Review: Fascism in General, and Fascism in Particular

Reviewed Work(s): The Italian Dictatorship. Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of Mussolini and Fascism by Richard Bosworth: Syndicalism, Fascism and Post-Fascism in Italy, 1900-1950 by Ottar Dahl: Italian Fascism. Its Origins and Development by Alexander De Grand: The Making of Fascism. Class, State, and Counter-Revolution, Italy 1919-1922 by Dahlia Elazar: Fascist Ideology. Territory and Expansionism in Italy and Germany, 1922-1945 by Aristotle Kallis: Fascism by Mark Neocleous: The Fascist Experience in Italy by John Pollard: A Primer of Italian Fascism by Jeffrey Schnapp

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Fascism in General, and Fascism in Particular

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Richard Bosworth, *The Italian Dictatorship. Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of Mussolini and Fascism* (London: Arnold, 1998), 269 pp., pb., £14.99, ISBN 0-340-67727-9.

Ottar Dahl, *Syndicalism, Fascism and Post-Fascism in Italy, 1900–1950* (Oslo: Solum Forlag, 1999), 180 pp., hb., 280 NOK, ISBN 82-560-1187-4.

Alexander De Grand, *Italian Fascism. Its Origins and Development*, 3rd edn (Lincoln, NA, and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 191 pp., pb., £9.95, ISBN 0-8032-6622-7.

Dahlia Elazar, *The Making of Fascism. Class, State, and Counter-Revolution, Italy 1919–1922* (Westport, CT, and London: Praeger, 2001), 172 pp., hb., $46.50, ISBN 0-275-95864-7.

Aristotle Kallis, *Fascist Ideology. Territory and Expansionism in Italy and Germany, 1922–1945* (London: Routledge, 2000), 286 pp., pb., £15.99, ISBN 0-415-21612-5.

Mark Neocleous, *Fascism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1997), 120 pp., pb., £9.99, ISBN 0-335-19487-7.

John Pollard, *The Fascist Experience in Italy* (London: Routledge 1998), 158 pp., hb., £40.00, ISBN 0-415-11631-7.

Jeffrey Schnapp, ed., *A Primer of Italian Fascism* (Lincoln, NA, and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 325 pp., pb., £16.95, ISBN 0-8032-9268-6.

You realise that fascism has become an academic industry with a continuous production line when a colleague complains, I hope kindly, that any book proposal with 'fascism' in the title has publishers slavering for your signature on the contract, and when another colleague, responsible for what our British university calls 'Reach Out', reports that what the local sixth form colleges want from us professional historians are seventeenth-century English history and fascism, better known as 'the Third Reich'. Since our history students can study 'fascism', aka 'the Third Reich', in some form or another, in all three years of their modular degree programme, and many of them have already 'done' Nazism at GCSE, A/S and A level, one wonders whether we are meeting or creating demand. There are good 'civic' reasons why each cohort of students should not be allowed to forget the genocidal outcome of racist fascist ideology, even though remembering the not too recent past does not seem to have affected the way people behaved towards each other in the more immediate past. The current language of 'ethnic cleansing' is now used to describe the Nazi

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'final solution'. But one suspects also the pull of the familiar for young people who are effectively becoming part-time students, and whose attendance at my 'fascism' module is sustained by being the telesales persons who interrupt my family's every mealtime.

These somewhat gratuitous remarks on the popularity of studying fascism have a point, and it is a dangerous one to make for someone who is himself a worker on the production line. There is a risk of over-production, of market saturation. So, for instance, the study of Italian Fascism moved on or back some time ago from the immediate post-First World War origins of the movement. 'Origins' studies have lately focused on the 'prehistoric fascism' of the years before the First World War. These works have probably taken us too far down the road of 'proto-fascism'. Just because some of the ideas which were being pushed by cultural and intellectual non-conformists in the 1890s and 1900s were similar to those being pushed by political movements in post-1918 Europe, does not mean that the two sets of ideas amounted to the same thing. Sternhell manages to massage a fully-fledged 'fascist' ideology into life from the swamp of prewar counter-cultural ideas,[1] historically and analytically pre-empting the actual arrival of the real thing in 1919, which would not have been possible without the experience of the Great War. Mussolini, after all, became the first Fascist in 1919, not 1914, a wartime transition matched by those ex-revolutionary syndicalists who joined him as 'national syndicalists' after, and as a result of their reading of, Italy's war.

It is surprising, then, to find a book like Dahlia Elazar's being published. But it does have 'Fascism' in the title. There may be a point in revisiting old themes, if there is something new to say. But there is an Aunt Sally quality to the book, setting up an easy imaginary target and then demolishing it, and demonstrating with some methodological rigour what has been known and self-evident to historians for some time. The author disarmingly says in the preface that 'I disclose what everybody knows . . .' (p. xi), and then proceeds to do just that. The book's self-declared targets are the 'sociological theories' of fascism (Dutt, Lipset, Barrington Moore), which in their concern with the historical and social 'preconditions' of fascism, predetermine in analytical terms what fascism was like. The 'gap' which the author detects in these theories and which the book intends to bridge, is the *process* by which Italian Fascism came to power, the 'bit' between its emergence as a movement in 1919 and the 'march on Rome' in 1922. The argument is that Fascism was not 'pre-determined', but 'became' what it was in the course of its violent confrontation with the organised working-class movement and its forging of anti-socialist alliances with local and national landed elites and with the organs and personnel of the embattled liberal state in Italy's immediate postwar political and socioeconomic crisis. But since when does the book's claimed 'reconceptualisation' of Fascism as 'an organised anti-socialist, anti-democratic paramilitary organisation sponsored by the organised

[1] Zeev Sternhell, *La droite révolutionnaire, 1885–1914. Les origines françaises du fascisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1978); Zeev Sternhell, Mario Sznajder and Maia Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: from Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

propertied class' (p. 102), represent a 'revision' of our understanding of Fascism? Fascism was this, and more.

The Fascists' taking of power as 'process', and the way this 'process' shaped the internal and external political articulation of Fascism, have already been well covered in Adrian Lyttelton's book, and in the first volume of Emilio Gentile's probably definitive history of the Italian Fascist party, the PNF.[2] You can only agree with Elazar's demonstration that what 'made' Fascism 'new' was its 'militarisation of the political struggle' (p. 153) through squadrism and what Mussolini called the 'surgical' deployment of violence. But the book does not draw out the real significance of this for the formation of the Fascist state – which Gentile does – that squadrism was a crucial component of the concept of 'totalitarianism', invented or adopted by Mussolini as the Fascist regime's legitimation. The squadrist 'terror' of the early 1920s was the working model of 'total' Fascist party control, and although the PNF was later formally subordinated to state authority, it was through the single, monopolistic 'totalitarian' party that the regime attempted to 'militarise' the country from the late 1920s.

There is a line of inquiry touched on in the book which is worth pursuing in terms of understanding the 'why' of Fascism's coming to power in Italy, and that is examining the links, or rather the lack of them, between reformist socialists and liberals across the prewar, wartime and immediate postwar periods. Such an analysis could also open up a comparative perspective. That Fascism succeeded in coming to power in Italy during Europe's immediate postwar crisis, but was headed off during the same period in Germany, was largely down to German Social Democrats putting the defence of democratic institutions before socialist revolution.

Elazar's book, in its understandable focus on the role of political violence in the rise of Fascism in Italy, also rather underestimates the close alliance or symbiosis between Fascist squadrism and syndicalism, especially in the Emilian provinces, strengthening a 'national syndicalist' strand of Fascism which persisted well into the regime, as is well documented by Roberts's work.[3]

Ottar Dahl claims to be filling the 'gap' apparently left by Roberts's summary treatment of Fascist syndicalists in the 1930s. But, again, if the 'gap' was ever there, one wonders whether Dahl's book plugs it. The work is basically a descriptive roll-call of the major figures of Italian syndicalism, a recapitulation of their ideas and of the attitudes towards syndicalism of the big names of the Fascist movement and regime, including Mussolini, Grandi, Bottai and Rocco. The description is almost ahistorical, lacking the essential historical and political contextualisation which would make intelligible why certain choices about syndicalism were made by the Fascist movement and regime. Dahl's book does take the description of syndicalist ideas into the wartime Salò Republic and into the neo-Fascist syndicalism of the early postwar

[2] Adrian Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power. Fascism in Italy, 1919–1929* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973); Emilio Gentile, *Storia del Partito Fascista, 1919–1922: Movimento e Milizia* (Bari: Laterza, 1989).

[3] David Roberts, *The Syndicalist Tradition and Italian Fascism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979).

period. If the book has any point, it is to show that there was a clear continuity of syndicalist ideas from the fascism of 1919 to the neo-Fascism of the MSI. But I thought we knew this already.

In their own ways, these are not 'bad' books. Elazar's is much better than Dahl's, because at least it has an argument, even if its conclusions appear self-evident. One just wonders whether they were necessary.

What might be necessary is a study which finally nails down Fascist corporatism, though one has to admit that this is a difficult, probably boring and perhaps futile project. We already know a lot about the academic and intellectual industry which corporatist studies became in the Fascist regime in the early 1930s, coinciding with and stimulated by the impact of the Great Depression on the world's economies and polities. Corporatism was one of the ways through which Italian Fascism gave itself an international profile and meaning, as a 'third way' solution to the crisis of capitalism and parliamentary democracy. But although we know what the corporations were meant to do, we know rather less about how the 'corporate state' actually operated in practice, once its laborious and drawn-out construction was near-enough completed with the formation of national corporations covering the major branches of the Italian economy in 1934.

This will be difficult to find out, largely because the evidence is missing. There is no trace of the archive of that most 'Fascist' of ministries, the parvenu Ministry of Corporations. Under its most 'corporatist' Fascist under-secretary and then full Minister, Giuseppe Bottai, the ministry aspired to be a new streamlined model of Fascist élan and efficiency, less an executive body than a kind of High Command for the modernisation of the Italian economy. The ministry's intended svelteness probably worked to its disadvantage. My impression is that for its 'technical' intervention in the sectoral management for which it was nominally responsible, the corporate bureaucracy relied on the technical services, even the information, supplied by organised interest groups such as the industrialists' association, Confindustria, imbalancing from the start the power relationships within corporate bodies which were meant to harmonise the various factors of production in the overriding national interest.

The historian of the Fascist corporations will, then, have to rummage around for the titbits, or shards, of information which probably lie in other state archives, such as the Presidenza del Consiglio (effectively, the Cabinet Office), and even the PNF archives, which reveal much of what was going on, or meant to be going on, in the provinces. The tangential, or indirect, approach to corporatism may well, anyway, be the best way in, and out, of the topic. The intuition, or assumption, of most historians of Italian Fascism is that of the grand old man of anti-Fascist studies, Gaetano Salvemini, whose own contemporary demolition of Fascism's corporative pretensions led him to conclude that the search for anything substantial in the Fascist corporate structures was akin to looking for a black cat in a dark room.[4] The cat would have to keep its eyes closed to complete the image of impenetrability.

[4] Gaetano Salvemini, *Under the Axe of Fascism* (London: Gollancz, 1936).

This is why the project might be futile, and not worth the trouble. Important decisions about the economy were probably not being made in the corporate system at all, but in the proliferating state and para-state agencies, from the Institute for Industrial Reconstruction (IRI) downwards, which were improvised both to contain the economically destabilising effects of the Depression and to bypass corporative procedures perceived to be too cumbersome for crisis management. These initially provisional and temporary expedients to handle the fall-out of the Depression tended to become permanent quangos, as the regime made creaking attempts to regulate and direct the economy in pursuit of autarky and preparation for war.

The sense that the economic decision making which mattered was being taken anywhere but in the corporations is confirmed by my own (boring) research in this area at the micro-level of the province and commune, where, for a decade from the late 1920s to the late 1930s, the PNF effectively improvised its own 'corporative' organs, the intersyndical committees, to fill the vacuum left at the provincial level by the regime's corporative laws and decrees.[5] But we probably still need that definitive study which confirms what we want to believe, that the corporations did nothing (as long as I do not have to write it).

Perhaps the more interesting pointer for further research from all this corporative fluff is party–state relations in the Fascist regime of the 1930s. The provincial party's intersyndical committees existed alongside, but, in effect, superseded what were intended to be the state's provincial corporative organs, presided over by the prefect. We have become too accustomed to repeating the mantra that the Italian Fascist 'totalitarian' state system was founded on the subordination of the PNF to state authority, which, to use De Felician terms, marked the transition from 'movement' to 'regime', and for some, marked the closure of Fascism's 'radical' phase. The PNF's national leader for much of the 1930s, Achille Starace, was a martinet and an incompetent, but he believed literally in the party's 'totalitarian' role. Party and state files reveal his tenacious defence and promotion of that role in the upper reaches of the regime's hierarchy, and he encouraged the provincial PNF leaders to be as predatory in the localities. The 'reality' of the Fascist regime might well not be the apparently ordered chain of command and authority from state to party, designed to mute the PNF's presence and impact, but a fluctuating, competitive and unstable cohabitation of party and state organs. This would bring Fascist Italy closer to the 'totalitarian' model of Nazi Germany, where the Darwinist jungle of party, state, para-state organisations, and party–state fusions and hybrids, was paradoxically both dysfunctional and energising for the implementation of Nazi policies in all areas of German life.

As Richard Bosworth suggests in another worthy addition to his canon of historiographical studies,[6] it is really about time that Fascist Italy ceased to be

[5] Philip Morgan, '"The Party is Everywhere": the Italian Fascist Party in Economic Life, 1926–1940', *The English Historical Review*, 114, 455 (1999), 85–111.

[6] Richard Bosworth, *Explaining Auschwitz and Hiroshima: History Writing and the Second World War, 1945–1990* (London: Routledge, 1993); *idem, Italy and the Wider World, 1860–1960* (London: Routledge, 1996).

the least of the historiographical powers, and that some of the interpretative and explanatory categories which historians have used to examine Nazi Germany, including 'functionalism' and 'intentionalism', be applied to the study of the Italian Fascist regime. We still need to know much more about the institutional and decision-making structures of the Italian Fascist regime, and just how the important decisions got made. One approach would be to apply the Weberian concept of 'charismatic' authority to Mussolini and his regime, as effectively as this has been done by Ian Kershaw in the case of Hitler and the Nazi system of rule.[7] Did, for instance, the principle of 'charismatic' authority function at the levels below that of the Duce in Fascist Italy, as it did below those of the Führer in Nazi Germany? The outcomes of such an analysis of the workings of the 'leader principle' might be very different in the Italian Fascist case. Mussolini increasingly isolated himself from other Fascist figures in the 1930s, both in the myth-making of the omniscient and omnipotent Duce and in the actual practice of government, with the result, one suspects, that things just never got done. Hitler was lazy, and inattentive to the detail of policy in a way which Mussolini was not, and yet the delegation of 'charismatic' authority in the Hitler 'mandate' required continual contact with other Nazi bigwigs and Hitler's toleration of those bigwigs creating their own formidable administrative and political empires. But this, nevertheless, would be the very stuff of comparative history, since the use of common explanatory tools could, and should, illuminate our understanding of both sides of the comparison.

One area where Fascist Italy has not been historiographically 'backward' is that of 'cultural studies', with many contributions coming from scholars in their place of origin, the United States. I must admit that the 'culturalist' injection into the bloodstream of the history of Italian Fascism is a mixed blessing for ordinary political historians like myself, and even for Richard Bosworth, who has some sharp words in his book on the mystifying effects of the 'cultural studies' approach. Alexander De Grand would clearly like the whole thing to go away. But he, nevertheless, feels obliged to add a new concluding chapter on the political culture of Fascism to the third edition of his still consistently excellent survey history of Italian Fascism. Here De Grand elegantly restates the line of interpretation which runs throughout the rest of the book, that Fascist Italy was essentially a rightist approach through which conservative elites coped with an era of mass politics, and that the Fascist regime resembled a 'modern feudalism' (p. xvi), a compromise and balancing out of various semi-independent interest groups and internal Fascist factions cohered by Mussolini's leadership and a generic nationalism. The 'culturalist' approach to Fascism is not so much rejected by De Grand, as subsumed within this interpretative framework. Fascism's pluralistic cultural policies of the 1930s – or rather, for De Grand, the lack of a single, uniform cultural policy – led to the proliferation of cultural fiefdoms, which reflected the political and socioeconomic compromises at the basis of the Fascist system of rule. In the end, for De Grand, Fascist practice was always more relevant than Fascist ideology, 'what Fascism did has always seemed ... more important than

[7] Ian Kershaw, *Hitler* (Harlow: Longman, 1991).

what it said it wanted to do' (p. ix). For someone like myself who is still struggling to grasp the meaning and usage of 'narrative', 'text' and 'discourse', and regards such incomprehension as a failure of intelligence, this is just the cold shower of historical pragmatism which I needed.

But, much against the grain, I should, tentatively, reassert the utility of 'cultural studies' to the historical understanding of Fascism. One cannot assume that the compromises with Italy's conservative establishment on which Mussolini consolidated the dictatorship in the late 1920s were set in stone. There *was* a 'totalitarian' dynamic to the actions and policies of the regime in the 1930s, which subverted these compromises, and was intended to do so. It was a 'process' rather than an 'event', and we need to remember that even in Hitler's Germany the distinctively Nazi components of that modern 'feudal' regime were shouldering their way through only in the late 1930s. There is a tension in De Grand's own analysis between the short-term compromises by which he characterises the Fascist regime, and the long-term Fascist project of creating a 'great' and 'Fascist' Italy by 'remaking' Italians, in and through war. If the point of all that 'totalitarian' organising and propaganda in the 1930s was to 'remake' Italians, create the 'new Fascist man', reshape Italians' consciousness of themselves and others, then 'culture' and cultural change were the essence of what Fascists understood by their 'revolution'. The regime developed and used various forms and techniques of collective psychology to control and 'manipulate' people, and the historians' entry to the world which 'ordinary' history cannot reach, requires them to draw on the disciplines of anthropology and psychology, and the works of those who do so.

There is a sense in which historians should not even attempt entry, because it involves trying to know the unknowable. You cannot retrospectively put an entire nation on the psychiatric couch, and given the difficulties in measuring and assessing popular attitudes in a democratic society against the conventional polarities of 'consent' and 'dissent', you could conclude that defining 'consent', let alone gauging its extent, in a repressive 'totalitarian' society, is an impossible task. But history is about the filling of the empty spaces in the past, or the attempt to do so. I think that we might have to accept that all that we can ever really know and reconstruct are the 'totalitarian' intentions and goals of the Fascist regime, and the means through which it attempted to realise them. But this, after all, is something, since it treats Fascism as an 'autonomous' political phenomenon, not as an epiphenomenon, a kind of secondary by-product of 'modernisation' or 'capitalism in crisis'.

The challenge, of course, is to remain historians. Many of the 'cultural studies' products are so loaded with jargon as to be impenetrable, and the historian's obligation is always to write clear, intelligible and jargon-free prose. Another of the problems of much of the 'cultural studies' mode of historical writing is that it overloads meaning into its 'textual' analyses, giving a weight of significance to evidence which the evidence itself cannot bear. You will know what I mean once you realise that the mother holding up her baby in the Fascist national maternity and infancy agency's poster was not really offering her child to the future of the nation and to the Duce, but actually taking a peek up her baby's bottom, so representing the

Italian mother's anally retentive relationship with the dictator. The historian, in these circumstances, needs to maintain a sense of proportionality of the different kinds of evidence, recognise and admit to being speculative when speculation is all there is, not necessarily take Fascism's representation of itself as the 'reality', and perhaps, above all, retain a sense of irony which so often is a casualty of these po-faced studies.

Having defended the indefensible, I am not quite sure how to react to the fact that the first serious document collection on Italian Fascism in English to appear for some time since Delzell and Lyttelton,[8] is pulled together by Jeffrey Schnapp, the author who brought us, with no apparent trace of irony, the story of the Fascist play whose protagonist was a FIAT truck.[9] This is a 'cultural' anthology of the writings of the regime's political thinkers, intellectuals, artists, art critics and entrepreneurs, which provide various perceptions of what Fascism was, or was meant to be, and of the role of art and culture in the Fascist state. The collection meets the De Grand test of 'aesthetic pluralism' and cultural fiefdoms, but fails the De Grand test of relevance and outcomes, since as the editor makes clear, the implementation of these 'declarations of intent' cannot be assumed (p. xii). Many of the usual suspects are there. But the collection has rather a neutral, or neutered, feel to it, which may have something to do with the editor's decision to pare down the translations from the original over-the-top Italian, and remove all 'archaic' (p. xiv) capitalisations from the texts. Even 'Fascism' has a small 'f' throughout; it is like reading the Bible with 'God' as 'god'. No chance, then, for the historian's irony or sense of the ridiculous to prevail when reading such debatably domesticated texts.

The focus on ideological and philosophical statements does make for lengthy and sometimes pretty boring extracts (corporatism features often). Perhaps only Marinetti, for sheer brio and effrontery, and Evola, for sheer lunacy, spring to life from the page. The collection, I feel, could have done with more of Mussolini, not only because he was the horse's mouth on Fascism, but also because he retained in his speeches and writings the feel for the punchy phrase of the good journalist which he was. This is a worthy collection, and a start. But it is not something you would put in front of your students as learning tool.

John Pollard's book is, however, something you would recommend to undergraduate students taking twentieth-century survey modules, its intended market. It is a zappy little book, a clear, succint introduction to the prewar and wartime roots of Fascism, the rise to power, the regime, and the Salò Republic, its brevity encouraging many bold statements and historical connections. There is an interesting chapter on Fascist ideology, which works on Mussolini's own *ex post facto* stance in the 1932 Doctrine of Fascism, of practice as premise, and arrives at the De Grand position of Fascist ideology being a 'composite of different ideas representing different

[8] Charles Delzell, ed., *Mediterranean Fascism, 1919–1945. Selected Documents* (London: Macmillan, 1971); Adrian Lyttelton, ed., *Italian Fascisms: From Pareto to Gentile* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973).

[9] Jeffrey Schnapp, *Staging Fascism. 18 BL and the Theater of Masses for Masses* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

constituencies' (p. 128). There is an equally interesting conclusion on Fascism's legacy to postwar Italy, where Renzo De Felice's 'revisionism' is bluntly located in the move to a 'post-Fascist' Italy and 'providing an acceptable past for Italians' (p. 141).

No book of this brevity can live up to all the claims of its blurb. The book includes translated extracts from primary sources, some of them unpublished archive sources, as an impetus to 'thinking historically' (p. vii). But the extracts are so short and selective that the commentary on them usually occupies more space, and they become simply extensions of the narrative text, when in some cases, a fuller extract would allow a better sense of what was said and meant to emerge. There is still, in other words, a niche for a new collection of documents on Italian Fascism which covers all aspects of the movement and regime. The model for this should be the Noakes and Pridham volumes on Nazism,[10] which are almost the perfect teaching and learning tool, since the extracts are lengthy enough to be significant in their own right but not too long to be boring, and the editors' commentary contextualises and opens up the documents without pre-empting their analysis by the reader.

It is also time for the general histories of Italian Fascism in English to include explicitly in their accounts some assessment of the work of Renzo De Felice and his 'school', whose 'revisionism' of an alleged postwar anti-Fascist historical orthodoxy has provoked the nearest thing in Italy to the 'Historians' Controversy' over Nazism in Germany. This would be a daunting task, and yet a real 'service' at the same time, since De Felice's encyclopaedic multivolume biography of Mussolini is a difficult and cumbersome read. This is not only due to its inordinate length, made unmanageable by a totally inadequate index, but also because of a style of writing which is almost designed to be obfuscating, with sentences tumbling on interminably from clause to sub-clause to sub-sub-clause. The biography is not 'good' history, and is probably untranslatable into English. It is perhaps no wonder, then, that one of the more recent general histories of Fascism by John Whittam,[11] who calls De Felice 'maestro' in the annotated bibliography, acknowledges his debt to De Felice's work, or at least lists all seven volumes, but avoids him in the actual text. Richard Lamb's recent book on Anglo-Italian diplomatic relations in the 1930s[12] reproduces for the English-language reader the De Felician school's line on Britain's and Mussolini's foreign policies in all its mistaken glory. The antidote to this should be a reading of Kallis's book.

Richard Bosworth's lively and provocative study of the historiography of Mussolini and Italian Fascism before and since 1945, written in a vivid Antipodean, relates the De Felician and other developments to the evolution and vicissitudes of Italy's postwar politics. In what turns out to be a defence of some of the values of the allegedly once orthodox anti-Fascist line of postwar historiography, Bosworth is as critical of De Felice's claimed objective and value-free historical approach, disguising a conservative agenda, as he is of the 'culturalist' approach to the study of Fascism.

[10] Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, eds. *Nazism, 1919–1945. A Documentary Reader*, 4 vols. (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1997–1999).

[11] John Whittam, *Fascist Italy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

[12] Richard Lamb, *Mussolini and the British* (London: John Murray, 1997).

But historiography is not the same as history, and one looks forward to a one-volume history of Italian Fascism which takes De Felice on board, both contextualising his contribution to the study of Italian Fascism and handling the most controversial areas of his treatment of Mussolini and Fascism, as far as these can be discerned in a biography the length of which makes it impossible for De Felice to remain consistent throughout. This would involve exploring, *inter alia*, the internal contradictions of the biography, especially De Felice's implausible scenario of Mussolini acting like a conventional and pragmatic Italian statesman on the international plane, while simultaneously in Italy itself being anything but conventional and pragmatic, embarking on the attempt to remake Italy and Italians in the 'totalitarian' state. But it would be more fun than writing the history of Fascist corporatism.

Both Kallis's and Neocleous's books, in their very different ways, are concerned with locating the first fascism in Italy among the other fascist movements and regime, treating fascism as a generic phenomenon. This, in itself, is an interpretation of fascism, some distance from the extreme nominalist position which sees no such 'thing' as 'fascism' outside Italian Fascism, only a series of radical nationalist movements which were the unique products of different national histories and contexts.

Kallis's dense and closely argued book examines the expansionist plans and realisations of the Italian Fascist and German Nazi regimes with all the single-minded persistence and earnestness of the doctoral dissertation on which it is based. It wants to answer all the historiographical questions about fascist foreign policies, and goes some way to carrying out in this field Bosworth's suggestion of the comparative application to Fascist Italy of interpretative categories up to now used to study Nazism in Germany. It examines Italian Fascist and German Nazi expansionism as an ideology which both built on and surpassed longer-term trends and traditions in post-unification Italy and Germany, and moves from intentions to their attempted implementation, to ideology which necessarily had to be adapted to and by domestic and international opportunities and constraints. It is heavy going. The conclusion is that while the aims and direction of fascist expansionism were not exclusively 'fascist', the extremeness of their articulation and the dynamic pursuit of their realisation were distinctively 'fascist' and inspired by 'fascist' values. This does raise interesting questions as to the place of expansionism in any definition of generic fascism. Were all the European interwar and wartime fascist movements expansionist-minded imperialists? But the book does, to my mind, bridge what I think is often the artificial discontinuity drawn by historians of fascism as far apart as Sternhell and De Felice between fascism as 'movement' and fascism as 'regime', which assumes that as a matter of course, the 'ideological' fascist 'movement' is somehow betrayed by the pragmatic 'regime'.

Neocleous's book is a different animal altogether. It is not original, uses exclusively English-language sources, and is basically a thinking through of the nature of fascism. This has a clear polemical purpose, as is evident from the warning quotation from Orwell's *1984* in the conclusion, 'who controls the past controls the future; who

controls the present controls the past' (p. 94). Fascism is not treated as a dead and buried historical phenomenon, but one made timeless and repeatable by being an essential feature of modernity, or more specifically, since Neocleous offers a sophisticated Marxist interpretation, a feature of capitalism. Fascism's timelessness, according to Neocleous, is what justifies the over-producing academic industry of fascism, which is where this review came in.

It is all persuasively done. The book successfully reconnects racism, long taken as the distinguishing mark of German Nazism, to the generic idea of fascism by treating it as a by-product of nationalism. It defines and explains fascism as oxymoronic 'conservative revolution', 'counter-revolutionary revolution', 'reactionary modernism', which is one of the most effective ways of reconciling the apparently paradoxical combination of the 'old' and the 'new' in fascist ideology and practice. In my view, the concept of fascism developed here, as a 'revolution' in political forms, but protecting and prolonging the power of a socially conservative order, is not fully satisfactory on all historical counts. The real (and deadly) opponents of fascism in interwar southern and eastern Europe were these countries' *conservative* elites; it was fascists who filled the jails of authoritarian governments in Portugal, Hungary and Romania. The approach also tends to underestimate the 'primacy of politics' in the fascist regimes, where state power was deployed to change the 'normal' development of capitalist economies and undermine the place of the conservative establishments. This underestimation is, in turn, integral to a perception of 'revolution' as only meaningful in socioeconomic terms, when the fascist 'revolution' had nothing to do with socioeconomic structures, but was directed at changing consciousness, a 'spiritual' revolution too easily dismissed as a diversion or sublimation of the 'real' source of power relationships in society. The 'culturalists' may then have the last say.