THE MAKING OF FASCISM

Class, State, and Counter-Revolution, Italy 1919–1922

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Preface

In his classic *Invitation to Sociology* (1963), Peter Berger describes the various images people have of sociologists and their work. One such image is of sociologists as collectors of statistics that reveal the obvious. "A sociologist," Berger writes, "is a fellow who spends $100,000 to find his way to a house of ill repute" (p. 8). Some historians of modern Italy may argue that in this work I do the same; that I disclose what everybody knows: Where the Fascists violently attacked the Socialists—that is where they won power. Nevertheless, what may be a truism in one discipline is far from self-evident in another. In spite of the vast, accurate and detailed historical documentation of the Fascists' violence in Italy and of its role in their seizure of power, there is little trace of this drama in sociological theories of fascism. Sociologists continue to try and explain the rise of Fascism within the democratic paradigm in terms of an increase of supporters. Fascists, from this perspective, acquired power because free citizens elected them to power. The question that needs to be answered is, therefore, who voted for the Fascists and why.

But if we take the historical evidence on the Fascists' organized violence seriously, it is clear that the question of voters is the wrong question to ask. Where electoral democracy does not exist and the rule of law at best—or the very existence of an electoral campaign that is free of fraud and terror—is ambiguous it makes little sense to analyze political change as simply the function of the will of an (unfree) electorate.

It is therefore perhaps not surprising at all that the first to draw attention to these issues were the contemporary Communist observers of Fascism in Italy and Europe. They saw the bloody struggles taking place and the Socialists' helplessness in the face of these attacks. Indeed, the communist theory of fascism, as John Cammett observes, "has nothing to be ashamed of" in its explanation of the rise of fascism (1967, p. 154). The communists have made what, in retrospect, I think are not only the first but also the most acute and precise interpretations of fascism. Fascism, theyargued, was not reducible to issues of class or social base; not even to the question of the crisis of capitalism. Rather, it emerged and prospered in the course of a concrete external political struggle against the Socialists, which also led to crucial internal struggles within its own ranks.

In a posthumous article in *Radical History Review*, Tim Mason, the

historian of National Socialism, lamented the "disappearance of theories, or articulated concepts of fascism from research and writing about the Third Reich..." (1991, p. 89). This book, which is neither a historical study nor about National Socialism, may not be what Mason had in mind. I did, however, take his advice seriously and employ his general dictate regarding the "primacy of politics." By putting "class relations and class-state relations firmly at the center of the stage" (1991, p. 90), I try to show that the communist analysis is correct: The political struggles between the Italian Fascists and Socialists were formative struggles that determined not only the Fascists' political fate but their specific social and political significance. I hope I was able not only to disclose some of the unique features of Italian Fascism, but also to contribute to the conceptualization of fascism in general.

During the years that have passed since I first started thinking about the Fascists, I collected many debts of gratitude on two continents. The Department of Sociology and the University of California at Los Angeles provided generous financial support, the University's Research Library was an extraordinary research facility whose librarians could obtain any source, no matter how obscure. I also benefited from a grant from the Center for German and European Studies, University of California, Berkeley. The Faculty of Social Sciences at Tel Aviv University generously helped in the preparation of the manuscript for publication. I thank Yasmin Alkalay for invaluable computer assistance and Tali Kristal for diligent assistance in compiling the index. Nina Reshef carefully edited the manuscript and transformed it into a book.

Many individuals—teachers, colleagues and friends—contributed to the fruition of this study. At UCLA I benefited from the advice and guidance of Jeffrey Alexander, Emanuel Schegloff and Michael Wallerstein. My friends and colleagues at Tel Aviv University contributed their generous intellectual and moral support: Hanna Ayalon, Yinon Cohen, Yosef Grodzinsky, Yitzhak Haberfeld, Hanna Herzog, Gideon Kunda, Alisa C. Lewin, Zvi Razi, the late Yonathan Shapiro, Yehouda Shenhav and Haya Stier. Finally, I was privileged to have Maurice Zeitlin as my PhD advisor at UCLA. My debt to him for his generous guidance cannot be settled with a few lines. He will always be a precious source of inspiration and friendship.

I would have never started this study without Amit's encouragement, wisdom, love, and patience, and I would have finished it much earlier if not for our daughter, Anna Rebecca, who chose to arrive during the last stages of the preparation of the manuscript for publication. This book is dedicated with love to both.

Chapter 1

The Making of Fascism: An Overview

> It is a grave mistake to believe that Fascism started out in 1920, or from the March on Rome, with a pre-established, predetermined plan for the dictatorial regime...All the historical facts of Fascism's development contradict such a conception...Fascism was not born totalitarian, it became so...What I have wanted to demonstrate...is that Fascism must not be viewed as something which is definitively characterized; that it must be seen in its development, never as something set, never as a scheme or a model.
>
> Palmiro Togliatti (1935)[1]

This book is an inquiry into the causes of the Fascist seizure of state power in Italy and the crucial process of transition of the Fascists from "contenders" for power into "rulers." The central question, premised on what the late historian Tim Mason (following the National Socialists' slogan) terms the "primacy of politics" (1968), is how did the political strategy of the Italian Fascist organization (*Fasci di Combattimento*) determine its seizure first of provincial power and then of national power (1919-1922)? How, in other words, did the Fascists' political conduct bring about, first, their defeat of the Socialists, and second, their subsequent taking of power?

The empirical and theoretical significance of the question about the Fascist takeover derives from a critique of sociological theories of fascism. These theories—from R. P. Dutt's (1934) pioneering study to contemporary analyses by sociologists such as S. M. Lipset (1963) and B. Moore Jr. (1966)—concentrate on a single common theme or central puzzle: What were the social "origins"[2] and "bases" of fascism? What were the historical preconditions of the emergence of fascist "social movements"? Which classes supported them, and why?

Hence, despite their obvious divergence on substantive theoretical levels and units of analysis, prevailing theories of fascism are bound together by a single paradigm. They share the same essential problem in their conception of the phenomenon of fascism—and this in turn generates what Robert K. Merton terms a "pocket of theoretical neglect." None of these theories attends to the very process of the Fascists' ascendance to power, the specific nature of their concrete political struggles for power, nor their actual practices when in power. The explanations of fascism simply stop too early—when fascism has yet to undergo the metamorphoses of its own development into "complete" fascism. By tending to equate (or conflate) the analytical notion of cause with the historical notion of emergence or origins, this paradigm necessarily assumes that once fascism "emerged," whatever followed that emergence was already predetermined. Thus, once the fascists seized power, they became, by necessity, hostages to the circumstances, relationships, and social bases that had brought them to power. In short, these theories, and the empirical analyses guided by them, are commonly silent about the role of the Fascists themselves in forming their own political organization, in determining both the taking and the practice of political power, and thus the making of Fascism itself.

Theoretically, the prevailing focus on Italian Fascism's origins rests on an implicit conceptual equation between two distinct social and historical processes: the initial emergence of Fascism and its eventual triumph, that is, its successful taking of and consequent practice in power. The Fascists' struggle for power and their seizure of provincial and central state's institutions are taken for granted as, somehow, an immanent necessity once Fascism, and Fascist organizations, emerged historically. Inherent in this conflation is an implicit conception of Fascism as a pregiven, monolithic, and static phenomenon: It is assumed that Fascist organizations had a unified program, and that their members and leaders shared a singular identity from the moment they appeared until they seized power.

This paradigmatic theoretical neglect leads, ironically, to the depiction of the *fasci di combattimento* and the Fascist regime as an epiphenomenon—whether as the product of the crisis of capitalism, the expression of lower-middle class "extremism," or the culmination of an earlier "revolution from above."

This conceptual conflation has led to empirical neglect. By focusing on the sequence *preceding* the initial historical appearance of fascist organizations, what follows this appearance has simply been ignored. Virtually all the theories examined here are based on empirical observations that stop at the period immediately following World War I. This necessarily leads to the neglect of the period of the Fascists' ascendance, and overlooks entirely several decisive determinants of Italian Fascism, namely, its political strategy, form of organization, mode of operation and, most importantly, political alliances.

I will try to address both the theoretical and empirical "silences" in this paradigm. To analyze the making of Fascism (rather than asking why it emerged, who supported it and what produced this support), we must discover how the Fascists in fact took national power. This, in turn, requires asking what political strategy and practices they employed; against whom; and in alliance with whom. What were the consequences? How, in short, was Fascism created in the process of its political struggles? Underlying this question is the proposition that political struggles can themselves be history-making events. The general theoretical issue here is, in short, the "relative autonomy of politics," or "the possible *independent effects of political phenomena in the shaping and transformation of basic social relations*...within the objective limits imposed and the objective alternatives made possible by the existing circumstances" (Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 1989, p. 503, emphasis in original). This, it should be emphasized, does not imply a theory of "voluntarism"—let alone indeterminacy—in which any organization can make facts and transform circumstances. Rather, the specificity of the political strategies employed by these organizations, their actual modus operandi, and the political alliances established in the process shaped both the form and content of the political struggle they waged against their opponents. Eventually, they determined the odds of winning or losing this struggle.

This theoretical premise is closely linked with the method of inquiry. The transformation of Italy's liberal state into a fascist state was not determined by the social and political processes that had led to the Fascist organization's emergence. The real determinants of Fascism can be deciphered and explained only through an analysis of the specific process by which the Fascists, as an organization, fought for power. The unit of analysis, therefore, is not the "voting individual" or the relatively loose association of such individuals into a "social movement." Rather, the appropriate units are active political organizations and parties, with their distinct structural contours, and their individual forms of struggle against each other. These are the features that not only create their own specific identities and determine their political significance, they also transform the political terrain on which their struggles take place. This logic of inquiry requires us to examine the unfulfilled historical possibility that Fascism could have become something else, that is, to ask what were the specific moments of Fascism's creation, and why.

Therefore, focusing on the contingencies of the Fascists' strategy implies a counterfactual question, what Max Weber calls an analysis of other "objective historical possibilities." By necessity, to ask how the Fascists seized state power is to ask what were the historical alternatives to this outcome. Could the Fascist taking of power have concluded in a different manner than it did? If so, what prevented the realization of such possibilities? I attempt to understand the phenomenon of Fascism by focusing on what it became, not on its origins, and on the process of its becoming one type of organization and not another. How, then, did the Fascists' specific struggle for power, their organization's structure, leadership, and policies, affect their takeover of the Liberal state?

Analyzing the specific developments and determinants of the Fascists' strategy reveals an essential paradox in Italian Fascism: The Fascist

organization, per se, had to be transformed, if not completely destroyed, in order to save itself as a political force. This book, then, also seeks to explain how their struggle for state power affected the nature of their own organization. The Fascists' seizure of state power took the form of a dual (external and internal) political struggle. Through this dual struggle, Fascism was constantly creating itself. The Fascists' assault, first, against the Socialist Party (PSI, the *Partito Socialista Italiano*) and the workers organizations, and then against the Liberal government, led to serious friction within the Fascist organization itself. These internal conflicts were, perhaps, the prime reason for the establishment of the Fascist Party (PNF, the *Partito Nazionale Fascista*), the constitution of its program, and the relationship between the Party and the state.[3] The Fascist organization that seized national power after twenty months of violent political struggle was not the same organization, with the same members, structure, ideology, or political objectives, that had initiated and carried out this struggle.

The Fascists seized state power, not through an electoral campaign over the hearts and minds of Italy's electorate but through a violent campaign against the Socialists' provincial strongholds. Nor was the Fascist organization a product of Italy's "historical origins." On the contrary: To consolidate its rule, the Fascist Action Squads (*squadristi*), the militant avant garde cadres of the emergent Fascist organization, had to be subjugated by Benito Mussolini, who had established the Fascist Party essentially for this very purpose.[4] This is the irony of the relationship between Mussolini and his political power base (which the prevailing theories commonly neglect): It was precisely this element of militant radicalism, decisive in the Fascists' seizure of power, that Mussolini had to submerge to preserve Fascist rule.

The following analysis is divided into three parts: The first examines the pre-Fascist agrarian and political relationships among the landlords, the peasants, and the Liberal state, and the threat to the political hegemony of the landlords posed by the Socialist ascendance. The second analyzes the reaction of the landlords, soon supported by the Fascists, against the threat of the Socialists' post-World War I rise to power. Crucial in this struggle was the Fascists' militarization of the political struggle through the employment of an extraparliamentary, paramilitary political strategy. In practice, this strategy was deployed almost exclusively against Socialist Workers Movement institutions. Just as important were their "offensive" alliances with the propertied class and their "defensive" alliances with state officials, both provincial and national. Here I examine the determinants of the Fascists' tactic of violence, the organization and mode of operation of the Action Squads that executed those tactics and, most importantly, the Fascists' allies. The final part examines the political consequences of the Fascists' political strategy. What made it a successful strategy? How did the squads' explicitly anti-Socialist tactic of violence affect their taking of provincial political power? Who were the Fascists' immediate political allies, and what was the role of these allies in the Fascists' seizure of power?

Here the social relationships examined are expanded to include those between the Fascist organization (and its own transformation into a party) and the Liberal state. My main concern in this section is with the collusion of state authorities with Fascist violence, and the effects of the collaboration between the propertied class and the state on the Fascists' seizure of provincial and national power. I also examine the effect of the Fascists' anti-Socialist struggle on the internal relationships evolving within the newly established Fascist Party.

THE FASCISTS' STRUGGLE FOR POWER

The Fascists began organizing the Action Squads in 1920, during the severe social and political crisis that followed the conclusion of World War I. Mussolini and the Fascist leadership, which had suffered a humiliating defeat in the general elections of 1919, set out to make Fascism a military force. This was evident in the leadership's deliberate efforts to recruit ex-servicemen and officers, the organization of these recruits into small combat units (the Action Squads), and the mode of operation ("punitive expeditions" in Clausewitz's terms) employed by these Squads.

Economically, the crisis of 1919-1920 was grave: Severe food and coal shortages, increasing rates of unemployment, new taxes, and soaring rates of inflation led to a wave of food riots and to an unprecedented number of industrial and agricultural strikes throughout the country. From 1918 on, both the number of strikes and the number of workers striking, in industry as well as in agriculture, increased dramatically. The climax of the organized strikes was the occupation of the factories in September 1920, two months before the first postwar local elections. The factory occupation movement spread from Turin to the rest of the country and lasted for three weeks, involving, at its height, half a million workers.

Growing militancy and radicalization of the Socialists accompanied the crisis. Italy's Socialist Party adopted a radical program. Its call for collectivization of land and for participation of industrial workers in factory management seemed, as the Party's leadership itself repeatedly claimed, to be a prelude to a "second Bolshevik revolution" in Italy. The PSI's success in the postwar elections appeared to verify its "revolutionary threat." In the elections of 1919, the Socialists became Italy's largest opposition party, and in the local elections held the following year, they won electoral majorities in twenty-five of the country's sixty-nine provincial councils. The Socialists' greatest victories were in the northern and central regions, where capitalist relations of production prevailed and where masses of wage workers, agricultural and industrial alike, had been engaged in struggles against employers since the turn of the century. These electoral successes, coupled with union militancy, signified the rapid rise of a workers movement led by a political party whose rhetoric called for the use of political violence against the establishment and in favor of the "proletarian dictatorship."

This was an unprecedented challenge to the political system underlying Italy's liberal state. Since unification in 1870, the state had been based on the system of *trasformismo*, the creation of national parliamentary coalitions through clientele relations with local oligarchies. It maintained, protected, and reinforced the domination of the nation's propertied families over the peasants and workers. Men of property possessed exclusive access to state power, and the allegiance between central state officials and the interests of property was taken for granted. The political hegemony of the propertied class remained uncontested until the electoral reforms of 1911 and 1918, when property restrictions on (male) suffrage were removed and new mass parties emerged. After the war, the advent of the Socialists elevated them to office in many communal councils and provincial governments, and often stripped the propertied class of its accustomed direct hold on these institutions.

Postwar Liberal governments attempted to contain the social upheaval by shifting their policies to capture the support of the newly enfranchised electorate of workers and peasants. But the social reforms enacted by these postwar governments led, in turn, to a crisis among Italy's propertied class and major employers. Responding to what they saw as the abdication of their own political leadership and facing an unprecedented wave of workers insurgency, employers' associations abandoned their customary political methods and began an internal organization drive aimed against the workers movement. Leaders of the employers' organizations blamed the state for "conniving with the Bolsheviks." They were convinced, as the president of the National Agrarian Association declaimed, that "the government was in no way able to guarantee us the respect for property or persons...Respect for authority and for the law...is now totally lacking" (cited in Corner 1975, p. 108, n. 2).

The reaction of the propertied class to the Socialists' postwar ascendance, especially the direct power acquired in many provincial and communal governments, was crucial in the development of the Fascists' political strategy. In the fall of 1920, the landowners of the northern regions turned to the Fascist Squads and requested that they act on their behalf against the Socialist organizers. This was the beginning of a strong, personal, and violent alliance between the regional landowners' associations and the Fascist Squads. While the industrialists supported the Fascists mainly through financial contributions, the landowners' associations in the north embraced Fascism *tout court*. Their unqualified and systematic support of the Fascists eventually led to an official convergence between their associations and local chapters of the Fascist organization. In addition to massive financial assistance, northern landowners actively supported and were directly involved in organizing the Fascists' local chapters or *nuclei* (*fasci*); moreover, they participated and often led the Squads' "punitive expeditions" into Socialist provinces. The Fascists' paramilitary capacity, together with the financial patronage of the landowners, combined to create a unique political strategy and to determine the pattern of its deployment.

The Fascists' violent attacks on Socialist strongholds began immediately after the local elections of 1920, and lasted for twenty-two months, until Mussolini's appointment as Prime Minister in the fall of 1922. The Squads' campaign of "punitive expeditions" throughout Italy's provinces almost invariably resulted in the complete destruction of the workers organizations. The Fascists marched through townships and villages; they intimidated and assaulted striking workers, transported and protected strikebreakers, and burned union halls and Socialist headquarters, which were replaced by the new Fascist unions, the National Syndicates. They attacked local labor leaders, Socialist mayors, trade union organizers, and other working class activists, and forced them to resign, sent them into exile, or killed them. The terrorized population was then forced to join the National Syndicates, and to comply with the rule of the Squads' commanders, who became provincial strongmen. By May 1921, only six months after these expeditions had been initiated, more than two hundred workers had been killed and over a thousand wounded. Over two thousand workers had been arrested. By the fall of 1922, the Fascists had installed their own regimes in all of Italy's sixty-nine provinces.

The Fascist strategy based on this dual mobilization—the formation of the Action Squads and their alliance with the propertied class—was first and foremost an anti-Socialist reaction. This alliance dictated that the Fascists would almost exclusively attack the Socialist provincial strongholds that posed the greatest threat to propertied interests. The provinces under the control of the Liberal Party and its propertied constituency remained virtually untouched by the Fascists. Indeed, the Fascists' tactic of violence was, as one of its leaders described it, "the systematic work of destruction of everything Bolshevik," that is, the elimination of the most stringent Socialist strongholds in the country.

The Socialists were at their strongest, both organizationally and electorally, in the north and center of the country; they were barely present in the south. Each of these regions displayed substantially different basic class relations, especially those prevailing on the land: in the north, capitalist employment of wage labor on a large scale in the countryside and in the towns; in the center, a mix of sharecropping and wage labor; and in the south, seigniorial tenantry. There is, then, a close association between the region, the incidence of Fascist violence, and the number of provinces taken over by the Fascists.

Once the Squads achieved their immediate aim—the destruction of the Socialist organizational structure and the murder of many of its leaders and cadres—the question of how their violence affected the Fascists' actual takeover of provincial political power needs to be examined. There is an essential difference between the effects of violence as a target-specific tactic of destruction, intimidation, and terror, and its strategic value as a means of achieving political control. In contrast to the destruction of the workers' organizations, which affected the Socialist leadership and its working-class constituency almost exclusively, the Fascists' takeover of provincial power

affected the political and economic life of the province as a whole, including the position of the propertied class.

Therefore, an understanding of the determinants of the Fascist deployment of violence tells us little about its political consequences. To turn the Socialists' defeat in a one-sided civil war into Fascist political power, the Fascists, again, decisively, needed not only the continued support of the propertied class, but the collusion of local and central state authorities, too.

The Fascist takeover of provincial power occurred in three phases: (1) the destruction of workers organizations; (2) the establishment of Fascist economic organizations, the National Syndicates, and the use of force when recruiting workers (they thereby attempted to restore traditional labor relations in the provinces; the Syndicates, like the Squads' deployment of violence, were sponsored by—and thus dependent on—the collaboration of local employers' organizations); and (3) the Fascists' takeover of provincial political institutions. The final phase was determined both by the collusion of Liberal state authorities and by the support of the dominant class. Nationally, the collusion of the Liberal government culminated in Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti's May 1921 invitation to the Fascists to join the ruling coalition. The Fascists thus became partners in the electoral National Bloc led by the Liberal Party. The incorporation of the Fascists into the "parties of order," and the national patronage and legitimacy that came with it, won their organization (which was still not formally a party) thirty-five deputies in the May 1921 elections to the Parliament. Figure 1.1 schematically represents the process while Table 1.1 shows the relationship between violence and the Fascist takeovers.

The Fascists' seizure of provincial power was led by the *ras*,[5] the leaders of the Squads' "punitive expeditions." Finally, in twenty-six of the country's sixty-nine provinces, the *ras* took power and set up their own "local tyrannies." These provincial takeovers occurred in the span of mere eighteen months, from the first wave of takeovers in May 1921 through October 1922, when the Fascists moved their extraparliamentary, paramilitary political struggle to the national level. Faced with Mussolini's threat of a *coup de main*, the so-called "March on Rome," King Emmanuel III invited him to become premier.

The collusion of the state authorities was determined by the Fascists' "offensive alliances" with the propertied class, and the latter's continuing political hegemony. In spite of the political transformations that followed World War I, the Socialists' electoral power in the provinces was limited, and the propertied class retained its power in the liberal state's executive branch and bureaucracy, as well as continued to control government policies in the provinces. This was a consequence of the Socialists' political strategy and of the persistence of *trasformismo*, especially Giovanni Giolitti's reliance on the traditional method of clientelism. By refusing to join Giolitti's "bourgeois" government, the Socialist Party limited the arena of its legal national political struggle to parliamentary opposition while it concentrated on building its organization and agitation in the northern provinces.

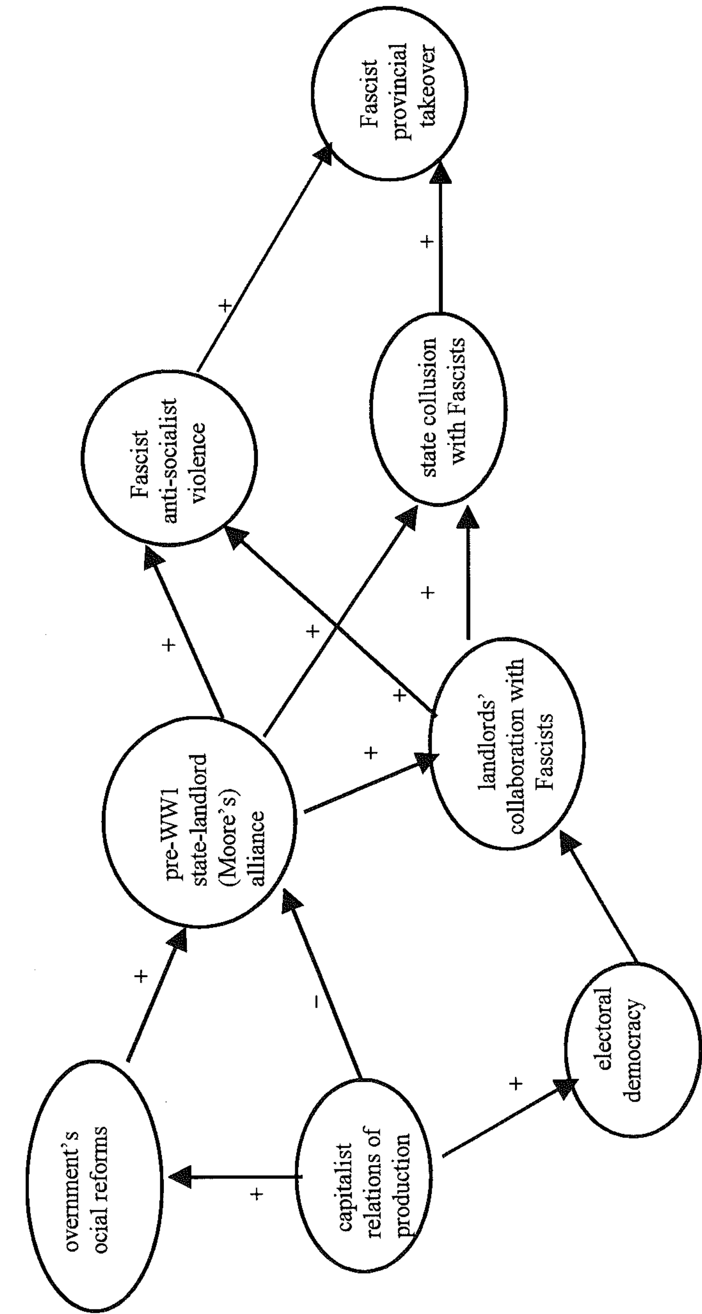

Figure 1.1
Analytical Model of the Fascists' Seizure of Power in Italy's Provinces (1920-1922)

Table 1.1
Incidents of Violence and Fascist Takeovers in Italy's Provinces, by Region

Region	Violent Incidents	Fascist Takeovers
North		
Alessandria	21	X*
Belluno	2	
Bergamo	1	
Bologna	73	X
Brescia	6	
Como	10	
Cremona	13	X
Cuneo	3	
Ferrara	49	X
Forli	4	
Genoa	14	X
Mantova	42	X
Milan	18	X
Modena	93	X
Novara	21	X
Padova	39	
Parma	18	
Pavia	49	
Piacenza	29	X
Porto Maurizio	1	
Ravenna	10	X
Reggio Emilia	41	X
Rovigo	79	X
Sandino	0	
Treviso	5	
Turin	13	
Udine	10	
Venice	22	
Verona	29	
Vicenza	15	
Center		
Ancona	6	
Arezzo	–	X
Ascoli Piceno	7	
Florence	8	X
Grosseto	2	X
Livorno	13	X
Lucca	12	X
Macerata	3	
Messa Carrara	3	X
Perugia	74	X
Pesaro Urbino	7	X
Pisa	44	X
Rome	15	
Siena	15	X

Region	Violent Incidents	Fascist Takeovers
South		
Aquila, Abbruzzi	7	
Avellino	1	
Barri Apulia	30	X
Benevento	0	
Cagliari	4	
Caltanissetta	1	
Campobasso	–	
Caserta	8	
Catania	2	
Catanzaro	4	
Chieti	7	
Cosenza	1	
Foggia	15	X
Girgenti	6	
Lecce	14	
Messina	1	
Napoli	5	
Palermo	0	
Potenza	4	
Reggio Calabria	2	
Salermo	0	
Sessari	1	
Siracuse	14	
Teramo	7	
Trapani	0	

*X=The province was taken over by the Fascists.

Sources: De Felice, R. *Mussolini il fascista Vol. II*, 1966, pp. 167; Lyttleton, A. *The Seizure of Power, Fascism in Italy, 1919-1929*, 1987, pp. 444-45.

Thus, the Socialists failed to use their substantial representation in Parliament to gain access to the state's executive powers. In addition, local state authorities, which remained staffed by the propertied class and loyal to its interests, were hostile to the Socialists—that hostility antedated, by decades, the emergence of the Fascist organization. So, once an alliance was forged between the propertied class and the Fascists, the authorities' hostility to the Socialists was easily turned into full-blown collaboration with the Squads.

The authorities' collaboration with the Fascists was crucial in the latter's seizure of power. Italy's government, led by the Liberal Party, assisted the Fascists first passively, by its absence from the scene of struggle, and later actively, by taking the Fascists into its governing parliamentary coalition. Thus, the Liberal government legitimized both the Squads' extraparliamentary strategy and the political achievements the Fascist organization gained from it.

However, the Liberal government not only generally failed to defend the legally constituted Socialist governments under Fascist siege, they even aided and abetted the Fascists. Ministerial decrees proclaimed the dissolution of provincial Socialist governments and discharged prefects who opposed the Fascists for being alleged "accomplices of the Bolsheviks." The Liberal government replaced these prefects and provincial governments with commissioners favorable both to the Fascists and to the employers' organizations.

But, as mentioned earlier, the Fascists' paramilitary strategy, especially the Squads' use of violence, affected not only their own political fortunes but also the nature of their organization itself. An analysis of the specific character and development of this strategy allows us to reconstruct a decisive phase of the process in which Fascism itself was invented. From its inception in early 1919, the Fascist organization experienced several internal conflicts that led to significant changes in the composition of its membership, its leadership, and its program. The factions within the organization created during and by the struggle for power developed their own distinct social bases of support, independent financial and political alliances and, in consequence, distinct and even conflicting political objectives. A new Fascist cadre emerged, composed of the leaders of the Squads' expeditions and the new provincial strongmen. As Angelo Tasca puts it: "Men who have killed together, burned houses, terrorized whole country-sides could not stop or separate. To commit crimes at top speed became a law...The bond uniting the aggressors was not their own blood, which was seldom spilled, but the blood of their victims" ([1938] 1966, pp. 180-81).

Bound together by this "unifying effect of violence," as Tasca calls it, the intransigent faction was both a prime mover behind the Fascists' political strategy and its major beneficiary within the Fascist organization. The violence of the *squadristi*, one of the main components in the Fascists' political strategy, enhanced their influence on the organization's leadership and program. But this "spirit of violence" did not go uncontested, nor did the influence of the propertied class on Fascist provincial leaders and, through them, on the

Fascists' organization. Two specific and at times even dramatic internal debates in the Fascist organization—the first, the Pact of Pacification with the Socialists, and the second, the transformation of the Fascist organization into a party—exemplify the rupture in the organization. In these debates, the Fascists were split between "intransigent" Squads and "moderates", or "revisionists." The "intransigents" objected to the Pact and demanded the takeover of the state by the Party. The revisionists, represented by the intellectual and urban elements, demanded that the Party be subordinated to the authority of the state to permit collaboration with the existing state bureaucracy and elements of the old ruling classes that were now supportive of the Fascists. Eventually, the revolutionary Syndicalists and ex-Socialists, who were among the founders of the original Milan *fascio* in 1919, opposed this turn to the Right and soon left the organization.

Thus, the Fascists who eventually seized national power after twenty months of violent political struggle were not the same men who had initiated this struggle. How, then, did these internals struggles and factions affect the nature of the Fascist organization? What issues divided them? What determined the intransigents' ascendancy within the Fascist Party and their unique relations with Mussolini?

The prevailing theoretical assumption that the Fascist takeover is but a linear continuation of the movement's emergence overlooks this internal ideological and social differentiation among the Fascists themselves. The destruction of "provincial Fascism," that is, of the Fascist "mini-states" that had been established in northern Italy during the first years of the organization's struggle for power, was a crucial condition for the establishment of the national Fascist state. These strongholds constituted a major political force in Italy's numerous provincial and local governments, and subsequently served as springboards for the Fascist seizure of state power. At a certain stage, however, they became an impediment to the consolidation of the Fascist Party and its regime. This is the paradox that characterizes the relationship between Mussolini and his political power base: The militant radicalism of the Squads that had gained power for Mussolini now hindered his efforts to consolidate Fascist state power.[6]

The Fascists' seizure of power was neither the authentic representation of the social interests of a "mass base" nor a mere repercussion of Italy's "route" to capitalism. If Barrington Moore, Jr. (1966) is correct in stating that the specific relationship between Italy's landlords and the central state affected their general stance toward the Fascists, this did not in itself determine what the Fascists in fact did to achieve their support and later win power. Neither the Fascists' actions nor the consequences of their actions were somehow predetermined historically. The Fascist Squads set out to defeat the Socialist insurgency in Italy's postwar crisis. This led to their alliance with the propertied class that, in turn, was the main determinant of the state's collusion with the Fascists. Supported by organized landlords and blessed with the authorities' indulgence,

the Fascists were able to destroy—both physically and politically—the legitimately constituted Socialist provincial governments and install their own regimes instead.

On the heels of the establishment of Fascist regimes in most of Italy's northern provinces, the Fascists moved their struggle to the national level. This culminated in Mussolini's threat of a "March on Rome" in the fall of 1922 and the decision by King Emmanuel III, in October of that year, to install him as prime minister. The Fascists' strategy and concrete practices had relatively independent effects, given Italy's "route" to capitalism, in determining their own political victory and the triumph of Fascism.

NOTES

1. The word *fascio* means simply "combination." Its origin lies in the bundle of elm or birch rods bound about the lector's ax, the emblem of the authority of the Roman state, or from Aesopos' fable about the father who proved the strength of union to his sons by showing them how individually weak sticks can become an unbreakable bundle. The word had been used in Italy by various political and social associations of, for example, peasants and agricultural laborers, in the late nineteenth century, long before the emergence of Fascism.

The terms *fascisti* and *fascismo* were also current at the end of World War I and used to designate a wide range of political and social movements (Lyttelton 1987, p. 456, n.1). Until the formal establishment of the Fascist Party in 1921, the Fascists were known as the "*fasci di combattimento*." In what follows I use a lower case "f" for "fascist" or "fascists" when I refer to the generic political phenomenon, and an upper case "F" for "Fascist" and "Fascists" when I refer to the Italian political organization.

2. I use the term "origins" in the limited sense offered by the historian Vivarelli: "the actual circumstances owing to which the fascist phenomenon came to life" (1991a, p. 29).

3. These struggles and debates were to continue after the seizure of power, with the "intransigent" faction demanding the total takeover of the state's institutions by the Fascist Party, and their rivals, the "revisionists."

4. The task I set for myself in this study, to examine the effects of the political strategies in the transformation of Italy's regime and state, requires I minimize the role played by Mussolini in the Fascists' rise to power. This surely is not to say that his leadership, persona, political beliefs, and personal qualities were irrelevant to the events examined here. There are abundant studies on Mussolini, his own autobiography, and biographies written by friends, lovers, and foes, as well as authoritative studies by historians. See, for example, Mussolini 1928; Sarfatti 1925; Mack Smith 1981; and De Felice's voluminous biography (1965, 1966, 1968).

5. This was the name the *squadristi* adopted from the term for Ethiopian chieftains.

6. Indeed, "provincial Fascism" was destroyed during 1925-1928 by Mussolini and his revisionist allies, who successfully conducted a purge of the Fascist Party. The political crisis over the assassination of Giacommo Matteotti, a Socialist opposition leader, in June 1924 marked the low point of the Fascist grip on the state as well as of Mussolini's control of the Party. The intransigents—who blamed Mussolini for the "Matteotti crisis"—rebelled against his attempt to rule through a parliamentary

coalition. They demanded that he establish a dictatorship and eliminate all parliamentary opposition.