

Towards the International

MM The idea of a universal fascism destined to transform the face of the European continent developed at a time when Mussolini was looking beyond the domestic boundaries of his Fascist Regime for new projects and adventures. The consolidation of the regime was achieved in the late twenties, and the thirties were above all the era of the fascist "Empire." This momentous transformation reflected many of the changes which fascism had undergone during its first decade in power, profound changes which must be analyzed before the full significance of projects for a Fascist International can be understood.

Unlike the Nazis, whose achievement of a monolithic State entailed the expansion and consolidation of the Nazi Party, Mussolini's dictatorship was a uniquely personal one, and was largely achieved *at the expense* of the *Partito Nazionale Fascista*. Beginning with the Matteotti crisis in 1924, Mussolini worked throughout the twenties first to discipline and then to disarm the Party. This was accomplished during the tenure of Augusto Turati as Secretary of the Party; by 1928 the PNF, which had been able to dictate to Mussolini in the early twenties, was essentially reduced to the status of an extension of the governmental bureaucracy. In keeping with the slogan "Everything in the State, nothing outside the State, nothing against the State," the discipline and capture of the Party was a necessary step in the construction of the new Fascist State. The success of

this enterprise meant that Mussolini need no longer fear the menace of the kind of *ultimata* which had harassed him so frequently in the first three years of his rule.¹

As the Party was being brought under governmental control, Mussolini extended the sphere of his discipline to other areas of Italian political activity. The crushing of the traditional political parties was facilitated by the fatuous opposition movement of the Aventine Succession of 1924,² which drove the more liberal parliamentary elements far outside any effective sphere of legislative action, and left Mussolini with a free hand to reorganize the legislature itself. By the end of the decade the Fascist Party was the only legally recognized political party, and control over its membership was strictly exercised by the Secretary, who in turn had taken his place in the governmental structure. Further, the reorganization of the legislature and the change in the electoral laws which were promulgated in 1928 gave the Grand Council of Fascism (a governmental rather than a Party organization) virtually complete control of the selection of candidates for the new House. With the passage of time, the Grand Council itself became increasingly the right arm of the dictator and its meetings became significantly ever less frequent.³

In short, the first decade of fascist rule had produced a unique personal dictatorship, which left Mussolini with no single opponent in the political realm capable of opposing his will. The emasculation of the old parties, the transformation of the legislature, the "purification" of the Fascist Party itself, and the isolation of the monarchy from any effective role in decision making, all combined to ensure the widest possible scope for Mussolini's initiative. At the same time, the dictator had acted to reduce the effectiveness of the two large organizations from the economic sector, the *Confindustria* on the side of the businessmen, and the *Confederazione di Sindacati Fascisti* (Confederation of Fascist Trade Unions) on the side of the workers.⁴

The discipline of the economic organizations was as necessary to Mussolini as that of the political structures, and his actions in the twenties went hand in hand with his strokes against his potential political foes. As Renzo De Felice has recently demonstrated, fascist economic policy in the twenties—in particular the deflationary actions taken between 1925 and 1927, and the revaluation of the lira at the level of the famous “quota 90”—must be viewed as actions designed to drive the industrialists into the arms of the Duce.⁵ The harshness of the revaluation was designed to demonstrate to the business leaders the absolute indispensability of Mussolini himself, and also the force of his own will in formulating economic policy. Having beaten them with the stick of deflation and revaluation, Mussolini was then able to turn around and offer them the carrot of guarantees against strikes by their class enemy.

In endearing himself to the industrialists by guaranteeing the continual operation of their factories and promising State intervention against strikers, Mussolini simultaneously struck a blow at one of the few organizations which might have been capable of posing a counterforce to his own strength. Edmundo Rossoni's Confederation of Fascist Trade Unions was the only surviving organization in Italy which could pretend to some sort of radical intent.⁶ The Fascist Party, originally populated by the *enragé* elements of Italian socialism, had long since abandoned any pretense of radical aim, but this tradition of fascist socialism was kept alive by Rossoni and his followers. The treatment of the Confederation by Mussolini was in keeping with his actions toward other strong groups; not only was the traditional proletarian weapon of the strike taken away from the workers, but the Confederation itself was dissolved into smaller units in keeping with the new “corporate” structure which was being introduced in the late twenties.⁷

Finally, the keystone in the triumphal arch of fascist con-

solidation was unquestionably the Conciliation with the Vatican, which not only gave Mussolini tremendous prestige both at home and abroad, but also acted to insulate fascism from some of the more pointed tongues in the Church.⁸ The Church, too, became defused as a potentially explosive element in Italy.

The situation, then, as fascist Italy prepared to enter the 1930's was one of an effectively consolidated personal dictatorship, with potential enemies largely disarmed, co-opted, or driven into prison or exile. Control over the press was, legally at least, firmly established, and in terms of what we know about public opinion in the early and middle thirties, Mussolini's popularity would never again reach such heights.⁹ Yet fascism seemed to many to be a failure, and Mussolini himself was well aware of the strong currents of discontent running through the country. We have already dealt with the important case of Giuseppe Bottai, and the significant elements of the youthful intelligentsia which followed the guiding genius of *Critica Fascista*. There were other voices, although many were not so outspoken as Bottai, suggesting that all was not right in the Palazzo Venezia. This is the origin of the oft-repeated rumor, which circulated among reputable fascist circles in the late twenties, that Mussolini had been “captured” by his entourage and become isolated from the “true fascists.”¹⁰

This sort of complaint was tantamount to saying that the Fascist Revolution had been betrayed, and that the regime constructed with such terrible effort during the twenties was not “truly fascist.” Since this complaint could hardly be voiced in Italy in the 1930's, it was translated into different terms. The context in which we encounter it most commonly is that of the “future of the Revolution,” and all manner of opponents of the newly established regime were to be found under the generous folds of the revolutionary banner. Bottai, to take again one of the most important cases, put the question in its archetypal

form on the first day of 1929: "Is the Revolution therefore completed? Is nothing left but to accept the closed cycle of its history as it exists in the institutes, the laws, the concretized regime?"¹¹ Bottai's own answer was that the Revolution was not complete but only begun, and that the major part of its creative activities lay ahead.

This conflict demonstrates the variegated nature of fascism. Mussolini's power rested upon a highly explosive coalition, and the volatility of this power base had already been demonstrated during the crisis of 1924. As the dictatorship grew more stable in the late twenties, many of the early leaders of fascism were disgruntled as they found themselves becoming less and less central to the affairs of the Italian State. Dissatisfaction with the nature of the regime was not by any means restricted to intellectuals like Bottai and his followers. Indeed, many of those who had participated in the early surge of squadristism were furious to find themselves occupying an ever more marginal position in fascist ranks, and the cries of betrayal directed at Mussolini came from various positions along the fascist spectrum.

What must be kept in mind throughout the period of the thirties is that critics of fascism within Italian society could have a variety of complaints about the structure of the regime, for the simple reason that the establishment of the Fascist State had been largely a haphazard operation. There was little about it which was intrinsically beyond modification. Mussolini had demonstrated his consummate ability to abandon allies and beliefs which had outlived their usefulness to him, and many fascists continued to support the regime in the belief that it was only a matter of time before they would win the Duce to their side. More often than not, those fascists who believed in a "revolutionary" fascism had come from syndicalist or anarcho-syndicalist ranks; and throughout the thirties they would attempt to convince Mussolini to re-embark upon the revolu-

tionary path which, they thought, had characterized much of fascism in its heroic early days. Thus a man like Bottai could remain active in the Fascist Regime throughout the *Ventennio* in an attempt to revivify the potentially radical elements of the Corporatism for which he fought unsuccessfully in the late twenties. Innumerable other cases could be cited, but our concern here is more with a certain attitude of mind, a sort of self-hypnosis by which critics of the regime convinced themselves that fascism could change its direction, or, in the popular slogan, recapture the spirit of 1919.

If those who had fought and lost could remain on the field of battle, it is hardly surprising that many of the young Italians who came of age under fascism could believe that their battle, still to be waged, was destined to succeed. This belief was reinforced, as we have seen, by much of the rhetoric of fascist leaders as well as by that of Mussolini himself.

Furthermore, it is now possible to suggest that youth had a very real importance to Mussolini. The construction of the Fascist Regime had been accomplished at the expense of various groups within Italy, but rested upon no solid base. Diverse scholars have made this fundamental point,¹² but perhaps its classic statement was that of Stefano Jacini, shortly after the Second World War:

The regime did not have at its disposal any compact group whose material and moral interests corresponded fully with its own, or were such as to tie it indissolubly to its wagon; to be sure, it theoretically dominated the entire nation, and actually availed itself here and there of devoted groups, and more frequently of influential persons; however neither the one nor the other normally represented the best, on the contrary they stood for the worst of the respective groups of origin.¹³

This situation arose logically out of the historical origins of the Fascist Regime itself. Having had to eliminate groups one

at a time as potentially threatening to his own power, and indeed at times to his very continuation in office, Mussolini at the end found himself with no solid base of support. The much-vaunted ideology of the super-State which became codified in the thirties was in point of fact a reflection of fascism's failure to establish a solid base. The consequence of this was a frenetic search after "consensus," which masked the intrinsic weakness of fascism's political and social situation.

The implications of this instability are vital to an understanding of the importance of youth in the development of fascist practice and ideology in the period under consideration. Since the present generation of Italians had been eliminated from positions of influence and strength by Mussolini's maneuvers in the twenties, a genuine basis of loyalty and active support could not be expected for some time. We have seen the realization on the part of leading fascist hierarchs that the "fascistization" of the schools had been a failure, and it would be easy to cite similar failures in other important sectors of Italian life (most notably the working class).¹⁴ What was crucial, however, was not the sense of failure surrounding a particular policy or group so much as a growing conviction on Mussolini's part that the entire generation which had marched on Rome was a failure. Thus Mussolini and many of the youthful critics of fascism were united in their condemnation of a particular generation in Italian history.

It is no accident that the calls for the revivification of fascism came from Arnaldo Mussolini and from the youthful sectors of the fascist intelligentsia. Arnaldo called for a generation which would not only follow his brother's will, but actually provide the kind of dynamic leadership for which Italians yearned so strongly. The young Italians, themselves committed to the heady goal of bringing the spirit of the *Risorgimento* back to Italian life, were the logical group in Italy for the kind of

transformation the Duce was calling for. From Mussolini's point of view in the late twenties, all that was necessary was for the regime to endure, to survive. When the new generation came of age, it would provide the new blood which the aging body of Italian political and cultural life needed so desperately. We can find this theme as early as 1926, in one of Mussolini's speeches from the balcony of the Palazzo Venezia:

My word of command is a verb: endure! Endure day by day, month by month, year by year, so that all the doubts, the criticisms, the opposition, smash themselves like dirt against the monolithic block of fascist will and tenacity.¹⁵

The prospect for the emergence of a new élite from the ranks of the young fitted neatly with the current rhetoric announcing the opening of a "new cycle" of fascism, and this kind of appeal made it possible to enlist many who had become disenchanted with the construction of the Fascist State itself. People who had been shunted out of the centers of power might now look forward to a new fascist epoch, as a time when their ideas could finally have a creative effect on history. There was therefore a twofold component to the demand that a new ruling class be created in Italy: a rejection of the limitations of fascism as then constituted, and a desire to reconsider some of the fundamental tenets upon which the regime apparently rested. Perhaps the clearest statement of the state of mind which characterized many of fascism's disillusioned followers was made by Giuseppe Bottai on the front page of *Critica Fascista* on June 15, 1930:

. . . we might say that this appears to be the *conclusive* year for the work of constructing fascism. Having conquered the discipline of the Nation and the entire Italian people, which lives in a profoundly changed moral and historic climate, having ensured and restored to health the bases of the economy, reorganized the entire structure of the State, and regulated the pro-

ductive enterprise with the corporate order, the nearly eight years achieved by fascism represent a titanic effort of will crowned by full and undeniable success.

But the fact that we have reached all the objectives we proposed, far from meaning that fascism has exhausted its task, obliges us to clarify from now on the new paths which still remain to be trodden. . . .¹⁶

Coming from Bottai, there is a peculiar irony to these words. He was, after all, Minister of Corporations, the director of the edifice which was supposed to be the masterpiece of fascist theory: the corporate structures. But Bottai too had had some of his sharper corporate teeth drawn, or at least filed down, by Mussolini,¹⁷ and the much-heralded Corporate State would remain largely an interesting theory for academics and foreign leaders. What is important here is the tone of frustration which characterized Bottai's call for a continuing Revolution and, as we shall see, the transformation of this frustration into a demand for the expansion of fascism.

Having lauded the accomplishments of the regime, Bottai turned to a prospectus for the future:

A movement of such vastness and scope as our own cannot permit itself the luxury of easy dreams of past conquests . . . since there must be a vigilant and constant effort to perfect and adapt to a reality in constant change; but not even this most delicate task, which employs all the tenacity we can muster, can exempt us from the historic destiny of all great revolutions: expansion beyond the limits of its own territory of birth and experiment. . . .¹⁸

With this, Bottai shifted the emphasis of his search to transform fascism onto an international plane. And here his ideas corresponded fully with those of Mussolini, of many leading fascists both at home and abroad, and above all of a highly vocal and literate segment of Italian youth—to see the emergence of a universal fascism from the experimentation of the

twenties. For Mussolini, this was the result of the logic of his own regime. The general frustration and awareness that much of fascist "theory" remained on paper could not help but alarm the Duce, whose personal prestige and glory were at stake in the popularity of his regime. De Felice has described his reaction to the crisis of confidence as follows:

. . . in the thirties Mussolini—seeing the "social" card of corporativism irremediably devalued in his hand—would end by searching for the "historic" justification of his power and by launching his regime anew by taking the route of all modern dictators, that of national "grandeur" and "strength," of colonial expansionism and military adventures.¹⁹

At first at least this policy met with considerable success. The period of the early thirties—until the beginning of the alliance with Hitler and the dreadful adventure in Spain—was the time of fascism's greatest popularity among the Italian people.²⁰ A large part of this popularity was due to the exciting prospect of seeing fascism become the model for the future of Europe, and—for those who had still not been disillusioned by the dictator's personal manipulation of his potential enemies—the prospect of developing something radically new and durable within the framework of fascism itself.

This scheme of launching a "new wave" of fascism on an international level also appealed to many who had been outflanked by Mussolini in the first tests of strength in the twenties. Having lost the first round, they could still hope to emerge victorious in structuring fascism's international incarnation. Bottai seems to have been one such, for his enthusiastic adherence to the plan for the construction of a fascism which would be "merchandise for export" is otherwise very hard to explain. In fact, he had opposed the idea when it was first voiced in 1925 by Camillo Pellizzi. In a celebrated letter to *L'Epoca* in February, Pellizzi had sarcastically noted that only those Italians living

outside the peninsula had been able to recognize that fascism had universal implications:

That at last even our Roman leaders realize that there can be a universal sense and a universal function to fascism, is something destined to make us exiles happy, we advanced sentinels who have felt this truth almost like an epidemic sensation and have tried to spread this truth among our comrades for months and years. . . .²¹

In 1925 Bottai felt that it was inappropriate for the regime to dissipate its energies on such prospective developments as foreign "fascist" movements, and urged his followers not to become deflected from the main task before them: the construction of the Fascist State in Italy.²² What had happened between 1925 and 1930 was that people like Bottai had lost any real hope for the achievement of their domestic programs, and consequently hoped the "exportation" of fascism might offer them some chance of bringing about the changes they desired.

By 1933 Bottai had come to agree with Pellizzi on the urgency of developing a coherent fascist doctrine which could be applied outside the Italian sphere. The terms in which Pellizzi described this new doctrine are of great interest to us, since they point both to the shortcomings of Italian fascism and to the failure of the regime to establish coherent centers of propaganda abroad. Pellizzi observed²³ that most of the propaganda abroad was centered on the person and speeches of Mussolini himself, and that the whole notion of the Fascist Revolution was therefore shrouded in mystery. Nobody seemed to know exactly what fascism represented, and for that reason it was foolhardy to presume that a worldwide adherence to it would spring up spontaneously.

He continued by making some serious observations on the shortcomings of fascist doctrine, in particular, the notion of Corporativism:

. . . Corporativism, naturally, is not what it should be, because it is still being made. Until it is something living, it will continue to create itself, and therefore will not be what it should. But it is time now that we stipulate what it *should be* . . . the Labor Charter is an important document, and it has been appreciated abroad; but in some measure the facts have already contradicted it, in part it has been surpassed, and there still exist (especially in the areas of principles and methods) vast zones of absolute obscurity. . . .²⁴

The grounds for such a clarification were that without a coherent set of principles and formulas, fascism could not hope to be "exportable." This brings home one of the most interesting elements of the doctrine of universal fascism: it offered its supporters the opportunity to criticize fascism from the standpoint of the exigencies of a new international order, and thus served as a rallying point for many of the critics of the regime.

Aside from its domestic utility, the notion of universal fascism also had some serious pretensions on the international level. At the end of 1933 Pellizzi wrote a long letter to *Critica Fascista*,²⁵ complaining about the innumerable requests for information on fascism which were flooding his London mailbox, and observing that there was no single organization to which he could turn in an attempt to obtain such printed information. Instead, he was besieged by a long list of Italian organizations in England, asking him to speak, to write articles, or to provide information for their purposes. Noting that he was associated with the University of London, and not with either of the two traditional centers of English higher education, Pellizzi speculated that the Italians at Oxford and Cambridge must be inundated by such requests.

His complaint was a serious one, and points up the failure of the regime to organize its propaganda apparatus coherently. The large number of organizations which had entered the field of propaganda had produced chaos, and Pellizzi reasonably

requested that the government take steps to centralize the entire operation.

Yet whatever the obstacles to the "exportation" of fascism, both Pellizzi and Bottai were agreed on its desirability by the middle thirties, and their enthusiastic support for the program of universal fascism shows the appeal of this ideology to fascists critical of many of the practices of the regime. After all, there was much in the rhetoric of Mussolini that could lead his followers to believe the new period of fascist expansion would entail a full-scale transformation of fascism itself. The "new cycle" of history which seemed to many to lie at hand might well provide dissident fascists with the opportunity to transform a regime which had become ossified. The question here is the amount of seriousness with which the regime, and Mussolini in particular, embarked upon the enterprise of spreading fascism onto a European plane. Was it simply a rhetorical flourish, or was there a substantial attempt to organize a practical fascist thrust on the European scene? In analyzing this problem it is necessary to keep in mind the very close connection between domestic and foreign policy under Mussolini, for, as we have seen in other instances, the Duce's actions were motivated by a variety of concerns. Above all, he was desperately committed to the creation of a coherent and strictly organized fascist society at home, and his actions abroad must be viewed against that backdrop.

Most historians of the fascist period have concluded that the campaign for a worldwide fascist movement was a tactic by the dictator to extend his own prestige abroad while simultaneously enlarging his own domestic support.²⁶ This is undoubtedly true, yet the emphasis on the purely tactical nature of the program seems somewhat misplaced. The notion of universal fascism was, after all, closely tied to the concepts of Youth and national revivification already discussed at some length. Thus actions by

Mussolini, designed as they were to stimulate similar sympathies throughout the world, stemmed from a dynamic source within Italy itself. Indeed, it seems reasonable to suggest that Mussolini simply claimed for himself the sentiments of many fascist intellectuals, putting himself at the head of an already existent movement in order to expand both the boundaries and the anatomy of fascism.

By proclaiming his adherence to the principles of universal fascism, Mussolini was able to give many of his critics a new dedication to fascist Italy. As is often the case, however, the new rhetoric was not immediately followed by new actions, and Mussolini's problem became one of how to satisfy enhanced expectations. As we shall see, this was resolved, at least temporarily, by the call for the creation of a Fascist International, the Italian answer to international Bolshevism.

The transformation of fascism into a "universal" movement was immensely popular among youth, a popularity by no means restricted to the confines of the Italian peninsula. Enzo Santarelli has summarized the success of the "new face" of fascism:

. . . fascism acquires a "universal" aspect, and appeals to the youth of Europe. All this explains sufficiently why the great mass of youth (save, perhaps, in the factories and at the level of a highly select intellectual élite) adheres to fascism.²⁷

We must turn now to an examination of the doctrine itself, and shall begin by looking at perhaps the most widely read journals involved in the promulgation of *fascismo universale*, *Ottobre* and *Antieuropa* (*October* and *Anti-Europe*).

Ottobre, subtitled "The Journal of Universal Fascism," began its literary life on October 28, 1932, in Rome. Surely no fascist newspaper ever had a zodiacal pedigree as impressive as this one, and its title served to accentuate its appearance on the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome. Its director, Asvero

Gravelli, had an equally impressive fascist lineage. Gravelli was a member of the original *Fascio di Combattimento* in Milan, and participated in the celebrated sacking of the *Avanti* offices on April 15, 1919. He was involved in D'Annunzio's melodramatic storming of Fiume in 1919, and joined in numerous squadrist actions during the early twenties. He ultimately became one of the first leaders of the *Balilla* and served for a time as personal secretary to Michele Bianchi, one of the original quadrumvirs of fascism. With fascism installed in power, he turned his energies towards journalism, almost invariably aimed at the mobilization of youth. To this end, he founded *Giovinetza* and *La Giovane Italia*, two of the most important journals for young readers. In 1928 he founded the monthly journal *Antieuropa*, dedicated to the promulgation of the ideas of universal fascism, and the newspaper *Ottobre* served as its bi-weekly supplement. The title *Antieuropa* was designed to embody the hostility of the movement towards the "old Europe" of liberalism and capitalism. In February, 1934, *Ottobre* became a daily, testifying both to the popularity of its theme and to the financial support Gravelli was able to find for the enterprise.

Ottobre embodies all the basic themes of the universal fascism movement. Stressing the unity of the Fascist State, and its triumph in involving all classes in the State rather than constructing a rule on the power of one class, the contributors to *Ottobre* argued that fascism represented the only solution to the crises besetting the West. Its scope was never restricted to Italian problems, but stressed the universal applicability of fascist techniques. Thus, from its inception we find writers from all over Europe contributing to *Ottobre*. Further, considerable attention was devoted to the Nazi movement in Germany, and from the start *Ottobre* was unsparing in its criticism of the prophets of Nordic supremacy to the north. This concern with Hitler's movement would continue, as would the strident attacks on Nazi doctrine, particularly its racist component.

One can gain a sense of what all this furor was about by looking at the lead article by Gravelli in *Antieuropa* in the winter of 1930. The article is entitled "*Verso l'internazionale fascista*" ("Toward the Fascist International"), and begins with a definition of Gravelli's own group. Typically, that definition placed it in a European context:

Antieuropa is the avant-garde of European fascism. Its task is to group together the best elements in Europe, to instill the experiences of fascism, to nourish the revolutionary fascist spirit, and to establish devotion to the cause of European dictatorship.

... The conquest of power in Italy was only the beginning of a European action. . . .²⁸

With the notable exception of the new emphasis on dictatorship, we have heard this language elsewhere, specifically in the journals of young Italians calling for the renovation of their own country. And in keeping with Mussolini's desire to involve youth in the expansion of fascism, Gravelli defined the project of spreading the fascist gospel beyond the boundaries of Italy as one which awaited the genius of fascist youth: "This is why we are anticipating and preparing the union of the young forces of the West. Our modern idea in Europe is a *becoming*, as opposed to a *being* incapable of progress."²⁹

Just as the spokesmen for Italian youth had attempted to define their role as that of participants in a generational struggle, the notion of universal fascism came to be cast in battlefield analogies by its proponents. This was, of course, in keeping with fascism's origins in the trenches of World War I, with its early ties to D'Annunzio, and with its reiterated belief in the moral virtues which emerged from struggle. This theme was voiced in the usual melodramatic tones of the Duce in his message for the year IX of the Fascist Era (1931-32):

The struggle between the two worlds does not admit of compromise, the new cycle which begins with the year IX puts the

dramatic alternative in ever-clearer relief. Either them or us. Our ideas or theirs. Our State or theirs! . . .

This explains why the struggle is now unfolding on a worldwide scale, and how fascism is the order of the day in all countries. . . .³⁰

The struggle was one between two conceptions of the world, and the Italian fascist response to the worldwide crisis was a message of youth. In 1932, Gravelli made this theme explicit when he collected many of his articles from the previous two years and expanded them into a volume with the same title as his earlier article, *Verso l'internazionale fascista*. Imitating Mussolini's syntax, Gravelli set down the conflict in clear terms: "Either old Europe or young Europe. We hold to a new pact of European fraternity and discard the old ideas. . . . Fascism is the gravedigger of old Europe. Now the forces of the Fascist International are rising."³¹

The similarity between this kind of appeal and that of groups like the one around *L'Universale* hardly needs to be labored. What is significant for us is that Gravelli, unlike Berto Ricci, can be considered an authoritative spokesman for the Fascist Regime, and that what had been a fascist heresy in certain quarters had now become official policy. It will be recalled that the contributors to many of the youth journals put great emphasis upon the development of genuine creativity, a creativity which would demonstrate the viability of fascism as a liberator of human genius. Similarly, the kind of association which Gravelli and his followers conceived as a "Fascist International" would insist upon the development of national fascisms which were not necessarily to be carbon copies of the Italian Fascist State. Because "the Europe of tomorrow will be dominated by Youth," it was not possible for spokesmen of the present order to lay down firm guidelines for fascism's future development. Furthermore the very nature of this future devel-

opment in countries other than Italy made any prediction dubious. Fascism would undoubtedly take a variety of forms; and the specific form of collaboration between these different fascist revolutions could not be anticipated.

The program of Gravelli and his followers was therefore designed to ensure the maximum flexibility for each national fascism, provided only that it meet certain "spiritual" criteria. This concept is best illustrated through Gravelli's definition of a fascist dictatorship, found in a special number of *Antieuropa* given over entirely to this question in 1933.³² Gravelli's interesting conception of the fascist dictatorship is that the figure of the dictator himself logically and historically precedes the institution of the dictatorship. The figure of the national dictator emerges from the nation's struggle for survival, whereas in other forms of revolution (as, for example, the Communist Revolution) the movement itself is committed in advance to the establishment of a dictatorship. True dictators, says Gravelli, emerge only in periods of great crisis and political chaos. Consequently such genuine leaders as Napoleon, Hitler, Mussolini, and Mustafa Kemal could never have been the products of a merely political coup and change in institutions; the dynamism of their rule stemmed from the dialectic of the process which brought them to power.

This brings us back to the notion of the new "fascist man" dealt with at the end of the preceding chapter. Given the vagueness of fascist doctrine, or, perhaps more accurately, the many different fascist doctrines current at the time, the focus of the call for a fascist awakening in Europe centered less on institutional change than on a spiritual transformation of Europeans. The point was driven home by Gravelli many times, perhaps most clearly on June 5, 1934, in *Ottobre*:

. . . It is not enough to change the institutions. We have stated and repeated this a hundred times: the men and their mentality

must be changed. In other words, revolutions are great spiritual facts, before being economic, social, and political facts.

It appears that all this has not been considered carefully enough in certain foreign areas, where it is believed with a certain aplomb that one can imitate or duplicate fascism.³³

Gravelli's message was designed to appeal to many who had grown somewhat disgruntled with fascism, and also served a useful function for Mussolini. Yet the subsequent development of the *Antieuropa* movement leaves little doubt that it ultimately became something of an embarrassment to the regime, and that Gravelli and his followers may have become too enthusiastic in their pursuit of a Fascist International.

The concrete stimulus for the expansion of Gravelli's group came in reaction to one of Mussolini's showpieces in honor of the first decade of fascism, the Volta Congress. As part of the celebration of fascism's first decade in power, Mussolini organized a vast international Congress on Europe, named in honor of the noted Italian scientist Alessandro Volta. Held under the auspices of the Italian Academy, the Volta Congress met in Rome in November, 1932, to listen to the prognostications and ideas of some of the most distinguished European intellectuals favorable to the fascist regime. The list of dignitaries constituted a representative cross section of European rightist thought in the early thirties, ranging from the most outspoken Nazis to those sympathetic to anti-racist, Corporatist conceptions of society. Delegates included Daniel Halévy and Pierre Gaxotte from France; Werner Sombart, Alfred Rosenberg, Hjalmar Schacht, and Hermann Goering from Germany; Prince Rohan and Stefan Zweig from Austria; Mihail Manoilescu from Rumania, and other noted conservative and reactionary figures from the continent. The two major powers without representation at the Congress were Great Britain and the Soviet Union.³⁴

The discussions were undoubtedly gratifying to the organi-

zers, since for the most part the speakers hurled elaborate verbal bouquets at the feet of the Duce. The theme of the Congress, "On Europe," produced a number of reflections on the twentieth-century crisis, as well as a kind of spiritual geopolitics which saw Europe menaced by a Soviet-led Africa and Asia on the one hand, and by America and England on the other. The thrust of many of the speeches was for the spiritual revivification of Europe, and most of them looked towards fascist Italy for the inspiration needed. To be sure, National Socialists and other nonfascists were at the Congress and spoke their piece; but the clear sentiment of the delegates was for Roman leadership and Italian fascist guidance. The major concern of the delegates was fear of a Communist Revolution, and Mussolini was repeatedly hailed as having been the first great leader in Europe to have effectively routed the Bolshevik menace in his own country, thus serving as an example for the rest of the world.³⁵

This celebration of Italian achievements could not help but inspire those who had been agitating for a Fascist International, and predictably Gravelli wrote about the Congress in glowing terms. His report appeared on January 15, 1933, in *Ottobre*. After an account of the events of the Congress, Gravelli called for a meeting of "Young Europe," of the forces for that revivification the delegates to the Congress had demanded but were unable to provide:

. . . Prepared in men's spirits, realized by the situation, vital to the life of the future, this Young Europe has already carried its crown of flowers to the tombs of the crushed ideals of the entire Old World . . . [men feel] that in Rome, and in fascism, vibrates all the poetry of an original world. . . .³⁶

The Volta Congress had indicated that the terrain had been prepared for a movement of European youth. The remarkable support for Mussolini which the older representatives of continental culture and politics had demonstrated was simply a

fraction of the enthusiasm for fascism which lay untapped beneath the surface of European ferment. This judgment was evidently quite widespread among fascist leaders, for less than a week later the Rome correspondent of *Le Temps* reported on conversations he had heard in "fascist circles":

It is said that the Volta Congress . . . only brought together the representatives of the old generation, attached by a thousand ties to the liberal and democratic ideal. Now it is time to convoke, on the banks of the Tiber, the representatives of European youth desirous of a profound reform in the spirit of our continent, based on the ideas of order and authority.³⁷

The cry launched early in 1933 was for an organization of the spirit of Youth, and the Italians were quick to seize upon this slogan, tied as it was to their own revolutionary history. Recalling that nearly a century before Mazzini had organized the movement of Young Italy, the writers for *Ottobre* called for a movement to be called "Young Europe," to be touched off by a Youth Congress.³⁸

This cry for the organization of the forces of Youth all over Europe met with considerable support outside Italy. In addition to the declaration of support from Paris, Gravelli received letters from Colonel Fonjallez, the leader of Swiss fascism, and Simon Ooms, the head of a group of Dutch fascists.³⁹ It is significant that at no point in the discussions on Young Europe (which lasted well over a year) was Nazi participation strongly supported, nor did any initiative come from the German National Socialists. From the very beginning of the agitation for an international organization of fascisms, contributors to *Ottobre* warned of the dangers of association with the Nazis. Typical of this attitude is the warning delivered by a Dutch fascist named Jan Baars in December, 1933, who deplored Nazi anti-semitism (a position supported by Gravelli), and warned that Hitler sought a homogeneous state, and the expansion of German suzerainty over a gigantic *Deutschum*.⁴⁰

In any event, by July *Ottobre* could begin to spell out the kind of structure the proposed international movement would have. It is worth looking at this proposal at some length:

. . . It must be stressed that the International—precisely because it will be baptized by an élite of free and unprejudiced men, not tied in any way to any government, not even to one of the Fascist States—will assume with full consciousness responsibility for the action . . . it proposes to launch and will launch in the world.

The full and absolute independence of the International and of its sections from all governments must be solemnly affirmed and guaranteed.

At the same time the Fascist International, which will gather to its bosom men who put their love for their own countries at the base of their internationalism, must take an oath never to impede the work of states and of responsible governments aimed at international collaboration. . . .

We conceive of the Fascist International according to the teachings of Mazzini: "Like a militant church with a task to achieve."⁴¹

As the weeks passed, the proponents of the new International developed ever more elaborate schemes. They began to distinguish between élitist and mass elements, and by the summer of 1933 bitter debates over the possible inclusion of German Nazis and their sympathizers had broken out in the pages of both *Ottobre* and *Antieuropa*.⁴²

It would be a serious mistake, however, to limit our analysis to these journals. A veritable outburst of journals, newspapers, *ad hoc* groups, and the like was busy attempting to organize some sort of international body for the expansion of fascism. To get some notion of the phenomenon involved here we shall consider two such groups.

The year 1932 saw the first appearance of a bi-monthly journal entitled *Universalità Romana* (*Roman Universality*), under the direction of a distinguished economist from Milan, Carlo Emilio Ferri. In addition to his journalistic activities, Ferri

was associated with two organizations in Milan that were tied in various ways to the attempt to found a Fascist International. These were the *Circolo Filologico Milanese* (The Milan Philological Circle) and the *Centro di Studi Internazionale sul fascismo* (Center of International Studies of Fascism).

The *Circolo Filologico Milanese* was a fascinating group, ostensibly dedicated to the development of Italian culture. In practice, it seems to have been a kind of international clearing-house for men and ideas sympathetic to the cause of international fascism. Virtually every important foreign fascist leader who passed through Milan in the early thirties gave an address at the *Circolo*, and many of those in Italy involved in the attempt to found an International appeared there as well. Gravelli himself spoke at the *Circolo* in February, 1933.⁴³ When the Swiss fascist leader Georges Oltramare came to Milan in May, 1933, he spoke there, as did Goebbels the following month.⁴⁴ As director of this organization, Ferri was in the forefront of contacts with non-Italian fascists; his semi-official status as a representative of the Italian cultural community lends his writing considerable importance.

The *Centro di Studi Internazionale sul fascismo* was one of a great many such institutes formally designed to encourage the study of fascism, but actually centers for the distribution of fascist propaganda. Organizations of this sort appeared at a remarkable rate in the early thirties, and one of the most famous was the CINEF, the *Centre International d'Études sur le Fascisme*, located in Lausanne, Switzerland, under the leadership of an Englishman, James Strachey Barnes. A brief digression is in order here if we are to understand the nature of these institutes, which constituted a principal means of circulating fascist propaganda in the thirties.

The primary source of information about the operation of the Lausanne Center comes from its 1928 *Yearbook*,⁴⁵ the only year in which the publication appeared. The Center had a

genuinely international governing body, headed by Barnes himself as secretary general, and a three-man executive council, composed of H. De Vries De Heekelingen (formerly a professor at the University of Nijmegen), Marcel Boulenger, and Giovanni Gentile. The other members of the governing body were A. Andreades, professor at the University of Athens; Antonio Aunós, director of publications of the Joint Commission of Employers and Employees of Catalonia; Count Thadee Dzieduszyckie of Warsaw; Istvan Ereky, professor at the University of Szeged, Hungary; C. Fougner of Oslo; Edmund Gardner, F.B.A., professor at the University of London; A. Geouffre de Lapradelle, professor at the University of Paris; John L. Gerig, professor at Columbia University; Jonkheer J. W. Godin De Beaufort of Holland; Nae Ionescu, professor at the University of Bucharest; Ladislav Jablonowski, member of the Polish Senate; J. W. Mannhardt, professor at the University of Marburg; J. Renkin, Minister of State in Brussels; Baron Rolin Jaequemyns, formerly Belgian Minister of the Interior; Walter Starkie, professor at Trinity College, Dublin; Lord Sydenham of Combe, London; Count Paul Teleki, former Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs; and M. W. F. Treub, formerly Dutch Minister of Finance.⁴⁶

This not undistinguished assemblage of intellectuals had undertaken to spread the fascist message to the world outside Italy. The work of missionary devotion was masked by the formal declaration of purpose which De Heekelingen announced in the 1928 *Yearbook*:

The "Cinef" intends to abstain from the expression of any opinion of its own on Fascism. It proposes . . . to furnish the means by which the student may be enabled to lay his hands on anything of importance that has been published on the subject. . . .⁴⁷

Yet a brief survey of the *Yearbook's* contents is sufficient to remove any doubts as to the true nature of the Center. The

articles included "The Birth and Establishment of Fascism in Italy" by Gioacchino Volpe, the "official" historian of the Italian Fascist Regime; "The Civil Strife in Italy, 1919-1922," a violently anti-socialist polemic by Luigi Villari; "The Significance of Fascist Syndicalism" by the apostle of the Fascist Syndicalist movement in Italy, Edmundo Rossoni; "The Labor Charter" by the Secretary of the Fascist Party, Augusto Turati; and "The Reform of the State in Italy" by Barnes, who had recently published a book of his own on the universality of fascism. It is therefore clear that the Center was at the very least supported by the intellectual output of some of the most important members of the Italian fascist hierarchy. This sympathy was further demonstrated by the fact that Mussolini contributed an Introduction to Barnes' book, *The Universal Aspects of Fascism*.⁴⁸

The *Yearbook*, in article after article, stressed the uniqueness of Italian fascism in offering guidelines to other societies for solving their common problems, and also tried to show the benevolence of Italy toward other versions of fascism. "One of the main postulates of fascism," De Heekelingen told his readers, "is indeed that there can exist no particular form of government capable of serving as a model at all times and places."⁴⁹ Thus, even though the particular institutions which the Italian fascists had developed in the peninsula might not appeal to potential fascists in other countries, the inspiration for these institutions might find another expression abroad.

This theme was developed at great length by Barnes in *The Universal Aspects of Fascism*, a ponderous work which invoked the intellectual support of figures ranging from St. Thomas Aquinas to Alfred North Whitehead in behalf of fascist "doctrine." In attempting to demonstrate that many of Italian fascism's institutions need not be considered essential to fascism itself, Barnes took the evolution of Mussolini's dictatorship as a

paradigm. "Fascism does not stand for a dictatorship, neither of a person nor of a class. . . . If there is a dictatorship in Italy now, it is because the revolutionary organisation has taken this form by an accident of history."⁵⁰ The same could be said of the Corporate State:

Mussolini rightly considers that the best form of Government is the one which, in the given circumstances of a particular country, works best. So Fascism does not and cannot absolutely condemn popular Government, for instance. . . . Nor does Fascism, conversely, stand absolutely by the idea of the "Corporate State." . . . These matters are contingent. . . .⁵¹

Barnes' notion of fascism, in short, was one of a successful movement which might inspire other governments to abandon the outmoded principles of Western civilization: *laissez-faire* economics, liberalism, and above all socialism and communism. His goal for the future was, interestingly enough, that of the end of all nations, the unification of mankind under a single structure. However, he argued that national fascism was the most appropriate route toward this destiny:

Fascism insists that progress towards this goal can only be made by upholding the principle of authority in existing States, and not, as would humanitarian Internationalists, by weakening authority and national sentiment, which sustains authority. . . .⁵²

Thus the adherents to universal fascism would not be asked to sacrifice any of their national integrity, but simply to join in the common search for the true expression of national genius wherever the forces of the modern world expressed themselves. As such, fascism was clearly a harbinger of things to come, and Barnes set it firmly against the system of the past by stating that "the present *Weltanschauung* of Fascism may be summed up in one word: *Youth*."⁵³

In his development of the ideal of fascist Youth, Barnes explicitly voiced a sentiment which in Italian debates had often

remained slightly beneath the surface: the inability of the generation in power to achieve a truly fascist Revolution. Barnes' complaints about the "middle generation" sound strikingly like those of many of the youthful intellectuals we have discussed earlier, and show again the close relationship between universal fascism and the cult of Youth:

. . . the men between 30 and 45, represent a more difficult proposition; and I doubt if they can, as a whole, be transformed into the complete Fascist.

The speeches of Mussolini and of . . . Turati have only to be read and it will be realized how hard the leaders of Fascism hammer the rank and file, who will not or cannot live the Fascist ideal. But the process is undoubtedly telling and the result is a new generation growing up, who promise to make a governing class really worthy of the ideal. . . .⁵⁴

In short, the Fascist Revolution was a revolution of man, and could be said to have succeeded when and only when men's ideas and behavior had been drastically changed.

Barnes also devoted much attention to the Christian component of fascism, repeatedly claiming that the "true" philosopher of fascism was St. Thomas Aquinas.⁵⁵ This stress upon the religious element in the Roman synthesis would receive considerable attention from many of the advocates of universal fascism, among them Carlo Emilio Ferri and the group around *Universalità Romana*.

As a testimony to the cosmopolitan nature of its readership, *Universalità Romana* carried articles in many different languages. Ferri was devoted to Arnaldo Mussolini, and the first issue of his journal carried a long article by Arnaldo on the universal implications of fascism. Further, the motto of the journal reinforced Arnaldo's emphasis on the religious nature of fascism: "Religion and fascism are the key to life." This emphasis on the religious component of fascism was common to many,

but by no means all, of the propagandists for universal fascism.

Ferri's personal vision was presented to the readers of *Universalità Romana* in its second issue, in an article (written in French) entitled *Pour une Union Intellectuelle Fasciste* ("For an Intellectual Fascist Union"). His analysis of the crisis of the West and the prospects for its cure ran along "standard" lines: ". . . Everyone agrees with the proposition that Europe and the entire world can only find health in an idea, the creative force of which can give new youth to the West. . . ."⁵⁶

Yet when Ferri turned to his proposal for the organization of a union, he restricted it to intellectuals, and went out of his way to state that he was not, at least for the time being, interested in attempting to organize a full-scale International. Noting that "many among us have advanced the more ambitious project of wanting to constitute a veritable Fascist International," Ferri maintained that such an ambitious enterprise was premature, feeling that the immediate appeal of fascism was not yet sufficiently powerful to permit the realization of a viable political organization on an international scale. He was nonetheless convinced that fascism had achieved tremendous popularity and penetration among two crucial groups in the West: the intellectuals and the young. To these two elements, Ferri added a third: surprisingly enough, "workers' organizations." This was tied to the usual polemic eulogizing the fascist achievement of "social justice," and, not surprisingly, working-class organizations were not mentioned again in Ferri's program. Instead, his focus was upon European youth:

It is youth which has a distaste for traditional political doctrines, for parliamentary dreams, for the vague and hypocritical words of internationalism: everywhere youth considers the "Nation" to be the central kernel of the new order. . . .

The future lies with youth. It is to the youth of "Young Europe" that a fascist Intellectual Union must address itself. . . .⁵⁷

This clearly put Ferri in harmony with the general aims of the *Antieuropa* group, and the similarity in their rhetoric turns out to have been more than fortuitous. Ferri and Gravelli had been in contact with each other,⁵⁸ and obviously directed their activities so as to compliment one another. Both traveled widely, in Italy and Europe, and attempted to generate continental enthusiasm for their programs. Working through various centers of propaganda, including the School of Fascist Mysticism in Milan, Ferri managed to attract an international editorial board for *Universalità Romana*.⁵⁹ And, like Gravelli, he solicited and received a large volume of support and encouragement from various foreign fascist groups, all anxious to participate in the coming International, whatever form it might eventually take.

In this process of attempting to organize propaganda centers, many organizations already in existence before the campaign for universal fascism were able to change their direction and join the great adventure. One such was associated with Ferri's group, the *Istituto di studi romani*. This had been founded in 1925, and had been headed by such notable figures as Professor Pietro Fedele and Luigi Federzoni, the former Nationalist leader. Mussolini himself was honorary president of the Institute, which had been dedicated to the furtherance of Latin, or "Roman" culture. By the winter of 1932 it was clearly involved in the activities of Ferri and his colleagues. Its goal was that of winning converts to the Roman revelation:

. . . Its aim is . . . to create in Italy, and especially abroad, cultural centers of Roman studies on a vast scale, which will recultivate on the ruins of the anti-Romanic world . . . the great Western culture which can no longer live without Rome as its center and guide.⁶⁰

Groups of this sort, aimed at various kinds of audiences abroad, became widespread during the middle thirties. Ruggero Zangrandi has testified to the ease with which they were organ-

ized, and the wide range of organizations willing to sponsor them.⁶¹ Whether under the direction of the GUF, the Party itself, or the Ministry of Popular Culture, people who were trusted by the regime and who were recognized in the field of journalism and propaganda were invariably given the opportunity to participate in this movement to create a Fascist International. As might be expected, centers appeared and disappeared with great regularity, depending upon their state of favor in Rome. Whatever the particular title, they were often in fact simply sinecures for the friends of fascist hierarchs, the profits of the fascist spoils system.

Yet having said this, it must still be recognized that there were serious elements at work within this network of men and organizations. We will see in the next chapter that Mussolini for a time tried to channel this activity through a single organization and that a considerable amount of money and energy was spent trying to support this attempt to organize an International under official auspices. But at this stage it is necessary to stress two things. First, it seems clear that the notion of the potential application of fascist doctrine to problems outside the Italian peninsula was a viable one for many Italians and for foreigners as well. Second, the cult of youth played an essential role in this concept of expansion, and many young Italian intellectuals were anxious to fulfill the doctrinal prophecies.

This close connection between youth and universal fascism is demonstrated in yet another group engaged in the formulation of fascist ideology, that formed around Oddone Fantini and Carlo Curcio and their journal, *Universalità Fascista (Fascist Universality)*. Fantini and Curcio were two highly respected and rather distinguished older intellectuals. Fantini, born in 1890, had won a gold medal for valor in the Great War, held a chair of Political Economy and Finance at the University of Rome, and had become the director of the Fascist Institute of Culture

there. Curcio, a Neapolitan, was born in 1898 and was Professor of the History of Political Doctrine at the University of Perugia. Fantini had founded a journal in 1929 called *Università Fascista* (*The Fascist University*), a monthly review of university activities in Italy. Two years later, in May, 1931, he changed its title and scope, and it became "a monthly review of revolutionary expansion and Italian university life."

Well aware of the existence of other journals dealing with the "revolutionary expansion" of fascism, the editors of *Università Fascista* were careful to distinguish between their own goals and those of others, pointing out that while *Università Romana*, for example, was dedicated to spreading the message of universal fascism, the goal of *Università Fascista* was to be the clarification and study of fascist doctrine.⁶² Their efforts over the next two years were summarized by Fantini in a volume published in 1933 entitled *Universalità del Fascismo* (*Universality of Fascism*). The introduction by Curcio anticipated Fantini's analysis:

Nothing, ever, in the history of a people is as powerful as the idea . . . [the fascist idea] is above all a *moral* idea: a new ethic in the relationships of the society, a new faith in men themselves and in the Nation, and a new character, a new civil religion.⁶³

The stress on morals is very close to the call for the new "fascist man" encountered elsewhere, and Fantini elaborated on this fundamental theme at great length. As one would expect from a man who had directed a journal dedicated to universities, he stressed the role of education in creating the new fascist generation. Noting that various fascist organizations were involved in the education of youth from an early age, Fantini expressed his confidence that the new generation would provide a solid guarantee of the durability of fascism: "In this way fascism has provided for the creation of new human material,

the new people, that is to say, the indispensable precondition for making the new political and economic order a lasting one. . . ."⁶⁴

For Fantini and Curcio, then, fascism meant more than simply the establishment of a set of institutions, or spreading the institutions of Fascist Italy to other countries. The Corporate State, for example, important though it might have been, was not the same thing as the Fascist State. Further, just as Mussolini had not come to power with a specific program, it would be preposterous to demand that other fascist leaders copy the doctrines of the Duce, especially since that program was not a rigid one, but in the process of development.

The spokesmen for the creation of a Fascist International were insistent on this point: that the expansion of fascism guaranteed considerable integrity and initiative to non-Italian fascisms. This represented an extension of the principle (outlined earlier) that the creation of a durable fascism in Italy awaited the creativity and energy of a new generation. If fascism in Italy was "incomplete," then it would be preposterous to export an imperfect product. Yet the impetus for a new society and a new man *was* present in Italy, and this drive for the creation of a new order was something which could be extended beyond Italian boundaries.

The notion of universal fascism as a new doctrine for a new world thus infused the movement for the creation of a Fascist International, and the International increasingly came to be viewed as a way of focusing discontent with existing institutions, both in Italy and in Europe as a whole. The appeal which this notion held for young fascist intellectuals should be clear. Not only would Italy be revived, but this transformation would extend throughout the world.

It must be stressed again, however, that despite the internationalist rhetoric, Italian problems and Italian society remained

at the center of the debates surrounding the creation of the International. Indeed, one frequently finds articles reminding adherents of the International that their first task was the creation of a viable Italian fascism, and above all the elucidation of a coherent fascist doctrine within the Italian tradition. Without the Italian paradigm, the creation of a Fascist International would be mere fantasy.

In the edition of *Fascismo Universale* he published in 1933, for example, Gastone Silvano Spinetti used the call for a Fascist International as the basis to return to one of his basic themes: the need to construct a coherent and dynamic fascist doctrine capable of demonstrating the vitality of the movement. He argued that before a successful international organization could be created, it would be necessary for numerous national conferences to be held in order to fully elaborate fascist doctrine.

In such conventions . . . it will be necessary to demonstrate how fascism, even though it is the expression of the civilization of the new times, is not opposed to tradition and culture, and how such culture is not that Celtic one from beyond our frontiers, because [that foreign culture] is atheist, individualist, and anti-national.⁶⁵

The reference to "Celtic" German National Socialism, while somewhat oblique, remained a major theme in the writings of the proponents of universal fascism and was to play a major role in the debates concerning a Fascist International. But Spinetti's insistence on clarifying Italian fascist doctrine is clearly a thinly veiled critique of Italian fascism itself, and provided him with the opportunity to call once again for a systematic formulation of fascist theory. He was not alone in this desire.

The very vagueness of official fascist theory, especially as to the practical possibilities of exporting fascism, gave the advocates of universal fascism the opportunity to attempt all kinds of initiatives, ranging from the efforts of such people as Oddone Fantini and Carlo Emilio Ferri to organize groups of European

intellectuals in propaganda centers, to those of Asvero Gravelli to hold a conference on "Young Europe." All of this activity was of course duly noted by Mussolini and could not but have produced some anxiety in Palazzo Venezia. The kind of spontaneity frequently associated with these groups and, more importantly, the kind of criticism of the regime (although not, of course, of Mussolini himself) implicit in the demand for universal fascism, combined to suggest to many around the dictator that the organizations might be masks for some genuinely anti-fascist activity. As a result, surveillance over these groups was increased, and by 1935, if not earlier, OVRA and other secret police elements were watching the participants regularly.⁶⁶ If some of their activities became excessive, the groups were generally warned by one of the hierarchs, and if the behavior was not terminated, the groups were simply dissolved.

The program of "exporting" fascism beyond Italy did not suffer from any lack of organizations devoted to such activity.⁶⁷ We have already seen that there were various *ad hoc* centers for the dissemination of fascist propaganda abroad, and mention must be made of three other official organizations, in order to give a more complete picture of the range of these bodies: the *Fasci all'estero* (Fascist Groups Abroad), the *Società Dante Alighieri* (Dante Alighieri Society), and the *Scuola di Mistica Fascista* (School of Fascist Mysticism). The last was discussed earlier in another connection, but its activities in generating propaganda must be dealt with here as well.

The *Fasci all'estero* were the official organizations for all Italians living outside the boundaries of the peninsula, and included activities which paralleled those provided at home for native Italians.⁶⁸ Thus, young Italians living abroad could participate in the *Balilla*, and so forth. The Dante Alighieri Society was a worldwide organization for the study of Italian culture,

and during the fascist *Ventennio* provided a useful means of coordinating the propaganda activities of numerous groups of fascists living abroad.⁶⁹ The School of Fascist Mysticism was one of the major centers for the editing, publication, and distribution of books dealing with the fascist message. In 1933, *Universalità Romana* carried an advertisement for various books published by the School, and some of the titles show the extent to which Arnaldo's School for the creation of a new élite had become involved in the spread of the doctrines of universal fascism. They included Arnaldo's own *Coscienza e dovere* (*Conscience and Duty*), *L'eredità spirituale di Giuseppe Mazzini* (*The Spiritual Heritage of Mazzini*) by Gianni Poletti, and *Orizzonti imperiali* (*Imperial Horizons*) by Valentino Piccoli.⁷⁰ Bearing in mind the other organizations mentioned earlier, the number of groups acting on behalf of the prestige of the fascist regime was quite impressive. But the problem of groups agitating for a "spontaneous" Fascist International, outside the framework of any government, remained unsolved.

That segment of the press dealing with universal fascism found itself able to say things which would undoubtedly have been censored coming from other areas. The most likely explanation for this is that fascist foreign policy during the early and middle thirties was in a constant state of flux, and consequently proposals for the creation of a Fascist International were not immediately evaluated in the context of a coherent foreign strategy. Not only was the question of Italy's relation to the League of Nations under careful review, but the emergence of Nazi Germany posed a whole series of problems for the Foreign Office. We shall deal with this in greater detail later on, but for now it must be said that Mussolini's original response to Hitler was overwhelmingly negative. Yet Mussolini was to be personally intrigued by the *Führer*, and the existence of initial secret contacts between the two dictators suggests that

the full story of the early relations between Hitler and Mussolini remains to be written.

From the standpoint of universal fascism, the existence of Nazi Germany simply involved a special case of a more general problem, which might be termed the problem of foreign fascisms. In the early and middle thirties all manner of political movements emerged calling themselves "fascist," and more often than not such movements proclaimed their fealty to Mussolini and to Italian fascism. What was the regime to do about these foreign groups? One thing was becoming increasingly clear: if the government failed to institutionalize the activities directed towards the formation of a Fascist International, it might very well find such an organization established outside official fascist structures. This was clearly intolerable to Mussolini, and he moved quickly to co-opt the movement for a Fascist International.

It might be thought that the problem of foreign fascisms was a relatively simple one, given that a small number of fascist movements emerged before the actual outbreak of the Second World War. Such, however, is not the case, for there was an incredible proliferation of fascist movements across the European continent in the interwar period. Unless one has looked at some of the literature surrounding the proposed Fascist International, it is hard to imagine just how many fascist groups apparently existed in the middle thirties. Literally dozens of them appeared briefly, then vanished back into the chaotic background of European politics. Yet each one posed a serious dilemma for the regime, and for the would-be organizers of an International of fascisms. In each case it was necessary to decide whether the group in question was genuinely fascist, and whether it was worth the time, energy, and (often) money to encourage their activities. In fact, the Italian government spent a great deal of money financing foreign fascist movements in

the thirties. The two best-known cases are of course the Austrian *Heimwehr* and the Belgian Rexists,⁷¹ but considerable sums were distributed somewhat indirectly as well. Given a tight fiscal situation in Italy, the regime wanted to make sure it got a decent return on its investment.

As a consequence of these problems, many of the journals dealing with the expansion of fascism undertook to analyze these foreign movements case by case, in an attempt to ascertain which of them were worthy of inclusion in a Fascist International. At times the question was very difficult, since the journalists might decide that a movement claiming to be fascist was phony, while some of the hierarchs in Rome felt otherwise. An even more perplexing problem involved the Spanish Falange, which claimed *not* to be fascist, but looked for all the world like a paradigm of a foreign fascism.⁷² In a lengthy analysis for *Universalità Fascista* in 1936, Spinetti argued that the Falange was a true fascist movement because of its belief in the fascist trinity of "authority, hierarchy, order," and because of the Spanish "mysticism" which raised Falangist principles to a universal plane.⁷³

Other fascist movements were subjected to careful scrutiny by the writers of *Ottobre*. The Irish Blue Shirts, under the leadership of Colonel O'Duffy, were considered a true fascist movement,⁷⁴ and Salazar's Portugal gained the stamp of approval early in 1933.⁷⁵ A figure like Vidkun Quisling, however, received ambivalent treatment from the advocates of universal fascism, who admired his qualities as "a man of action," but had some serious reservations about his racist ideas.⁷⁶ Various Dutch parties came under scrutiny, and *Ottobre* supported such figures as J. C. Baars and Ooms,⁷⁷ but considered Mussert unworthy of the fascist label.⁷⁸ The Austrian *Heimwehr* were hailed enthusiastically,⁷⁹ and when Starhemberg came to Rome in April, 1934, he granted an extended interview to *Ottobre*

in which he proclaimed his support for Mussolini and his antagonism to National Socialist principles.⁸⁰ In France, *Ottobre* saw only one true fascist movement, the *Jeunesses Patriotes*;⁸¹ the *Action Française* was considered too traditional, and Marcel Bucard's *Franciste* movement was rejected because of the federalist doctrines of its leader.⁸²

While there was considerable debate over various movements claiming to be fascist, there was very little argument over the nature of German National Socialism. From the very beginning the Nazis were branded heretics of the first order, and throughout the period under consideration here the press continued to attack the "pagan" racism of the Nazis.⁸³ Mussolini himself was unsparing in his denunciations of Nazi racial theory, once calling *Mein Kampf* "that incoherent tirade I have never managed to read,"⁸⁴ and terming Hitler's doctrine 10 per cent science and 90 per cent sentiment.⁸⁵ Further, from the point of view of the advocates of a fascist organization on an international scale, the German brand of military expansion and the Nazi concept of a *Reich*, which was little more than an expansion of Germany's borders, were anathema.

The theme of anti-Nazism became ever more pronounced with the success of Hitler's regime, as the Italian propagandists saw that the predominance of Mussolini on the European scene was being considerably weakened by the *Führer*. In fact, if there is a single theme which dominates the literature of the period, it is the tension between Rome and Berlin, the antagonism between fascism and Nazism. This is brought out well in a special issue of *Antieuropa* in the winter of 1933,⁸⁶ entirely given over to the question of racism. Fascist after fascist wrote of the folly of the racist doctrine, stressed the humanistic and religious components of Italian fascism, and attacked Hitler.

As if to symbolize the antagonism to the Nazis, the special number of *Antieuropa* began with an excerpt from Mussolini's

introduction to the Italian edition of Richard Korherr's *Regression of the Birth Rate, Death of Peoples*, which put forth the theory that a concentration of populations in cities produced a drop in a people's potency. Mussolini summed it up nicely, with particular emphasis on the most afflicted spot on the globe:

The progressive sterility of citizens is in direct relation to the monstrous rapid growth of the city. Berlin, which in a single century has passed from 100,000 to over 4,000,000 inhabitants, is today the most sterile city in the world.⁸⁷

This slur on the vitality of the German capital was only the beginning of an extended assault on Nazi doctrines. The final denunciation came from Gravelli, after a lengthy analysis of the nature of Nazi racism and an exploration of its political consequences. "We are," he told his readers, "the protestants of the racist religion; we refute this faith and believe in the reality of facts, not in a presumed reality which does not correspond to the truth."⁸⁸

All these conflicts necessitated some action by Mussolini, since proclamations of adherence to the International on the one hand and philo-Nazi cries of anger on the other were flooding into the offices of the various journalistic headquarters. Mussolini's response was to attempt to bring the entire movement under control as best he could. Where possible, he simply brought some of the independent groups under the auspices of an already existing official organization, such as the GUF.⁸⁹ But that still left a large sphere of activity untouched. To bring these other groups under his control, Mussolini organized the *Comitati d'azione per l'Universalità di Roma* (the Action Committees for Roman Universality, known as the CAUR), under the direction of Eugenio Coselschi, a veteran of the Great War, and formerly D'Annunzio's private secretary in Fiume in 1920. At the banquet celebrating the foundation of the CAUR in

June, 1933, Coselschi paid tribute to Gravelli and his allies for having generated much support for the creation of an international organization for the universality of fascism, but the tone of his speech was such as to create considerable apprehension among the staff of *Ottobre*, who rightly saw the CAUR as a menace to their own continued activities.

Despite the anxieties of those who had been in the forefront of the struggle to create an International, it nonetheless seemed that their long journalistic campaign had been crowned by success. Although the formal organization of the International might be in the hands of a relative newcomer to the battlefield, the war itself seemed about to be waged. We must now turn to the international sphere in order to consider the activities of the CAUR, and to examine the outcome of this romantic attempt to fulfill a Mazzinian vision under the rubric of universal fascism.