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Conquest, Foreign and Domestic, in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany

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. . . between Germany and Italy there exists a community of destiny. . . [Germany and Italy] are congruent cases.

—Benito Mussolini, 1936

The brown shirt might perhaps not have arisen without the black shirt.

—Adolf Hitler, 1942

I. FASCISM, GENERIC AND HISTORIC

Mussolini and Hitler have not been alone in emphasizing the common origins, features, and destinies of Fascism and National Socialism. Theories of “fascism”—that elusive generic phenomenon with a small “f”—have proliferated with abandon ever since the 1920s.¹ Definitions have ranged from the Third International’s “open terroristic dictatorship of the most reactionary, chauvinistic, and imperialistic elements of finance capital” through Ernst Nolte’s militant anti-Marxism, to the modernization theorists’ “mass-mobilizing developmental dictatorships under single-party auspices.” Voices of caution have occasionally sounded, urging the “deflation” of a concept that “exists in faith and is pursued by reason,” or suggesting that fascism fails to encompass adequately the ultimate evil of National Socialist Germany.²

But the notion is still with us, even if no two theories of fascism coincide. Almost all Marxists equate fascism and capitalism “in the final

¹ I thank the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation for generous support during the research and writing of this piece, which attempts to summarize the argument of a book in progress. My thanks also to Hans W. Gatzke, Michael Geyer, Isabel V. Hull, Adrian Lyttelton, and Williamson Murray for helpful comments and suggestions. Initial quotations: Strunk minute, January 31, 1936, U.S. National Archives, microcopy T-454/56/000226; Hitler, *Monologe im Führerhauptquartier 1941-1944* (Hamburg, 1980), p. 43.

² Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism* (New York, 1966), pp. 20-1; Gilbert Allardyce, “What Fascism is Not. Notes on the Deflation of a Concept,” *American Historical Review* 84 (1979): 367-88; see also Berndt Martin, “Zur Tauglichkeit eines übergreifenden Faschismus-Begriffs,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* (henceforth VfZG) 29 (1981): 48-73.

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analysis," but tend to divide over fascism's precise degree of subservience to capital. In cases such as Germany, where the evidence is overwhelming that the "fascists" actually ran the country, the more flexible Marxists have had recourse to "Bonapartism," that independent dictatorial executive over rather than of the bourgeoisie.³ But the Bonapartism Marx described in his *18th Brumaire* was not a mass movement like Fascism or National Socialism, and although Marx apparently did not realize it, once he conceded even temporary autonomy to politics, his essentially monocausal philosophy of history would cease to illuminate events. Tim Mason has attempted to resolve that dilemma with a Marxist version of Hermann Rauschnig's *Revolution of Nihilism*.⁴ The primacy of politics over economics in Nazi Germany, Mason has argued, meant that the Nazi state was by nature outside of history, incapable of "social reproduction," and thus doomed to self-destruction for violating the historical "law of motion" Engels claimed Marx had discovered. Sadly, the real Nazi Germany was so un-self-destructive that it nearly achieved total victory in 1940–41, and defied a world of enemies that included the three remaining world powers for three years after that. Its enemies literally had to blast it flat; destruction was indeed its most striking characteristic, but it was the destruction of others.

Ernst Nolte's *Three Faces of Fascism* attempted to define fascism as the "epochal phenomenon" of interwar Europe, a violent, militarily organized anti-Marxism that World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution had conjured up. Nolte's definition had the advantage of eliminating from consideration the likes of Khaddafi, Castro, and Perón. Still, the European societies in which the various fascisms arose were embarrassingly diverse, and the movements themselves even more so. A concept that unites Nazis, Action Française, the Rumanian Iron Guard, and the Estonian Association of Freedom Fighters stretches belief. Nor does the lowest common denominator or "fascist minimum" that Nolte has chosen (militant anti-Marxism) help much in characterizing the interwar movements or regimes generally called fascist. Implicitly, it also contradicts Nolte's chronological boundaries.

Anti-Marxism helps explain the origins of many of the movements, but it was not as central to their ideologies or policies as Nolte's definition

³ Particularly August Thalheimer, "Über den Faschismus," (1930), now in *Faschismus und Kapitalismus*, Wolfgang Abendroth, ed. (Frankfurt, 1967); see also Jost Dülffer, "Bonapartism, Fascism, and National Socialism," *Journal of Contemporary History* 11 (1976): 109–28.

⁴ Mason, "The Primacy of Politics. Politics and Economics in National Socialist Germany," pp. 165–95 in *The Nature of Fascism*, Stuart J. Woolf, ed. (New York, 1969); Rauschnig, *The Revolution of Nihilism* (New York, 1939).

requires. What it did was aid recruitment, and help make the movements respectable at home and abroad. Hitler, the prophet of race, did not so much object to Marxism as to its purported Jewish essence: "A Jew who calls himself a Communist nevertheless remains a Jew." The anti-Marxism of his post-1919 world view was actually a compound of anti-semitism and expansionism, and he rejoiced in 1941 at the "good turn" the Soviet regime had done him by enslaving Russia's peasants even before the coming of the *Herrenvolk*. As for the anti-Marxism of the ex-socialist Benito Mussolini, it fluctuated in intensity depending on momentary usefulness, but was never central to his ideas.⁵

The third major approach is that of the social scientists, who have attempted to relate fascism to that process known as modernization. Unfortunately for this approach, modernization has acquired almost as many definitions as fascism, and is equally vague. It tends either to include everything that has happened in the West since the Renaissance—and is thus analytically useless—or it rests on essentially arbitrary choices of indicators whose relationship to one another is unclear and whose measurement is problematic. At worst, the concept confuses chronology with morality, and becomes a normative, teleological Whig theory of history, unreflectively derived from the West, and imposed on the rest.⁶

Be that as it may, modernization theory has so far given rise to four principal fascisms. Barrington Moore has argued that fascism is the outcome of conservative modernization. While this is superficially plausible for Germany and Japan (if an extra-European fascism is admissible), it fails convincingly to include liberal Italy, which had neither Junkers nor samurai. Others have argued that fascism is a political alternative characteristic of the stage of economic growth at which industry begins to

⁵ Hitler: Edouard Calic, *Ohne Maske. Hitler-Breitung Geheimgespräche 1931* (Frankfurt 1968), p. 108; *Monologe*, p. 62 (September 17–18, 1941); Mussolini (at the founding meeting of the fasci): Bolshevism "would not scare us if it demonstrated to us that it could guarantee a nation's greatness" (Mussolini, *Opera omnia* [Florence and Rome, 1951–1978] [henceforth *OO*, followed by volume and page, 12:325 [March 23, 1919]); his fall 1939 remark that Stalin's regime was "a kind of slavish Fascism" (Galeazzo Ciano, *Diario 1937–1943* [Milan, 1980], October 16, 1939); and Philip V. Cannistraro and Edward D. Wynot, Jr., "On the Dynamics of Anti-Communism as a Function of Fascist Foreign Policy, 1933–1945," *Il Politico* 38 (1973).

⁶ The best example of all these defects is Horst Matzerath and Heinrich Volkmann, "Modernisierungstheorie und Nationalsozialismus," pp. 86–102 in *Theorien in der Praxis des Historikers*, Jürgen Kocka, ed. (Göttingen, 1977). In the ensuing discussion (pp. 102–16), Jürgen Kocka suggested that the only alternative to constructs such as modernization theory is "myths and ideologies"—a remark that establishes both a false dichotomy and a distinction without a difference.

outweigh agriculture. Unfortunately, this theory only fits Italy and Argentina -- not a very useful assortment.⁷ A third possibility is that fascisms are "modernizing dictatorships." This category presumably rules out Hitler, since Germany was already highly industrialized. It also includes everyone from Nkrumah to Mao, giving the concept all the rigor of india-rubber, while excluding the single most powerful and dangerous regime generally considered fascist.⁸ Finally, modernization theory has provided a possible negative definition of fascism as a revolt against the modern world, a utopian anti-modernism. But regrettably for its opponents, the chief example of this sort of fascism was Nazi Germany, a regime infatuated with high technology and social engineering. Recognition of this has prompted one commentator to describe the Nazis as "reactionary modernists," a paradoxical category that suggests that analyzing fascisms in terms of modernization is unrewarding.⁹

After sixty years of debate, the scene resembles a desert battlefield littered with the burnt-out, rusting hulks of failed theories. What alternatives exist? One largely unexplored possibility, which combines both breadth and reasonable closeness to the evidence, is comparative history. Except for Nolte, who has joined unsystematic but often shrewd comparisons to a theory of fascism, few have tried it. It is inherently difficult, it lacks the sex appeal of "isms," and, of necessity, it violates the sacred principle of academic specialization. But it does offer considerable opportunity to understand phenomena by careful analysis of similarities and differences.

Inevitably, the obvious candidates for comparative treatment are the two principle "historic fascist" regimes of Italy and Germany. Both arose in relatively advanced societies —northern Italy was different from Bavaria, but no more backward economically. Both were in part responses to affronts to the self-esteem of nations that were relative latecomers to unification and industrialization, and that suffered from deep social, regional, and, in Germany, religious cleavages. Finally, both were the creation of leaders who combined conspicuous talents as agitators, political tacticians, and ideological visionaries.

This last quality inevitably implies a collision between vision and reality. Comparison of those visions and of their respective collisions

⁷ See A. F. K. Organski, "Fascism and Modernization," pp. 19–41 in *The Nature of Fascism*, Woolf, ed.

⁸ See particularly A. James Gregor, *Italian Fascism and Developmental Dictatorship* (Princeton, 1979), and Gregor's other works mentioned therein.

⁹ See Henry Ashby Turner, Jr., "Fascism and Modernization," pp. 117–39 in *Reappraisals of Fascism*, Turner, ed. (New York, 1975); Jeffrey Herf, "Reactionary Modernism. Some Ideological Origins of the Primacy of Politics in the Third Reich," *Theory and Society* 10 (1981): 805–32.

with reality may offer new insight into the nature of both movements and regimes, and into possible distinctions between them and other varieties of political evil. But any attempt to analyze Fascist and National Socialist ideologies and final goals raises several questions. Did the movements have ideologies worthy of the name? If they did, whose pronouncements are authoritative sources, and which of those pronouncements are irrelevant, which are tactical, and which are fundamental? Attempts to answer the first question have frequently fallen into two pitfalls: "mirror-imaging" and radical skepticism. Victims of the first pitfall have unreflectively applied conventional categories of liberal and Marxist social thought to phenomena that liberalism and Marxism are ill-equipped to explain. They have attempted to understand Fascist and National Socialist ideologies as social ideologies expressing the attitudes of particular classes, and addressing the problems those classes faced in adapting to industrial society.

Unfortunately for this approach, Fascist and National Socialist ideologies were not expressions of particular classes and groups, but—like Marxism—above all the creation of individuals: Mussolini and Hitler. Despite Rosenbergs and Gentiles, Feders and Himmlers and Bottais, the two dictators were the sole unimpeachable creators and interpreters of the doctrines of their movements. The dictators were the doctrine, the word made flesh, and understanding the success of their ideologies requires both appreciation of the role of charismatic leadership in hammering doctrine home, and analysis of the context in which they flourished. No pat social interpretation ("the revolt of the petite bourgeoisie") can help explain extreme nationalist political religions the first principle of which was the denial of class, and which appealed to all classes, although in varying degrees.

Nor has the widespread assumption that an ideology must be social encouraged fruitful enquiry. Commentators have seized on whatever scraps of doctrine fit their assumptions about what an ideology must contain, especially Mussolini's "Doctrine of Fascism" essay, written in collaboration with Giovanni Gentile. But that pompous exercise had less to do with Fascist ideology than with Mussolini's intermittent tactical attempts to achieve intellectual respectability. And even the Mussolini-Gentile essay proclaimed that the true test of manhood and nationhood was war—a curiously antisocial social ideology.¹⁰ As for Fascist corporativism, which the regime itself touted as the answer to the social needs of the age, it remained a sickly plant in which Mussolini himself took little interest. In the German case, nothing even resembling a conventional

¹⁰ "The Doctrine of Fascism," p. 47 in *Italian Fascisms from Pareto to Gentile*, Adrian Lyttelton, ed. (New York, 1973).

answer to the social problems of industrial society ever emerged. Only recently have scholars begun to take Hitler's "status revolution" seriously, although without relating it adequately to his wider ambitions.

Discarding the assumption that an ideology must be a variety of conventional social thought makes it possible to examine Fascist and Nazi ideology and goals in their own terms. But any such attempt inevitably comes up against the second pitfall: the temptation to dismiss everything as propaganda. In the Italian case, radical skepticism has been especially fashionable. Roberto Vivarelli, in a witty essay on Mussolini's transition from socialism to fascism, has claimed that no logical connection existed between Mussolini's words and deeds, "which does not mean that 'words' counted for little in Mussolini's life"¹¹ Renzo De Felice, whom Vivarelli was attacking, also concluded in the early volumes of his monumental Mussolini biography that the Duce was always the man of day-to-day improvisation, of "absolute relativism," of power for power's sake.¹² At least one prominent Italian Communist historian has concurred, and another has dismissed Mussolini as a mere "gang leader preoccupied with holding onto power."¹³ In the German case, scholars have tended to take Hitler's ideological efforts more seriously. The man did, after all, write a book. But some historians have gamely continued to deny Hitler had ideas, or to argue that whatever ideas he had were irrelevant to his political course.¹⁴

The case of the radical skeptics would be stronger if Hitler and Mussolini had displayed the sort of erratic behavior consonant with the absence of ideology and the nihilistic pursuit of power. But in both cases the dictators

¹¹ Roberto Vivarelli, "Benito Mussolini dal socialismo al fascismo," *Rivista storica italiana*, 79 (1967): 448; see also his *Il dopoguerra in Italia e l'avvento del fascismo (1918-1922)*, 1: 227-8, 260; on pp. 294-5 Vivarelli also makes the "social thought" argument.

¹² De Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario, 1883-1920* (Turin, 1965), p. xxvi; *Mussolini il fascista* (Turin, 1966), 1: 168, 464ff., 537.

¹³ Paolo Spriano, *Sulla rivoluzione italiana* (Milan, 1978), p. 56; Ernesto Ragionieri, *Storia d'Italia*, 4 (Turin, 1976), p. 2215.

¹⁴ See particularly A. J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (New York, rev. paperback ed., 1966), pp. 70-2, and Norman Stone, *Hitler* (Boston, 1980), pp. 16, 67. Hans Mommsen, "National Socialism," in *Marxism, Communism, and Western Society* (New York, 1973), 6: 67, finds Schumpeter's "aimless expansion" the best description of National Socialist policy. Gerhard Schulz, *Aufstieg des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt, 1975), p. 218, argues on the basis of a *Mein Kampf* passage (p. 170 of the English edition, tr. Ralph Manheim [New York, 1971] [henceforth MK]), that Hitler was a mere "*Machiavellist*" who did not care whether his ideology was "true or false" (see also pp. 212-3). But the *Mein Kampf* passage actually establishes only that Hitler thought Marxism "false"; he viewed his own theoretical task as the establishment of "absolute truth" (MK, p. 210).

expressed at the beginning of their careers coherent ideologies that were not necessarily entirely popular or plausible, and continued to profess those ideas both publicly and privately throughout. The steady radicalization of their policies suggests an attempt to bring practice into line with theory, and implies that their increasingly rare moderation was tactical, and their extremism genuine. In the end, both provoked catastrophe by persisting, against steadily increasing risks, in their attempts to bend the world to fit the idea. If that was opportunism and nihilism, it was clearly a strangely elaborate and consistent variety.

II. FROM MISSION TO PROGRAM

The Italian case is admittedly the more ambiguous of the two. Mussolini's pilgrimage from socialism to Fascism, and his apparently sincere although private criticisms of Hitler as a doctrinaire, imply an unwillingness to take principles seriously.¹⁵ The well-attested influence of Nietzsche, Sorel, and of the prophet of the "rape of the crowd by political propaganda," Gustave Le Bon, might suggest that for Mussolini, any myth would do. In a December 1914 attack on critics of his conversion from socialist pacifism to rabble-rousing *interventismo*, he declared that life was relative: "the absolute does not exist except in cold and unfruitful abstraction." And in the summer of 1920 he insisted that "nothing is eternal," neither political regimes nor modes of production nor systems of ideas; time and chance happen to them all. But both these apparent confessions of relativism were no more than Mussolini's habitual way of attacking the millenarian silliness of the socialists.¹⁶ Mussolini himself, both as socialist and Fascist, had a world view that rested on one underlying assumption, and two political myths. The fixity of these ideas suggests that they were not simply Nietzschean conceits or expressions of a nihilist will to power, but ideas in which he actually believed. What Mussolini did not do was to assemble his ideas into an all-embracing intellectual system or a mon-ocausal, teleological philosophy of history. He may have been a visionary, but unlike Hitler he was not a doctrinaire.

The later Duce's underlying assumption, derived from sources as varied, if mutually reinforcing, as Heraclitus, Nietzsche, Darwin, Marx, Pareto, and Alfredo Oriani, was that life was struggle. History was an endless

¹⁵ See De Felice, *Mussolini il duce* (Turin, 1974), 1: 496.

¹⁶ *OO*, 7: 81 (December 13, 1914); 15: 86-7 (July 11, 1920). For more on Mussolini's supposed relativism, see Emilio Gentile, *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista (1918-1925)* (Bari, 1975), pp. 143-4, 147, 425.

¹⁷ Pareto, *elites*: *OO*, 1: 6-7, 73-5, 128 (1904-08); 3: 26 (1910); Marx and Darwin: 2: 9-10 (1909); Oriani: note 21 below. For Pareto and Marx, see especially Gregor, *The Young Mussolini and the Intellectual Origins of Fascism* (Berkeley, 1979).

succession of conflicts between elites, states, and tribes. In each epoch a particular elite or state set the tone. By definition, dominant elites or states were the fittest, a conception Mussolini took not as rationalization for resignation, but as a call to battle.¹⁷

Mussolini's two myths, revolution and the nation, determined the nature of that battle. The first was inevitably that of revolution.¹⁸ This was the myth of Mussolini's childhood and youth in the red Romagna, a myth that a career as socialist journalist-agitator, and reading Marx and Sorel, reinforced. Not that Mussolini was the most orthodox of Marxists. The Marx he preferred was Marx the revolutionary; for Marx the philosopher of history, the economic theorist, the historian, the German patriot, or the heir of the Enlightenment Mussolini had little use. These latter Marxes he identified with the unadventurous stodginess of the reformist socialists. What Mussolini instead proclaimed was Sorel's "barbarous notion of socialism," a revolution by an elite of primitives to inaugurate a "new civilization" of joyous paganism.¹⁹ This was precisely what Mussolini later attempted as a Fascist. Even the terminology, the goal of a new civilization, remained the same, as did most of Mussolini's enemies: the reformist socialists, the bourgeois establishment, the monarchy, the military hierarchy, and the Church.

Mussolini's second fixed idea was that of the nation and the national mission, an idea also acquired in his socialist youth. Revolutionary expectations and adaptation to prevailing socialist dogma prompted occasional antinational outbursts, such as his famous 1910 exhortation to plant the Italian flag in a dunghill, or his neutralist September 1914 party manifesto. But behind protestations that the proletariat had no fatherland

¹⁸ I have throughout endeavored to use the term *revolution* in as neutral a fashion as possible, without assuming that revolutions (violent attempts to achieve rapid, fundamental changes in dominant values and myths, political institutions, social structures, leadership, and government policies) are of necessity "progressive." I have also applied the term to relationships between states, to mean an attempt to achieve violent, fundamental change in power relationships and the distribution of territory. The widespread assumption that only the Left makes revolutions contains a hidden but indefensible teleology, and when applied to the twentieth century falls afoul of the obvious confusion between political extremes: was Stalin "Left" or "Right"? (See, in general, Eugen Weber, "Revolution? Counterrevolution? What Revolution?," *Journal of Contemporary History* 9 [1974]: 3-47; Perez Zagorin, "Theories of Revolution in Contemporary Historiography," *Political Science Quarterly* 88 [1973]: 23-52, and "Prolegomena to the Comparative History of Revolution in Early Modern Europe," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 18 [1976]: 151-74).

¹⁹ Barbarous socialism: *OO*, 3: 66 (1910); "I am a primitive," 4: 183 (1912); paganism (Nietzsche): 1: 174ff.; new civilization: 3: 87 (1910); revolutionary elite: 1: 128 (1908), 3: 26 (1910).

lurked the convictions of a radical nationalist. The Socialist Mussolini displayed an unsocialist reverence for Mazzini, as well as public approval of Giuseppe Prezzolini and his circle of quasi-nationalist litterateurs grouped around *La Voce*. That journal's attempt to further "the spiritual unity of [all] Italians" met with Mussolini's emphatic approval.²⁰ He occasionally let fly an anti-Austrian barb sharpened by his experience as an agitator in the Trentino and his association with the irredentist socialist Cesare Battisti. Finally, from 1909 if not earlier Mussolini was an "assiduous and devoted reader" of the eccentric nationalist philosopher-historian Alfredo Oriani. Oriani was a bloodthirsty recluse ("blood will always be the best warm rain for great ideas") who insisted that only war could make post-Risorgimento Italy whole, and demanded that the nation take up Rome's historic mission in Africa and the Mediterranean. This last enthusiasm did not possess Mussolini until the war years, but he could scarcely have called himself "*un orianista*," as he did in 1909, without sharing much of Oriani's world view.²¹

It was the shock of European war in 1914 that removed the theoretical opposition between the myths of revolution and the nation. Mussolini greeted the collapse of the Socialist International with something approaching relief. When his attempt to lead the Socialists into support of a "revolutionary war" failed, his last speech to his comrades before they expelled him from the party in November 1914 was pure Oriani:

If Italy remains absent, it will be once more the land of the dead, the land of cowards. I tell you that the duty of socialism is to shake this Italy of priests, pro-Austrians, and monarchists Despite all your howls of protest, the war will flatten the lot of you [vi travolgerà tutti].

In the following months, the myths of revolution and of the nation fused. War, and war alone could undermine the old Italy of priests, kings, and fainthearted Socialists, assuage the national inferiority complex, and make the nation whole. "A nation old with fifty centuries of history and young with fifty years of national life" could not behave like "a nation of rabbits." War must destroy "the ignoble legend that Italians do not fight, it must wipe out the shame of Lissa and Custoza, it must show the world that Italy can fight a war, a great war; I say again: a *great*

²⁰ Antimilitarism and internationalism: 2: 7, 2: 169-70 (1909); 3: 137 (1910); 4: 53 (1911); Mazzini: 3: 68 (1910); national unity: 2: 55 (1909); 38: 11-12 (1909).

²¹ Nationalism: *OO*, 2: 75 (1909); 3: 266-7 (1910); 6: 58-60 (January 20, 1920); Oriani: 38: 45-6; 2: 128 (1909). Gentile, *Ideologia*, p. 37, assumes Oriani's nationalism, and hence Mussolini's, was cultural—a charitable interpretation that ignores both ideologues' thirst for blood.

war.” No longer would foreigners see Italy as a land “of travelling storytellers, of peddlers of statuettes, of Calabrian *banditi*.” And war could also be a kind of revolution. The day Italian bayonets crossed the Ringstrasse in Vienna, “the Vatican’s death knell [would] sound.”²²

Under the sign of perpetual struggle, internal and foreign policy, revolution and war merged. The barbaric new man of Mussolini the socialist became the “impatient and generous youth,” the “young rebels” of *interventismo*.²³ And despite stalemate and Caporetto, the war, as Mussolini put it in early 1918, had proved that this “small, despised people,” this “army of mandolin players,” could fight. Combat, and the fact that Italy had willed it by deliberately entering the war, in turn confirmed the nation’s historic mission and claim to “higher destinies.” And it was the myth of Rome that shaped Mussolini’s conception of those destinies. In December 1918, while proclaiming Italy’s right to expansion, he insisted that Rome would “once again become the beacon of civilization for the world.”²⁴ Italy might of course choose to become an “archaeological bordello or an Anglo-Saxon colony.” But the example of Rome, which had “laid out roads and drawn boundaries and given the world the eternal laws of its legal codes” placed modern Italians under “another universal duty.”²⁵ No one, in Theodor Mommsen’s words, could “remain at Rome without a universal idea.” Rome must again become “the leading city of the civilization of all of Western Europe,” and Italy “the leading nation of world history.”²⁶

The political content of this “new civilization” was clear from very early in Mussolini’s career as a Fascist. The world, Mussolini announced in 1921 and 1922, was moving towards the right; as for Fascism, it was “scarcely at the beginnings of its mission.”²⁷ By mid-1925, Mussolini had taken to characterizing Fascism as “one of the few creative ideas of this tormented historical period.” In early 1926 he described Italy, the last of the great powers to achieve maturity, as the first to construct a truly modern state. Like the French Revolution, the Fascist revolution

²² *OO*, 6: 429 (November 10, 1914); 7: 70 (December 11, 1914); 7: 197 (February 14, 1915); 7: 418 (May 24, 1915); 7: 394 (May 16, 1915).

²³ *Ibid.*, 7: 57 (November 29, 1914).

²⁴ The war and Italy’s mission: *ibid.*, 11: 86 (May 19, 1918); 13: 147 (May 24, 1919); 18: 200 (May 24, 1922); 21: 443 (November 4, 1925); 23: 248 (November 4, 1928); beacon of civilization: 12: 77 (December 20, 1918); 16: 128 (January 25, 1921).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 14: 22 (September 24, 1919); also 15: 70, 16: 106, 17: 148; Rome: 15: 217–18 (September 24, 1920).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 16: 159 (February 6, 1921); 18: 144 (April 6, 1922).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 17: 18 (June 30, 1921); see also 18: 69, 71; 16: 142 (February 2, 1921).

would have world-wide influence and epochal significance. By late 1926, the Duce had become self-assured enough to claim that his movement was the bearer of a "new type of civilization." The twentieth century would not merely be the "century of Italian power," it would also be the century of universal Fascism.²⁸

If Mussolini's fundamental ideas were not entirely unsystematic, Hitler's "rock-hard convictions" amounted to a genuine philosophy of history, an all-embracing, all-explanatory system of belief. Its first principle, from which Hitler never wavered after his first recorded enunciation of it in 1919, was pseudo-biological racism, the "anti-Semitism of reason."²⁹ Race, he claimed in January 1921, was "the driving force of world history"; later, in *Mein Kampf*, he described it as "the key not only to world history, but to all human culture." History was the history of race struggle. National Socialism was ultimately a science.³⁰

Some historians have tended to argue that any attempt to interpret Hitler's ideology "as if it were systematic" is futile; others have suggested that in the end the ideology's function as a tool of totalitarian manipulation was essential and its "intellectual substance" unimportant.³¹ Actually, Hitler was neither a trendy relativist, nor a man who lacked respect for convictions. In his way—and to the dismay of more up-to-date Party ideologues such as Rosenberg—Hitler was a good old nineteenth-century positivist. Hitler's ideas were at least as systematic as those of the Marx who asserted that history was the history of class struggle. Both Marxism and Hitler's ideology were millenarian religions of world salvation: salvation for man as a species reborn from the Proletariat in one case, salvation for the reborn Aryan species of man in the other.³² Both required the pitiless elimination of groups: the class enemy for Marxism, the racial enemy for Nazism. Nor did Nazism's alleged "lack of intellectual

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 21: 389 (September 24, 1925); 22: 109 (April 7, 1926); 22: 187 (early August 1926); 22:12 (November 18, 1925); 22: 135 (May 23, 1926); also, in general, Michael Ledeen, *Universal Fascism* (New York, 1972).

²⁹ Hitler, *Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen 1905–1924*, ed. Eberhard Jäckel and Axel Kuhn (Stuttgart, 1980) (henceforth HSA), p. 89 (September 16, 1919); a dearth of sources has so far prevented convincing reconstruction of Hitler's views before 1919.

³⁰ HSA, p. 301 (January 26, 1921); MK, p. 339.

³¹ Mason, "The Primacy of Politics," p. 193; Karl Dietrich Bracher, in Bracher, Wolfgang Sauer, and Gerhard Schulz, *Die nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung* (Cologne, 2nd rev. ed., 1962), pp. 262, 271, 286; Schulz, *Aufstieg des Nationalsozialismus*, pp. 218, 421; Martin Broszat, *The Hitler State* (London, 1981), p. 218; Mommsen, "National Socialism," p. 68.

³² On the eschatological core of Marxism, see Robert C. Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* (London, 1961), and Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1978).

substance” prevent intellectuals from Heidegger and Carl Schmitt to Konrad Lorenz from embracing it with an enthusiasm that could not have been wholly feigned.

But despite its fixity and coherence, even Hitler’s system did not spring suddenly from the aspirant Führer’s brow, although scholars have sometimes overestimated the length of time Hitler took to weld his ideas together.³³ Much later, Hitler conceded to his entourage that “in the early days of the movement I found myself compelled to act from intuition.” Only during his post-Putsch imprisonment in 1924, he maintained, did he have the time to “confirm his ideas by the study of natural history [den Gedanken naturgeschichtlich zu begründen].”³⁴ Hitler’s early speeches suggest it required roughly three years, from the fall of 1919 to the winter of 1922, for the “anti-Semitism of reason” to harden into a genuine world-system, complete with a visionary program for action, of which more later.

Hitler’s starting point was the “recognition” (English cannot do justice to the force of the German *Erkenntnis*) that the “race-tuberculosis of nations,” the Jews, were responsible for the 1918 revolution and thus for Germany’s defeat in the Great War. By the late spring of 1920 Hitler had taken a further, decisive step. Perhaps under the influence of his revered friend, the drunkard poet Dietrich Eckhart, and of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, published in German in January 1920, Hitler began to enunciate an all-embracing interpretation of world history.³⁵ He now recognized the Jews from Moses to Lenin, or “from Joseph to Rathenau,” as the essence of triumphant evil from the Bronze Age to the Weimar Republic. Jewish “robber nomads,” the “most national race of all the ages,” lived by parasitically corrupting other peoples while seeking world mastery for themselves. Only Germany stood in the way: “Jewry . . . knew well that its domination could only be broken by a national force as strong as itself, and that would be the German *Volk*.” Hitler’s solution, as early as April 1920, was simple and drastic: he proclaimed “the inexorable resolve to strike the evil at its root and exterminate it root and

³³ Common practice is to ascribe canonical status to *Mein Kampf* (1924–26). The early sources in HSA show that all decisive elements in *Mein Kampf* had emerged by the end of 1922.

³⁴ *Monologe*, p. 49 (July, 1941); see also p. 262.

³⁵ HSA, pp. 88–90, 156, 176. Hitler freely and gratefully admitted Eckhart’s early influence (MK, p. 687, and *Monologe*, p. 208 [1942]). For Hitler as a “pupil” of the *Protocols*, see Walter Laqueur, *Russia and Germany* (Boston, 1965), pp. 103–4, 340 note 54; Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide* (New York, 1966), p. 193. Hitler’s first recorded mention of the *Protocols* is August 1921 (HSA, p. 452); his speeches suggest earlier acquaintance with their contents.

branch."³⁶ That this was at least potentially a project on a world scale was clear from the insistence with which Hitler spoke of the Jews' own "world power plans" and "eternal Jewish goal—world domination." His remarks about German aims widened correspondingly, from the conventional nationalist (and Party program) demand for the unification of all Germans in one state "from Memel to Pressburg, from Königsberg to Strassburg," to the more grandiose if vaguer project of creating a "germanic empire of the German nation."³⁷

By March 1921 he had gone far beyond merely pointing out that Germany was the main obstacle to alleged Jewish plans. His aim was no longer defense, but offense: it was Germany's mission to "heal" a sick world.³⁸ In the spring of 1922, Hitler began to make this claim a major element in his speeches. Only two alternatives existed: "either victory of the Aryan side or its annihilation and victory of the Jews." Germanic blood was gradually becoming exhausted, and the future of the world was grim unless Germany "made itself free." The nation's "greatest deed" lay ahead of it: "to be leader [Führer] in the coming battle of the Aryans against the Jewish world peril." Germany, he insisted in the next months, must be "the foundation of an Aryan world order." This was Germany's "historic mission."³⁹

Implicitly, Hitler's "Aryan world order" would mean an end to history in the conventional sense. In *Mein Kampf* he made this implication explicit:

And so the folkish philosophy of life corresponds to the innermost will of Nature, since it restores that free play of forces which must lead to a continuous mutual higher breeding, until at last the best of humanity, having achieved possession of this earth, will have a free path for activity in domains which will lie partly above it and partly outside it.

Even the iron law of struggle might fall into abeyance: ". . . the pacifistic-humane idea is perfectly all right perhaps when the highest type of man has previously conquered and subjected the world. . . ."⁴⁰ Mankind would achieve biological apotheosis. Hitler had fused pseudo-Darwinist

³⁶ HSA, pp. 137–8, 145–6, 184–204 (May 31, June 11, August 13, 1920); HSA, pp. 119–20 (April 6, 1920): ". . . es beseelt uns die unerbittliche Entschlossenheit, das Übel an die Wurzel zu packen und mit Stumpf und Stiel auszurotten (lebhafter Beifall)."

³⁷ Jewish world domination: HSA pp. 195, 220, 254, 273, 464, etc.; uniting all Germans: pp. 106, 126, 128, 180, 242.

³⁸ HSA, p. 354 (March 19, 1921); Hitler borrowed from a 19th century tag: "und es mag am deutschen Wesen / einmal noch die Welt genesen."

³⁹ HSA, pp. 620, 623, 631, 698, 779 (April 12, 1921; September 28, 1922; January 3, 1923); see also p. 694.

⁴⁰ MK, pp. 383–4, 288.

anti-Semitism and German nationalism into a religion of world redemption. All that remained was to work out the practical details.

On a fundamental level, the beliefs of Hitler and Mussolini were thus different in kind. Mussolini's assumption that struggle was the father of all things, and his revolutionary and national myths, were scarcely cut from the same cloth as Hitler's political religion. Mussolini did not propose to rescue the world for good—but merely to establish the new Rome's dominant place in it. Nevertheless, the political and geopolitical programs the two leaders drew from their ideologies were rather more similar than the beliefs themselves.

By 1925–26, Mussolini's program was set in all essential details. Internally, he proposed to create a fanatical following for the national myth, while creating a new sort of Italian and consolidating his own unchallenged power as dictator. If Italy were to fulfil its destiny, Mussolini repeatedly insisted as early as 1919 and 1920, the national will had to be “directed towards a common objective.” The war had undoubtedly accelerated the “process of consolidation of the national consciousness,” but given Italy's fragile traditions and short existence, *italianità* remained a “privilege limited to a relatively small minority.”⁴¹ Only a new elite could enforce the unity and discipline necessary for external self-assertion. Here the war itself was a help. It had divided the fittest nations, including Italy, from the unfit, and had divided the Italians themselves into those who “had been there,” and those who had not. The former, the “lords of the trenches [trincerocrazia],” would rule. But this vision soon proved a disappointment; the returning veterans were relatively democratic in their convictions, and disinclined to destroy the liberal system.⁴² As for the early Fascists, Mussolini ruefully concluded in 1919 that “their utter lack of respect for authority [strafottanza] and dynamism make it hard for them to form a bloc even with themselves.” By mid-1922, Mussolini had apparently concluded that the creation of national unity and of a new elite would take time; it would require “future Fascist universities and . . . Fascist schools” to rear the new imperial Italy. But Fascism would yet accomplish the task at which the Risorgimento had failed, the task of “making Italians.”⁴³

⁴¹ See particularly *OO*, 13: 147–8 (May 24, 1919); 16: 20 (November 20, 1920).

⁴² *Ibid.*, 8: 272, 10: 140 (December 22, 1916; December 15, 1917; on the veterans' movement, see Giovanni Sabbatucci, *I combattenti nel primo dopoguerra* (Bari, 1974).

⁴³ *OO*, 14: 71 (October 18, 1919); 18: 331 (August 2, 1922); 20: 284 (May 24, 1924); the Risorgimento as failed revolution was a favorite theme of Mussolini as well as of Gramsci.

The full urgency of this task did not apparently dawn on Mussolini until the summer 1924 crisis following the murder of the Socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti. The spontaneous revulsion of much of Italian opinion showed that whatever conversion to Fascism had so far taken place had been superficial. After he struck down the opposition in January 1925, Mussolini proclaimed his goal with a new openness. Fascism's "totalitarian will" was "to fascistize the nation, so that tomorrow Italian and Fascist, more or less like Italian and Catholic, will be the same thing." That would give Fascism the right to call itself a revolution. To the Fascist Party congress of June 1925, the Duce insisted that he would now create, "through an obstinate and tenacious labor of selection, the new generations." The idea of spawning the new man "in the laboratory" aroused his enthusiasm:

. . . to create . . . the class of the warriors, who are always ready to die; the class of the inventors, who pursue the secrets of the mysteries [of nature]; the class of judges; the class of the great captains of industry; of the great governors. It is through this sort of methodical selection that one creates the great elites that in turn establish empires.⁴⁴

By the fall of 1925 Mussolini announced himself satisfied that dictatorship had overcome the old "image of the Italian people, repeated abroad, . . . of a small nation, disorderly, noisy, and fidgety." But what Mussolini described as the "the weaknesses of the Italian character: . . . shallowness, fecklessness, the belief that everything will go well," yet remained. These "traditional defects" must give way to "tenacity, perseverance, and methodical work." The regime would create a "new Italian," a "Fascist Italian," out of the generations that had fought the war, and above all from the new legions under training in the Party youth organizations.⁴⁵ The regime must sweep away "the sediments deposited in those awful centuries of political, military, and moral decadence that r[an] from 1600 to the rise of Napoleon," and complete the Risorgimento, which was "only the beginning, the work of a tiny minority." The final goal, as Mussolini put it in 1934, was an Italian who knew (like Caligula) that being loved was second best: "the most important thing [was] to be feared." It was time to smash the old clichés Italians still labored under: "No more mandolin players; [instead,] grenade throwers; no more exquisite

⁴⁴ All from *ibid.*, 21: 362-3 (June 22, 1925).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 21: 426 (October 28, 1925); 22: 23, 100, 117, 246 (December 5, 1925; March 28, April 15, October 28, 1926); 23: 78-9 (December 17, 1927).

manners; [instead,] the fist." It was the eve of Italy's unprovoked attack on Ethiopia.⁴⁶

The fist was also in store for the old elites and institutions at home. In the left-wing euphoria of the immediate post-1918 period Mussolini made tactical concessions to the spirit of the hour by describing Fascism as "ultra-libertarian," and denouncing all dictatorships except that of "will and intelligence."⁴⁷ But once "the hour of Fascism" came in the summer of 1920 with the Trieste Fascio's ruthless assault on the Slovenes of the newly annexed areas, Mussolini felt safe to celebrate hierarchy and discipline. The turbulent chieftains of provincial Fascism must submit to him, "if [Fascism] wants, tomorrow, to impose discipline on the entire nation."⁴⁸ He made no secret of his conviction that parliamentary democracy was a miserable nineteenth-century relic; this belief was yet another link between Mussolini the socialist and Mussolini the Fascist.⁴⁹ He openly proclaimed that he and his Party would entrench themselves "and defend themselves against all comers." And in the spring of 1924 he described the new Chamber of Deputies, despite its Fascist majority, as "the last parliamentary experiment Italy [would] make."⁵⁰

Nor was he afraid to pronounce the word *dictatorship* with approval as early as November 1921. At a November 1923 press conference, he remarked that "every century [had] its history, its institutions; an intelligent dictatorship could last a long time." The "essential thing . . . [was] to set up the machinery; once it was set up, an operator could always be found." The new regime was to be no mere personal dictatorship, but the inauguration of a new age in government.⁵¹ Implicitly, the Duce's "ferocious totalitarian will"⁵² required the taming and ultimate removal of monarchy and papacy, as the political struggles of the 1930s were to show.

The method Mussolini chose was entirely consonant with the tradition of Oriani and of other post-Risorgimento yearners for a Great War to

⁴⁶ Ibid., 24: 283 (October 27, 1930); 44: 91 (October 29, 1934): "Sonatori di mandolino, no; lanciatori di bombe, gente cortese, no. Cazzottatori."

⁴⁷ Ibid., 14: 133 (November 15, 1919); also 14: 151; 12: 326-7 (March 23, 1919)

⁴⁸ Ibid., 18: 391-2, 412-13 (September 7, 20, 1922); for the "hour of Fascism," 15: 152 (August 21, 1920).

⁴⁹ Ibid., see 17: 18, 268-9 (June 30, November 22, 1921); 18: 66ff. (February 25, 1922).

⁵⁰ Ibid., 19: 196 (March 1923); 20: 295 (May 27, 1924).

⁵¹ Ibid., 17: 268 (November 22, 1922); 20: 80 (November 1, 1923). De Felice's contention (*Mussolini il fascista*, 1: 537-8 (see also pp. 465, 591, 594, 602, 618, and 2: 9-10, 34-5, 67, 128-9, 342) that Mussolini did not seek a one-party dictatorial regime before late 1925 does not fit the evidence.

⁵² *OO*, 21: 362 (June 22, 1925).

make Italy whole. Mussolini had already called in 1914–15 for war as a kind of revolution. All revolutions, he remarked in 1920, apropos of events in Russia, were “fated to be imperialist.” War and revolution, he insisted in the same 1925 speech in which he celebrated the creation of the new generations in the laboratory, were “almost always linked. Either war produces revolution or revolution leads to war.”⁵³ His regime, although he was careful not to alarm his conservative allies with the thought, sought to fuse the two.

In foreign policy, Mussolini’s 1914 discovery of the nation and its mission led him naturally to celebration of its imperial destinies in terms familiar to readers of Oriani and of the nationalist leader Enrico Corradini. But Mussolini was more systematic than either in his synthesis of demographic expansionism and rudimentary geopolitics. His starting point was inevitably the war, which even before its end had made Italy an “imperial” nation, fully entitled to the Adriatic victory Slavs and Allies sought to deny. Italy also had the right to expansion in the Mediterranean, “the sea of Rome”; the Italian people was “prolific and hard-working.” Imperialism, Mussolini insisted unseasonably on the first day of January 1919, in the midst of his countrymen’s Wilsonian enthusiasms, was “an eternal and immutable law of life.”⁵⁴ At the March 1919 inaugural meeting of the *Fasci di Combattimento*, Mussolini proclaimed with statistics in hand that Italy’s narrow, mountainous land and rapidly multiplying forty millions entitled it to a greater share of the earth. Should the Allies of 1915–1918 cheat Italy at the peace table, Mussolini threatened in the following weeks, Italy should join the Germans. From its position athwart Britain’s Mediterranean communications it should shatter the British Empire in Africa and Asia.⁵⁵

Mussolini took up with a vengeance Corradini’s myth of the international class war. Italy should challenge the “quintessentially plutocratic and bourgeois” alliance of French, British, and Americans. The French, at least, were demographically exhausted. Italy would follow the Spain of Charles V and the France of Louis XIV and Napoleon as the “dominant nation of the entire Latin world,” thanks to its demographic dynamism and the “virtues of our race [stirpe].”⁵⁶ Versailles was transitory. Demographic equilibria were shifting. The “immense wave” of Slavdom would wipe away the small states of central Europe, while the 70 or 80

⁵³ Ibid., 14: 292, 21: 363 (February 7, 1920, June 22, 1925).

⁵⁴ Ibid., 10: 434–5 (April 7, 1918); 11: 91–2 (May 28, 1918); 12: 77, 101 (December 20, 1918, January 1, 1919).

⁵⁵ Ibid., 12: 323 (March 23, 1919); 15: 184–5 (September 5, 1920); 13: 71, 76 (April 20, 23, 1919).

⁵⁶ Ibid., 13: 109, 147–9 (May 9, 24, 1919).

million Germans would move West into France to rectify that decadent nation's regrettable "imbalance between territory and population." As for Italy, it was after Russia and Germany the "most compact and homogeneous national bloc" in Europe. By 1950 it would have 60 million inhabitants, of which 15 or 20 million would be around the shores of the Mediterranean and across the Atlantic. Italy, "to be free," must throw off its economic dependence on the Anglo-Saxons by achieving self-sufficiency in grain and energy. It could then "become the dominating nation of the Mediterranean basin and discharge on the African shores of that sea the majority of its population and energies." The areas Italy was destined to conquer were "extraordinarily thinly settled"—an insight that would have come as a surprise to their inhabitants. But some "overflowings of human masses [straripamenti di masse umane]" were "inevitable and necessary," the "fertilizing reversals of history."⁵⁷

Demography continued to furnish a major argument for expansion. But by the mid-1920s Mussolini had turned the argument in a direction unthought of by Corradini and other prophets of the imperialism of the prolific poor. Once in power, Mussolini discovered that pride in the "riotous development" of Italy's population was misplaced.⁵⁸ Some areas of Italy, he recognized as early as mid-1923, were prey to "demographic decadence," like the despised French. By 1927, after precise statistics had become available, Mussolini had become alarmed. In his marathon Ascension Day speech of May 1927, he surveyed the demographic decline of France and Britain, and insisted that the same decline—in other words, the usual demographic pattern of industrial societies—was a threat to Italy's future as well. Only fools claimed Italians were too numerous. "Demographic potency" was the fundamental ingredient of national power. Forty million Italians were too few compared to the 40 million French, the 46 million British, the 90 million Germans, the 200 million Slavs, and the 540 million inhabitants of the British and French colonial empires. Italy, "if it [were] to count for something," must "approach the threshold of the second half of th[e] century with a population no smaller than 60 million inhabitants." The alternative was renunciation of Italy's mission: "If we diminish in numbers, gentlemen, we will not found an empire, we will [instead] become a colony." The tenacious resistance to "the pernicious currents of contemporary civilization" by Basilicata, one of

⁵⁷ All from *Ibid.*, 16: 105–6 (January 8, 1921): "Per essere liberi."

⁵⁸ Demography (among others): *ibid.*, 16: 335, 18: 180, 19: 191, 20: 74, (1921–23) and particularly 21: 97 (October 4, 1924); "decadence" in some areas of Italy: 19: 285 (June 22, 1923).

Italy's most miserably poor and populous regions, was thus an act of foreign policy.⁵⁹

Mussolini's ensuing campaign to "ruralize Italy, even if it takes billions, and half a century," was no more than a small part of a grand design that stretched far beyond the confines of the Italian state of the 1920s. It was an attempt to create the demographic conditions for Italy's Mediterranean primacy. The "battle for grain" of 1925 and later years, which many historians have interpreted as a propaganda stunt or as largesse to the landed interests, was a conscious attempt to provide the economic prerequisites of Italy's "freedom":

In an Italy entirely reclaimed [bonificata], cultivated, irrigated, and disciplined, in other words a Fascist Italy, there is space for another ten million men. Sixty million Italians will make the weight of their numbers and their power felt in the history of the world.⁶⁰

The geographic and strategic requirements of Italian freedom, and of empire, were as much on Mussolini's mind as the economic and demographic ones. The Great War had resolved the problem of Italy's land frontiers; the future now lay on the waters. Only Italy was a truly Mediterranean nation. French and Spaniards had Atlantic ports. Mediterranean preponderance (*predominio*) was therefore Italy's "by right of its geographic configuration and the maritime traditions of its race [stirpe]." The inland sea must become an Italian lake, "expelling those who are . . . parasites." Asserting Italy's rights would require breaking "the chains of hostility that surround[ed] Italy in the Mediterranean," and might also require "the demolition of the British Empire." The British guarded the principal exits from the Mediterranean at Gibraltar and Suez, and thus had a stranglehold over Italy's supplies of food and raw materials.⁶¹ By 1926-27, Mussolini had apparently elevated this insight into a general law of geopolitics:

A nation that has no free access to the sea cannot be considered a free nation; a nation that has no free access to the oceans cannot be considered a great power. Italy must become a great power.

⁵⁹ French decadence: see especially *ibid.*, 38: 396 (June 22, 1923); the rest from 22: 364-7 (May 26, 1927) (the "discorso dell'Ascensione").

⁶⁰ "Ruralize Italy": *ibid.*, 40: 298 (March 24, 1927); the rest from 23: 216 (September 1928). De Felice's assumption that Mussolini's foreign and domestic programs were mutually exclusive alternatives (*Mussolini il fascista* [Turin, 1968], 2: 359-60; *Mussolini il Duce*, 1: 179; *Mussolini il Duce* [Turin, 1978], 2: 155) fits neither Mussolini's words nor the regime's actions.

⁶¹ In order: *OO*, 13: 143 (May 22, 1919); 15: 289-90 (August 20, 1920); 16: 300-01 (May 3, 1921); 18: 439 (October 4, 1923); 15: 37 (June 15, 1920) (see also 15: 29, 18: 459); 18: 432 (October 1, 1922); 21: 273 (April 2, 1925).

The “prisoner of the sea that was Rome’s” must break that imprisonment in order to fulfil its historic mission.⁶²

Hitler’s vision had many similarities with Mussolini’s, but was different in three fundamental ways. First, Hitler’s unified, monocausal world view allowed him to derive everything from the central tenet of race. Second, the tenet’s world-wide implications inevitably pushed any program drawn from it in the direction of world domination and biological utopia, while Prussia-Germany’s tradition of blood and iron and its barely thwarted “grasp at world power” in 1914–1918 made such a program inherently plausible to some Germans. Mussolini’s nationalism, by contrast, merely aspired to Mediterranean mastery and a century or two of European cultural and political hegemony, on the model of Rome or of France from Louis XIV to Napoleon III. And Italy’s weakness made even that aim seem visionary.

From the beginning, Hitler showed greater theoretical rigor than Mussolini. Even the beer-hall agitator of 1920–21 conceived his internal goals, the “nationalization of the masses,” race purification, and creation of a pitiless national dictatorship, as a unified whole.⁶³ Germany’s class, religious, and tribal cleavages must disappear, as they had in the euphoria of August 1914 and the trenches of the Great War. *Klassen- und Standesdünkel*, religious mistrust, and Prussian-Bavarian enmity all weakened the Germanic Aryan race’s struggle against the Jewish world conspiracy. And those internal divisions were themselves the product of racial mixing and Jewish parasitism. Class consciousness was a Jewish disease, a form of false consciousness that the Jews, that “most national race of all the ages,” deliberately and systematically spread, but did not share.⁶⁴

The remedy was simple: a “revolution of attitudes [Revolution der Gesinnung]” that would sweep away class distinctions and inculcate the “blind, rock-hard, unshakable *belief* in the irresistible power of the German Volk” and in a better future. “For this reason, the aim of the National Socialists from 1920 on was “*not to become a class organization, but rather a Volk movement.*”⁶⁵ And hence Hitler’s “socialism”: the term was more than mere demagoguery, although Hitler did remark at one point that the movement’s title of “workers’ party” was a consequence of the

⁶² Block quotation from Emilio Canevari, *La guerra italiana* (Rome, 1948–49), 1: 212 note; “prisoner”: *OO*, 24: 234 (May 17, 1930); also *I documenti diplomatici italiani*, 7th series (Rome, 1953—), 8, no. 323. For more on this geopolitical vision, see MacGregor Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed, 1939–1941* (Cambridge, 1982), particularly pp. 38–40.

⁶³ For the phrase, MK, p. 336; for some of the background, George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses* (New York, 1975).

⁶⁴ HSA, pp. 136–8, 145–6, 151 (May 31, June 11 and 24, 1920).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 239, 255, 156 (September 24, October 26, July 3, 1920).

need to "have the workers behind us."⁶⁶ What Hitler meant by "socialism" was not a society based on a nineteenth-century theory of political economy, but a new egalitarian style and unprecedented social mobility. The National Socialist revolution would not merely be one of *Gesinnung* or status.⁶⁷ It would liberate those Germans who until now had had no chance to rise. Ossified distinctions of birth, education, and wealth, according to Hitler, profited only the Jewish parasites. "Make way for talent!" was a corollary of anti-Semitism, the chief social ingredient of National Socialism, and one of its most effective appeals. Hitler, the self-proclaimed and self-evident "most capable man" of the Party, was simultaneously the prophet of the career open to talent, and its prize exemplar. His demand that the world judge him "by performance alone" was as unanswerable while success lasted as his sincerity was undeniable when he insisted that every true German "carried his marshal's baton in his knapsack."⁶⁸

The career open to talent inevitably had a negative side. By 1923 Hitler had come to the conclusion that those without talent—the requisite pedigree or physical attributes—must vanish. Germany would expel its Jews, if they were lucky, and take measures against the deformed, the mentally ill, syphilitics, and drunkards: "The preservation of a nation is more important than the preservation of its unfortunates." The *völkisch* state would see to it that "only the healthy beget children." By 1923–24, in connection with the evolution of his foreign-policy ideas, Hitler had also come to the conclusion that the healthiest of the healthy were the peasantry: "The slums of the cities were responsible for nine-tenths, alcohol for one-tenth, of all human depravity." The countryside, not the cities, had provided the "healthier section of the Volk" that had crushed the 1919 red terror in Munich.⁶⁹ But Hitler came to the mysticism of blood and soil relatively late, as a consequence rather than a cause of his vision of eastern conquest. He never displayed the full-blown agrarian sentimentalism of Darré, Himmler, or Bormann.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 105 (January 16, 1920).

⁶⁷ David Schoenbaum, *Hitler's Social Revolution* (New York, 1966).

⁶⁸ HSA, p. 296 (January 12, 1921): "Freie Bahn dem Tüchtigen!"; p. 461 (August 26, 1921); Hildegard von Kotze and Helmut Krausnick, eds., *Es spricht der Führer* (Gütersloh, 1966), pp. 215–16 (1937): "... einem Sozialismus, dessen höchsten Ausdruck es ist, einem Staat zu organisieren, in dem jeder Volksgenosse dem Marschallstab in Tornister hat." See also HSA, p. 158 (July 6, 1920), for Hitler's favorable early assessment of the French Revolution ("national und aufbauend").

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 646, 1023, 1026, 1116 (June 22, 1922; before October 1923; February 28, 1924); MK, p. 403.

⁷⁰ HSA, pp. 1023, 1116 are apparently the only pre-1925 Hitler references to the life-giving qualities of the peasantry.

The final ingredient in Hitler's internal vision was of course a political revolution to accompany the revolution of attitudes, the career open to talent, and the repudiation of the last shreds of Judaeo-Christian morality. Germany, Hitler proclaimed as early as April 1920, needed "neither monarchy nor republic, but the form of state that is the best for the [German] people. We need a dictator who is a genius." He demanded "a [man with an] iron skull, with muddy boots, perhaps, but with a clear conscience and a steel fist, who will end the blathering of these [Reichstag] drawing-room heroes, and give the nation a deed."⁷¹ Once Hitler had received "dictatorial powers" from his own party, in the summer of 1921, his utterances on this score took on new authority. In a "Germanic democracy," the best brain decided, not the "sluggishness of the majority." Hitler had already cast himself in the part. He might describe himself as a mere "drummer" when flattering nationalist notables, but he also claimed for his movement the right to provide the "strong man" Germany needed. As early as February 1922 he insisted the Party would lead Germany "when the rotten edifice [of the Republic] finally collapse[d]."⁷²

Mussolini's example was a powerful help. Hitler apparently first took public note of the Duce in August 1922, and was soon proclaiming that Mussolini "had shown what a minority can do, if a holy national will inspires it." The Fascists had allegedly smashed "Jewish-Marxist terror" and dragged a lethargic majority with them. The National Socialists, he now repeatedly proclaimed, aspired "to take the Volk in hand."⁷³ In the course of 1923 he sometimes veiled his claim to supreme leadership ("We must forge the sword; the almighty will give us the man for this sword"). But in predicting to the *Daily Mail* in October 1923 that if a German Mussolini came, "people would fall down on their knees and worship him," Hitler could only have had himself in mind.⁷⁴ In his speeches at his trial after the November 1923 Putsch, he openly claimed political leadership of the *völkische* movement and of a nationalist revolution. His later outline in *Mein Kampf* of the constitutional implications

⁷¹ HSA, pp. 126, 127 (April 27, 1920), also p. 443; "iron skull": p. 333 (March 6, 1921).

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 438 (July 14, 1921); p. 622 (April 12, 1922); pp. 643 and 643, note 6; also pp. 753-4 (May 29, December 4, 1922): "Wir brauchen einen starken Mann, und den werden die Nationalsozialisten bringen"; p. 565 (February 2, 1922).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 683, 726, 704, 711 (August 17, November 9, and 22, October 25, 1922); see also pp. 795 ("heads will roll"), 806, 950. As early as February 1921, Hitler had claimed that the movement's swastika flag was the only appropriate one for a future "germanic state of the German nation" (p. 323).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 966, 1027.

of the Führer principle was no more than confirmation of views he had held since 1921–22 at least.⁷⁵

Hitler's early sense of his vocation as Führer was never more apparent than in the foreign policy that accompanied and complemented his internal revolutionary goals. From very early, as with Mussolini, unity and leadership at home were the indispensable prelude to expansion abroad in fulfillment of the nation's mission: "Nations are only capable of great advances when they have carried through the internal reforms that make it possible to project the entire race towards foreign policy goals."⁷⁶ Still, unlike the "prisoner of the Mediterranean," German traditions did not foreordain the direction of German expansion. Hitler was set on war from the beginning, and the Party's January 1920 program demanded "land and soil for the nation," but it took until 1922 to work out whom to conquer.

Hitler had to start somewhere, and he began with the staid Wilhelmine program of naval and economic expansion he later denounced as naive and unworkable. Germany, a "thickly populated state with highly developed industry, [was] necessarily impelled towards the world economy and overseas self-assertion [Weltgeltung]."⁷⁷ He celebrated Germany's rise to industrial might in his early speeches, and his provisional conclusion of late 1920 was that a modern state could only exist through participation in the world market. Only renewal of the German state's power position could ensure the success of that participation.⁷⁸ Throughout 1921 and into 1922 he groped toward the synthesis of racialism, demography, and geopolitics that became his trademark. It was a short step from the Party program's demand for soil to the claim that the causes of Germany's present misery included population increase. An aspiring nation that scorned birth control (which allegedly reduced nations to the "plaything [Fangball] of others") faced three choices: colonies, but Germany was a latecomer; emigration, which led to the permanent loss of the best blood to others; and industrial export. Prewar Germany had taken the third course, and had failed because of England's envy, "the innermost

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 1007, 1128, 1188, 1210; MK, pp. 449–50. For a different view, see Albrecht Tyrell, *Vom "Trommler" zum "Führer"* (Munich, 1975). Tyrell's stress on the role of Hitler's surroundings and followers in creating the Führer role is well taken. But Tyrell also reads Hitler's comparative modesty between 1919 and 1921–22 as self-doubt, and ignores the more plausible possibility of tactical reticence.

⁷⁶ HSA, p. 269 (November 30, 1920).

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 207–8, 218 (August 25, 1920).

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 271 (December 8, 1920).

root cause of the outbreak of war." At least in 1921 Hitler offered no remedy other than resistance to Versailles.⁷⁹

But by the end of December 1922, Hitler had developed a coherent vision, one he stuck to thereafter. His increasingly full-throated espousal of a German mission as "Führer of the Aryans" brought with it the need for a commensurate foreign policy. Even before the French occupation of the Ruhr in January 1923, which usually passes as the catalyst that impelled him to define his foreign program, Hitler's ideas had set. In a remarkable December 1922 conversation with an emissary of the then-Reich Chancellor Cuno, Hitler outlined with only slight reticence his ideas on both internal and foreign policy.⁸⁰ Internally, he was tactically circumspect, in deference to his audience. The nationalist dictatorship needed to smash the Left could eventually give way to a monarchy; solution of the Jewish question need not involve violence. His other views were less restrained:

In foreign policy Germany must adjust itself to a purely continental policy, while avoiding the harming of English interests. We should attempt the carving up of Russia with English help. Russia would provide soil enough for German settlers, and a broad field of action for German industry. Then, when [we] settle accounts with France, England would not get in the way.

Hitler also mentioned Italy as a possible ally; even before hearing of Mussolini's movement he had been alive to the chance of exploiting Italy's aspirations to "predominance in the Mediterranean." After discovering the Fascists, he had defied German nationalist orthodoxy by proclaiming in November 1922 and thereafter that the Italian alliance required an end to "empty protests" over the South Tyrol, which Italy had annexed in 1918.⁸¹

Hitler's December 1922 remarks included all the essential elements of the program he later outlined in the second volume of *Mein Kampf*, written in 1925–26: the forcible reestablishment of domestic unity; expansion at Russia's expense; a settling of accounts with France; England and Italy as allies, and the most un-Wilhelmine conception of isolating enemies and destroying them one by one. The order of the steps in this

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 384, 421–2, 426–7 (May 10 and 31, 1921); for his increasingly radical critique of Wilhelmine policy, pp. 505, 511 (October 21, 1921).

⁸⁰ Conversation with Eduard Sharrer, *ibid.*, pp. 770–5; for the importance of the document, see pp. 34ff. of Geoffrey Stoakes, "The Evolution of Hitler's Ideas on Foreign Policy, 1919–1925," in *The Shaping of the Nazi State*, Peter D. Stachura, ed. (New York, 1978).

⁸¹ HSA, pp. 118, 122, 168, 728 (March 29, April 17, August 1, 1920; November 14, 1922); Jens Petersen, *Hitler-Mussolini* (Tübingen, 1973), pp. 65–8.

Stufenplan remained problematic, however.⁸² What the Ruhr occupation apparently did do for Hitler was to make neutralizing France his highest priority; eastern expansion could only come after that preliminary step. But that was a relatively minor change. The foundations of Hitler's program were in place. His subsequent elaborations of his vision in an essay of April 1924, in *Mein Kampf*, in his unpublished "second book" of 1928, and in campaign speeches of 1928 and 1930, in which he unambiguously claimed world mastery for Germany, brought only two new elements. The first was Hitler's discovery of America—the recognition that the United States might prove his final adversary. In that contest, Hitler concluded, Germany's greater concentration of Aryan stock would carry it to victory.⁸³ The second novelty was the recognition, even more explicit than that of Mussolini, that foreign and domestic policy were inextricably linked:

Domestic policy must secure the inner strength of a people so that it can assert itself in the sphere of foreign policy. Foreign policy must secure the life of a people for its domestic political development. Hence domestic policy and foreign policy are not only most closely linked, but must also mutually complement one another.

Translated into cruder terms, revolution was a prerequisite for expansion, and expansion for revolution. This insight was in its way as important a part of Hitler's program as his external *Stufenplan*.⁸⁴

If the foundations of the world views of Hitler and Mussolini were rather different, the visionary programs the two developed thus had much in common. Internal policy and foreign aggrandizement were intertwined. Both leaders developed a peculiar blend of demography and geopolitics. Both leaders hoped to proceed by stages: consolidation at home, then exploitation of the rivalries of other powers to gain freedom for conquest. But Hitler was relatively rigid in laying down the alliances and stages

⁸² For Hitler's insistence on the need to proceed by stages, see MK, pp. 249–50, and Calic, *Ohne Maske*, pp. 50, 93; for the *Stufenplan* metaphor, Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitlers Strategie* (Frankfurt, 1965); Klaus Hildebrand, *Deutsche Aussenpolitik 1933–1945* (Stuttgart, 1971); and Jost Dülffer, *Weimar, Hitler und die Marine* (Düsseldorf, 1973).

⁸³ For the chain of utterances that links the Hitler of 1924 with that of 1933, Jochen Thies, *Architekt der Weltherrschaft* (Düsseldorf, 1976), pp. 41–61, and Dülffer, *Marine*, pp. 204–20.

⁸⁴ Adolf Hitler, *Hitler's Second Book* (New York, 1961), p. 34; similarly, pp. 24, 46–7, 79, 210. See also Martin Broszat, "Betrachtungen zu 'Hitlers Zweitem Buch,'" *VfZG* 9 (1961): 422; the only systematic attempt to interpret Hitler's later policies in these terms is Dietrich Orlow, *The History of the Nazi Party*, vol. 2 (Pittsburgh, 1973).

by which Germany would climb to world mastery. The early Mussolini never went beyond generic predictions that European turmoil would permit Italian expansion. With the partial exception of his tilt towards France in 1935, he remained uncommitted to a specific alliance structure until 1936—and in this sense, if only in this sense, was more of a “realist” than Hitler.

III. EXPANSION AND REVOLUTION

Counterfeit Peace Any comparative analysis of the collision between these visions and the external world, and of the interplay of domestic politics and foreign policy in the two regimes, must begin with the contexts in which the two leaders operated. Those contexts had similarities, but also serious differences, both ideologically and politically. Mussolini could draw effectively on the Roman myth, thanks to the megalomania of Gioberti, Mazzini, and post-Risorgimento ideologues such as Oriani. If the liberal Establishment could routinely invoke the myth, as prime minister Orlando did when he described the 1918 victory as a “vittoria romana,”⁸⁵ Mussolini could invoke it with greater conviction and skill. And Mussolini could exploit, in ways the Establishment could not, the gap between Roman example and Italian achievement, between Rome’s status as center of the world and Italy’s relative backwardness and weakness in the age of industry and true world empires. For the consequence, at least in the eyes of many educated Italians, of the gulf between national claims and reality, between Roman victories and liberal defeats at Custoza, Adua, and Caporetto, was a national inferiority complex that only imperial self-assertion could soothe. And when the “Roman victory” of 1918 failed to move the Allies at the Paris peace conference to concede the territories Italy demanded, the myth of the “mutilated victory” further intensified the frustrations that fed the success of the Fascist movement.

From Mussolini’s point of view, the Roman national myth also had an undoubtedly useful side. Caesar and Augustus personified the imperial face of the Roman myth (for the virtues of the Republic, other than discipline, Mussolini had little use). But the myth also had an unfortunate side, which Mussolini’s piously authoritarian Nationalist allies exploited to the full. Rome had given the West its legal tradition, and that law and the bureaucracy—*lo Stato*—that embodied it was a brake on arbitrary personal power.

The ideologies and traditions of the principal competitors of extreme nationalism—Socialism and the Church of Rome—also stood in the way of the “barbarous” revolutionary dictatorship Mussolini sought. If German Social Democracy, in the words of one of its founders, was a “preparatory

⁸⁵ Quoted in Vivarelli, *Il dopoguerra in Italia*, p. 198, note 207.

school for militarism" that took its organizational cues from the Prussian Army, Italian Socialism was a preparatory school for anarchy.⁸⁶ The fissiparous tendencies of the Italian labor movement and the irresolutely intransigent *massimalismo* Mussolini had helped create made the nationalization of the masses a herculean task. And the Vatican's ideological grip was far stronger even than that of the Socialists. The Church might exalt order, hierarchy, and "rendering unto Caesar," but it remained determined to preserve its own power. "Catholic totalitarianism," as Pius XI half-jokingly described it in a 1932 conversation with Mussolini, must have its due.⁸⁷ The Church could not entirely abandon the main tenets of Judaeo-Christian ethics or its own claims to educate the young. Those claims conflicted directly with the regime's project of forging a new man.

Political realities and institutional structures also conspired to limit Mussolini's scope. First, Italy had entered the war in 1915 of its own choice. Salandra, Sonnino, and the king could not claim, as did other governments—some in good faith, some out of cynical calculation—that they were victims of aggression. The "radiant days of May" during which *piazza* and Consulta, D'Annunzio and Sonnino, in their separate ways impelled Italy to attack Austria, further divided a divided nation. May 1915 ensured that Italy would fight the Great War in what one contemporary, with only slight exaggeration, described as "an atmosphere of civil war." In this civil war, the chief antagonist of the *interventisti* was inevitably the Italian Socialist party and labor movement, which had opposed the war either out of principle, as its supporters claimed, or from inertia and cowardice, Mussolini's preferred explanation. That no true *union sacrée* developed in Italy even after Caporetto—because the Socialists were agog with the millenarian novelties in Petrograd—had a decisive influence on postwar political alignments and possibilities. Mussolini attempted at various points in 1920–21 to bridge the gulf that separated him from the more moderate of his former comrades, and to achieve the national unity his program demanded. But that gulf proved unbridgeable both then and later.

Italy also held serious institutional disadvantages for dictatorial seekers after power. The liberal state might often be brutal in its dealings with the *popolo*, but it had always maintained considerable respect for the rights of its own political elite. Cavour trampled on liberal principles in the heat of political struggle, but he was not an admirer of Mill and Bentham for nothing. The monarchy's quasi-coup of 1898 had failed

⁸⁶ For the remark (by August Bebel), A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848–1918* (Oxford, 1954), pp. xxxiii–iv.

⁸⁷ *OO*, 37: 129.

because even the Right lacked the bloody-minded consistency to purge or suppress the Chamber of Deputies. Giolitti's regime acquired a low moral reputation, and failed to acquire the loyalty of the young, the Nationalists, and the avant-garde. But even during World War I Italy remained a liberal state, with a tradition of voting, however crooked, and of majority rule—if only of the majority of the *classe politica*.

The one bright spot for an aspirant to dictatorship was the Piedmontese-Italian state's authoritarian tradition in foreign and military policy, those most closely held of the *arcana imperii*.⁸⁸ For both constitutional and practical purposes this area had remained out of bounds to parliament, as Salandra, Sonnino, and the king had demonstrated in May 1915. But unfortunately for Mussolini, these arbitrary powers were not ones he could easily appropriate; by definition they belonged ultimately to the monarchy. And the king and his generals and admirals remained jealous of the authority and autonomy that war and victory had reinforced. Even after 1925, the monarchy remained the state's center of legitimacy for Italians who considered the state legitimate at all. Above all, the monarchy remained the center of legitimacy for the army, the only institution in Italy that could throw Mussolini out.

Finally, the political circumstances in which Mussolini took power were in some ways far from promising. True, liberals from Orlando to Nitti to Giolitti to Bonomi to Facta had failed to govern, and had connived at Fascist violence. The dissolution of the state's authority had begun with Cadorna's wartime recalcitrance, had proceeded through D'Annunzio's sedition of the military, the violence of the Socialist agrarian leagues, and the even bloodier Fascist response. It had culminated in the Fascist takeover of the prefectures of much of northern Italy in October 1922. The liberals had ultimately caved in to Mussolini, because they, like the king, preferred him to civil war. But the crisis of the liberal state was in no sense as cataclysmic as the German crisis of 1930–33; the Italian liberals remained in parliament as the far from discredited "flankers" of the Fascist Party, which until May 1924 mustered only 35 seats out of 535 in the Chamber of Deputies. Even after the abolition of the remaining non-Fascist parties in November 1926, conservative ex-liberals in black shirts, along with Mussolini's Nationalist allies, helped set the tone in the Chamber, and above all in the Senate. That tone was anything but *totalitario*. Even that implicit prophet of authoritarianism, Wilfredo Pareto, left behind a political testament, published in 1923, that urged Mussolini

⁸⁸ See Brunello Vigezzi's illuminating "Politica estera e opinione pubblica in Italia dal 1870 al 1945," *Nuova Rivista Storica* 63 (1979): 548–54.

not to abolish parliament.⁸⁹ Italy's Establishment remained in its heart committed to liberal forms, if not liberal principles. It only embraced the "cult of the Duce" gingerly after the Duce left it no choice—both in 1922 and 1925—between acquiescence and a civil war the Fascists might not win, but which might lead to chaos.

The Fascist Party itself was also little help to Mussolini. It began as anything but a centralized *Führerpartei*, and until 1926 it preserved an internal apparatus of committees and elections that smacked suspiciously of liberalism.⁹⁰ The Grand Council of Fascism, despite its role as spearhead in the "participation" of the state, was as a collegial body an implicit check on Mussolini's authority. The Party contained figures whose politics varied from violent monarchism (De Vecchi di Val Cismon) to syndicalist corporativism (Massimo Rocca) via brutal *squadristo* (Roberto Farinacci, Italo Balbo). Party intellectuals such as Bottai openly aspired to a liberalization of Party and regime. Above all, the turbulent local chieftains defied Mussolini's authority again and again, until after 1925 he finally bent them to his service by calling it the service of the state.⁹¹

From the viewpoint of a would-be dictator, Germany was far more promising territory. Ideologically, German myths—the Teutonic hordes described in Tacitus, the splendors of the medieval Reich, the glories of the vanished second Reich of Bismarck and Wilhelm II—placed fewer restrictions on arbitrary power than did the myth of Rome. The German tribal myth allowed Hitler to clothe unchecked dictatorship in a veil suitable to the age of mass politics: "Germanic democracy."⁹² The myth of the medieval Reich also served as an all-purpose justification for the cleansing rule of the "man with an iron skull," Barbarossa returned from beneath the Kyffhäuser to save Germany from Jews, "November criminals," and the Great Depression. The Prussian tradition of historic great men, of Fredericus Rex and Bismarck, booted and spurred, inspired awe for leadership and exacerbated the gap between gray Weimar reality and past glory.⁹³ Finally, the political traditions of the Second Reich, from Bismarck's quasi-dictatorship to Wilhelm II's failed attempt to found a naval-imperial *Volkskaisertum*, helped create the role that Hitler eventually filled. Defeat and the resulting decapitation of the state in the 1918 revolution produced disorientation and widespread "waiting for a Führer."

⁸⁹ "Pochi punti di un futuro Ordinamento Costituzionale," *La vita italiana* (September–October 1923), pp. 165–9.

⁹⁰ See the 1921 and 1926 Party statutes, in Alberto Aquarone, *L'organizzazione dello Stato totalitario* (Turin, 1965), pp. 315–29, 386–92.

⁹¹ See Adrian Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power* (Boston, 1973), Chap. 11.

⁹² HSA, p. 622 (April 12, 1922).

⁹³ Schulz, *Aufstieg des Nationalsozialismus*, pp. 65–6.

Those expectations the Nazi movement did its successful best to focus on its leader.⁹⁴

In addition, unlike Mussolini, Hitler found in *völkisch* racism a preexisting radical ideology with wide resonance in many parts of Germany. The already organized hypernationalism of small-town Germany, land of *Stammtisch* and rifle club, of combat veterans' leagues and patriotic beer-hall singing groups, did the rest.⁹⁵ The ideological alternatives to extreme nationalism in Weimar Germany were relatively weaker than similar forces in Italy. The outcome of the Thirty Years' War had ordained a religious division on geographical lines that in part survived even Hitler. The Catholic Church and the Center and Bavarian Peoples' Parties preserved an unparalleled grip on the population of many Catholic areas, but the Catholic world was a subculture, not the majority culture, as in Italy. Similarly, the urban workers and the Social Democratic Party were far more integrated into the nation than their counterparts in Italy. The German Communist Party remained an isolated sect. The wartime inter-party truce had broken down in 1917–18, but the SPD and much of the working class had a healthy dislike of "Bolshevism" and a latent susceptibility to nationalist appeals.⁹⁶

Finally, the ideology of the Prussian Protestant subculture—a subculture that included the Reichswehr—proved particularly susceptible to Hitler's blandishments after 1929. As Hitler himself put it, Protestantism, thanks to its origins and traditions, was better suited than Catholicism to defending "the interests of Germandom."⁹⁷ The decapitation of the state in 1918 had left the Protestant churches, those celebrants of the mystical union of Throne and Altar, of "Potsdam and Bethlehem combined," without a focus for earthly loyalties at a time when they were already having difficulties holding onto their flocks in the face of urbanization and the unsettling effects of the war. The Nazi movement offered insecure Prot-

⁹⁴ See Wolfgang Horn, *Führerideologie und Parteio rganization in der NSDAP (1919–1933)* (Düsseldorf, 1972), pp. 25–98. For the antecedents, see Heinrich Class (pseud. Daniel Frymann), *Wenn Ich der Kaiser wär'* (Leipzig, 1912), pp. 54 (a remarkable prophecy of dictatorship should Germany lose the coming war), 242, 263 ("In Erwartung des Führers"); Schulz, *Aufstieg des Nationalsozialismus*, pp. 19–21, 127–8, 133–4; and F. L. Carsten, "Die historischen Wurzeln des Nationalsozialismus," in *Deutschland, Wandel und Bestand*, E. J. Feuchtwanger, ed. (Munich, 1973), pp. 156–8.

⁹⁵ See the description in William S. Allen, *The Nazi Seizure of Power* (New York, 2nd ed., 1973), Chap. 2, and, for Bavaria to 1924, Harold J. Gordon, Jr., *Hitler and the Beer Hall Putsch* (Princeton, 1972), pp. 3–119; on the rifle clubs, Mosse, *Nationalization of the Masses*, pp. 148–54.

⁹⁶ On KPD, SPD, and Germany's "Tory workers," see Richard F. Hamilton, *Who Voted for Hitler?* (Princeton, 1982), Chap. 11 and pp. 387–9.

⁹⁷ MK, p. 112.

estant clergy a chance to draw closer to the Volk by participation in a great popular movement.⁹⁸ The NSDAP's conquest of Protestant Germany after 1929 was a consequence in part of the preexisting extreme nationalism of the Protestant subculture, in part of the yearning in time of crisis for a Führer to fill the void the departing Hohenzollerns had left. Hitler's cult was a conscious creation, but it was one that rested, far more than did the cult of the Duce, on native roots.

Institutionally, as well, Hitler faced a relatively promising situation. The decapitation of the state had left a vacuum that the Weimar presidency could not fill. President Ebert, a former saddler and SPD union official, could scarcely command the wholehearted allegiance of an officer corps that—for all its ruthless openmindedness on military technique—contained a higher percentage of nobles after 1919 than it had before 1914. The state bureaucracy conceived its position to be “above the parties, but to the Right”—a conception particularly visible in the judiciary's handling of the Right's political murders. Nor did the parliamentary system provide coherent government. During the celebrated golden age between the Republic's consolidation in 1924 and the fall of the Müller government in 1930 no fewer than seven cabinets came and went. All failed to create more than ad hoc majorities on individual issues. The Weimar political elite could not even agree on the colors of the national flag.⁹⁹

Finally, the system—which Right and far Left, Nazis and Communists equally hated—faced after 1930 an economic cataclysm infinitely more serious than the relatively mild Italian recession of 1921. The Bonomi government's failure to avert the collapse of the Banca Italiana di Sconto and the giant Ansaldo steel firm in December 1921 apparently lessened Italian industry's loyalty to the liberal system. But in Germany the barons of steel and coal had little loyalty to lose even before 1930. And the Italian unemployed were not a major political factor in 1921–22, unlike the more than six million German unemployed in the last year of the Republic. But not merely the unemployed voted for Hitler. The fundamental component of the Nazi vote was Germany's solid citizens, to whom the Führer offered leadership with “the self-assurance of a sleep-walker,” and nationalist solutions. What above all distinguished 1932 Germany from 1922 Italy was the atmosphere of apocalyptic crisis that

⁹⁸ For the phrase (Friedrich Naumann's), see Bracher, Sauer, Schulz, *Macht-ergreifung*, p. 329; on the Protestants, see particularly Hamilton, *Who Voted for Hitler?*

⁹⁹ For the flag crisis and its implications, Fritz Stern, *The Failure of Illiberalism* (Chicago, 1971), pp. 161–92; on the 1924–28 period in general, Michael Stürmer, *Koalition und Opposition in der Weimarer Republik 1924–1928* (Düsseldorf, 1967).

invested with plausibility and attractiveness the Nazi claim to be “the opposite of everything that now exists.”¹⁰⁰

All these differences affected the nature of the compromises the two movements struck in order to gain power, and the dictators’ subsequent freedom of movement. Mussolini, despite the clubs, daggers, and pistols of the *squadre* behind him, faced as prime minister an entrenched establishment, relatively unshaken in its self-confidence and prerogatives: the monarchy, the military, the Church, and the conservative “flankers” of Fascism in the chamber of deputies. He was dependent on a parliamentary majority to an extent Hitler, even before the Enabling Act of March 1933, was not. And his own movement was as yet insignificant in parliament.

What Mussolini could and did do was to consolidate control over his own Party forces, and attempt to insert them into the state to counterbalance the conservative flankers.¹⁰¹ The first step, taken in mid-December 1922, was the establishment of a Fascist “parallel cabinet,” the Grand Council of Fascism. This institution, while anything but an expression of Mussolini’s untrammelled will, marked the beginning of his attempt to create a Party sector of the state under his own control. The Grand Council proceeded to decree the establishment of the Fascist Militia (MVSN). The Militia was not merely a device to control the unruly *squadre* by placing them under formal military discipline. It was indeed, as Mussolini later billed it, the first step towards the “Stato totalitario,” the first attempt to breach the old state’s monopoly of organized force. Mussolini also moved adroitly to coopt and dominate the “flankers” closest to him, the Nationalists, by inviting them in late 1922 to fuse with the Fascist Party. The fusion increased Mussolini’s social respectability and newfound appearance of monarchical loyalism, helped take control of the South, where the Nationalists were strong, and provided the legal and political experts provincial Fascism could not produce. The Duce also took immediate steps to conciliate the great economic interests. He flattered the major military leaders of the World War and reassured them that the Militia would serve primarily as a police force. The Vatican did not remain exempt from his attentions: while Po Valley *squadristi* attacked Catholic labor unions, Mussolini made clear in Rome his readiness to strike an advantageous compromise, and supervised the government bailout of the Church’s ailing Banco di Roma. In return, Mussolini could dispense

¹⁰⁰ Gregor Strasser (speech of October 20, 1932), quoted in Bracher, *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik* (Villingen, 1964, 4th ed.), p. 108; for electoral behavior, Hamilton, *Who Voted for Hitler?*

¹⁰¹ The best account of Mussolini’s tactics and relationship with his flankers is Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power*, Chaps. 5, 10.

with Democratic and Catholic (*Partito Popolare*) ministers he had accepted into his cabinet, split the Catholic conservatives from the *Popolari* with tacit Vatican assistance, and push through an electoral law that in theory provided the government with an iron-clad majority.

In practice Mussolini still depended on the liberal and Catholic deputies. And despite the Militia, he remained a royal prime minister. The Fascist Party was too weak politically to inaugurate a genuine reign of terror in the absence of Establishment support—even if terror could achieve the unity Mussolini desired. Middle-class opinion in any case lost its enthusiasm for castor oil once the Socialist mass organizations were crushed. An open trial of strength with the monarchy would have ranged the military and the vast majority of the politically active population behind the king. The crisis after Mussolini's bodyguard of thugs murdered Matteotti in June 1924 made clear the relationship of forces. His antechamber, the Duce later complained, emptied magically overnight; parliament rang with the accusation that he was the murderers' accomplice. The liberals who made up most of the government majority publicly demanded an end to violence and respect for the constitution. D'Annunzio, inventor of the balcony speech and Mussolini's rival as national mythmaker, described the regime as a "fetid ruin."¹⁰² The army, which despite assurances had taken amiss the creation of a Fascist fourth service, repeatedly claimed dominance over the Militia. Mussolini had to concede. The Militia swore loyalty to the king, and Mussolini appointed additional generals to its command positions.

Mussolini's threat, made in cabinet, to "oppose any successor with all his forces" in the *piazza* ultimately carried the day, and opened the road, along with an opportune revolt by extremist Militia leaders, for the suppression of the opposition and its press. The monarchy, through its military ministers and its Nationalist representative in the cabinet, Luigi Federzoni, saved Mussolini rather than risk the civil war averted in 1922. Consolidation of the dictatorship in 1925–26 came with the sufferance of the pillars of the state, and the resulting balance was one Mussolini could not easily shift. He attempted to tilt the system slowly in his favor: that was the significance of his much-quoted slogan of 1925: "durare."¹⁰³ Fascism had endured, had outlasted its enemies; now it must outlast its allies. This long march was to proceed through the forging of the new man in the youth organizations, and through encroachment on the Establishment's terrain.

The liberals proved easiest to dispose of. Mussolini's powers to legislate by decree steadily increased, and by 1926 he had no need of Salandra,

¹⁰² De Felice, *Mussolini il fascista*, 1: 681, note 3.

¹⁰³ *OO*, 21: 388 (September 24, 1925).

or Giolitti, or the rest. The monarchy and its Nationalist and military following were not so easy to shake; they survived to remove Mussolini in 1943. The Duce was able to insert the Grand Council of Fascism, like the Militia, into the structure of the state. The law of 1928 that sanctioned its new authority as organ of the regime as well as of the Party also arrogated to it the right to regulate the royal succession.¹⁰⁴ The king was furious, but his own version of the strategy of endurance ultimately dictated acquiescence. In his relations with the military, Mussolini also combined circumspection with gradual encroachment. When his 1924 choice for the War Ministry, General Di Giorgio, ruffled the army's corporate feathers with proposals for military reform, Mussolini abandoned him and fulsomely praised the military establishment. He also temporarily adopted the army's thesis that defense of the Alpine frontiers had highest priority—a conception that cut across both his own Mediterranean projects and the navy's interests.¹⁰⁵ This concession to the army, and the rivalry between his two chief military assistants, Badoglio and Cavallero, permitted Mussolini, who assumed all three service ministries in 1925, to achieve an uneasy position as arbiter. What he could not do, however, was to impress his own vision and priorities on the immobile army bureaucracy, or goad it to reform insofar as his own military dilettantism allowed him to see need for reform.¹⁰⁶

Mussolini fared somewhat better with the king's men in government, the Nationalist notables. Fusion with the Fascist Party eliminated them as an organized, autonomous group, an outcome Mussolini had insisted on.¹⁰⁷ He also put important Nationalists to use. Federzoni, although he had momentarily wavered before the imposition of dictatorship, made a first-rate minister of the interior and guardian of the state against Party extremism. Alfredo Rocco, the legal brain of the Nationalists, produced a juridical edifice crowned with the famous Unified Law on Public Security of November 1926, a law so suited to police convenience that much of it survived Fascism. But the Nationalists were also a long-term liability. A revolution to make Italians into joyous pagan barbarians was unlikely if some of the revolutionary elite believed—with the ex-Nationalist and sometime Fascist Party secretary, Giovanni Giuriati—that a revolution

¹⁰⁴ See Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power*, p. 431, and De Felice, *Mussolini il fascista*, 2: 310–11.

¹⁰⁵ *OO*, 21: 312–13 (May 18, 1925). For the Navy view, see Grand Admiral Thaon di Revel's vigorous interruptions of Mussolini's speech, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ On Mussolini's military dilettantism, see Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 7–8, 16, and *passim*.

¹⁰⁷ See Mussolini's comments in Franco Gaeta, *Il nazionalismo italiano* (Bari, rev. ed., 1981), pp. 242–3.

was "a juridical construction, in other words, a far-reaching reform of internal public law."¹⁰⁸

The Church was an even more formidable obstacle than the Nationalists to any such revolution. Pius XI drove a hard bargain in the negotiations that led up to the "conciliation" of Roman Church and Italian state in the Lateran Pacts of 1929. The regime, to the dismay even of the king, conceded far more than any liberal government could have. In return, Mussolini gained major advantages. The deal with Pius XI harnessed the Church's prestige to Mussolini's cult of personality. He was now "the man Providence ha[d] placed in Our path." The Church had blessed the regime with all the weight of its centuries of authority; Italy's overwhelmingly Catholic population was now free to support Fascism without reservations. And the Vatican was itself caught: once it had made its pact with Mussolini, it had invested in the regime's continued existence. The Pope's blessing of Mussolini meant that later Vatican protests against the regime's 1931 attack on Catholic Action youth groups, and against Mussolini's 1938 racial policy, did not entirely carry conviction. But the Lateran Pacts also entailed constant Church interference in the most varied political and educational questions. The Vatican's legal rights under the treaties in some ways made it a more dangerous competitor for the loyalty of the public after 1929 than before.

Internationally, Mussolini faced a web of restraints at least as daunting as those at home. The Great War had indisputably improved Italy's power position. Austria-Hungary had disintegrated, and the Yugoslav successor state could neither challenge Italy at sea nor threaten it on land. This gave Italy both Balkan opportunities and freedom for Mediterranean expansion without worry about its rear. In other respects the position was less favorable. Germany's temporary eclipse had removed the time-honored counterweight to French power. England, Italy's "traditional friend," was no more likely than before 1914 to underwrite an Italian imperial expansion that would ultimately conflict with its own interests. Worse, Italy's immense wartime debt and endemic balance of payments deficit rendered Mussolini as financially dependent on London and Washington as liberal Italy had been on Paris and Berlin. This weakness, the narrowness of the industrial base, and the anything but pleasant memory of the Great War made the sort of armaments expenditure Mussolini's program required unpalatable to his domestic allies. The regime barely succeeded in stabilizing the lira in 1926-27, and that hard-won stability, which was largely dependent on the favor of the house of Morgan, coun-

¹⁰⁸ Giuriati to Mussolini, July 17, 1943, in Giovanni Giuriati, *La parabola di Mussolini nei ricordi di un gerarca* (Bari, 1981), p. 221.

selling caution.¹⁰⁹ In the event, only the navy and the newly created air force put the 1920s to use; the army stagnated.¹¹⁰

Finally, before Mussolini could strike out on his own, he had to clear up liberal Italy's colonial legacy: Libya, whose Arab inhabitants had driven the Italian garrisons back to coastal enclaves in 1915–18. The last liberal governments began the reconquest. But not until 1931–32 could Mussolini and his associates announce that the "rebellion" was "definitively crushed." The regime, consolidated at home, and fresh from killing or starving perhaps a third of the population of Cyrenaica, was free to look for new conquests—just as the Great Depression ended American financial tutelage, enfeebled the British, and produced, through Hitler, the German revival that Mussolini had foreseen would give Italy freedom. The Duce had from the mid-1920s on tried the patience of his advisers with projects for attacks on Turkey or swoops on Croatia or France.¹¹¹ Now, ten years after the March on Rome, the road to empire began to open.

Hitler faced some of the same restraints that ensnared Mussolini, but the restraints themselves were weaker, and the power of the Nazi movement within Germany and of Germany in the world were notably greater than in the Italian case. The overwhelming force of the economic crisis that had helped bring the Nazis to power made that task easier. Radical solutions seemed more plausible than in the Italy of 1922–25. The size and unsatiated radicalism of SA, Party, and infant SS made a purge of enemies unavoidable, even had Hitler wished to avoid it. The party and its organizations were also large enough, and had attracted enough middle-class support, to provide adequate if often crude cadres for many of the key positions in the *Land* governments, for the new organizations such as the propaganda ministry, and for the expansion of Party and SS into areas reserved for state and Establishment. And that state and Establishment were themselves both less unified and more in tune with the dictator's goals than their Italian counterparts had been.

At the top, instead of Victor Emmanuel III, tenacious defender of the centuries-old prerogatives of his house, stood the "old gentleman," Reich President Field Marshal von Hindenburg. Hindenburg had in 1932 assured

¹⁰⁹ When Mussolini heard that his Ascension Day, 1927 prophecy of European war between 1935 and 1940 (*OO*, 22: 386) had appalled his New York bankers, he backpedalled vigorously (*Documenti diplomatici italiani*, 7, 7, no. 236; see also *OO*, 23: 177).

¹¹⁰ See Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, Chap. 1.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 33–4, 308 note 159, and the 1930–33 revelations from General Gazzera's diary reported in "Le guerre segrete di Mussolini," *La Stampa*, January 9, 1982.

an acquaintance that he would not hand Germany over to Hitler "like a laboratory rabbit." But after January 30, 1933 he did just that, through miscalculation of Hitler's intentions, the weariness of age, and the effects of Hitler's deferential and persuasive handling.¹¹² The army looked to Hindenburg for a lead, but received none. Instead, War Minister General von Blomberg, whose appointment Hindenburg apparently regarded as guarantee of the army's independence, soon showed himself convinced of Hitler's historic mission. The army, in the words of Blomberg's more calculating assistant, Reichenau, must enthusiastically "enter the new state" to reassert its own time-honored position.¹¹³ The Nazis indeed solved the army's major political problem. They apparently offered the more traditional officers organized popular backing for military-mindedness and for the old values the army could no longer successfully propagate on its own. And for the military specialists, the apostles of "total war" who demanded the wholesale reconstruction of society for war-making, the Nazis offered a vehicle for mass mobilization.¹¹⁴ The specialists could therefore devote themselves to rearmament without political distractions—an aspiration that came true, but not quite in the way they expected.

General Baron von Fritsch, who became army commander in early 1934, took the traditional view. Fritsch saw what he took to be Hitler's anti-Marxism and military-mindedness in a favorable light, and was implicitly willing to use the SS, police, and Party to curtail the subversive influences to which the restoration of conscription would expose the army.¹¹⁵ But he conspicuously lacked Blomberg's enthusiasm. This divergence ultimately worked in Hitler's favor; had Fritsch and Blomberg stood together, the army's defense of its prerogatives might have been far more effective than it was. As for the navy, its "1918 complex"—the officer corps's rage and remorse over the fleet mutinies that touched off the revolution—helped produce thoroughgoing commitment to the regime.¹¹⁶ The new air force, founded under the command of Hitler's large associate, Hermann Göring, was of necessity National Socialist in

¹¹² On Hitler's method for handling Hindenburg, see *Monologe*, pp. 211–12 (1942).

¹¹³ Klaus-Jürgen Müller, *Das Heer und Hitler* (Stuttgart, 1969), p. 53.

¹¹⁴ Andreas Hillgruber, "Militarismus am Ende der Weimarer Republik und im Dritten Reich," p. 146, in his *Deutsche Grossmacht- und Weltpolitik im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Düsseldorf, 1977).

¹¹⁵ Müller, *Heer*, pp. 41, 43, 165–7; Michael Geyer, "Military Work, Civil Order, Militant Politics," *Wilson Center ISSP Working Papers*, No. 39 (Washington, D.C., 1982), p. 55.

¹¹⁶ See Walter Baum, "Marine, Nationalsozialismus, und Widerstand," *VfZG*, 11 (1963): 44–5.

ethos and interservice politics. Finally, the state bureaucracy saw in the Nazis the new force needed to recreate the authoritarian state it aspired to serve and rule. But unlike the services it lacked an ostensibly apolitical territory, like rearmament, within which to maintain some measure of independence. The bureaucrats succeeded only in mounting a rearguard action in defense of the legal niceties.

The absence of Establishment cohesion was particularly noticeable in the implementation of Hitler's central policy: rearmament. All flankers agreed in principle that Germany must again become the dominant European power; but there agreement ended. Blomberg failed to impose order on his own bureaucracy, much less on the services or industry. Until Hindenburg's death, Hitler himself probably did not have the authority to impose programs or allocate resources in unpopular ways. Afterwards, he showed a singular lack of interest in rigid long-term planning. Temperamentally, he preferred the "law of the stronger." More important, his goals were so far-reaching that he could not have enunciated a coherent program without appalling even the true believers among his subordinates. Instead, he preferred to raise targets continually on an ad hoc basis. Poor Admiral Raeder, for instance, initially proposed the modest goal of naval parity with France, and by 1938–39 found himself cast as a "reluctant Tirpitz," building a fleet ultimately designed for world domination and based on a strategic concept the Führer had not yet deigned to reveal.¹¹⁷ Instead of rationalized, centralized planning, rearmament went forward as a struggle between temporary alliances of the various potentates and powers—Blomberg, Fritsch and his chief of staff Beck, Göring, Raeder, Schacht, the sometimes reluctant barons of heavy industry, and the eager new machine, electrical, optical, light metal, and chemical industries. Hitler could graciously await the bids of the contenders for his favor. In the relatively few cases in which the military's targets were insufficiently megalomaniacal, or financial strain and raw material shortages produced stalemate, as in the summer of 1936 and in May 1938, he intervened to demand more of everything.¹¹⁸

Even before rearmament got under way, Hitler was able to eliminate his political flankers—Papen, Hugenberg, and associates. Their appalling ineptitude was a final, vital difference between the processes of consol-

¹¹⁷ See Dülffer, *Marine*, pp. 457–8; Wilhelm Deist, "Zum Problem der deutschen Aufrüstung 1933–1936," *Francia* 5 (1979): 564–5; Deist, in Deist *et al.*, *Ursachen und Voraussetzungen der deutschen Kriegspolitik* (Stuttgart, 1979), pp. 497–500.

¹¹⁸ Deist, *Ursachen und Voraussetzungen*, part 3; Michael Geyer, "Rüstungsbeschleunigung und Inflation," *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 2 (1981): 121–47.

idation in Germany and Italy. The political balance of forces was admittedly far less favorable to the flankers than in Italy. Hugenberg's Nationalists (DNVP), the Nazis' sole electoral allies, received only 8.8 percent of the vote in the March 1933 elections, to 41.1 percent for the NSDAP. But the flankers above all failed within the government, which they counted on dominating by expertise and birth. By mid-summer 1933, Hitler had eliminated the flankers from effective power, and Hugenberg—with the blessings of Neurath and the foreign office—from the cabinet. He then outlawed all other parties, a step Mussolini had required four years to accomplish.

In achieving this result, the NSDAP was a help rather than the necessary inconvenience the PNF usually was for Mussolini. Hitler himself had a far closer relationship with his Gauleiters than Mussolini with the provincial *ras*. In the lean years after the refounding of the NSDAP in 1925, Hitler had personally appointed his paladins on the basis of loyalty and proven effectiveness.¹¹⁹ This relationship was not solely the result of Hitler's "charisma"; German traditions of military obedience, the war experience, and the yearning for a Führer that Hitler had drawn on since the beginning helped. By 1933 the NSDAP also had a major advantage besides numbers that the PNF lacked. The Nazis came to power while Establishment and middle classes still thought them necessary to smash the Left. The violence with which Hitler's proconsuls consolidated their grip in the provinces appeared a salutary blow against "bolshevism" rather than a brutal invasion. And after the crushing of the left-wing parties, the Nazis were in command of much of the government machine. But Hitler was careful not to overreach. The revolution, he announced to the Gauleiters in late June 1933, was over; the Party's primary duty was not to fight, but to educate.¹²⁰

When the SA was not content with education, but challenged the army, Hitler massacred the SA leaders in June 1934. The purge strengthened Blomberg, who could cite it to the Prussian traditionalists as evidence of Hitler's good faith. At the long-expected death of Hindenburg in August 1934 Hitler received his reward. Blomberg, apparently on his own initiative, had the armed forces swear unconditional personal loyalty to Hitler in person. Given the officer corps's passion for technique, narrow horizons, stern conception of duty, and aspirations to European hegemony, this step was decisive. In the eyes of most officers it deprived resistance

¹¹⁹ See Horn, *Führerideologie*, Chap. 4.

¹²⁰ See Broszat, *The Hitler State* (London, 1981), pp. 111–12; Orlow, *Nazi Party*, 2: 79–80.

to the regime of moral validity; only a few, under the threat of impending war or defeat, succeeded in freeing themselves of that oath.

By the summer of 1934, with the military oath and the constitutional change that fused the offices of Chancellor and Reich President, Hitler had achieved a position far stronger than Mussolini ever enjoyed. That position was nevertheless utterly inadequate to the tasks Hitler had set himself. He had not yet built a "foundation that [could] guarantee the life of the Volk for many centuries."¹²¹ The bureaucracy remained capable of passive resistance, and after Hindenburg's death Hitler again gave the Gauleiters license to attack it. Given the difficulty of finding enough qualified National Socialist recruits, he foresaw that it would require ten years to produce the responsive instrument he sought.¹²² The Army and the economic magnates remained at least partially beyond his grasp. He needed their expertise, and the Army remained the only institution in Germany with the power to destroy the regime.

Worst of all, Hitler faced the ideological resistance of Germany's various subcultures. The effectiveness of that resistance and the extent of Nazi penetration of society are still largely a matter of conjecture; the social history of Germany from 1933 to 1945 is mostly unwritten. Clearly, not everyone embraced the new gospel; the population of the large industrial centers remained particularly unreliable. The "yes" votes from Hamburg and "red Berlin" in the August 1934 plebiscite that sanctioned Hitler's replacement of Hindenburg were well below the 75 percent mark, and nothing suggests that the attitudes and convictions that produced those figures altered with any rapidity in the ensuing years.¹²³

The churches and their flocks were an even more serious obstacle to ideological control than the industrial workers. As late as 1940, 95 percent of Germany's citizens were members of a Christian church—a figure that presumably rose when the regime deported Germany's Jews in 1941–42. By his own later account, Hitler's initial hope was to fuse Catholics and Protestants into a national church in the regime's service.¹²⁴ The

¹²¹ Speech at Berlin Sportpalast, January 22, 1933, in *Hitler, Reden und Proklamationen*, Max Domarus, ed. (Munich, 1965), p. 182.

¹²² Conference minute, November 1, 1934, in Hans Mommsen, *Beamtenum im Dritten Reich* (Stuttgart, 1966), pp. 145–6.

¹²³ Figures: Bracher, Sauer, Schulz, *Machtergreifung*, pp. 358–9. For more on National Socialist penetration of society, see (among others) Mason, *Arbeiterklasse und Volksgemeinschaft* (Opladen, 1975); Martin Broszat *et al.*, eds., *Bayern in der NS-Zeit*, 4 vols. (Munich, 1977–81); Detlev Peukert and Jürgen Reulicke, eds., *Die Reihen fast geschlossen* (Wuppertal, 1981).

¹²⁴ Figures: Bracher, Sauer, Schulz, *Machtergreifung*, p. 347; national church: Gerhard Engel, *Heeresadjutant bei Hitler* (Stuttgart, 1974), p. 49 (June 18?, 1939).

first step in this project was the attempt to annex the Protestants through the creation of a semiofficial "German Christian" movement. But the German Christians' doctrinal innovations, aimed at "de-Judaizing" Christianity, and their clumsy attempts to take over the Lutheran organizations inevitably produced a backlash. The Protestant pastors, unlike their army coreligionists, refused en masse to take an oath to the Führer.¹²⁵ The fanatical nationalism of most Protestants prevented an open political breach with the regime, but by mid-1934 Hitler had clearly lost the ideological battle on this front.

He fared even worse with the Catholics. Politically, he outmaneuvered the Center Party, securing its support for the March 1933 Enabling Act with promises of a concordat, then dissolving the party with Vatican acquiescence in return for concluding that same concordat. But ideologically, especially in the deeply Catholic areas of south Germany and the Rhineland, the Church remained an almost insuperable obstacle. Its unfriendly reception of the regime's July 1933 law on sterilization of the insane and congenitally ill, which Hitler pushed through the same cabinet meeting that ratified the concordat, was symptomatic of the limits of Catholic support. Hitler, that connoisseur of mass psychology, "did not underestimate the suggestive power of the churches."¹²⁶ He was also aware that success in the 1935 Saar plebiscite depended on the Catholic vote. Consequently he urged tactical restraint on the Party, while demanding of the churches, as a minimum, that they leave politics—a field he defined in the broadest possible terms—to Party and state. The NSDAP must secretly prepare for final confrontation; the Party's ultimate loyalties must be to him, not to the churches.¹²⁷

The internal obstacles to the full realization of Hitler's program were thus considerable, even if less serious than those that weighed upon Mussolini. Internationally, the position was less daunting. Germany was inherently far stronger than Italy, and although defeated in 1918, it had like Italy improved its long-term strategic position in the war. Versailles had left Germany's potential almost untouched, and the collapse of the great eastern empires left it facing a motley collection of *Saisonstaaten* incapable of defending themselves either singly or collectively.¹²⁸ The withdrawal from Europe of the United States, the power that had robbed

¹²⁵ Bracher, Sauer, Schulz, *Machtergreifung*, p. 338.

¹²⁶ Engel, *Heeresadjutant*, p. 30 (August 6, 1938).

¹²⁷ Alfred Rosenberg, *Das politische Tagebuch Alfred Rosenbergs aus den Jahren 1934/35 und 1939/40*, ed. H.-G. Seraphim (Göttingen, 1956), pp. 32, 56.

¹²⁸ See Gerhard L. Weinberg, "The Defeat of Germany in 1918 and the European Balance of Power," *Central European History*, 2 (1969): 248–60.

Germany of final victory in 1917–18, completed a relatively favorable picture. Hitler, despite his railing at Versailles, was well aware of the true correlation of forces. Germany had a second chance at world mastery—if, as he put it in 1931, it acted soon. Those twin colossi, the Soviet Union and the United States, still slept; “when they awake, Germany is finished [dann ist mit Deutschland Schluss].”¹²⁹

To take the path of world conquest, Germany must mobilize its potential, and thus perhaps rouse France, its most dangerous immediate adversary. They would soon see “if France has statesmen,” Hitler told the military leaders four days after his appointment as chancellor: “if it does, it will not allow us time [to rearm] but will attack us. . . .”¹³⁰ The French had no statesmen. Western feebleness helped foster the close congruence that persisted until 1936 between the traditionally nationalist policies of generals, diplomats, and economic magnates, and the preliminary stages of Hitler’s vision of racist world revolution. With each success—Germany’s departure from the disarmament conference and the League, the February 1934 nonaggression pact with Poland, the Saar plebiscite, the announcement of universal military service and Luftwaffe, the Anglo-German naval treaty—Hitler’s ascendancy over the Establishment grew.

The remilitarization of the Rhineland in March 1936 produced the first major divergence over tactics between Hitler and his military and foreign-office flankers. It was also another in a series of foreign-policy triumphs intended to galvanize public opinion. The recipe had worked once before, in the fall of 1933 when Germany left the League, but since then the regime had lost popularity. Rearmament brought full employment but also increasing strain and shortages, and the reintroduction of conscription in 1935 was anything but popular—that year the regime mounted no general elections or plebiscites. The Party, although increasingly successful at preventing the bureaucracy from administering, proved relatively inept at remolding the public into good national socialists. Enforced enthusiasm was not contagious.¹³¹ Hitler conceded openly to his foreign-policy advisers that his decision to go ahead resulted in part from a need to distract the public from domestic difficulties.¹³²

The flankers, although still in agreement with Hitler’s immediate revisionist goals, began to find his methods excessively risky. Blomberg, in particular, warned of dire consequences from the Rhineland coup, and

¹²⁹ Calic, *Ohne Maske*, p. 85.

¹³⁰ Liebmann minute, February 3, 1933, p. 435 in Thilo Vogelsang, ed., “Neue Dokumente zur Geschichte der Reichswehr 1930–1933,” VfZG, 2 (1954).

¹³¹ See the description in Allen, *The Nazi Seizure of Power*, Chap. 17.

¹³² Hassell notes, pp. 202–5 in Esmonde Robertson, “Zur Wiederbesetzung des Rheinlandes 1936,” VfZG, 10 (1962).

when news of French and British unhappiness began to filter back, beseeched Hitler to withdraw the troops. Hitler himself suffered an attack of nerves, but held to his course.¹³³ When the French predictably caved in, Hitler could preen himself on his superior judgment; perhaps too-cautious military advisers were outliving their usefulness. Active expansion would clearly call for men of sterner stuff.

Similarly, the struggle throughout the spring and summer of 1936 over economic priorities—essentially a contest in which Hitler, Göring, and the military defeated Schacht and those economic magnates who deplored the increasing strain of rearmament—marked the parting of the ways between Hitler and another important group of flankers. Fortunately for Hitler, the two main sources of opposition were themselves at odds, both internally and with one another. The generals split into military traditionalists and total war theorists, overt pro-Nazis and self-proclaimed unpolitical soldiers of the old school. In industry, firms such as I. G. Farben that benefited from autarky and accelerated rearmament divided from much of the rest of heavy industry, which was increasingly reluctant to build new plants when reason dictated that Germany would eventually run out of currency and raw materials, and the armaments boom collapse. Hitler demonstratively slapped down industrial and financial footdragging by placing Göring in charge of much of the economy in September 1936. But the military and foreign-policy Establishment was less accommodating. By late 1937 Hitler had discovered that foreign adventure was impossible without a further measure of revolution at home.

Unholy War Mussolini's transition to active expansionism aroused less resistance than Hitler's; the Duce's chosen victims seemed less capable of defending themselves. Nevertheless, the decision to attack Ethiopia has found a variety of interpretations. Determinists have argued that the Depression and consequent need to reflate the economy prompted expansion. Another popular claim is that Mussolini sought to "relaunch" a flagging regime and cement the loyalty of the younger generation by foreign adventure.¹³⁴ Renzo De Felice, while rejecting the economic argument and demonstrating convincingly that the regime was at the height of its popularity, has suggested that failure in transforming society at home impelled Mussolini into previously unsought imperial adventure. The decision for war, in all these views, was a choice for second best,

¹³³ Friedrich Hossbach, *Zwischen Wehrmacht und Hitler* (Göttingen, 2nd ed., 1965) pp. 84–5.

¹³⁴ Franco Catalano, *L'economia italiana di guerra* (Milan, 1969), p. 7; Giorgio Rochat, *Militari e politici nella preparazione della campagna d'Etiopia* (Milan, 1971), pp. 105–7.

and Ethiopia no more than a target of opportunity that German revival impelled the frightened French to offer Mussolini. Finally, Jens Petersen has argued that what happened between 1932 and 1935 was that international alignments at last permitted Mussolini to implement a long-held expansionist program. German rearmament and French fear (to which one must add the Depression's severing of financial dependence on Washington) at last gave Mussolini his chance.¹³⁵

Mussolini's repeated, almost monotonous references to the goal of empire from 1918 on support the last interpretation. But it was more than a foreign policy program that moved him to action. War, Mussolini insisted both as Socialist and as Fascist, was linked to revolution. Only war, whose uncivilizing effects he well remembered, could help break the old society's resistance to the new paganism, make Italy the "militarist" nation he demanded,¹³⁶ and further undermine monarchy and Church. Foreign adventure was also internal forward policy, not the mere "social-imperialist" defense of order at home characteristic of more staid authoritarian regimes.

The choice of Ethiopia was long overdetermined. Fascism, as part of its historic mission, had to avenge Adua, the humiliating defeat of its great precursor Crispi. Mussolini's interest in "profiting from an eventual dissolution of the Ethiopian empire" dated from at least 1925, and concrete planning began in November 1932.¹³⁷ Once it had conquered East Africa, the "prisoner of the Mediterranean" might hope to lever the British out of the Sudan and Egypt.¹³⁸ Finally and most importantly, Ethiopia was the one enemy Mussolini's flankers and the European powers would reluctantly permit him to conquer. The flankers also felt the shame of Adua, and assumed that the Italy that had stood up to Austria-Hungary could defeat a land-locked, half-tribal, half-feudal kingdom with perhaps a quarter of Italy's population. And the other powers were ultimately disposed to tolerate an Italian aggression outside Europe that did not directly touch their own possessions.

Mussolini nevertheless faced and overcame major obstacles in launching his Fascist imperial war. Internally, he had to sap the tenacious resistance of the army. That hierarchy remained wedded to its Alpine priorities and dubious of the advantages of empire; the Austrian crisis of July 1934

¹³⁵ *Mussolini il fascista*, p. 359; *Mussolini il duce*, 1: 179, 466-7; Petersen, "Die Aussenpolitik des faschistischen Italien als historiographisches Problem," *VfZG*, 22 (1974): 417-57.

¹³⁶ *OO*, 26: 308 (August 24, 1934) (the "discorso del carro armato").

¹³⁷ See Rochat, *Militari e politici*, pp. 26-33.

¹³⁸ Pompeo Aloisi, *Journal (25 juillet 1932-14 juin 1936)* (Paris, 1957), p. 382 (May 8, 1936).

emphasized the need to keep Italy's guard up in Europe. Both Marshal Pietro Badoglio, the chief of the vestigial interservice general staff, and General Federico Baistrocchi, the dynamic army chief of staff and undersecretary for war, were initially hostile to the project, which originated in the colonial ministry under Mussolini's aegis.¹³⁹ Once he had converted Baistrocchi and partially neutralized Badoglio by mobilizing navy and air force support, Mussolini still faced the king and a conservative Establishment that abhorred risk. The Duce complained in 1936 that the monarch bore no responsibility for victory: "He didn't want to go—I had to force him." First-hand evidence of the king's attitude is lacking, but Mussolini's June 1935 complaint to his field commander in East Africa about "grumblers and defeatists—more on high than below" suggests that king and Establishment were indeed recalcitrant.¹⁴⁰ Even Fascists wavered. The ex-secretary of the Party, Giovanni Giuriati, allegedly told the king that Mussolini's policy would lead to "national disaster." And Britain's apparent intention of fighting Mussolini in the Mediterranean if he went ahead produced warnings from Badoglio and the military of "a disaster that would reduce us to a Balkan level."¹⁴¹ Even the Duce's son-in-law and future foreign minister, Galeazzo Ciano, temporarily gave way to despair after the League imposed sanctions.¹⁴² Only the Church, which looked forward to civilizing the heretical Copts, and much of the public, which believed the regime's tales of Ethiopian and British provocations, and of an East African el Dorado, remained stalwart for aggression. Much later, Mussolini complained that many, many important people came to him and said, "You have already done great things. Now [you should] pull in your oars."¹⁴³

Mussolini's knowledge of the British fleet's relative unpreparedness—on which he bet too heavily—and Whitehall's craven reluctance to force the issue allowed him to hold his course. But the attack on Ethiopia remained, in the words of overcautious advisors Mussolini later quoted, "a gamble [un'avventura], a great gamble."¹⁴⁴ The Establishment's reluctance may not have been entirely a consequence of Mussolini's external risk-taking. Defeat at the hands of British, or stalemate at those of the Ethiopians, would risk far more than Italy's reputation and international

¹³⁹ For details, Rochat, *Militari e politici*, Chaps. 1, 2.

¹⁴⁰ Luigi Federzoni, *L'Italia di ieri per la storia di domani* (Milan, 1967), p. 233 (also Attilio Tamaro, *Venti anni di storia* [Rome, 1953–54], 3: 217, note 98a); *OO*, 42: 107 (June 26, 1935).

¹⁴¹ Badoglio to Mussolini, September 1935, in Rochat, *Militari e politici*, p. 229.

¹⁴² Alessandro Lessona, *Memorie* (Florence, 1958), pp. 239–40.

¹⁴³ *OO*, 44: 325 (April 17, 1943).

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

position. It would risk the regime, and with it, the advantages the Establishment had secured through its forced compromise with Mussolini. Conversely, victory would excessively reinforce the regime and increase Mussolini's chances of receiving the blind obedience to which he aspired. And Mussolini lost no opportunity to make victory popular and Fascist, rather than military and dynastic. General Emilio De Bono, his original choice as commander in East Africa, was despite loyalty to king and army a man who owed his position to "Fascist merits."¹⁴⁵ The Militia mobilized, with army help, to provide specifically Fascist units whose combat performance the propaganda apparatus could then inflate. The new empire, Mussolini proclaimed to frenetic applause on May 9, 1936, was a Fascist empire that "bore the indestructible marks of the will and power of the Roman *fasci*." By implication, it owed nothing to the old order.¹⁴⁶

Victory indeed had consequences. Mussolini, as "founder of the Empire," could now impose on his subordinates, without being laughed at, the reverence he aspired to. His subsequent policy—Spanish intervention, the racial laws, the campaign against the bourgeoisie, the annexation of Albania, and the plunge into war in 1940—was only possible thanks to domestic reinforcement through African victory, and the license for aggression which increasing German preponderance brought. Far from representing a falling off from the famous "realism" that his propagandists and some historians have ascribed to him, Mussolini's later policies were simply ever more risky attempts to implement his program within his own lifetime. It was his mission to remake "the character of the Italians through combat." Revelation of a long-held vision, not the "involution" of personality and will that some scholars have discerned, presided over Italy's road to the Second World War.¹⁴⁷

African victory naturally did not remove all obstacles. Mussolini put the League of Nations's sanctions to good use in convincing the great economic interests that autarky—the breaking of Italy's remaining ties to the world market—was the only feasible course. And although autarky proved "too tight a shirt" for the export industries, the increasing stream of armaments contracts helped ease the pain. Italy's massive dependence

¹⁴⁵ His replacement in November 1935 by Badoglio was consequently an internal setback for Mussolini—but winning on the battlefield obviously had immediate priority.

¹⁴⁶ *OO*, 27: 268–9 (May 9, 1936).

¹⁴⁷ Mussolini's words: Galeazzo Ciano, *Diario 1937–1943* (Milan, 1980), November 13, 1937. For the involution thesis, which resembles the folk wisdom of the day ("... se dopo l'Etiopia, si fosse fermato. . ."), De Felice, *Mussolini il duce*, 2, Chap. 3.

¹⁴⁸ Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, p. 30.

on imported energy and strategic raw materials made genuine autarky impractical, but furnished yet another argument for expansion. In both domestic and foreign policy, Mussolini moved with increasing self-confidence. He plunged into Spain apparently without consulting the king; when Baistrocchi objected and Badoglio grumbled, he sacked one and ordered the other to show public approval. Spain, however, provided anything but the expected easy victories, and the disaster at Guadalajara in March 1937 allowed the king to level veiled reproaches at Mussolini.¹⁴⁸ But the humiliation passed with the summer 1937 victories in the Basque country. By early 1938, the German example—Hitler made himself commander-in-chief of the armed forces on February 4—prompted emulation. The Party, presumably on Mussolini's secret instructions, pushed through Chamber and Senate a bill creating both Duce and king "First Marshals of the Empire." This demotion of the monarch to Mussolini's level produced wrath at the Quirinal.¹⁴⁹ Mussolini also promulgated in 1937–38 laws that formally wrote the Party into the constitution, and in January 1939 the Chamber of Deputies became the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations. Only the Senate remained as a relic of the liberal-monarchical past, and it owed its considerable staying power to its life tenure and royal appointment.

Mussolini and his entourage began looking forward with increasing anticipation to the removal of the king, perhaps even as early as the end of the Spanish war. It was only right, the Duce commented cynically in 1936 when exempting the king's foreign assets from the nationalization that League sanctions made necessary, to leave him "a well-protected nest-egg." The fate of monarchies was frequently an uncertain one.¹⁵⁰ The Duce's private remarks suggest an ever-growing resolve to smash the internal and foreign-policy restraints the monarchy still imposed.¹⁵¹

The military, like the monarchy, also failed to show the necessary enthusiasm for Mussolini's increasing risk-taking. Although he had achieved de facto direction of the armed forces during the Ethiopian war, Mussolini remained a prisoner of their institutional structures. Major surgery, such as the 1933 and 1936–37 plans for a tri-service defense ministry that would restrict the services' autonomy, was impossible without disturbing the interservice balance and tampering with the monarchy's

¹⁴⁹ De Felice, "Mussolini e Vittorio Emanuele III Primi Marescialli dell'Impero," in *Università degli Studi di Messina, Scritti in onore di Vittorio De Caprariis* (Rome, n.d.), pp. 347–68.

¹⁵⁰ De Felice, *Mussolini il duce*, 2: 16 (in general, pp. 14–21).

¹⁵¹ See particularly *ibid.*, p. 40, and Giuseppe Bottai, *Diario 1935–1944*, ed. Giordano Bruno Guerri (Milan, 1982), entries for June 23, July 12, and June 13, 1938.

prerogatives.¹⁵² Both the rigidity of service promotion procedures and the caste resistance of the senior generals inhibited the injection of fresh and necessarily Fascist blood into the higher reaches of the military. In strategic planning, Mussolini had his way for a while. In 1937 and 1938 the army, under Baistrocchi's successor Pariani, made grandiose plans, with navy cooperation, for an assault on Egypt from Cyrenaica. But after the shock of Munich Badoglio reasserted his prerogatives, and killed the plan. If France were also hostile, Italy was too weak to seize Suez. Badoglio's refusal to permit planning "that d[id] not correspond to the situation" meant that when the situation changed, Italy had no plans. In the event, Mussolini had to trick his generals and admirals into war in 1940 with the assurance that they need not fight.¹⁵³

Less dangerous for Mussolini than the recalcitrance of monarchy and military, but still inconvenient, was the Church. The Vatican, despite its compromise with Mussolini, made difficulties about what Pius XI denounced as "pagan state idolatry." Naturally, the Church overwhelmingly supported the Ethiopian campaign and Mussolini's allegedly anti-Bolshevist intervention in Spain. It evinced qualified approval even of the annexation of Albania.¹⁵⁴ But when Mussolini's concern with the "purity of the race" came home from the colonies, and in deference to the Germans attacked Jews as well as blacks, the Vatican became uneasy. The Church was not averse to religious discrimination, and avant-garde Jesuits urged segregation of the Jews, but the pseudo-biological provisions of the 1938 racial laws included Catholic converts.¹⁵⁵ At the same time, the German alliance and the increasing risk of general war added to the Church's reservations about the regime. War—apart from the predictable loss of life and destruction—would either result in Axis defeat, endangering Italy and the Lateran pacts, or a victory that would bring pagan racist revolution in earnest. Hence the papal protests and peace messages against which Mussolini increasingly railed between 1938 and 1940.

The upper middle classes, too, began to distance themselves subtly from Mussolini as he moved to implement his vision. It required the shock of defeat to consummate the divorce Italian-style between the regime and what Mussolini described as a bourgeoisie riddled with "cowardice, laziness, [and] love of the quiet life." But the origins of that divorce lay in Mussolini's post-Ethiopian activism both at home and abroad. Italy's forced "non-belligerence" in September 1939 was thus

¹⁵² Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 17–18.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19, 58, 119–23.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁵⁵ See De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo* (Turin, rev. ed., 1972), pp. 204–5, 286–87.

not an example of Mussolini's purported realism, but rather the Establishment's last victory over the regime's expansionism. The pope and Badoglio, Ciano and the diplomats, industrialists and king, all coalesced to hold back Mussolini and the Party enthusiasts. But the victory was a Pyrrhic one. Mussolini remained in control of the machinery of government. Only a coup, which the king briefly contemplated in March 1940, could remove him. When the king failed to move, the members of the quasi-coalition of "moderates" remained prisoners of their separate bargains with the Duce, and of their own cautiously expansionist appetites.

The great German victories in the West in May 1940 enabled Mussolini to activate that expansionism with the promise that Italy need not fight. He himself sought instead a swift but decisive conflict that would free Italy from its Mediterranean imprisonment and give him the prestige to crush his flankers. That was why the regime insisted—contrary to common sense, which dictated the mobilization of all strands of Italian nationalism—that this war was "*la guerra fascista*." It was a war of internal as well as foreign conquest. And when Italy's independent war ended in the winter of 1940–41 in disaster at Taranto, in the Albanian mountains, and in the sands of Beda Fomm, Mussolini's revolutionary project died with it.¹⁵⁶ The regime survived until the "moderate" Fascists revolted against Mussolini and the king and generals overthrew him in July 1943. But the crushing defeats of 1940 and Italy's humiliating new status as first satellite of the Reich had broken the prestige Mussolini needed for internal transformation. In the end, the flankers, emboldened in defeat, repudiated the regime in the name of the same Italian nationalism, and interests, that had once led them to support it.

Hitler fortunately also failed, but his failure was less humiliating and infinitely bloodier than Mussolini's. Hitler had written in *Mein Kampf* that Germany would "either be a world power, or cease to be." He almost achieved the first, and barely failed at the second. His starting point in blending revolution and territorial expansion was his discovery in November 1937 that Germany's growing if foreseeably temporary preponderance in armaments had not convinced Blomberg, Fritsch, and Neurath that Germany could, should, and must fight. Their lamentable lack of faith emerged from the alarmed protestations at the November 5, 1937 Reich Chancellery conference at which Hitler revealed for the first time that he intended to seize Austria and smash Czechoslovakia, situation permitting, as early as 1938. Fritsch and his subordinate Beck did not merely object to the risks involved, but above all to Hitler's implicit claim to be Germany's sole font of strategic leadership. Regrettably, the

¹⁵⁶ Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, Chaps. 3 and 6, and Conclusion.

first civilian since Bismarck to impose on the army both civilian control, and Clausewitz's heretical notion that war was a tool of politics, turned out to be Hitler.

The dictator confirmed his November 5 prediction of war two weeks later in a speech to Party officials: new tasks awaited Germany, "for the living space of our Volk is too narrow." And he again stressed the identity of foreign and domestic policy. Just as the National Socialists had "led the nation upwards" internally, so they would achieve for Germany abroad "the same rights to existence as other nations."¹⁵⁷ Two months later, he dismissed both Blomberg and Fritsch, and for good measure, Neurath and the ambassador to Italy, Hassell. Blomberg's mesalliance with an ex-prostitute, and damaging though bogus SS charges of homosexuality against Fritsch allowed Hitler to dispense with both, and take over Blomberg's position in person. He had breached the Establishment's last citadel, strategy and foreign policy.

In the aftermath of the February 4 coup, many high officers seethed with indignation at the preposterous accusations against Fritsch, but foreign policy came to Hitler's aid. Political developments in Austria allowed him to distract the army with a job to do: the Anschluss. The resulting personal triumph allowed him to brush off Army pressure for Fritsch's reinstatement, while the public, consulted in the first plebiscite since the Rhineland coup, returned an overwhelming vote of confidence. Foreign policy had first demanded domestic upheaval, then blessed it with success.

But obstacles remained. The credulous acceptance of the Fuhrer's mission and quasi-supernatural gifts by Keitel and Jodl was not yet general in the officer corps. Throughout the summer, as preparations to attack Germany's next victim, Czechoslovakia, went forward, Hitler gave vent to a stream of complaints against the generals. Most of them "had rejected [his leadership], and continued to reject it." They "as yet did not understand the meaning of the new age," and were far inferior in élan to his trusty Gauleiters. Delays in the army-supervised construction of the *Westwall* fortifications led him to threaten to turn the job over to Martin Bormann, "whom he could at least rely on."¹⁵⁸ Fritz Todt, another Party luminary, actually got the job. And several months later, Hitler apparently intimidated a reluctant Admiral Raeder with the not entirely incredible threat that if further delays slowed the gargantuan naval program, he would turn procurement over to Todt.¹⁵⁹

The real issue of the summer, however, was what Hitler characterized as "*Angst* and cowardice in the army": the refusal of Beck and the

¹⁵⁷ Domarus, *Hitler*, p. 760 (November 21, 1937).

¹⁵⁸ Engel, *Heeresadjutant*, pp. 20, 26, 32 (April 20, June 25, April 18, 1938).

¹⁵⁹ Dülffer, *Marine*, pp. 500-1, 512, 541.

hesitation of other senior officers to accept his strategic leadership and the risks the Czech enterprise would involve. Fortunately for Hitler, Beck was relatively isolated both in his high assessment of the risk of general war and his dogged insistence on the coresponsibility of the army chief of staff for strategic decisions. Nevertheless, Hitler felt obliged to harangue his top commanders twice in mid-August to counteract Beck's influence and steel their nerves for the coming struggle. Conveniently for Hitler, Beck cracked under the strain of isolation and resigned. His successor Halder plotted in secret, but made no attempt at open contradiction.¹⁶⁰ Even more fortunately for Hitler, the West surrendered Czechoslovakia without fighting. Bloodless triumph cut the ground from under doubters and plotters. Munich also raised Hitler higher in the public esteem than ever before—the German people had nationalist triumph without war.¹⁶¹

The crisis had other effects besides strengthening Hitler internally. He had passionately sought war against the Czechs, both to steel the young, and to test the newly minted Wehrmacht. Only at the last moment had he accepted a negotiated surrender of the Sudetenland. On the evening of September 27, Hitler had watched motorized units on their way to the border roll through central Berlin, as he had ordered. The public stood, silent and sullen; no cheers or "German greetings" honored the Führer's appearance at the Reich Chancellery balcony.¹⁶² The delirious scenes of August 1914 did not repeat themselves. After the euphoria of the Anschluss, this may have come as a shock. The unfeigned enthusiasm of German crowds for Chamberlain added insult to injury.¹⁶³ Hence Hitler's post-Munich rage at the British ("we will no longer tolerate the supervision of governesses") and his diatribe to German press representatives on November 10 demanding indoctrination that would "free the Volk of doubts that make it unhappy" and inculcate "*fanatical* belief" in final victory. The nation must stand like "formed-up troops" behind his decisions. The "intellectual strata"—by which he meant those educated Germans, including officers, who still refused to accept him on faith—were unfortunately still necessary: "otherwise one could exterminate them, or whatever."¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Müller, *Heer*, Chaps. 7, 8; Williamson Murray, *The Change in the European Balance of Power, 1938–39* (Princeton University Press, forthcoming), Chaps. 5–7.

¹⁶¹ Ian Kershaw, *Der Hitler-Mythos* (Stuttgart, 1980), p. 123.

¹⁶² See Telford Taylor, *Munich* (New York, 1979), p. 877.

¹⁶³ See the editors' remarks in "*Es spricht der Führer*," pp. 230–31.

¹⁶⁴ "Governesses": speech at Saarbrücken, October 9, 1938, Domarus, *Hitler*, p. 956; the rest from "*Es spricht der Führer*," pp. 283, 281–2.

Hitler could have been under no illusion that propaganda alone would consolidate internal unity behind him. As he harangued the press, the SS and police were supervising the cleanup of the debris from synagogues and Jewish shops burned out in the *Kristallnacht* pogrom. Hitler had inspired that action as a hint of things to come and as a salutary release for Party radicalism, but he was too shrewd a judge of public and elite opinion to associate with it openly. Generals were still heard to mutter about hanging "this swine, Goebbels," who was ostensibly responsible.¹⁶⁵ The time of the Jews was nevertheless coming, Hitler hinted in his January 30, 1939 Reichstag speech. That of the churches, he had said privately the previous August, had not yet come; he still had "too many other problems."¹⁶⁶

Yet as his insistence on his cyclopean building program and his acceleration of the already breakneck pace of naval construction suggest, Hitler had already left the confines of the interwar German state far behind (symptomatically, Germany proper now became the "*Altreich*"). The immense Nazi eagle with a globe in its claws that Hitler ordered to crown his gigantic Berlin great hall was no mere ideological metaphor. Germany, he told a group of senior officers in early February 1939, was bound for world mastery; the triumphs of 1938 were not the end of the road but the beginning. Germany could best preserve the reputation and prestige acquired since 1933 by "without letup exploiting every opportunity, however small, to move immediately towards a new success."¹⁶⁷ He would tolerate no more "warning memoranda"—an apparent reference to Beck's attempts to thwart him the previous summer. The alleged "hothouse intellectualism" of the general staff since Schlieffen's day was outdated; he demanded "believing officers" with "trust and blind confidence."¹⁶⁸

The next major success, Hitler decided shortly after his bloodless absorption of rump Czechoslovakia in mid-March, must come in war against Poland. The origins of that war, which contrary to Hitler's intentions eventually became a world war, have inevitably provoked vast controversy. But until Tim Mason's work on the regime's relationship with the industrial workers, few scholars have had much to say about the internal ramifications of Hitler's decision. Mason has opened the question up by suggesting that Hitler took the plunge largely to escape the economic and political crisis rearmament had created. Conquest was "an end in itself," an improvised defensive "flight forward" to escape

¹⁶⁵ Fedor von Bock, quoted in Müller, *Heer*, p. 385.

¹⁶⁶ Domarus, *Hitler*, p. 1058; Engel, *Heeresadjutant*, p. 30 (August 6, 1938).

¹⁶⁷ All from Thies, *Architekt der Weltherrschaft*, p. 116.

¹⁶⁸ Quoted in Müller, *Heer*, p. 383.

intolerable domestic problems. The argument is not overly convincing.¹⁶⁹ Hitler had passionately wanted to fight in 1938, before the crisis reached full intensity. Politically, the regime was hardly on its last legs, either in the public or in the official mind. Mason's arguments for social and political crisis echo with the liturgy of the class struggle, but fail to address at least some of the evidence. The Ruhr miners, on whose efforts all of German industry relied, had a lower absentee rate in 1938 than in 1929, and later showed remarkable aptitude for supervising slave labor.¹⁷⁰

As for the economic crisis, the evidence does not suggest that anyone except a narrow circle recognized it as such. Hitler merely argued, in prodding his generals toward war, that Germany could hold out only "for a few more years."¹⁷¹ This was less a prediction of imminent catastrophe than a ploy to egg the reluctant onward by reminding them of difficulties that they had helped him create. Mason has also claimed in support of his thesis Hitler's remarks in both 1937 and 1939 that Germany faced a choice between expansion and degeneration. But those remarks were Hitler's standard justification, fixed since 1921–22, of the need for *Lebensraum*.¹⁷² The economic strains of 1938–39 were for him no more than confirmation of that insight.

But the foremost difficulty with Mason's theory is that it isolates the events of 1938–39 from those preceding, and thus interprets as cause a

¹⁶⁹ See Mason, "Innere Krise und Angriffskrieg 1938/1939," pp. 158–88 in *Wirtschaft und Rüstung am Vorabend des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, ed. F. Forstmaier and H. E. Volkmann (Düsseldorf, 1975); also his *Arbeiterklasse und Volksgemeinschaft*, pp. 119ff. For the criticisms, Jost Dülffer, "Der Beginn des Krieges 1939: Hitler, die innere Krise, und das Mächtensystem," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 2 (1976): 443–70, and Ludolf Herbst, "Die Krise des nationalsozialistischen Regimes am Vorabend des Zweiten Weltkrieges und die forcierte Aufrüstung," *VfZG*, 26 (1978): 347–92 (see particularly pp. 376–82). For public opinion, see Kershaw, *Mythos*, pp. 123–5, which suggests that only fear of war marred the popularity Hitler had achieved through foreign success in 1938–39.

¹⁷⁰ John Gillingham, "Ruhr Coal Miners and Hitler's War," *Journal of Social History*, Summer 1982, pp. 637–53.

¹⁷¹ Hitler speech summary, August 22, 1939 (probably from stenographic notes by Canaris), *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik*, Serie D, (Baden-Baden, Frankfurt, 1950—) (henceforth ADAP,D) 7: 168. A second version, written that evening by Admiral Boehm, suggests even less urgency: "perhaps 10–15 years." Mason prefers the Lochner document (ADAP,D, 7: 171–2 note), which ascribes to Hitler a lament that "the Four Year Plan [has] failed and we are finished, without victory in the coming war." But the Lochner version will not bear much weight; its provenance, its divergences from all other accounts, and its piquant fabricated details (a Göring war-dance on the conference table) mark it as an Abwehr/resistance concoction for Western consumption. (On the sources, see Winfried Baumgart, "Zur Ansprache Hitlers vor den Führern der Wehrmacht am 22. August 1939," *VfZG* 16 (1968): 120–49).

¹⁷² Mason, "Innere Krise," pp. 182–4; see above, note 79.

phenomenon that is first of all effect. As Jost Dülffer has pointed out, the internal crisis was a consequence of Hitler's ever-increasing demands on the economy for armaments and for the immense building program.¹⁷³ Those demands led directly to war, with no need for an intervening *deus ex machina* in the form of internal crisis. Only war could transmute armaments into *Lebensraum* and world mastery. Only war, along with the new Reich's cyclopean monuments and incessant propaganda, could fully nationalize the masses. The 1938–39 crisis was above all a symptom of Hitler's offensive forward thrust towards war and revolution, rather than a driving force behind it.

As for the timing of the attack on Poland, three considerations were decisive. First and least important was the pact with Stalin, which secured Germany's rear and checkmated the remaining doubters among the generals. Second came a broader consideration, which Hitler repeatedly emphasized in his 1939 harangues to his military leaders. Rearmament had created a brief window of opportunity for Germany; after 1941–42 that window would close as the other powers caught up. Finally, of course, came Hitler's ever-growing obsession with the short time left to him personally; as he told his generals "in all modesty" in November 1939, he alone possessed the nerve (*Entschlusskraft*) to fulfill Germany's mission.¹⁷⁴

He lost no time putting war to use. Within the Reich, he secretly ordered the killing of the congenitally ill and insane in state institutions. Poland offered an even greater opportunity to implement his internal programs for Germany—using Poles as "laboratory rabbits." As Heydrich crudely explained to the army, "we want to spare the little people, but nobility, clergy, and Jews must be killed."¹⁷⁵ The generals recoiled in pious horror, then sheepishly yielded responsibility for the occupied territories.

The generals did make a brief stand on the sole issue they could not evade: Hitler's demand, made immediately after Poland's collapse, for an immediate offensive to smash the French and British. The military's resistance, which included yet another hesitant Putsch conspiracy in which Halder again took fleeting interest, was the last twitch of the organized German Establishment. It was short-lived. This time, no one dared openly question Hitler's strategic judgment as Beck had done; instead, the generals took refuge in technical arguments that inevitably lost force as army readiness improved and French ineptitude and de-

¹⁷³ Dülffer, "Beginn des Krieges," p. 464.

¹⁷⁴ ADAP, D, 7: 168 (August 22, 1939) and 8: 348 (November 23, 1939).

¹⁷⁵ Müller, *Heer*, p. 427.

moralization became apparent. Hitler's tirades terrorized Brauchitsch and Halder, and the repeated weather postponements of the attack allowed the generals to prepare it with even more of the thoroughness that was their trademark. The pathetic April 1940 showing of the British and French in Norway did the rest. When army and Luftwaffe crossed the western borders on May 10, the doubters had long fallen silent or joined the ranks of the converted.

In mid-January, even before the Wehrmacht rolled, Hitler had made clear to some of his associates the internal consequences of victory: "The war is in this respect, as in many other matters, a favorable opportunity to dispose of it (the church question) root and branch." In the ancient world entire peoples had been liquidated, and the Soviet Union was setting the example in the present. But the old German "proclivity for mysticism" still thwarted him:

If he did nothing now against the rebellious parsons, then it was not least out of concern for the Wehrmacht. There they ran to the field chaplains, and a trooper who was brave with the good Lord was always more useful to him than one who was cowardly without Him. But here the indoctrination of the SS, which was now proving in war that ideologically schooled troops could be brave even without the Lord, would outline the necessary development.¹⁷⁶

In conversation with Rosenberg, his religion expert, Hitler foresaw the possibility of smashing the churches by force ("ein harter machtpolitischer Eingriff")—but this could only take place when Germany was "fully independent internationally"; "otherwise the resulting blaze of internal political controversy could cost us our existence."¹⁷⁷

The Wehrmacht's crushing victory over France in May-June 1940 did not secure the full measure of freedom Hitler sought, but he now commanded the confidence of the military elite as never before or after. Symptomatic of that confidence was the pleasurable anticipation with which many senior generals prepared to tackle the next intriguing military problem Hitler set them: the destruction of the Soviet Union and the physical elimination of its "Jewish-Bolshevik intelligentsia." A few had doubts, but now took refuge not in plotting but in irony. Fedor von Bock, who had wanted to hang Goebbels in 1938, saw off a fellow army group commander with a cryptic "Well, see you in Siberia."¹⁷⁸ The public, sullen during the phony war, suddenly went "berserk with success"; in

¹⁷⁶ All from Engel, *Heeresadjutant*, pp. 71–2 (January 20, 1940); see also p. 52 (July 8, 1939).

¹⁷⁷ Rosenberg, *Tagebuch*, p. 98 (January 19, 1940).

¹⁷⁸ See Helmut Krausnick, "Kommissarbefehl und 'Gerichtsbarekeitserlass Barbarossa' in neuer Sicht," *VfZG* 25 (1977): 685, 718–20, 757, and Andreas Hillgruber, "Das Russland-Bild der führenden deutschen Militärs vor Beginn

the words of one jaundiced eyewitness, after the French collapse Germany's cafes were full of "beer-soaked old pinochle players dividing up continents over their steins."¹⁷⁹

Nevertheless, Hitler still lacked the prestige to impose his vision in its entirety inside Germany. The attack on the Soviet Union was thus more than merely a response to Churchill's incomprehensible obduracy and to United States support for Britain, or another momentous step in Hitler's foreign policy *Stufenplan*. It was also a further mighty thrust towards the internal barbarization of Germany itself. *Lebensraum* and foreign policy "freedom" would enable him at last to crush that "reptile," the churches.¹⁸⁰ The war of racial annihilation in the East would harden German youth to destroy the old society at home, while the lavish rewards of victory would still whatever unquiet consciences remained.

But even while the Wehrmacht struck deep into Russia, the Bishop of Münster, Count Galen, raised his voice publicly against the euthanasia program, and the regime had to suspend it. Hitler raged in private. This, too, would appear on the churches' final bill. He had, he noted privately in October 1941, also had to put up with the Jews for a long time; now, though he left it unsaid, extermination had begun.¹⁸¹

That last foundation of his program was indeed all that remained once the Wehrmacht failed to take Moscow in November–December 1941. In Jodl's words, "long before anyone else in the world, Hitler suspected or knew that the war was lost," and that suspicion drove him to give the Final Solution an ever higher priority, a priority that soon eclipsed the fighting of the war itself.¹⁸² Internally, SS and Party vied in radicalism, while furtive half-knowledge of Germany's Eastern crimes and of coming retribution bound the public to the regime to the end. What remained of the Establishment had lost in 1938–40 all capacity to put the brakes on Hitler. The final despairing gesture of some of its members, the botched bomb plot of July 20, 1944, if anything strengthened the regime. Barbarous

des Angriffs auf die Sowjetunion," pp. 296–310 in *Russland—Deutschland—Amerika*, ed. Alexander Fischer et al. (Wiesbaden, 1978) (Bock quotation: p. 306).

¹⁷⁹ Friedrich Percyval Reck-Malleczewen, *Diary of a Man in Despair* (New York, 1970), pp. 109, 103.

¹⁸⁰ "Reptile": *Monologe*, p. 337 (August 11, 1942).

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 108 (October 25, 1941). Hitler frequently remarked that the ideal solution would be to let the churches die out naturally (*ibid.*, pp. 40–1, 67, 82–5), but he clearly intended to help them along (see especially *ibid.*, p. 272).

¹⁸² Jodl memorandum, October, 1946, in Percy Ernst Schramm, *Hitler: The Man and Military Leader* (Chicago, 1971), p. 204; Hillgruber, *Hitlers Strategie*, pp. 551–4 and note 84; Hildebrand, "Weltmacht oder Niedergang: Hitlers Deutschland 1941–1945," in *Weltpolitik II 1939–1945*, ed. Oswald Hauser (Göttingen, 1975), pp. 308–13.

revenge ended the history of Prussia, while miraculous survival fleetingly refurbished Hitler's defeat-tarnished charisma.¹⁸³ Hitler's revolution, unlike that of Mussolini, had at least made itself irreversible from within. And the temporary allies who met across the rubble of Greater Germany could not restore Bismarck's Reich, even had they wished it.

IV. CONCLUSION

From the perspective of results, Mussolini's claim that Italy and Germany were "congruent cases" was something of an exaggeration. It also cannot erase the many differences between the societies over which the two regimes arose, and between their myths, traditions, and institutions. The degree of freedom of action the regimes achieved was markedly different because of these underlying conditions, and not merely because of the frequently invoked but partly illusory gap in ruthlessness and dynamism between the dictators. The two leaders' visions, despite the differences between their underlying ideologies, were indeed congruent in their mixture of demography and geopolitics, if not in Hitler's racialist teleology. Above all, the relationship between foreign and domestic policy in the two regimes was similar. Foreign policy was internal policy and vice versa; internal consolidation was a precondition of foreign conquest, and foreign conquest was the decisive prerequisite for a revolution at home that would sweep away inherited institutions and values, Piedmontese-Italian and Prusso-German military castes, the churches with their claim to deep popular loyalties and their inconvenient if not always operative Christian values, and, last but not least, the putatively decadent and cowardly upper-middle classes.

In the end it is this identity of foreign and domestic policy that distinguishes these two regimes from the other types of political gangsterism prevalent in this century of war and mass murder. Most twentieth-century revolutionary regimes have sought to destroy either the social order or the international one. Despots that come to power through revolutionary civil war in relatively primitive societies—Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot—can have millions shot or starved without need of territorial aggrandizement, though they scarcely despise it. Ideology may dictate expansion, but in practice foreign conquest is a bonus, not the indispensable prerequisite for internal transformation. As for despots who inherit more organized nations, they usually expand partly to defend existing privilege. Brezhnev's troopers did not swoop down on Kabul, or the Argentine navy on the Falklands, to undermine order at home. Only Mussolini and Hitler simultaneously sought to overthrow their societies and their neighbors. In this sense, reason, not faith, unites their two regimes.

¹⁸³ See Kershaw, *Mythos*, pp. 186–91.