

tic" doctrines from beyond the Alps. Further, the impending alliance with Germany meant a drastic reappraisal of the entire notion of racism, and indeed ultimately entailed the adoption of anti-Semitic legislation in Italy itself.

Thus, within five years the advocates of universal fascism had gone from the creation of the CAUR to the rejection not only of their institutions, but indeed of the very essence of their world-view. How did they react to this defeat? For this bizarre story it is necessary to step back for a moment from the detailed investigation of the doctrine of universal fascism, and consider one of its central problems: the "Jewish question."

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Beyond the International*

△△△ The effort to construct a Fascist International on the basis of an ideology of Corporatism and the cult of Youth failed in the middle thirties. The greatest single reason for its failure was the new direction of fascist foreign policy, and we shall deal with that change and its implications shortly. But there were many other contributing factors to the collapse of the movement. The Lozzi report demonstrated the incompetence of the leadership from Italy promoting the International, as well as the flimsiness of the foreign organizations and movements which were to have provided its backbone. Furthermore, the dispute over the "Jewish question" at Montreux shows that there were serious doctrinal differences which made any durable union of national fascisms highly tenuous. This was to be demonstrated more concretely later on by the Axis alliance, a union which was a highly personal one between the two dictators, and which was never based on any solid unity of vision between Nazi Germany and fascist Italy.<sup>1</sup>

The fundamental reason for the collapse of the movement for a Fascist International remains the change in Italian foreign policy in the thirties. Mussolini's increasingly active involvement abroad, first in Ethiopia, then in Spain, meant that propaganda activities had to be coordinated with Italian foreign adventures rather than moving freely in the recruitment of declarations of support from other fascisms. And the necessity of training

troops and mobilizing support for foreign wars understandably drained off energy and personnel from many enterprises, so that the movement to create a Fascist International suffered greatly from a shortage of manpower. Such important figures as Giuseppe Bottai, Vittorio Mussolini, and Asvero Gravelli departed for foreign theaters of action, leaving their groups without effective leadership.

Finally, the increasing interrelation between Mussolini and Hitler meant that anti-Nazi polemics in the Italian press had to be suppressed, and with the emergence of Italian anti-Semitism in 1936, 1937, and 1938 the very basis of fascist doctrine had to be re-evaluated in the light of Mussolini's new attitude towards racism. It was no longer possible, in the second half of the decade, to present Italian fascism as an ideological alternative to German National Socialism, since the two countries were acting in concert and Mussolini had moved to a position of considerable support for the Nazi doctrines.

The effect of these various changes was to isolate many of those who had worked for a Fascist International. In particular, the adoption of anti-Semitism by the regime produced a cultural trauma of major proportions within the ranks of Italian youth and Italian culture. For many of those who had supported the doctrines of universal fascism, the adoption of the anti-Semitic laws of 1938 provided the occasion for a break with fascism itself, and drove them into open opposition to Mussolini.<sup>2</sup> For others, the crisis produced by the changed doctrines of the regime lured them into an adoption of racism. Whatever the particular result, 1936 marked a major turning point in the history of Italian fascism.

Most historians of the fascist *Ventennio* are agreed that the adoption of the anti-Semitic legislation in the late thirties produced a genuine rupture in Italian society.<sup>3</sup> Until that period, Mussolini had enjoyed a high degree of personal popularity.

Even those dissident elements we have examined could feel a strong sense of identification with Mussolini at the same time that they criticized many of the failures of the Fascist Regime. As we have seen, it was possible to believe that fascism would eventually carry out a genuine social revolution, even though it was clear throughout the history of the regime that that revolution had not yet occurred. This was especially true in those segments of society which enjoyed a certain freedom of expression in the press.

The change in fascist doctrines which culminated in the racial laws of 1938 produced a "crisis of conscience" among those elements which had genuinely been committed to a "Fascist Revolution." For Ruggiero Zangrandi, the anti-Semitic laws marked the beginning of a new period in fascist history: "It was then that the second part of the voyage across fascism began for those [youth]: to be liberated from it, that is to say, to find a way to oppose it, or to fight it."<sup>4</sup>

For Zangrandi and those who would follow him into opposition to the Fascist Regime, the fascist practice could no longer be accommodated within an ideology which called for "revolutionizing" fascism. The adoption of anti-Semitism by the hierarchs of fascism was something these young Italians found too foreign and too offensive to be tolerated. And whereas in the past unattractive doctrines had been attributed to those around Mussolini, Italian "racism" was too clearly associated with the Duce himself to be explained away. To fully understand the shock which Mussolini's adoption of anti-Semitism produced, we must look at the relations between Jews and Gentiles in Italy preceding the 1938 legislation, and in particular at Mussolini's attitude toward the "Jewish question."

The Jews of Italy had been unusually fortunate in their relations with their Christian countrymen, for Italy had very little of the mass anti-Semitism which characterized much of

Europe in the early twentieth century. Between 40,000 and 60,000 Jews lived in Italy and the Empire during the *Ventennio*, or roughly one-tenth of 1 per cent of the total national population. Their impact—as the impact of a specifically Jewish community—was as marginal as their total number. From the middle of the eighteenth century on, Italian Jews had been able to function on a level of increasing parity with their Gentile countrymen, and the assimilation of Jews into Italian life on both the legal and psychological levels went forward with increasing tempo and success.

Indeed, this assimilation was pronounced. Figures on mixed marriages, gathered from the Jewish archives, reveal that from 1930 to 1937 30 per cent of Jews who married chose members of other faiths. This remarkable figure compares with 11 per cent in Germany and 14 per cent in Hungary.<sup>5</sup>

Italians, then, were quite willing to deal with their Jewish compatriots on equal terms—by accepting them into their families. And the Italian Jews were equally prepared to abandon their purely Jewish identities for participation in Italian life. In fact it might be argued that the Jewish community of Italy had embarked upon a course of assimilation with such great enthusiasm and success that had it not been for the anti-Semitic legislation of 1938-43, it might almost have vanished completely. Luigi Luzzatti, a journalist in the late 1930's, says: "I was born a Jew, and I return passionately to being one whenever I am criticized for being Jewish or my being Jewish puts me in danger . . . if anti-Semitism ended I would publicly proclaim my Christianity."<sup>6</sup>

As one might expect, the Jews themselves felt a strong sense of patriotism and loyalty towards Italy. Mussolini personally recognized the substantial contributions of the Jews to Western civilization, and indeed frequently remarked to his friends that the Jews were the only people in the history of the world to

have given a God to humanity. On the subject of any intrinsic distinction between Jew and Gentile, he was categorical: "In Italy there is absolutely no difference between Jew and non-Jew in all fields, in religion, in politics, in the military, in economics. . . ."<sup>7</sup>

Assimilated as they were, many Jews were to be found within the fascist ranks. In 1922 there were nearly 750 Jews in the Fascist Party; by 1928 an additional 1,770 had joined; and by 1933 yet another 4,800. Like all other Italians, the Jews saw a variety of tendencies at work in the Fascist Regime. What they saw most clearly, however, was that the situation of the Jews got better and better over the first decade of fascist rule. They consequently behaved pragmatically when they supported a government which not only improved their legal status but, as we shall see, also became for a time one of the foremost advocates of the Zionist cause in Europe.

The middle period of fascism, which saw the consolidation of the Fascist Regime, brought about an increasingly warm and mutually beneficial relationship between the regime and the Italian Jews. Not only were the Jews given a new and coherent legal status, but in the area of foreign policy Mussolini was making increasingly pro-Zionist noises. A striking example of this is the meeting between Chaim Weizmann and Mussolini in the Quirinale in September, 1926. During the course of the discussions Mussolini expressed sympathy for the Zionist cause, suggesting that Italy might well be able to provide the assistance which the British had thus far failed to deliver.<sup>8</sup> This was not, as many suspected at the time, just another of Mussolini's rhetorical flourishes. It was rather a genuine statement of the dictator's beliefs. Not only was he sympathetic to the plight of the Jews, but he was intensely interested in establishing Italian influence over the Mediterranean, and Zionism was something he could exploit toward this end. The meeting with Weizmann

was only the first in a long series of meetings with Zionist leaders. The following June he met with Victor Jacobson, a representative of the Zionist "executive," and in October with Nachum Sokolov. With this last meeting, Mussolini became lionized by Zionism. Sokolov not only praised the dictator's human qualities, but announced his firm belief that fascism was immune from anti-Semitic preconceptions. He went even further. In the past, Sokolov observed, there might have been uncertainty about the true nature of fascism; but now, "we begin to understand its true nature . . . true Jews have never fought against you."<sup>9</sup>

These words, tantamount to a Zionist endorsement of the Fascist Regime, were echoed in Jewish periodicals all over the world. In this period, expressions of loyalty and affection for fascism poured out of the Jewish centers of Italy. In its turn, the regime was quick to act, arranging that public examinations should not fall on Jewish holy days, and making generous arrangements for the rights of the Jewish community.<sup>10</sup>

At the time of the Concordat with the Vatican, the Fascist Regime had found it necessary and desirable to formalize relations with the Jewish community as well, and the keynote for the new system was struck by Mussolini in a speech to the Chamber on May 13, 1929:

We respect this sacred character of Rome. But it is ridiculous to think, as has been said, that the synagogues must be closed. . . . Jews have been in Rome from the times of the kings . . . there were 50,000 at the time of Augustus, and they asked to cry on the corpse of Julius Caesar. They will remain undisturbed.<sup>11</sup>

Thus any anti-Semitic elements in Italy in the early thirties had to contend with the explicit statement by the Duce that the Jews were to be treated like other Italians. In fact, this period saw a veritable outpouring of philo-Semitic writings, often from the most surprising sources. Even Farinacci, who

would become one of the blackest racists after 1937, came to restrict anti-Semitic articles in his journal; in July, 1930, he published a long, vicious attack on racism and Nazi anti-Semitism.<sup>12</sup> On February 25, 1929, Costanzo Ciano visited the Temple of Livorno and said that there were too few Jews in Italy.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, by the time of the Montreux Congress, there was nothing vaguely resembling a "Jewish question" in Italy, a fact recognized by people like Bucard at the Congress itself. This set fascist Italy in clear contrast with Hitler's Germany, and indeed the early relations between Hitler and Mussolini illustrate the conflict which existed over this issue. After his first conversation with Hitler in Venice in 1934, Mussolini was reported to have told a friend that "it is not possible to talk with an idiot."<sup>14</sup> This simply confirmed the impression that the Duce had acquired a year earlier, when Mussolini sent the German *Führer* a message suggesting a lessening of German anti-Semitic policies and propaganda. On that occasion Mussolini had even gone so far as to point out the lunacy of Nazi anti-Semitism:

Every regime has not only the right but the duty to eliminate from posts of command those elements not completely trustworthy, but for this it is not necessary, indeed it can be noxious, to carry to the level of race—Aryanism and Semitism—what is rather simply a measure of defense and the development of revolution.<sup>15</sup>

This (as we have seen) was the position finally adopted by the representatives at Montreux, a position which skirted the issue of "race" by leaving each national fascism free to deal with its internal problems as it saw fit. Hitler's response to these words of revolutionary advice was heated. He told Mussolini's representative that the Italians did not understand the Jews, and that the course of the German revolution must be in the hands of Aryans. Racism, for Hitler, was not subject to negotiation.<sup>16</sup>

This clash presented Mussolini with a serious problem. Bombarded by many of the most authoritative spokesmen of Italian culture (including spokesmen for a Fascist International) requesting that he dissociate himself entirely from Nazi doctrines, yet unwilling to break off relations altogether with the only other government in Europe to call itself "fascist," Mussolini tried for a while to steer a middle course. On the one hand he let it be known that he was sympathetic to the plight of the German Jews and would do much to help them (Weizmann said in May, 1933, that Mussolini would not oppose plans to transfer German Jews to Palestine).<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, he became convinced that he could do little to deter the Nazis from their course of persecution. His activities for the next several years would be directed towards the dual attempt to moderate the intense anti-Semitism of the Nazis whenever possible while trying to circumscribe Hitler's sphere of activity. As late as 1937 this policy would be evident, when Mussolini advised Schuschnigg to accept "collaboration" with the Nazis while simultaneously urging the Austrians not to adopt the anti-Semitic policies of the *Reich*.<sup>18</sup>

The five-year period from 1932 to 1937 saw Mussolini maintain his public position on the "Jewish question." Thus, for example, he authorized Angelo Sacerdoti, the Chief Rabbi of Rome, to take a strong anti-Nazi stance at the World Jewish Congress in August, 1933. With the explicit support of the Duce, Sacerdoti spoke of Judaism and the civilization of Rome as forces which had formed the modern world, forces which ought to work in harmony with each other. He further proposed a resolution against Nazi racism.<sup>19</sup>

Having said all this, however, it must be noted that Mussolini was simultaneously trying to ingratiate himself with the rulers in Berlin. At the same time that he was advising both his own Embassy in Berlin and various Jewish organizations that Italy

would accept any Jewish emigrant from Germany (provided that he was not an enemy of the Nazi regime),<sup>20</sup> he was extracting guarantees from Jewish organizations that they would not press their attacks against Hitler if Italy could succeed in gaining some modification of the Nazis' anti-Semitic posture. In addition, Mussolini had established contacts with some of the more active centers of German nationalism early in his own regime, and he had continued to try to win the support of rightist elements in Germany on behalf of Italy's demands for revision of the Versailles Treaties.<sup>21</sup> The international events of the middle thirties combined to accentuate the pro-German elements in the patchwork quilt of Mussolini's foreign policy, as did the significant change in leadership within the Foreign Office itself.

The failure of Mussolini's *Patto a Quattro* (Four Power Pact), and the lack of any tangible support from France and England for his defense of the Austrian regime against the attempted Nazi *putsch* in 1934, led the Italians to reconsider some of the basic tenets of their European policies. This is not the place to undertake a detailed examination of European affairs in the thirties, but it is necessary to stress the extent to which Mussolini felt himself isolated by the English and the French, and the transformation of Italian foreign policy in the mid-thirties was no doubt to a large extent due to this feeling. Above all, the change in the entourage which advised the Duce on foreign problems must be stressed, for in a personal dictatorship those who advise the single ruler gain a disproportionate influence over a nation's destiny.

The member of the Foreign Office who, above all others, represented the traditional Italian policy of striving to guarantee an independent Austrian buffer between Italy and Germany was Fulvio Suvich. In a note to Mussolini a few months before his removal from office in the summer of 1936, Suvich repeated his

firm conviction that "it would be an illusion to believe that Germany, having arrived at the Brenner . . . would stop . . ." <sup>22</sup> He counseled the dictator to reassure the other powers of Europe that the momentary closeness between Italy and Germany in 1936, produced primarily by the sanctions against Italy stemming from the fascist invasion of Ethiopia, was not to be viewed as indicating a new course in Italian policy but simply as a momentary expedient. For Suvich the idea of an alliance with Germany was unthinkable, and his replacement by Ciano in the summer of 1936 was a clear omen of the changing course of the Duce's thinking, a change which was to have domestic reverberations of the first order. <sup>23</sup>

The entry of Ciano into the Foreign Office was an event of considerable significance in the evolution of fascist policy, both at home and abroad. Ciano himself believed that his leadership had finally made the Foreign Office "fascist" for the first time, and that henceforth Italian foreign affairs would reflect the "new" mentality of the epoch. <sup>24</sup> However, in concrete terms Ciano's stewardship saw the evolution of the Axis, an alliance which he would finally come to oppose, but for which he must nonetheless bear the lion's share of responsibility. Since Ciano was a figure who represented the "new man" for so many fascists, the crisis within Italian fascism produced by the alliance with the Nazis was heightened; those who otherwise would have condemned the Axis now had to sever their emotional ties to Ciano himself as well as reject the alliance. Many adopted anti-Semitism when confronted by this crisis, while others would turn to explicitly anti-fascist actions when the racial laws were promulgated. The important fact here is that the adoption of the anti-Semitic laws by the regime, coupled with the personal involvement of both Mussolini and Ciano in the evolution of this policy, made the issue emotionally charged in a way it would not have been had these policies not been so closely tied to two charismatic figures.

It is surprising, in retrospect, that the anti-Semitic laws met with so little resistance from within the regime, for most of the members of the Fascist Grand Council were opposed to their adoption. <sup>25</sup> This holds true even for those who had been anti-Semitic for many years, like Emilio De Bono, who recognized that anti-Semitism would be viewed as something foreign to most Italians. <sup>26</sup> Further, if we can believe the former head of the Secret Police, Mussolini was advised that the racist legislation would most likely produce serious resistance throughout the country, a prediction amply borne out in the late thirties and forties. <sup>27</sup>

But the maturation of the alliance with Hitler did not permit Mussolini to equivocate about Italian anti-Semitism, for it was simply not possible for the Axis to have any coherence if Italy continued to be opposed to the fundamental tenet of Nazi ideology. The primary cause of Italian anti-Semitism was the alliance with Hitler, not because of any direct pressure from the Nazis (there was none until 1943), but because of the logic of the alliance itself. <sup>28</sup> In sum, these policies were adopted in spite of known opposition to them, and Ciano was a key figure in their development.

We can now appreciate the depth of the crisis which this produced among Italians who had worked for the development of a "revolutionary" fascism that would become the model for a reinvigorated Europe, especially those who had viewed men like Ciano and Bottai as their spokesmen in the higher levels of the fascist hierarchy. Having expended so much energy to demonstrate the incompatibility of Nazism and Italian "universal" fascism, they found themselves confronted by a regime which adopted the very policies the proponents of universal fascism had condemned for years. Further, the adoption of the anti-Semitic measures was greeted with widespread hostility among the Italian populace, stemming as it did from foreign sources, and appearing in a country which not only had no

tradition of mass anti-Semitism but which had opposed those doctrines for decades.

The response to this dilemma was, as we said earlier, a varied one. For those who, like Asvero Gravelli, were personally close to Mussolini, deep loyalty to the person of the Duce enabled them to surmount this "crisis of conscience."<sup>29</sup> Gravelli remained dedicated to Mussolini to the bitter end, and recanted his earlier proclamation as a prophet of the "protestants of the religion of racism." In an article suggestively entitled "*Il razzismo italiano tra l'universalismo astratto e l'universalità concreta*" (Italian Racism Between Abstract Universalism and Concrete Universality) written in 1938,<sup>30</sup> Gravelli not only endorsed Italian racism, but took pains to claim that this doctrine was not part of a European-wide phenomenon but rather a uniquely Italian development which stood for "universal" tendencies. Thus he was able to maintain the position which had been adopted by the Montreux Congress, for Gravelli argued that each people would develop its own version of racism, and defend itself according to its own national traditions and inclinations.

Interestingly enough, Gravelli's adoption of racism did not prevent him from continuing his journalistic and personal activities on behalf of the expansion of fascism in the world and the spread of the cult of Youth. In the middle and late thirties he became associated with the *Istituto Europa Giovane* (Young Europe Institute) in Rome,<sup>31</sup> which published a monthly periodical entitled *Nazionale*. The director of this Institute, Pietro Gorgolini, was a fascist of long standing, and he devoted the activities of the Institute to spreading fascist values throughout the peninsula and to acquainting his followers with foreign developments of importance to fascist culture. When racism became the order of the day Gorgolini quickly joined the new movement, and organized a conference on Nazi literature in

1938. The Institute also published several books and pamphlets, ranging from works by Arnaldo Mussolini to topics related to the old notion of universal fascism, such as "The Rejuvenation of Europe." In addition to Gravelli, Gorgolini had managed to attract some of the leading fascist intellectuals to the Institute, such as Emilio Bodrero and Paolo Orano, and such foreign luminaries as Corneliu Codreanu and Mihail Manoilescu from the Rumanian Iron Guard, Armand Godoy from the Falange, and Franz Arens from Germany.<sup>32</sup>

This sort of activity, characteristic of the supporters of universal fascism, was no longer as valued by the regime as it had been in the early thirties, and financial support for Gorgolini's Institute was removed in 1941, when the Ministry of Popular Culture closed it down.<sup>33</sup>

While personal loyalty and affection for Mussolini might explain Asvero Gravelli's adoption of anti-Semitism, the case of Giuseppe Bottai is more complex and, in terms of the problems we have been dealing with, far more significant. For Bottai's anti-Semitism was evidently a virulent and deeply felt expression. Even the cynical Ciano marveled at the heat of Bottai's expressions on the "Jewish question,"<sup>34</sup> and while the response of most Italians to the racial laws was apathetic (if not antagonistic), Bottai eagerly embraced the new doctrine as a method of finally creating the "new fascists" which had been his concern for more than fifteen years. The means for the creation of these new people was, as always, education:

In the elementary school, by means suited to the infant level, a climate will be created that is appropriate for the formation of a first embryonic racist conscience, while in the *scuola media* the highest mental development of the adolescents, already in contact with the humanistic tradition . . . will make it possible to establish the bases of racist doctrine, its ends and its limits. The propagation of the doctrine will continue, finally, in the

*scuola superiore*, where studious youth . . . can prepare itself to be, in its own turn, the animator and teacher [of racism] . . .<sup>35</sup>

Bottai, as Minister of Education during the racist period, was in an excellent position to enforce the adoption of anti-Semitic doctrines, and his zealous conversion to the racist faith is eloquent testimony to the attractiveness of that doctrine, at least to some fascists. In Bottai's case, the question is complicated by his highly critical attitude towards the regime, for he had acquired a justly deserved reputation as the "frondist" within the fascist camp. As we have seen, young Italians were great supporters of Bottai, and his stance on the "Jewish question" is a measure of the depth of the crisis produced by the change in fascism in the late thirties. Bottai seems to have embraced anti-Semitism as a genuinely effective way of bringing about a change within the heart of fascism.

It is always dangerous to try to evaluate men's motives, yet in this case Bottai's intentions are most important. It has been suggested that his actions between 1938 and 1940 were the result of a considerable amount of autonomy granted him by Mussolini, in an attempt to win over the majority of Italian youth to the fascist cause.<sup>36</sup> If it is true that Bottai had achieved this degree of freedom, it might be argued that his anti-Semitism was a mask for his activities, which were directed toward the substitution of his own brand of fascism for Mussolini's. Ruggero Zangrandi has suggested that Bottai was aiming toward "creating a personal political base, looking towards the succession, resting on the undoubtedly superior part of Italian culture, and on elements which he knew very well were anti-fascist."<sup>37</sup>

If Bottai was seriously engaged in such subversive activities, an attitude of trenchant anti-Semitism would have served him well as a defense against charges of subversion from other Party hierarchs. Whatever the truth may be, it is beyond question that Bottai continued to act for the creation of his own kind of

fascism, and under the rubric of his anti-Semitic outcries in the late thirties he continued to hold conferences on universal fascism for many young fascists. (Indeed, many of the meetings sponsored by the government for young fascist intellectuals continued to revolve around themes of universal fascism, even as Italy moved ever closer to Hitler's fatal embrace.)<sup>38</sup> Bottai's publishing ventures in the late thirties and early forties, in particular his new journal *Primato* (*Primacy*, 1940) attracted many of those most highly critical of the regime to his side, and the participation of such genuine anti-fascists as Giorgio Spini and Luigi Salvatorelli leaves little doubt as to the direction of Bottai's activities.<sup>39</sup>

Whether or not Bottai's anti-Semitism was a mask for his attempts to promote his own version of fascism, the outcome of his maneuver was disastrous for his program to stimulate an independent school of fascist thought and action in Italy. Once the Axis was established and war had begun in Europe, there was no hope for such ventures as Bottai had in mind. Surprisingly, he was highly optimistic about the possibility of Italian cultural supremacy in a Europe conquered by the Axis.<sup>40</sup> His own activities after the formation of the Axis were aimed at maintaining a certain public support for ideas which had previously been embodied in the universal fascism movement, hoping that they could be successfully institutionalized after the war.

The ironic tragedy of this attitude is that, once the alliance with Hitler became established, both Bottai and Ciano found themselves in agreement on the universal relevance of Italian fascism, and on the odious nature of the Axis.<sup>41</sup> Yet both had contributed mightily to the formation of the Axis and the acceptance of anti-Semitism. Their optimism on the role that the Italian genius and the innovatory forces of Italian youth might play in the Europe of the future was as misguided as their failure to oppose the racial policies in Italy when first proposed.



When we turn from these two pivotal figures in the history of fascism to the more human-sized personalities involved in the movement for universal fascism, we find a monotonous conformity to the will of Mussolini. The CAUR, once in the forefront for the creation of a new world fascist movement, became one of many centers for the dissemination of racist literature, and a conduit for Italian funds to foreign movements congenial to the regime.<sup>42</sup> From 1938 to the end of the war, the CAUR would be primarily concerned with the distribution of literature on behalf of anti-Semitism and other neo-Nazi doctrines. Its final incarnation was in the form of a journal called *Giovane Europa* (*Young Europe*), which was a mere parrot for Nazi slogans.<sup>43</sup>

Oddone Fantini and the group around *Universalità Fascista* continued to act as if the day of Italian international hegemony was about to dawn; but calls for the creation of a Fascist International vanished by 1936, and the once prevalent attacks on Nazi doctrines vanished altogether.<sup>44</sup> Fantini never became one of the vociferous advocates of anti-Semitism, but in the summer of 1937 *Universalità Fascista* published an article on National Socialist demographic politics which praised Nazi efforts to increase the German birth rate and remove undesirable elements from the population, citing the Nuremberg racial laws favorably.<sup>45</sup>

The School of Fascist Mysticism became one of the principal propaganda organizations for the regime in the late thirties, and innumerable conferences, radio broadcasts, movies, and lectures on the "Jewish question" were produced under its auspices, culminating in an attempt to integrate anti-Semitism into the fabric of "fascist mysticism."<sup>46</sup>

The actions of these various individuals and groups is sufficient to demonstrate that the adoption of racism was not incompatible with the belief that a "revolutionary" fascism might yet provide

the leadership which Europe so desperately needed. Renzo De Felice, speaking of those young fascists who accepted anti-Semitism, supports this position:

[The adoption of anti-Semitism] must be viewed as part of the discontent of many young people with the culture and politics of fascism. The "discovery of race" constituted a very important cultural fact for these young people, offering them a *key* finally to "understanding" the reason for the inadequacy of fascist culture up to that moment and enabling them to react to it in the name of new *values*.<sup>47</sup>

To understand how anti-Semitism was able to attract many young fascists who were critical of fascist culture and politics, we must briefly examine its nature here. Unlike the Nazi anti-Semitism he was often accused of copying, Mussolini's doctrine did not rest upon a pseudo-biological racism. Indeed, he continued to regard Nazi racial doctrine as unmitigated nonsense. As late as 1940 we find him telling his official biographer that there was no such thing as an "Italian race," and that the Italian spiritual climate acted to dissipate the purity of any race which might move to the peninsula. "All races passed through the convoluted passages of the Italian distillery," he observed, but "none camped long on our piazzas."<sup>48</sup>

The distinction between Italian and Jew was not a biological one in the *Weltanschauung* of Italian anti-Semitism, but rather a spiritual contrast. For Mussolini there were various spiritual types in the world, and he believed that at certain dramatic moments in history it was possible to speak of "races" becoming co-extensive with "nations." Such was the case with fascist Italy, where the genius of the Italian race (a spiritual "type") had made it possible to begin the construction of the Fascist State. Yet within that State were some recalcitrant elements, which did not share in the qualities of the "race," which did not adapt to the new spiritual climate of the period, and which

insisted on clinging to the values and goals of an earlier, corrupt epoch. The purpose of the anti-Semitic policies, as viewed by the Duce, was to retrain these elements, to Italianize and "fascisticize" them, and finally to reintegrate them back into fascist society.<sup>49</sup> When this reintegration was achieved, the Italian "race" and the Fascist State would be co-extensive, both geographically and spiritually.

It is important to stress the differences between the Nazi and the fascist conception of human nature which are reflected in the different versions of racism in the two countries. In an article on race which Mussolini considered very important, Mario Missiroli argued that ". . . the highest spiritual values are a conquest of conscience, the consequence of effort and perpetual choice and, as such, are not determined by natural fact. . . ."<sup>50</sup> This is clearly a dynamic theory of human nature, quite different from the Nazi concept, which was ineluctably tied to a changeless racial principle. The fascists insisted upon their ability to change the human spirit.

Mussolini's own language leaves little doubt about the "spiritual" nature of his racist thinking. Above all, the dictator's hatred was aimed at those Italians who did not feel themselves as such, who did not sense their "race." The goal of his racial policies was the transformation of the Italian people from "a race of slaves" to "a race of masters."<sup>51</sup> He even went so far at one point as to advocate his discriminatory policies on the grounds that they would intensify foreign antagonism toward Italy, and thus make all Italians aware of their uniqueness in the world.

In keeping with this spiritual concept of race, Italian anti-Semitic policy was aimed at the transformation of people rather than at their destruction. Mussolini himself termed this a policy of "discrimination," not "persecution."<sup>52</sup> Indeed, from his own warped point of view, Mussolini saw himself embarking upon a program of disciplining Italians, not launching a mass persecu-

tion. He believed that he could "Italianize" the Jews in short order: "The patriotic Jew loses the polemic characteristics of the race . . . I have Aryanized these men of great spirit. . . . It will be a question of a generation. Mixed marriages are slowly eliminating the Jewish characteristics."<sup>53</sup>

We can now appreciate the appeal of Italian racism to some of the more articulate and critical elements of Italian youth. In particular, the notion that the spiritual failings of the Italian people explained the failure of fascism to achieve a genuine revolution was one which many young fascist intellectuals had embraced, albeit without the "racist" framework. While the racist doctrines were anathema to many who viewed them as foreign to Italian tradition, to others Mussolini's racism offered an explanation for the prior failure of fascist culture and organization. For these, embracing racism reinforced what was, after all, already established within the framework of the doctrines of universal fascism: the belief that the successful development of the Fascist Revolution awaited the emergence of a new spiritual type. Furthermore, the racist "explanation" of fascist failures, namely, the existence of spiritually limited people rather than dynamic and creative fascists, fitted well with many of the criticisms which young fascists had directed at their elders. Many young fascists could view racism as an idea which only young people could embrace, an idea which did not find support in the ranks of the older generations because they were not ready for such a "revolutionary" step. This is the sort of rationale which De Felice has in mind when he speaks of racism as embodying a reaction to fascist culture in the name of "new values."

We can see the theme of "new values" and the "new man" at work in those areas of fascist culture produced by the supporters of racism. It is clearly elaborated in one of the last major journalistic attempts to promulgate the doctrine of universal

fascism, a special issue of *Universalità Fascista* brought out in October, 1937, which reprinted a series of speeches that had been delivered at the Foreign Student Center in Rome on the theme "The Universality of Fascism."

Anti-Semitism was not mentioned explicitly in any of the lectures, yet many of the speakers referred to it indirectly.<sup>54</sup> The year 1937 was, after all, that in which the regime had conducted the first major press campaign on behalf of the new policies. Further, a new and strident emphasis on anti-communism had entered the pages of *Universalità Fascista*. Whereas earlier in the thirties fascism had been contrasted with liberalism, communism, and National Socialism, the major contrast in 1937 was with communism. Indeed, in some articles anti-communism had become the "universal" content of fascism itself: "It is here that fascism assumes universal value, because it undertakes as its task the struggle to save the values of the spirit against the monstrosity of a system which makes man a piece of an enormous social machine. . . ."<sup>55</sup>

The conception which permeated all the speeches of 1937 was that of the new fascist man, a man who had "transcended" the old problems of liberal society. "When fascism speaks . . . of educating the race, of family, of health, of educating labor . . . it is not inspired by purely material interests. . . . but by a higher concept. . . ."<sup>56</sup>

The main thrust of these arguments was aptly summarized by Fantini. He raised the question, if the essence of fascism had to be distilled into a single word, what word would it be? And his answer was "Heroism."<sup>57</sup> Chanting, "Better to live one day as a lion than a hundred years as a sheep," Fantini turned to a lengthy discourse on the meaning of heroism:

Behold, here . . . the profound content of the Revolution, which is above all a new idea of life, a total and integral interpretation of the world. Man is no longer considered . . . as a creature

subject to nature; life is not viewed as a burden which is born resignedly; but he is . . . a fighter, a soldier, who every day must conquer glory. . . .

Fascist Italy today is itself the concrete embodiment of heroism. Instead of the hero-man our times see the hero-nation. And the new heroism projects itself no longer on the internal life of the nation, but on the life of all nations, as something higher, noble, sublime.

. . . The struggle which the Italian people, fascist people, fight is the revelation of a state of mind which transforms men, things, and the spirit into a splendid reality. . . .<sup>58</sup>

This is a far cry from the earlier prophets of universal fascism, who had foreseen the creation of Dante's Empire on the basis of Italian civilization rather than on military virtues. Further, Fantini's definition of an Italian hero-nation which would embody the military virtues contains all the essential elements of Italian racism. All that is necessary to complete the doctrine is to cast the Jew as antithesis of the hero.

So we see that the "new man," who in the early thirties had been described as an iconoclast, an enemy of the fascist hierarchy, and an innovator on a worldwide scale, has been transformed into a soldier in the ranks. Further, while the appeal was still aimed at young people, much of the rhetoric associated with the cult of Youth had vanished from the *universalfascismo* propaganda.

So, many young fascist intellectuals were captured by the regime's anti-Semitic programs in the late thirties and forties. Indeed, one of the bitter ironies of the fascist period is the degree to which the youth finally found themselves isolated by the development of fascism, and the consequent turn by some to the racist "answer" offered by the regime.

To say this, however, is to identify one of the very few groups which supported fascist anti-Semitism; and even within the ranks of fascist youth, there were very many who could

not accept the foreign doctrine of racism, so that the passage of the laws of 1938 marked the end of their participation in the fascist enterprise. Many of the young intellectuals who had previously supported the regime turned to an active, anti-fascist opposition to Mussolini himself. Members of the "fascist generation" who had believed that fascism could become a truly viable means of social transformation were catalyzed into open revolt by the adoption of the racial measures. Deeply disturbed by fascism's failure to produce any meaningful changes in Italian society, by its inability to generate a culture worthy of Italian tradition, and by its increasing closeness to the Nazis, many young intellectuals joined with those who had already turned on Mussolini. They did so for a variety of reasons, but above all because the changes in fascism in this period had stripped from them the "conditional liberty" they had enjoyed earlier, and because they were forced to submit to a racist policy and a German alliance which they found odious.<sup>59</sup>

This opposition took many forms in the late thirties and early forties, and an investigation of such activities would take us far afield. But it must be mentioned that the resistance to fascism on the part of youth took, generally speaking, two basic forms. The first was the path of clear and open revolt against the regime itself. This was the one taken by Ruggero Zangrandi and his companions in his "long journey across fascism."<sup>60</sup> The second was that taken by Gastone Silvano Spinetti, of remaining within fascist society while continuing to try to transform it, to make it into something worthwhile. These were the young people who continued to call themselves "fascists" even while they agitated against the regime and against its policies. Spinetti has described them thus:

[They were] young people who were not true anti-Fascists, because in order to profess their own ideas freely they called themselves "Mussolinians," but in reality they practiced a good

and beautiful anti-fascism, perhaps more productive in Italy than that practiced from outside by the *émigrés*, criticizing the hierarchs, the institutions, and even the principles proclaimed by the "fascist doctrine."<sup>61</sup>

These were among the young people who had agitated so forcefully for universal fascism, and who were, as Spinetti observes, *in nuce* liberals, socialists, Catholics, and Communists, but who all called themselves "fascists."<sup>62</sup> Having developed many critical ideas during the course of their lives in the *Ventennio*, they maintained their position of reformist agitation throughout the Axis period. When the war ended they returned to Italian politics as liberals, Christian Democrats, socialists, and Communists, and the change of political labels did not necessarily represent a profound change in attitude. The very failure of fascism genuinely to indoctrinate and integrate young intellectuals into the fabric of the regime produced a generation that possessed considerable independence, an independence they would demonstrate after the fall of fascism when many of them participated in the creation of the Italian Republic.