The Meaning of Fascism in Italy Today: Fifty Years After the Fall

PHILIP V. CANNISTRARO
Queens College, City University of New York

Editor's Note: *These essays, begun in the last issue, are the final ones under the guest editorship of Distinguished Professor of Italian American Studies Philip V. Cannistraro. Guest editorships were initiated to reflect the diversity of opinion in the Italian American community.*

The debate over the place of fascism in Italian history was rekindled in 1994, when Gianfranco Fini's Alleanza Nazionale movement was included in a coalition government under the leadership of Silvio Berlusconi, thus rekindling the fears of some observers that fascism would return. The most recent Italian elections, however, have quieted this uneasiness as the Italian electorate seems to have, at least temporarily, rejected the Fascist legacy. Which position is justified?

This collection of essays on "The Meaning of Fascism in Italy Today" was designed to probe both the historical importance of the Fascist experience and the future of neo-fascism in Italian politics. In the first three essays in this series, historians Claudio Segrè and Alexander De Grand joined with Italian journalist Furio Colombo to debate the question. While Segrè found that "the potential for fascism is always with us, always within us," De Grand argued for the importance of historical continuity—that is, that fascism incorporated much from pre-Fascist Italy and that there was a continuity of institutions and values from the Fascist era into the postwar republic. Colombo, on the other hand, believes that fascism is no longer a viable alternative for Italy, but that it can assume "new faces" in other societies because "the raw material" of fascism still exists.

In the concluding segment of this series, Italian historian Emilio Gentile explores the relationship between nationalism and fascism, while political scientist Mary Volcansek examines the role of the neo-Fascist movement in postwar Italy.

Confronting Modernity: Italian Radical Nationalism in the 20th Century

Emilio Gentile

Emilio Gentile is Professor of Political Parties and Movements at the University of Rome, La Sapienza. One of Italy's best known experts on modern Italian history, Gentile has published numerous ground-breaking works on the Fascist era, including La Voce e l'età giolittiana, Mussolini e La Voce, L'Italia giolittiana, Le origini dell'ideologia fascista, and the first of a two-volume study, *Storia del partito fascista. His most recent book, soon to appear in English with Harvard, is* Il culto del Littorio: La sacralizzazione della politica nell'Italia fascista.

After the 1994 national elections in Italy, for the first time the Italian Social Movement (MSI) became a strong component of a parliamentary majority. Some representatives of the Alleanza Nazionale, an electoral alliance whose leader, Gianfranco Fini, was the general secretary of the MSI, were members of the government led by Silvio Berlusconi. Since its foundation in 1946, the MSI claimed to be the heir of fascism. During the electoral campaign, however, the party did not stress its fascist roots. Nevertheless, only a few days after his party's victory, Fini glorified Mussolini as "the greatest statesman of this century."

These events spread fear about the resurgence of fascism, evoking extreme nationalism, authoritarianism, political violence, xenophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism. Foreign observers regarded the MSI electoral success as a potential threat to liberal democracy and a symptom of the revival of ultra-nationalism in many countries. Historians and political scientists have been besieged by journalists craving comments about the risk of a new fascist threat.

Historians do not have any particular gift for making predictions, but they may help people to understand current events by putting them in perspective. My purpose is to outline the ideological and political permutations of Italian right-wing radicalism in its historical development.

Italy was the first country after World War I in which a mass militia party of revolutionary nationalism achieved power, abolished parliamentary democracy, and aimed to build a totalitarian state. It was also the first country in Western Europe to institutionalize the power of mythical thought, to affirm the "secularization of politics," and to celebrate officially the cult of the leader as a superman. Since World War

II, Italy has been the democratic country with the biggest neo-fascist party, whose representatives are elected to Parliament and in local councils.

These events are not accidental. They prove that radical nationalism has a long tradition in Italian politics, a tradition that includes harbingers of fascism in the Giolittian era, such as the nationalist and Futurist avant-garde, to and including contemporary neo-fascism. Though they are not identical in ideas, organizations, and politics, ideological undercurrents and cultural motifs unite all these movements.

Fascist ideology availed itself of the new political culture of radical nationalism that had already had an important part in Italian life when the fascist movement arose. Nonetheless, the ideas and myths of radical nationalism cannot be considered as "proto-fascist," because some of them led to constellations of ideas quite different from fascist totalitarianism. The same currents of political culture are in the background of fascist ideology as in the background of anti-fascist ideologies emerging in the 1920s and 1930s. Consequently, I do not think that it is historically correct to assert the existence of a fascist ideology before World War I.

I shall distinguish three phases in the history of radical nationalism: the modernist, the fascist, and the neo-fascist phases. With the term "fascism," I shall refer only to historical Italian fascism. I shall use the term "neo-fascism" to label those postwar movements that: (a) claim to be the heirs of fascism, (b) assert that the fascist regime was a positive experience in Italian history, (c) praise fascism as a valid ideology that can still provide solutions to the problems of modern society. I prefer a restrictive use of these terms to avoid the inflation of "generic fascism." Fascism was an historical phenomenon. To assert the existence of "eternal fascism" means that we have left the realm of history for the realm of words as ideological idols.

The first three decades of this century were the cradle of ideologies and political movements, both of the left and the right, from which stemmed the essentials of Italian political culture. This period was the seedbed of most political myths of Italian right-wing radicalism.

Radical nationalism was a peculiar motif of the Italian avant-garde, the driving force of the political modernism that accompanied the dynamic of modernization in Italy. By political modernism I mean those political ideologies that try to make human beings capable of mastering modernization in order not to be overwhelmed by the vortex of modernity. The movements of the Italian avant-garde share a

cluster of myths and beliefs which make up the ideological and cultural core of Italian nationalism. They assert the primacy of the nation as a spiritual reality and as supreme value in collective life. They extol the authority of the national state as an organic community led by an aristocracy of men endowed with spiritual energy. These movements, moreover, despise rationalism and criticism and praise the power of myth and faith as spiritual forces uniting the nation and driving it to heroic deeds. Before World War I, these movements gave birth to a radical challenge of parliamentary democracy, one in which alternative visions of modernity were aligned in a common front against rationalist, liberal, and bourgeois modernity. In fact, the attitude toward modernity and modernization is one of the main clues in understanding the permutations of Italian radical nationalism.

The attitude of Italian nationalism toward modernization is quite different from that of other European nationalist movements. The confrontation between nationalism and modernity gave birth to what I call "modernist nationalism." This term defines a state of mind, a sensibility, a cultural orientation centered on the myth of the nation. The principal characteristic of "modernist nationalism" was the acceptance of modern life as an era of irreversible transformations that were affecting society, consciousness, and human sensibility, and that were preparing conditions for the rise of new forms of collective life. Modernist nationalism accepted both modernization and mass society and aimed at molding them to achieve the unity and the power of the nation within the framework of a new state.

The myth of the new state synthesized the aspirations of young middle-class intellectuals and politicians to create a national state appealing to the masses. They wanted to modernize the Italian state by nationalizing the masses and giving Italians a sense of national solidarity by reconciling the classes; they wanted to modernize and industrialize the country so that it might participate in world politics.

The Italian avant-garde movements, such as the groups around *Leonardo* and *La Voce,* Futurism, revolutionary syndicalism, and the Nationalist Association, all shared a common note of modernist nationalism, which manifested itself in what I have elsewhere called the "myth of Italianism," a conviction that Italy was destined to have a role as a great protagonist and exercise a civilizing mission. These movements believed in the necessity of revolution, a radical process of moral, cultural, and political regeneration. Many of the young believed that to synthesize nationalism and modernity it was necessary

to forge a "total personality," a "new man" and a "new culture." This idea of the new culture permitted a perfect rationalization of the youthful longing for a national revolution led by an aristocracy of intellectuals with the mission to create the "new Italian."

Many champions of the new state thought it would represent progress toward collective forms of a freer and more responsible life for the individual and the masses. Such, for instance, was the hope of Giovanni Amendola, one representative intellectual of radical nationalism who became later the leader of the anti-fascist opposition. Amendola thought that liberal democracy and mass society could coexist within the framework of a new state whose main goal would be to emphasize the nation and to improve civic freedom and responsibility.

Fascism promised to save men and women from the conflicts of modernity, unifying them in a moral community cemented by a political religion.

Many supporters of the new state considered that the Italian liberal regime was an antiquated oligarchy, powerless against anti-national forces and unfit to play an active role in national development. Parliament and parties were despised as the instruments of a weak and decaying bourgeoisie and of professional politicians. The Nationalist Association, developed between 1902 and 1914 and later fused with the Fascist Party, elaborated a genuinely authoritarian paradigm of the new state. Liberalism, in its view, was in contradiction with modern life and required new forms of authoritarianism. Liberal democracy based on the rational conception of politics, on individual rights, and on compromise aiming to reconcile contrasting interests, was considered out of date in the age of mass society. The nationalist Alfredo Rocco, the future architect of the fascist state, already had worked out a radical alternative to the liberal state in order to restrict individual rights and destroy liberalism and socialism.

The Great War and its consequences brought about the "fascist" synthesis of a new conception of politics, drawing on the heritage of modernist nationalism, interventionism, and the myth of the war experience. Many intellectuals of the nationalist avant-gardes supported Italian intervention. The myth of palingenetic violence—through war or revolution—is part of the cultural heritage of modernist nationalism. What sparked the interventionism of many young intellectuals was the conviction that Italy, to achieve modern greatness, would have

to pass through a bloody experience of war and contribute to the creation of a new civilization. A positive conception of war in the life of the nation was predominant throughout the new national culture. The new Italian was supposed to be shaped through an heroic pedagogy that created a spirit of sacrifice, discipline, readiness for combat, the sublimation of the individual to the national collectivity. These elements formed the new national ethics based on the cult of the heroic in an atmosphere of myth and epic, which is still predominant in the contemporary new radical right.

The Great War popularized modernist nationalism among the fighting masses. It created a new collective nationalist mentality by means of the comradeship of the trenches, the exaltation of national solidarity and discipline, hero worship and the veneration for the fallen, the glorification of leadership and hierarchy based on courage and efficiency. War worked as an element of fusion between right and left-wing national radicalism. Its most interesting result, in the context of the making of fascism, was the nationalization of some segments of revolutionary syndicalism. Since the eve of the war, national syndicalism had become a movement that suggested the ideology of the "third way," beyond right and left, capitalism and socialism. The myth of national revolution had a strong anti-conservative meaning for most veterans and young people, who wanted to seize power and reconcile the productive bourgeoisie and the working class in the name of the new Italy.

Fascist modernism sought to realize a new synthesis between tradition and modernity, without renouncing modernization to realize national power. For its part, fascism claimed to have invented a new formula for society capable of saving Western civilization from industrialism, mechanism, urbanism, utilitarianism and materialism. This formula, however, insisted on the renunciation of individualism and freedom in the name of the primacy of the national collectivity as organized by the totalitarian state.

Fascism defined its own myth of the new state calling for absolute political supremacy and total domination of society. The realization of this fascist myth could already be discerned in the fascist party, with its military organization, its style of action, and its terroristic methods, all of which contributed to shape its idea of the totalitarian state. The fascist armed party is the embryo of the totalitarian state, which derived its characteristics from the experience of the fascist squads. Fascists consider themselves the armed militia of an integralist and

intolerant political religion to be imposed on all Italians. Once in power, they did not hesitate to adopt discriminatory laws, such as the racist and anti-Semitic laws of 1938, to persecute the so-called "enemies of the nation." Though Fascism was not anti-Semitic in its essence, racism and anti-Semitism were attitudes quite consistent with its totalitarian mind.

The fascist state aimed to organize the citizens throughout their life and to mold human nature to its own ends. The closely knit network of fascist organizations, from the party to the trade unions, wanted to possess and absorb every aspect of Italian public and private life. In this way, fascism promised to save men and women from the conflicts of modernity, unifying them in a moral community cemented by a political religion. The sacralization of politics was a peculiar feature of the fascist state. By its very nature the totalitarian state had to assume the character of a sacred institution, with rituals and symbols totally enclosing man in his material and moral reality, because only by these means was it possible to involve the individual and the masses morally in the mystical body of the totalitarian community.

Fascists looked on the totalitarian state as the new order capable of solving the economic, social, and spiritual problems of modern society, of reconciling order and change, of achieving a dynamic synthesis between tradition and modernity. In the totalitarian state, the individual and the masses, who had been raised in the ethics of sacrifice and dedication to the national community, were sheltered from the corruption of hedonistic materialism and the alienation of modern life.

Fascists were convinced that their will could rise above all limitations and resistance to mold reality and the nature of man in the image of its own myth. Following this aim, fascism led the Italians to World War II. It wanted to conquer new countries and spread all over the New Europe the empire of the totalitarian "new civilization." What fascism really achieved was suffering, death, and destruction. That was eventually the failure of a utopia, whose purpose had been to solve the conflict of modernity by sacrificing open society to the primacy of a modern Leviathan.

During the first half of the century, radical nationalism was a rising movement that appealed both to intellectuals and the masses. It gave birth to a new regime and reached its highest power in the first years of World War II with the Nazi domination of Europe. But the defeat of fascism marked a watershed in the history of radical nationalism. It lost both its power and its appeal.

The fall of fascism ruined the prestige of the nation-state as supreme values in collective life. After twenty years of nationalist intoxication, the collective national feeling has steadily declined in Italy. Today, the only popular expression of a collective national identity is confined to parades celebrating the victories of the Italian soccer team. Today the Italians are believed to have almost lost their national identity. One reason is the identification of the very idea of the nation with fascist and neo-fascist nationalism. Consequently, every nationalist and even patriotic ideology has been discredited. The parties that have dominated the political life of Italy after the fall of fascism, such as the Christian Democrats, Communism, or Socialism, did not recognize the preeminence of the nation as essential to their ideologies. To most Italians, nationalism and even patriotism sound out of date. As a result, the monopoly of national and patriotic myth and symbols has been left to neo-fascists, who claim to be the only Italians who hold dear to national tradition, worshipping the nation and putting the interest of the nation-state above all particular interests.

Since the end of World War II, radical nationalism has been marginalized. It completely lost its influence on the broad masses and on intellectuals. Fascist ideology, however, was not totally eradicated. Though the Republican constitution outlawed fascist parties, the MSI originally defined its identity as the heir of historical fascism. Most of its leaders have been minor intellectuals or officials of the fascist regime and in the puppet fascist government during the Nazi occupation, the Italian Social Republic. Its youngest members, who had not directly experienced the fascist period, had been attracted by its zealous sense of nationalism, by its idealistic activism, and by the revolutionary and anti-democratic mythology. To establish its ideology, neo-fascism drew from fascist tradition, but the predominant motif has long been nostalgia: nostalgia for the lost fascist grandeur, the lost colonial empire, the lost genius of the Duce. Neo-fascist identity had been grounded more in emotional than ideological and historical motifs. Neo-fascists thought of themselves as true believers of the religion of the nation, who had passed through terrible ordeals and were ostracized in a world of turncoats and infidels. This self-image still marks the identity of most ultra-right militants and of the MSI.

Many essential elements of fascist culture, along with anticommunism, antiliberalism, antiparliamentarianism, and antiegalitarianism survived the humiliating defeat of fascist ambitions. The ideological core of Italian radical nationalism has remained almost unchanged

from modernist nationalism to the present neo-fascist permutations. One might just mention the spiritual idea of life, the primacy of mythical thought, the role of the nation as organic totality, the idea of a strong State, the worshipping of heroic fighting minorities, the myth of revolution as national palyngenesis, the pretension to be a "third way" from both capitalism and communism. To this core, neo-fascism added, among other things, the belief in the cultural and racial primacy of the so-called European nation and the neo-socialist idea of the workers' national State intended as the promoter of a partnership between employees and employers.

Although the MSI's radical nationalism has never denied its fascist roots, it has not accepted its heritage completely. The militia party, the totalitarian State, the new civilization, and the mania for mass organizations were buried under the rubble of the fascist regime. There is another remarkable difference. The strengthening of liberal democracies, the expansion of technology, the mass conformity to fashion and the search for well-being have radically changed the nationalist perception of modernity. As we have seen, modernist nationalism and fascism both perceived modernity as an epoch of expansion dominated by the will to power of young nations run by new elites. They also aimed to modernize the country in order to hurl Italy into international struggle and to conquer a new empire. They did not oppose mass society and technology but wanted to tame and use them for the nation's greatness.

Among neo-Fascists, the prevailing attitude towards modernity is a defensive one. Neo-Fascists have no enthusiasm for modernity, which they consider to be an epoch of corruption and degeneration dominated by mass conformity, materialistic cultures, the machine, egalitarianism, and denationalizing cosmopolitanism. Today, after the fall of communism, Americanism has become the main enemy for most neo-Fascists, such as the left wing of the MSI led by Pino Rauti, who denounces the moral contagion engendered by the "American way of life." They identify modernity with Americanism, that is materialism, hedonism, the cult of wealth, ruthless capitalism, urban neurosis, and dehumanizing technology that transforms human beings into cogs in a machine. Right-wing radicalism flees from modernity towards an ideal world remote from mass society and technology. Such an ideal world is dreamed up as the mythical tradition of archaic civilization rules by an aristocracy of worriers, the Nordic sagas or the fantasy world of Ronald Tolkien.

Because the MSI represented all neo-fascist opinions, its politics wavered between conservatism and radicalism, between the tendency to integrate itself into the parliamentary system and the tendency to present itself as the sole radical alternative to the system. But in the last decade, the MSI was gradually integrated into the parliamentary system. The participation of the MSI in the parliamentary majority that supported the Berlusconi's government was the climax of this process. At the same time, the MSI ceased to be regarded by ultra-right militants as the sole heir of fascism. Since the seventies, Italian neo-fascism has consisted of a myriad of political, cultural and even terroristic factions, such as New Order and National Vanguard, stemming together from fascist roots or neonazism, often opposing the MSI's politics as too conservative. Young right-wing radicals moreover, have been strident critics of the MSI's cult of the fascist past. This is the case of the New Right, a splinter-group founded in the early eighties opposing the MSI's leader Giorgio Almirante, claiming that it was necessary for right-wing radicalism "to come out of the fascist tunnel" and to confront modern reality. They assert, like the French Nouvelle Droit, the primacy of "metapolitical culture" instead of political extremism and define themselves as anti-authoritarian, accepting political pluralism and tolerance towards adversaries. Their strategy is to conquer consent in civil society instead of political power, aiming to build up a new national "Gemeinschaft" by stressing the role of sacred values experienced through myths, rites, and festivals while minimizing the State and mass organizations as means to improve national identity. They fight against the Americanization of the world and the capitalist consumer society. One might characterize this new right as post-modern right-wing "political existentialism" to distinguish it from the political modernism of fascism. On the opposing side of this New Right, there are fringe-groups of rightist extremists identifying themselves as Nazi-skins, whose ideology combines nationalist extremism with the Nazi-inspired idea of racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia. They are criminals devoting themselves to violence against African immigrants and Jews.

The MSI hastened to dissociate itself from these extremists, condemning political violence, antisemitism and xenophobia, but until recently the party had never denied its fascist roots. In the 1988 national congress, Fini declared that only fascism was a valuable ideology able to give valid solutions to present problems. Since the foundation of the National Alliance, however, the MSI ceased to vindicate the fas-

cist heritage, and its leaders claimed that to label their party and the minister of National Alliance in the Berlusconi government as "neo-fascist" was unfair. They described themselves as a "post-fascist" party, which accepts parliamentary democracy and repudiates anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia. Alessandra Mussolini, the dictator's granddaughter and MSI deputy, said: "We are a right-wing movement, even revolutionary, in a democratic sense. The term fascism that the foreign press keeps using to describe us has been consigned to history. Fascism was a very important part of history that cannot be demonized but no one is longing to introduce it into Italy today." This process of change culminated at the XVII national convention of the MSI, held in January 1995. By the largest majority of the militants, the conference decided to transform the old neo-fascist party into a new rightist, democratic party, the National Alliance. The new party renounces the facist heritage, repudiates any form of dictatorship and totalitarianism, condemns political violence, xenophobia, and racism and accepts freedom and democracy as indispensable to modern society. Only a tiny minority, led by Pino Rauti, opposed the metamorphosis and seceded from the National Alliance to remain faithful to the fascist heritage.

Although one must be cautious about any extemporaneous political conversion, the birth of the National Alliance represents a turning point in the history of radical nationalism in Italy. And I agree with the aged and highly respected Italian anti-Fascists who deny that Italy is facing the risk of a fascist or neo-fascist resurgence.

Post-Fascism and the Italian Experience

Mary L. Volcansek

Mary L. Volcansek is Professor of Political Science at Florida International University in Miami. A specialist in contemporary European judicial systems, her books include Judicial Politics in Europe, Judicial Selection: The Cross-Evolution of French and American Practices *(with L. Lafon), and most recently,* Judicial Impeachment *(1993). A long-time observer of the Italian political scene, Dr. Volcansek is currently in Florence, Italy, where she holds a Jean Monnet Fellowship.*

Fascism has demonstrated an amazing resilience in the Italian peninsula, even though it has been translated variously by the gener-

ations after World War II. Most Italians chose to dismiss the two decades of the Fascist regime as merely the "great parentheses," but a smaller number tended the flame for fifty years. That flickering light is once again burning brightly, and a growing number of Italians are casting their ballots for the contemporary heirs of Mussolini. I personally doubt that Italy will once again choose the fascist path, but fourteen percent of Italian voters in 1994 and 1995 support the new version of fascism (the self-proclaimed "post-fascism") presented to them by Gianfranco Fini's Alleanza Nazionale. Examining the odyssey of the neo-Fascists over five decades is instructive for it underscores how the fascist experience has affected postwar Italy.

Since de-fascification was never vigorously pursued, groups faithful to Mussolini's regime sprang up quickly after the war, including the *Uomo Oualunque* and the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI). And, initially, the programs they espoused were vintage fascism, proclaiming the primacy of the nation over either the individual or any class, the goal of corporatism, the need for Catholicism as the state religion, and the necessity of a foreign policy that reflected a national mission. As the MSI alone, and later with its alliance, the Destra Nazionale assumed the mantel of Mussolini, extremism was rejected, at least publicly, and parliamentary democracy was endorsed. The party pursued legitimacy and a share of political power, but it also tolerated and inspired street violence and welcomed extremists into its ranks. The strategy was dubbed the politics of the "cudgel and the double-breasted suit," but it never succeeded in wooing more than five to six percent of the voters. That is, until 1994.

The parties and the issues that dominated Italian politics since the end of the war are now gone. Politicians and voters alike are adrift.

Fini has chosen, in his role as leader of the Alleanza Nazionale, to represent the double-breasted suit, undoubtedly an Armani. Hence, what he labels "post-fascism," I call the designer version. But, how does it differ from the older, immediate postwar variety? The MSI was buried and the Alleanza launched in January, 1995, with declarations that the new party was not the child of fascism, not the party of nostalgia, and neither racist nor totalitarian. Its commitment to democracy was paramount. Yet, when one begins to read the finer print, a number of themes echo the fascist heritage, merely up-dated for consumption in the nineties. Foremost among the familiar themes is that of

nationalism; "the people are an aggregation of individuals..., a national community." Homage to Roman Catholicism sounds vaguely familiar, as the new party claims its religious roots as Roman and Christian. The party platform also emphasizes creation of youth associations, the primacy of the family and the woman's role in bearing and rearing children. For contemporary consumption, the last leads to opposition to abortion, sterilization, and divorce. Though racism is shunned, anti-immigrant sentiments are clear in its call for stronger enforcement of immigration laws. There are calls for creation of a professional militia with obligatory service for all men and for a European Union that preserves national identity and reins in Israel. Much that is new is reminiscent of that which is old.

If the differences between vintage neo-fascism and post-fascism are small, the question that follows is why, after fifty years on the political periphery, is there a resurgence now? An easy response might be that there is some pathology in the Italian public that renders it susceptible to the call. That answer gets me nowhere, since right-wing populist movements are gaining in popularity all across Europe, in Islam, and in the United States. Undoubtedly there are some aspects of the current resurgence that are connected specifically with the Italian experience, but others stretch more widely.

Looking first at the popularity of the more generic political right, the most obvious phenomenon that has fostered its rise is the end of the Cold War. The ideologies that divided the political spectrum into communist and anti-communist are now hollow. The former is discredited, making the latter anachronistic. Ending with the Cold War was the American-Soviet agreement to marginalize and actively to discourage any right-wing regime in Europe. Such bilateral agreements, whether tacit or explicit, are now moot. There is no more bi-polar world and no longer a postwar agreement.

Additionally, most of those who appear attracted by right-wing political movements are people without any experience of fascism or Naziism, since they reached adulthood after the war. What had been chilling experiences for people living through them can now be romanticized by ones who did not. Fini was, after all, not even born until 1952, and his political consciousness begins with the miracle years of the 1960s.

Other reasons for the current popular appeal of the post-fascists may be peculiarly Italian. I am reminded of Giovanni Sartori's theory of "polarized pluralism," developed in the 1960s and nurtured

through the 80s, that hypothesized that political parties in Italy were driven by centrifugal force to the extremes of left and right. When one party moved toward the center, it would either splinter or another would spring up on the outer fringe. I can see some evidence of such movement in the current party realignments, where the old communists renamed themselves and moved to the center, while the Refounded Communists claimed the vacant space to the left; similarly the old MSI became the Alleanza Nazionale and claimed to move toward the center, and the hardliners of the old party claimed the discarded name and moved to the vacuum created on the right.

Sartori's version of Italian parties never won universal assent, and the opposite view—that Italian parties were propelled by centripetal force toward the center—gained some currency in the 1980s. Indeed, from 1978 to 1992, all of the five governing parties tried to out-center one another. Now, the parties of the left and those of the right, including the Alleanza Nazionale, are trying to present themselves as centrists. The political center seems, once again, to be getting crowded.

There are, of course, some other explanations for the current rise of the right in Italy that are less theoretically lofty, but perhaps more plausible. The realignment of political parties in Italy since 1992 has been the result, not of the fall of the Berlin Wall, but of the fallout of Tangentopoli, the massive political corruption scandal that totally discredited the dominant Christian Democrats, the Socialists, and the Social Democrats and tainted many of the other primary players. The neo-Fascists were unscathed, because they had been excluded from the centers of power, both the government and the *sottogoverno,* for the whole of the postwar era. There is, moreover, a degree of legitimacy that the party has received by its association with Silvio Berlusconi and his Forza Italia Party. That, coupled with Fini's masterful use of public relations and his talented theorist Adolfo Urso's ability to tailor a program with popular appeal, has propelled the party's rise in fortunes. The results have been the achievement of what earlier neo-Fascist leaders found elusive—Fini is rated as the most trusted politician in Italy, the party has significant representation in both chambers of Parliament, and for the first time since Mussolini the party entered government in 1994, albeit briefly, with five ministers and twelve under secretaries.

Is there a rising tide of nostalgia for the fascist past? Has the romanticism of a by-gone era captured the imagination of the Italian public? Will fascism once again become a dominant force in Italy? I seriously

doubt it. The resurgence of the neo- or post-Fascists is more likely a relatively temporary phenomenon, the product of confusion in a political landscape where all of the traditional landmarks have been obliterated. The parties and the issues that dominated Italian politics since the end of the war are now gone. Politicians and voters alike are adrift. For fifty years, Italians often saw a vote for the outlying parties of the left or right as a vehicle for protest, a means of expressing dissatisfaction with the dominant parties and programs. Confusion rather than commitment is more common now that the cues that have guided voters for five decades are gone. The most telling sign of this is the fact that in the April 1995, local and regional elections, three million—one-tenth—of the ballots cast were either blank or intentionally invalidated.

The fascist era has undoubtedly informed and influenced the post-war era, but not in the direction that those remarks might suggest. Italy is now clearly part of the first world, firmly tied to the European Union and solidly grounded as a parliamentary democracy. These developments occurred largely in reaction to fascism and stand as monuments, the unintended legacies, of Mussolini's regime.

Announcing the A. WILLIAM SALOMONE PRIZE

Through the generosity of the family of the late A. William Salomone and of an anonymous donor, an annual "A. William Salomone Prize" has been established in the field of Italian American Studies. Dr. Salomone (1915-1989), who served for many years as Wilson Professor of History at the University of Rochester, was this country's most distinguished historian of modern Italian history.

The prize, in the amount of $250 a year, will be awarded by a committee of the American Italian Historical Association (AIHA) in cooperation with *Italian Americana* for the best article-length manuscript in the social sciences dealing with the Italian American experience. The competition will be open to established scholars and doctoral students. Manuscripts should be no longer than twenty-five (25) typed, double-spaced pages, plus notes.

The winner will be announced at the annual AIHA conference in November, where a version of the article will be presented as a paper. The winning article will appear in the AIHA proceedings and be published in *Italian Americana.*

For 1997, the deadline for the submission of articles is September 1. Articles and correspondence regarding the prize should be sent to:

Professor Philip V. Cannistraro
Department of History
Queens College, CUNY
200 Powdermaker Hall
65-30 Kissena Boulevard
Flushing, NY 11367