel periodo della neutralità: 1914–1915* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1962), pp. 69 ff.; DeFelice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 258 ff.; Vigezzi, *L'Italia di fronte alla prima guerra mondiale*, pp. 879 ff. In the most recent work on Mussolini the interventionist, P. O'Brien, *Mussolini in the First World War: The Journalist, the Soldier, the Fascist* (New York: Berg, 2005), the conversion to interventionism is attributed to the political opportunism of a Mussolini who was not a true Socialist, had invented fascism during the Great War and then brought it to life in his totalitarian regime.
109. Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, p. 417.
110. *Ibid.*, p. 421.
111. *Ibid.*, p. 426.
112. *Ibid.*, pp. 428–429.
113. *Ibid.*, pp. 427–429.
114. *Ibid.*, pp. 430–432.
115. On the question of the funding given to Mussolini to found and begin publication of *Il Popolo d'Italia* see De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario*, pp. 273 ff.; Valiani, *Il partito Socialista italiano nel periodo della neutralità*, pp. 70–71; P. Milza, *Mussolini* (Rome: Carocci, 2001), pp. 197–202.
116. Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, VII, p. 7.
117. *Ibid.*, pp. 13–15.
118. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
119. *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19. For the accusations made by *Avanti!*, *ibid.*, pp. 431 ff.

120. Ibid., p. 34.
121. Ibid., pp. 39–41.
122. Ibid., p. 43.
123. Ibid., pp. 32–33.
124. Ibid., pp. 33.
125. Cited in P. Spriano, *Torino operaia nella grande guerra (1914–1918)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1960), p. 43.
126. I. Toscani, “I giovani, il socialismo e la guerra,” *Avanti!*, November 29, 1914.
127. G. Zibordi, “Continuando a discutere di cose interne di famiglia,” *Critica Sociale*, August 1–15, 1914.
128. Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, p. 144.
129. G. Zibordi, “La logica di una crisi,” *Critica Sociale*, November 16–30, 1914.
130. Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. VII, p. 33.

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¹Note: Page numbers with “n” denote notes.

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