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The Debate on the Historiography of Fascism

Patrizia Dogliani

In 1986, a heated polemic flared up in West Germany under the name *Historikerstreit*.¹ The discussion, concerned with German responsibilities during World War II, aligned on one side a group of historians defined as "revisionists" (Hillgruber, Hildebrand, Sturmer, Hoffman) headed by Ernst Nolte, and on the other side intellectuals from Germany and from other countries.

The terms of the polemic are well-known. In June 1986, Nolte published an article, "The Past That Will Not Go Away," in the daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Briefly put, Nolte minimized German responsibilities for World War II as well as for the Holocaust. Nolte maintained that the former was a defensive war conducted by Germans in order to avoid the Communist and Bolshevik invasion of Western Europe, the latter an almost foreseeable consequence of an "Asiatic action" begun in the 1930s with Stalin's Gulags.

Nolte and other historians aligned with his position tried to legitimize the thesis of a preventative war and justify the slaughter of innocents as defensive actions suggested by other totalitarian systems. World War II was, in substance, the last episode of a civil war begun in 1917, which had seen Soviet and international Bolshevism oppose itself to western civilization.² As Andreas Hillgruber maintained in his book in 1986,³ it was the task of the

[Translated from the Italian by Anthony J. Tamburri]

Wehrmacht to defend Europe from the Soviet advance until the very end, until the spring of 1945. The extermination in the concentration camps was due in essence to Hitler's reaction to the revolutionary attempt that took place in Germany in 1919, following his identification of the revolutionaries with the Jews.

This new interpretation—the fruit of a new neoconservative, cultural-political alignment which constituted itself at the beginning of the 1980s in favor of a liberal—catholic coalition⁴—indeed surpasses the reductive thesis of one of Hitler's biographers, Joachim Fest, who, midway through the 1970s, had attributed to the lone heads of Nazism the responsibilities of genocide and of the war, overlooking the economic and political system which sustained the massacre.⁵ According to Nolte,

with the measure to which Hitler and Himmler held the Jews responsible for a process which had thrown them into a panic, they brought the original concept of annihilation of the Bolsheviks within a new dimension, and with the atrocity of their action surpassed . . . the Bolsheviks, thereby substituting the initial social point of departure [class struggle], with a biological one [antisemitism].⁶

Because they are more sophisticated and well documented, the recent revisionist positions appear to be more dangerous than those expressed a few years ago by those, such as the Frenchman Robert Faurisson, who simply tried to deny the existence of the extermination camps.⁷ On the contrary, in *Historikerstreit*, the Lagers have been justified as ordinary incidents of development in a "precautionary" war, minimizing the responsibilities of Nazism and reducing the history of Nazi Germany to the normality of history of all peoples and all epochs. If an error had been made, as Fest sustained some years ago, it was that of having widened the war in the West, weakening the Eastern front, and thereby allowing communism to triumph in Eastern Europe and in part of Germany itself. With regard to the concentrationist world of Auschwitz and other extermination camps, again according to the revisionist thesis, it was not different from the Gulags or from Pol Pot's Cambodia: what differed was only the method of annihilation—the introduction of gas chambers.

Many intellectuals joined the debate against such positions; first among all, the social scientist Jurgen Habermas (*Die Zeit*, 11 July 1986). Habermas suggested looking elsewhere, and not in the justification of the Nazi past, for the national identity that the German people, divided into two Germanies, struggle to find. In

addition, Habermas has advanced the suspicion that the German Federal Republic is trying to cancel its Nazi past insofar as it considers it an obstacle to achieving not only economic but also political hegemony over the Europe of 1992.

It is interesting to recall in this context that only the German Left has, in recent years, engaged in a probing study and in a full re-evaluation of institutions of the Republic of Weimar's democratic society and culture, which could constitute both a starting point and a frame of reference in order to understand the virtues and limitations of the German democratic system. In addition, as often happens in Germany, the discussion pitted several academics against one another. The conservative historians who refuted the movements and ideas of 1968 and the sixties in general, cloistered themselves around the old German historiographical school which had flourished in the fifties; whereas others have tried instead to renew German historiography with a new opening toward North American political and social sciences, in part heirs of the Frankfurt School, working today with the journal *Neue Sozialgeschichte*.

In addition, the latter have refused to associate criticism of Stalinism with that of a judgment on Nazism. History must teach to distinguish experiences and not to bunch them all together in a single interpretation which tends to justify, or worse still, to dismiss specific historic responsibilities. The echoes of such a discussion have provoked in Italy the reopening of the debate, in addition to Nazism, also on Stalinism and on the errors of the Third International and its leaders, among whom we find Palmiro Togliatti. The German discussion had closely preceded the admission on the part of Soviet authorities of Stalin's agenda and actions. Furthermore, in light of the possible opening of the Soviet archives even to foreign scholars, Togliatti's responsibilities for both the "great purges" and political isolation which marks the last years of Gramsci's life,⁸ have recently spurred debates in Italy.

The comparison with *Historikerstreit* has had some public resonances in Italy, hence the encounters in Rome (1 October 1987) and Turin (5-6 November 1987), organized by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, by the Goethe Institute, and the journal *Micro-Mega*. After 1987, the discussion essentially continued in specialized history journals along with the translations of some German texts.⁹ This differs from what happened in the United States, where still today public debates and seminars are held in which *Historikerstreit* is included in the research on the public awareness of the "Final Solution."¹⁰

It seems necessary to start from *Historikerstreit* not only because, as some Italian historians have suggested (Roveri, Collotti, Salvadori), one should take note of the common denominators that characterize, even in several political and intellectual contexts, a "neoconservative historiographical offensive," but also in order to define better today's characteristics of the Italian debate on Fascism. Is there perhaps in Italy an analogous debate going on which engages the conscience and raises questions on the collective identity with respect to the past? Do we find ourselves faced with a neoconservative phase and a revisionist historiographical current? Or still, is the present Italian political climate in need of opening a public historical debate on the Fascist past?

There are some analogies with the German situation which seem appropriate to recall at this time, assuming as a moment of confrontation the debate provoked by two interviews granted by Renzo De Felice to Giuliano Ferrara in the *Corriere della Sera* (27 December 1987; 8 January 1988). Following an official meeting between the Secretary of the Socialist Party, Bettino Craxi, and the newly elected Secretary of the Italian Socialist Movement, Gianfranco Fini, De Felice called for a normalization of the neofascist Italian party, suggesting a revision of the Italian constitution which until now has prohibited, in theory but not in practice, the reconstitution of the Fascist Party. De Felice's basic thesis, supported in the days following by historians and intellectuals of different political propensities (e.g., Ernesto Galli Della Loggia and Lucio Colletti), is that to achieve a renewal of the Italian political system it is necessary to overcome the antifascist ideology and tradition on which today's Italian ruling class is based.

One can agree with De Felice when he claims that one should not identify the Italian Republic only with antifascism. One must, however, not forget that our particular republican democratic system, with all its shortcomings and all its constitutional principles—which, by the way, have not been completely applied after forty years—sprang forth from a juridical and political culture developed in the years of opposition to Fascism, with the clear intention of overcoming not only the regime, but also the old liberal system which had consented to Fascism's advent to power. And it is true that in the last few years there has been a strained effort in the presentation of an antifascist unity, which has also tried to minimize the profound differences among the antifascist forces, resulting in celebratory rhetoric (the exaltation of the Resistance as a unitary movement, forgetting the profound differences, and even divergencies, among the catholic and lay political forces that

composed it). But at this point, to hold that it is necessary to overcome antifascism in order to obtain a better Italian ruling class is to run a double risk: on the one hand, it avoids the real Italian problems inherent in the renewal of society and of its institutions, and on the other, it overlooks the historical specificities of Italian democracy.

A response to De Felice and his supporters could have been given by the politicians, whereas it is the historian's task to refute De Felice's methodological procedure and his principal historical assertions, keeping in mind the political context in which they have developed.

As in Germany, the revisionist polemic developed initially in a journalistic milieu. But, contrary to the German situation, the publication of research and historical debates did not follow; it had a brief season with no resonances abroad.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to emphasize that De Felice's present position is the result of a long historiographical production and an interpretive maturation developed with his writing of the Mussolini biography, which dates to the mid-sixties. In addition, due to a series of favorable, concomitant factors, there have been other signs which give the impression that a revisionist current could successfully affirm itself in Italy. Let us recall some of them: an evident ideal political weariness which is felt above all by the younger generations, even more detached from and uninformed about the recent Italian past; the lack of a new, convincing response on the part of the old antifascist forces and associations (ANPI: National Partisan Association of Italy; ANED: National Association of the Ex-deported, etc.); the diminishing of studies on Fascism on the part of research centers set up for such a task (local institutes for the History of the Resistance); and the growing difficulty, in this regard, on the part of teachers of all grade levels.

Finally, the justifiable need on the greater part of Italian public opinion to say, and hear said, that the "ragamuffin" Italian Fascism was, in the final analysis, less dangerous and caused less drama and suffering than Nazism and other dictatorial regimes: that, in the end, Italians have been, and remain under all political systems, "nice people." In this cultural, political, and moral context, De Felice's revisionist positions have found ample space for political jockeying, for an audience and for success. In much the same way in which Nolte accused Habermas of conformism, overturning the positions (i.e., he who is more aggressive can appear more transgressive, even when he supports positions of a simple revival of a conservatism that had already flourished in the fifties in the

“cold war” climate), De Felice accused the entire historiography of antifascist origin to be outdated and surpassed.

But above all, it seems dangerous that both Nolte and De Felice had purposely denied the specificity of the Fascist and Nazi regimes. If Nolte’s thesis was justificatory, confronted with so many episodes of war and genocide in the course of this century, what is so different about Nazism with respect to other dictatorships? For De Felice, who attributed to Mussolini and to some of his leaders the political responsibilities of Fascism—responsibilities that became in the meantime personal, and not of a political and economic nature—the critical task today is that of maintaining that Fascism was not only a better regime than others, but that, in fact, nothing distinguished it from the preceding Liberal regime. Or better, that Fascism had begun a series of social and economic reforms and a modernization of the state which have in fact failed or have been abandoned after the creation of the republican state.

We are therefore confronted with De Felice’s interpretive evolution, which went from supporting the theses of a personal regime to the negation of the specificities of Fascism, and now close to the point of appreciating it.¹¹ If the polemic continues in these terms, soon one will no longer speak of Fascism or Nazism, but of European history *tout court* between the two wars. In fact, an exhibition set up at the Coliseum of Rome on the *Italian Economy between the Two Wars* has already underhandedly suggested this possibility. As one may deduce from the title, the organizers neglected to emphasize that the period in question had been characterized in Italy by Fascism.¹²

The virtue of having promoted the “miracle economy” of post-World War II had been attributed, on that occasion, to the Italian economy of the twenties and thirties; an evaluation only partially correct if linked to the process of a more amply chronological development, which originated from the industrial take-off of the Liberal-Giolittian era. Yet it is necessary to remember the price with which such a process was carried forth under Fascism. The exhibition in Rome, rich in graphics and statistics, neglected to recall that the Fascist regime was the response the economic power gave to the industrial crisis of post-World War I: that such industrial recovery was based on the repression of any contractual and union freedom of the workers, on low salaries, on an internal and international emigration hidden by the regime, on colonial enterprises and the entrance into World War II as a stimulus and solution for production; and, in the end, on an economic system

which "privatized profits and socialized losses." Therefore, nationalization took place when it was to the benefit of the great capital to nationalize, and privatization occurred when it was in the interest of the great industrialists and landowners to privatize. Under Fascism, the Welfare State in Italy was more an instrument of propaganda than an effective social achievement for the betterment of life of the more needy classes.

On the basis of this new interpretation, De Felice elaborates two theses, one of which is vindictory while the other is almost an exaltation of the work of Fascism. In the justificative thesis, he sustains that "Italian Fascism is safe from the accusation of genocide, it lies outside the shadow of the Holocaust." A serious affirmation from the historian who, the first in Italy, in 1961, dealt with the *History of the Jews under Fascism*. This was an important and complex study that substantiated the importation of Nazi antisemitism into Italy; an interpretation partially revised in 1978 by the Israeli historian Meir Michaelis, *Mussolini and the Jews: German-Italian Relations and the Jewish Question in Italy 1922-1945*. Michaelis maintained that Italian antisemitism was the interpretation that Italy gave to the alliance with Nazi Germany.

Today, however, De Felice tends to downplay the fact that the Italian racial laws of November 1938 and the isolation and the systematic registration of the Jewish community in Italy and of Italian citizens of Jewish origin prepared the Nazi deportation of 1943-45, further facilitated by the action of the troops of the Republic of Salò and by an Italian public opinion often indifferent, or worse still, predisposed to collaborate because it was influenced by the antisemitic politics of the preceding years.

De Felice adds that "for many aspects Italian collaborationism was better than French and Dutch Fascism," forgetting that if certain processes had not been thoroughly carried out because of impediments due to time, to geographical and transportation conditions, to the action of a strong Resistance, not for any of this are they less condemnable or less responsible. It is equally true that Italian Fascism in the thirties did not have as its main objective antisemitism, but it did bring forth a politic of demography and colonial expansion which expressed itself in racist terms with regard to African populations, in discrimination against those who are "different," in the social marginalization of the female, and in the exaltation of number and of the white race as a force of expansion.

"Here, revisionism is more helpful and less risky," De Felice concludes in his first interview, "for the reasons I have just espoused, which concern the necessity of building a new Republic."

In this same interview, De Felice held the position that risks being apologetic of Fascism. In republican Italy,

as a matter of fact, nothing different from the old Liberal-Giolittian state has been constructed, except perhaps some restoration. And the innovations introduced by Italian Fascism, indeed filtered through democracy, have survived with success, from the industry of the State to a social welfare system. Indeed the Fascist ruling class was illiberal. But are we sure that it was, in everything else, so much worse than the present one? Did the Fascist bureaucracy have perhaps a sense of state and civil duties inferior to the republican one?

With these fleeting judgments De Felice cancels out all attempts at analysis, the *distinguo*, and entire generations of historians and militants who emerged from the thirties to today. He even disregards the methodological teachings of historians who, some time ago, in a famous interview published also in English, he had indicated as his teachers: Federico Chabod and Delio Cantimori.¹³

De Felice further overlooks the analyses of the limits of the Liberal system which were conducted by Gaetano Salvemini and by his Italian and American school precisely for the purpose of understanding better Fascism's ascent to power. He disregards the studies on the reactionary regimes of the mass, conducted in Europe and in America by historians such as George L. Mosse, whom De Felice himself introduced to Italy. He does not take sides with regard to the interpretation, by now shared by the majority of historians, which maintains that these fascisms were not only illiberal, despotic and bonapartist systems, but that they constituted the total monopoly of a party, achieved through the transformation of the state apparatus (bureaucracy, army, police), by the permanent exclusion and violent repression of opponents, and by the creation, through propaganda, of a compulsory consensus of the mass.

It remains to be seen which audience these revisionist theses have had and will have in Italy, and what response is given to them. In our country, perhaps more than anywhere else, one now witnesses an imposition of a clear separation between an historical popularization for the wider public, conducted by some periodicals (e.g., *Storia Illustrata*) and by some journalists who challenge the greater public's taste often without any base of historical research (I have in mind Arrigo Petacco and Sandro Montanelli), and the scientific production of historians. The latter has little circulation outside the sphere of academic and scholarly journals

and book series. Furthermore, in the past few years De Felice, more than any other historian, has been allowed to express publicly his theses in some national newspapers, such as the *Corriere della Sera*, and in many debates organized by the Italian Radio Network, RAI.

Whoever sees in De Felice a "disturbing historian," s/he must ask for whom does he figure as a provocation. Surely, not for a certain ruling class which tries quickly to erase from the public's mind an authoritarian and illiberal past to which said class can easily be associated. And not even for the information of the state which, in the past few years, has been inclined to plot out the televised historical debates, by only calling on the "official" historians to express their opinions, delegated by the political parties.

I believe that for too long a time now Defelician interpretations have monopolized the debate on Fascism in Italy, and that the members of other historiographical currents appear in front of the wider public and take a position outside strictly academic spheres only when they are provoked by De Felice. Or better, only when some publicist exploits De Felice's "radical" positions in a neoconservative sense, such as in the cases of Michael Leeden in 1975 and Maurizio Ferrara today. We recall that in the sixties the reaction to De Felice's theses spawned a series of original analyses on Fascism, summarized in some timely interventions collected by Guido Quazza in 1973 (writings by Castronovo, Rochat, Neppi Modona, Miccoli, Bobbio) and by Nicola Tranfaglia in 1975 (interventions by Alatri, Quazza, Castronovo, Collotti, Rochat, Carocci).

Since then, studies have been conducted in different directions: for instance, regarding the institutions of the Fascist regime, Fascist foreign policy, the economy, culture and the organization of consensus, the Church and the catholic world under Fascism, society during the *Ventennio*, and the life of the middle classes and of the working class under the regime. The variety and richness of such studies can be found in a recent critical-bibliographical survey conducted in 1985 by Quazza, Collotti, Legnani, Palla and Santomassimo for the National Institute for the History of the Liberation Movement in Italy, in collaboration with the *Revue d'Histoire de la deuxième Guerre mondiale*.

In addition, more and more students and researchers produce, above all in the area of social history, studies on Fascism—this due also to the development of university teaching of contemporary history, which since the seventies provides a specific, four-year course of study in the Faculties of Letters and Philosophy.

Further, more instrumental is the proliferation of local institutes—there are about fifty of them—for the history of the Resistance, under the auspices of the National Institute, and to their journals, which number about thirty.¹⁴

What is missing today, in my opinion, are basic interpretations of Fascism which confront the simplifications and exploitations of De Felice's theses. In 1985, Quazza noted that

the dispute between the three classic interpretations of Fascism has, in Italy, weakened in the past fifteen years. But it has grown weak only in the sense that the first thesis, the Crocean one of the parenthesis, has been just about abandoned and that the other two, that of Fascism as the revelation of the old ills of the country and that of Fascism as the political degeneration of aging capitalism, came up with more vague, more subtle, and more complex variants.

The three classic interpretations were developed in the twenties and thirties. Croce's studies, which expressed judgment on Fascism as a parenthesis in the history of Italy and the confidence in the progress of Italian liberalism, are of 1928 (*Storia d'Italia*) and 1932 (*Storia d'Europa*). Of the same period are Gaetano Salvemini's first writings on Fascism (*The Fascist Dictatorship* [1927], *Under the Axe of Fascism* [1935], and *The Origins of Fascism in Italy* [1942], based on his lectures at Harvard University). Luigi Sturzo published in London *Italy and Fascism* in 1926; Silvio Trentin published in France *L'aventure italienne* in 1929 and *Dix ans de fascisme totalitaire en Italie* in 1937. Angelo Tasca, to whom after World War II a part of the historiography of the Italian and American Left made reference (I have in mind Alexander De Grand), published *La naissance du fascisme* in Paris in 1938.

Between the two wars, these studies, even with different approaches and interpretations, focused their attention on the causes which permitted Fascism's advent to power. Some intellectuals such as Croce tried to justify the action of the prefascist, liberal ruling class; others, such as Salvemini, severely criticized it. The Communists, influenced by the interpretations of the Third International, concentrated on the analysis of the economic system that had brought Fascism to power, and they expected, along with the crisis of Fascism, also the fall of Italian capitalism and the realization of socialism. These positions were partially revised by Antonio Gramsci after 1926; they were refuted by the revival of international capitalism after 1929 and by the rise to power on the part of Nazism; and they were finally revised in a more vast

study on the basis of mass Fascism by Togliatti in the mid-thirties.

This particular attention to Fascism's acquisition of power, to the crisis of the Liberal state and to the "red biennium"—the revolutionary period in Italy—continued even after World War II in Italian studies (e.g., Paolo Spriano's study of the occupation of factories in Turin) and in research of a notable scientific level on the part of English and American historians: Lyttelton, Corner, Cardoza, Snowden, Kelikian.¹⁵

The studies of the seventies are the result of research conducted in archives and also the fruit of a renewed political and historiographical debate that has tried to update the radical-Socialist and Actionist interpretations. Such debate attempted not only to examine prefascist Italy and the failure of the Liberal state, as the antifascist scholars had done between the two wars, but to forge ahead, in the aftermath of Fascism, in order to understand how much of the Fascist path had remained part of the institutions of the Republic, especially in the "separate bodies" of the State—court, law enforcement, and international affairs, which had not been substantially reformed after 1945.

The proponent of this analysis was Guido Quazza, president of the National Institute for the History of the Liberation Movement, who initiated the discussion with a collection of writings in 1976, *Resistenza e storia d'Italia. Problemi ed ipotesi di ricerca*. Quazza was aided by a Turinese milieu sensitive to this debate (Tranfaglia, Neppi Modona, Jocteau, Sapelli) and other historians such as Collotti, Pavone, Legnani. Furthermore, in the seventies some journals had assumed a firmly committed role in the debate on Fascism. *Rivista di Storia Contemporanea*, *Italia Contemporanea*, *Studi storici*, and more recently *Passato e Presente* opposed several interpretations of Fascism proposed by the journal founded by De Felice, *Storia Contemporanea*.

This debate and the proliferation of studies on Fascism have finally eliminated those barriers which had remained intact at the moment of Reconstruction between Marxist historiography and radical-Socialist historiography. The new generation of historians who came of age in the seventies find it hard to identify themselves not only ideologically, but also methodologically with one of the past historiographical currents which, as Quazza recalls, had come up with more subtle variants and more complex interpretations. In the past few years even those terms originating from the Leftist milieu of the "heated" years of the working-class struggle and the student revolt of 1968-1973 have appeared obsolete. I have in mind the accusations of betrayal of the revolutionary spirit of the Resis-

tance, levied against the Italian Communist Party by the protest movements at the famous discussion on the "turning point at Salerno" [*svolta di Salerno*] realized by Togliatti in March 1944.

To conclude this brief historiographical excursus, it might be necessary to outline the ten-year phases which have characterized the historiography of Fascism after World War II. In the fifties and in the first years of the sixties, one finds the first comprehensive treatments of Italian Fascism, by now distinct from the struggle against the dictatorship, but still very much influenced by the writings and the polemical studies of the exiled antifascists: writings by Luigi Salvatorelli and Giovanni Mira are from 1952, Giampiero Carocci's appeared in 1959; syntheses by Chabod and Franco Catalano are from 1962, whereas Enzo Santarelli's is from 1969.

With the sixties a new political and historical phase evolved which tried to make up for the delay in archival research. Surely, there were technical reasons for this new turn: the reordering and opening of the public archives regarding the *Ventennio*. But there were also purely political reasons: there was the response given by the democratic historians and intellectuals to the political alliance between the Christian-Democratic party and the neofascist movement, which culminated in the formation of the Tambroni government in 1960.

These years marked the beginning of the activity of the National Institute for the Liberation Movement in Milano and the creation of numerous local centers of the Institute in collaboration with secondary school teachers, university professors, associations for partisans and the deported, and municipal administrations of the Left. In addition, numerous series of public lectures and conferences were organized, which included the testimonies and reflections of those directly involved in antifascism and the Resistance.

The publication of lectures constituted an important source of information and a stimulus for the discussion on the part of teachers, students, militants, and researchers. In the seventies these series were followed by refresher courses for teachers, in collaboration with the Provincial education offices. In the eighties, some of these courses solicited a thorough examination of the teaching of history in the secondary schools and the result was the creation of a National Center for the Teaching of History, located in Bologna.

After the opening of the State Archives and the partial opening of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the first studies documented by primary sources appeared. Among these is De Felice's biog-

raphy of Mussolini (the first volume dates back to 1965), whose credit it is to have been the first to utilize fully Fascist archives and public propaganda. In addition, the first studies on the institutional and regulatory transformations of the Fascist state appeared: *L'organizzazione dello Stato totalitario* by Alberto Acquarone is from 1965, and the volume *Gli apparati statali dall'Unità al fascismo* edited by Isabella Zanni Rosiello appeared in 1976.

The seventies, which saw the rise of terrorism, with the assassinations and fascist massacres in Milano, Bologna, the train "Italicus" and at the Bologna train station of 2 August 1980, have spurred studies on Fascism not only as a pedagogical or political task, but also as a civic duty, by setting up a close comparison between past and present Italian society.

If we consider the span of publication of the more innovative and principal studies on Fascism, we notice that the majority date back to the seventies. They refer to the economy (works by Castonovo, Mori, Toniolo, Preti), to the corporate system (Cordova), to the culture and the intellectuals (Isnenghi, Turi, Mangone), and to the organization of the public consensus (F. Monteleone, Brunetta, the American Cannistraro). More than having exhausted historiographical subject matter, these works have suggested new paths to furrow for the study of Fascism.

It seems to me that the multiplication of studies and subject matter of the seventies has been followed by fragmentation in the eighties, without any main interpretive line, often giving rise to repetitive research, anecdotal and localized studies.

Some questions about Fascism raised in the seventies have remained at the level of articulation without having received subsequent verification in research, and today they have become historiographical lacunae. Some examples: studies on the structure and composition of the National Fascist Party are lacking (except for the research by one of De Felice's students, Emilio Gentile, and some students of the French historian Pierre Milza); studies on mass organization by Fascism are few in number (the only interesting works have been published by two Americans: Victoria De Grazia on the *dopolavoro*—*Mass Organization of Leisure*—in 1981, and in 1985 Tracy Koon on Fascist youth). A serious study on the condition of women under Fascism has yet to be done (except for some analyses on the working-class family by Chiara Saraceno and Luisa Passerini and a study dating back to 1975 by Piero Meldini). Research on political demography and ruralism should be resumed, and research on Fascist institutions should be most probing.

The political climate, which once urged the debate on and enriched the historiography of Fascism, has changed. Poverty, weariness, and vagueness prevail in studies today due to a general disorientation of the Left and to a profound revision of national and international historical memory. In years in which one speaks of a "crisis" of Marxism and the twilight of communism—when Eastern European "real socialism" countries rethink the political and historical significance of Stalinism and lived experiences in the decisive years such as 1948, 1956, and 1968, in a decade in which China has distanced itself from Maoism and suffers from the degeneration of the 1949 revolution—it is truly difficult to reopen the debate on Fascism by characterizing it as a particular totalitarian system, historically and ideologically different from other nonlibertarian and dictatorial systems.

The western world seems more interested in discussing once again concepts of democracy and civil liberties. In this climate, the lack of new interpretations of Fascism, the lessening of a certain historical-scientific spreading of information, and the rhetorical repetition of part of antifascist associationism can only facilitate the public attention and success of De Felice and his interpreters. It is now a question of understanding from which sector of Italian culture and society both a new type of research and a more mature reconsideration—indifferent to the political polemics concerning the recent Italian and international past—can derive. A reconsideration that does not cancel out the Fascist experience, but recalls it, evaluates it, and judges it, assigning to it its correct place in the development, as also in the delay, of Italian democracy in the twentieth century.

Notes

1. This is a revised version of a paper delivered at the conference "Fascism Today: A Political and Historiographical Debate," held at New York University (20 March 1989).

2. See Nolte's theses in *Die Europäische Bürgerkrieg, 1917-1945, Nazionalsozialismus und Bolschewismus* (Frankfurt a.M-Berlin, 1987).

3. Andreas Hillgruber, *Zweierlei Untergang. Die Zerschlagung des Deutschen Reiches und das Ende des europäischen Judentums* (Berlin, 1986).

4. For a reconstruction of the debate preceding 1986, see Alessandro Roveri, "L'Historikerstreit in un'antologia tedesca," in *Movimento operaio e socialista* 11.3 (1988):501-05, in reference to the collection of essays edited by Reinhard Kuhn, *Vergangenheit, die nicht vergeht* (Köln, 1987). See also Antonio Missiroli's bibliography to Hans Ulrich Wehler, *Le mani sulla storia. Germania, riscrivere il passato* (Firenze: Ponte alle Grazie, 1989); *Entsorgung der deutschen Vergangenheit? Ein polemischen Essay sur Historikerstreit* [München, 1988]).

5. Joachim Fest, *Hitler, Eine Biographie* (Berlin, 1973).

6. From an interview with E. Nolte in *Panorama* (January 22, 1989).

7. For some responses to Faurisson's theses, see G. Wellers, *Les chambres à gaz ont existé. Des documents, des témoignages, des chiffres* (Paris, 1981), E. Kogon, H. Langbein, A. Rükerl, eds., *Nationalsozialistische Massentötungen durch Giftgas. Eine Dokumentation* (Frankfurt a.M., 1983); and E. Collotti's essay in *Storia Illustrata* (September 1979), 20-29.

8. The first of these interventions is Luciano Canfora's *Togliatti ei dilemmi della politica* (Bari: Laterza, 1989).

9. For a list of articles which appeared, see C. R. "Il passato nazista verso la 'normalizzazione'", *Italia Contemporanea* 167 (June 1987), 184-87, and Brunello Mantelli "Al magazzino della storia. Riflessioni sull'Historikerstreit e i suoi echi italiani," *Quaderno di Storia contemporanea* 4 (1988), 11-19. See especially contributions by Enzo Collotti, "C'era una volta Hitler . . .," in *Rivista di Storia contemporanea* (Torino), No. 1, gennaio 1987: 3-11; and by P. Pombeni, G. A. Craig, R. Giardina, W. R. Born; in *Il Mulino* 2 (March-April 1987); M. Salvadori, "Perché un certo passato possa passare senza che lo si dimentichi," and G. E. Rusconi, "Di nuovo una questione tedesca alla luce di Historikerstreit," *Storia contemporanea* 2 (April 1988).

10. See Arnold J. Mayer's recent *Why Did the Heavens not Darken? The "Final Solution" in History* (New York: Pantheon, 1989), especially "A Personal Preface." Among the contributions in the United States, see "Special Issue on the Historikerstreit," *New German Critique* 44 (Spring-Summer 1988); Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust and German National Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1988); and Richard J. Evans, *Out of the Shadow of Hitler: West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape from the Nazi Past* (New York, 1989).

11. The two interviews with De Felice were reproduced, followed by other interventions, in the book edited by Jader Jacobelli, *Il fascismo e gli storici oggi* (Bari-Rome: Laterza, 1988). For the first reactions to De Felice's affirmations, see Enzo Collotti, "Il fascismo, chi era costui?" ["Fascism, Who Was He?"] *Passato e Presente* 14-15 (May-December 1987), 3-10.

12. Cf. the catalogue *L'economia italiana tra le due guerre 1919-1939* [Italian Economy between the Two Wars 1919-1939] [Rome, Coliseum, 22 September - 18 November 1984] (Comune di Roma, IPSDA, 1984); for criticism on the exhibition, see: Domenico Preti, "Una mostra da dimenticare: l'economia italiana tra le due guerre," *Passato e Presente* 7 (January-April 1985), 133-43. Less ambiguous, also because it did not attempt to offer the "only" interpretation and re-evaluation of Fascism, was the exhibition in Milano: *Anni Trenta. Arte e cultura in Italia*: 27 January-30 April 1982 (Comune di Milano: Mazzotta editore, 1982).

13. Renzo De Felice, *Intervista sul fascismo*, edited by Michael A. Leeden (Bari: Laterza, 1975) [*Fascism: An Informal Introduction to its Theory and Practice* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1976)]. See also his earlier book *Le interpretazioni del fascismo* (Bari: Laterza, 1969).

14. For a complete list of the local institutes and the titles of journals, see the quarterly journal of the Institute, *Italia Contemporanea* (Milano).

15. A. Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power: Fascism in Italy 1919-1929* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1973); P. Corner, *Fascism in Ferrara 1915-1925* (Lon-

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