

## 9 Organization of Fascism

### THE METHOD OF COMPULSION

The Fascist party defined itself as a "civil militia under the orders of the Duce in the service of the State." It should not be forgotten that Fascism, like National Socialism, began as a fighting organization; the mainstays of the movement were the *Fasci di combattimento*, approximately meaning "battle units," (*fascio* is bundle; the ancient Roman lictors carried *fascies*, a bundle of rods around an axe, as a sign of their power of life and death) In 1921, these *Fasci* were changed into the Fascist party. In other words, the "movement" transformed itself into the "party."

Before Mussolini came to power, he organized Fascist "squads" for the purpose of clubbing down political opposition. (This system was imitated by Hitler's Storm Troopers, the S.A.) After the victory of Fascism, these squads were increased and organized into a Fascist Militia which was used to gain control of the whole country. Young men in the uniform of the Militia, all wearing black shirts, patrolled the stations, streets, and public buildings, and became conspicuous throughout the land.

Mussolini saw himself compelled to create this private army in 1923 because the opposition to Fascism was growing rapidly after the victory of 1922. Liberals and Socialists tried their best to make the young Fascist regime collapse. The bitterness of the struggle reached a climax with the murder of the Socialist deputy Matteotti in 1924. But, after a brief interval of hesitation, Mussolini succeeded in turning the episode to his own advantage and strengthened his personal hold on the Fascist movement by assuming responsibility for its deeds on the one hand, and, on the other, emphasizing the necessity of strict discipline. In 1925, Alfredo Rocco began the reform of the penal code to bring it into conformity with Fascist ideas, a task successfully completed by 1930.

The Fascist party was strictly hierarchical in organization. It was not a mere political party in the ordinary sense, but, as pointed

out before, a legally recognized organ of the state. In January, 1937, the party's Grand Council was likewise given formal recognition. It became the real governing body; there were no limits to the range of its activity. It was broader in scope than the Nazi Party Cabinet which was not a legal organ of the state.

The Duce dominated the party but his position was so exalted that his name was not even on the list of "hierarchs." Next to him, the high party officials exercised their influence; the mass of the party rank and file followed and obeyed. The hierarchy distinguished between five different levels. At the top was the secretary of the party, appointed by royal decree, but subject to dismissal by the Duce. There were no secure appointments: every hierarch might find himself suddenly dismissed if he showed lack of efficiency, lack of obedience, or too little adaptability to the policy of opportunism.

The second level belonged to the National Directorate consisting of eleven members revocably appointed by the Duce at the suggestion of the party secretary. This body included secretaries from the most important centers of Italy. The third rank was made up of a group of men whose work was of particularly great importance, namely, the federal secretaries (liaison officers delegated by the central party to supervise the local *Fasci*) and the federal leaders of the Fascist youth organizations. The fourth grade in the hierarchy was filled by lesser officials, the leaders of provincial student groups, and lesser officers of the youth organizations. Finally, at the lowest level, were the commanders of the local Fascist groups and the local political secretaries.

Strict control of the subordinates by the superior party officials was characteristic of the relationship between the various levels of the hierarchy. Appointments and suggestions for appointments to the lower grades were in the hands of the higher ranking hierarchs. The appointments were all personal and no elections took place.

The administration of the party with its 7300 local *fasci* was very elaborate, no less imposing than the Nazi party organization. The secretary had his own chancellery. Furthermore there were six divisions of administration: the political secretariat, the administrative secretariat, the permanent price-control office, the office of

press and propaganda, the historical office, and the office of archives.

Another department of the party's administration was engaged exclusively in work for the youth organizations, namely, the Young Fascists, the Young Fascist Women, the Fascist University groups, and groups of rural Fascist girls. Separate and not quite so important were the offices of various compulsory professional groups; for example, the Fascist teachers' associations, or the associations of different types of public employees like railway workers, postal employees, and workers of other state enterprises. The last department controlled the *Dopolavoro* organization, the National Union of Retired Naval Officers, the National Olympic Committee, and the Italian Naval League.

This elaborate organization was the guardian of political orthodoxy and obedience in social and economic matters. As in Germany, large demands were made upon the time of the individual. For those who did not comply or were courageous enough to oppose the Fascist decrees, means of repression were not lacking. The Fascists elevated brutality to a method of government. Concentration camps for political "criminals" were established on the islands of Lampedusa, Pantelleria, Ustica, Lipari, and Ponza. The little advertised but omnipresent OVRA (*Opera Volontaria Repressione Antifascista*) was the Italian version of the inevitable secret police organization that is one of the foundation stones of any totalitarian regime. A Special Tribunal for the Defense of the State, the counterpart of the dreaded People's Court in Germany, dealt with opposition to the state, the Duce, and the king.

Fear was the supreme ruler of Fascist Italy. The policy of intimidation through fear, developed to a high art by the Nazis who surpassed their Fascist teachers, permeated the whole life of the nation. The danger of arrest by the police or the Fascist militia was an ever-present threat. The Fascists called this state of mind "iron discipline, leading on the road to glory."

The Fascist Militia (Voluntary Militia for the National Security), like the Storm Troopers of Hitler, was the guardian of the ideology of the state. Almost all the militia members did their work on a voluntary basis; they even bought their own uniforms and donated all their free time to the service of Fascism. They

proved invaluable and very inexpensive to the government. The militia men were trained by former army officers. They were used in Spain, in Ethiopia, against Greece, and against Russia. They did not command high respect among their fellow citizens.

These were the most important instruments through which the system of compulsion was enforced on the nation. But no government can expect to keep on suppressing people for an indefinite period. Therefore, the young generation of Fascist Italy were to be subjected to an appropriate indoctrination for life under a totalitarian regime. The adult population, too, was subjected to a never-ceasing "informal" education. The Germans learned much from the way the Fascists carried out their principles in practice, and the Fascists, in turn, doubtless learned from the Soviets. In Italy, as in Germany, the whole nation had to go to school again; in Italy, as in Germany, the state treated its adult population like adolescents, not excluding those who had declared themselves 100 per cent Fascists and had become members of the party.

#### *THE METHOD OF INDOCTRINATION*

The Fascists began rather late to exploit culture for purposes of indoctrination. Artistically, the Italians always were individualists, and Mussolini himself understood this national characteristic. His early association with Futurism is a case in point. The standardization of the arts under Nazism provoked his sarcasm—so long as political conditions permitted. Unless they interfered in politics, artists and scientists were incomparably freer in Italy than in Germany, at least until 1936 when a cultural agreement with Germany was concluded. As late as 1938, German refugees from Nazi oppression were permitted to work without interference so long as they showed no hostility toward Fascism.

Up to 1936, only certain fields of intellectual activity were controlled by the respective divisions of the party; for example, the newspapers, radio, and all propaganda. The creation in 1934 of the position of Under Secretary of State for Press and Propaganda was a step in the direction of stricter control. Propaganda was thus elevated from the rank of a party activity to that of a semi-independent institution. This development culminated in the foundation of the Ministry of Popular Culture in 1936.

The ministry had seven departments: one each for the Italian press, foreign press, propaganda proper, motion pictures, travel, theater, and radio. The department of the Italian press had four divisions: (1) personnel and general affairs; (2) dailies and periodicals in the Italian language (also those appearing abroad and in the colonies); (3) books and libraries; (4) internal propaganda (comprising literary, artistic, and sport publications, children's papers, and trade papers for radio and cinema). It will be noted that more or less all literary activities were unified, while the German Propaganda Ministry set up two separate chambers to deal with books and periodicals respectively.

The department of the foreign press had three divisions. The first dealt with personnel, general affairs, and news service to foreign countries; the second supervised foreign newspapers and foreign journalists according to language groups (one group consisting of French, Spanish-Portuguese, and English; another comprising Germanic, Slavic, Oriental, and other languages). The third division studied translations and criticism; it also administered an archive for foreign publications and regulated the circulation of foreign papers in Italy.

The department of propaganda had two divisions only. The first dealt with personnel and general administrative problems and worked on various aspects of propaganda in foreign countries. It distributed all sorts of publications and translations and was well-informed about the book market and libraries. Important, too, was a section on economic and corporative propaganda. The second division specialized in motion pictures, radio, and the fine arts. This was the only reference to the fine arts within the organization of the ministry. As will be remembered, the German Propaganda Ministry had a large section designed to use the fine arts for propaganda material. The Italians used them for simple cultural propaganda only. The whole propaganda division was subdivided into sections for internal and external propaganda.

The motion-picture department had four sections. The first was of a general and legal nature. It dealt with personnel questions, credits, and the supervision of the great national production center, *LUCE*. The second controlled the artistic and technical aspects of the production of films. The third was interested in film trade

papers and all sorts of "cultural" activities related to motion pictures. The last section tried to reorganize the Italian motion-picture industry, the distribution abroad of Italian movies, and the international exchange of pictures. It may be said that this reorganization never succeeded and that the Fascists were not able to produce good pictures. For this reason, the Italian public continued to show its preference for foreign, particularly, American, motion pictures, which the government forbade when Italo-American relations began to be strained.

The department of travel had five divisions administering all the details of one of Italy's foremost peacetime industries. The theater department, or, as it was also called, the "department of stage inspection," covered more than its name suggests and operated under four divisions. The first division dealt with administrative matters; the second was concerned with music, especially opera, concert, dance, operetta, mechanically transcribed music, and subsidies for the arrangement of Italian musical productions abroad. The Nazis, it will be remembered, organized a Chamber of Music for their *Reichskulturkammer*; the Fascists inserted music as a mere section into their Ministry of Popular Culture. Division three controlled the legitimate stage and was responsible for the permission of new performances; it also superintended radio dramatics and sponsored competitions. The fourth division supervised the more technical aspects of all these arts and maintained the theatrical censorship bureau.

The last department was the "inspectorate for radio and television." It had a Bureau of Coordination where the interests of all the ministries were taken care of and where correspondence, copywriting, and filing were handled. One division was devoted exclusively to domestic service, catering to the various strata of the people in town and country in accordance with the dictates of the Fascist government. The other division dealt with foreign countries only and set up special programs for the Mediterranean countries, the Far East, East Africa, Arabic countries, Greece, Latin America, and North America.

When the new ministry was created, its first incumbent was Galeazzo Ciano, who subsequently became minister of foreign affairs. In his budget speech before the senate on May 22, 1936, he

made some revealing remarks concerning the individual departments.

The control of the domestic press, Ciano said, should not be solely negative. The department would see to it that the new philosophy and the Fascist way of thinking would improve both journalism and journalists. There should be a complete elimination of the "black column" which was merely "an apology of crime catering to the ill-placed interests of the publisher. Such news items are now confined to the briefest possible space."<sup>1</sup> Signor Ciano was referring, of course, to crime and scandal news. The regulations concerning the profession of journalism were subsequently taken in hand by the respective syndicates.

Books were also put under stricter censorship than before. The "freedom of the artist" was not to be confined by censorship to shortsighted and narrow limits, and "every wholesome expression of the mind is welcomed, respected, and circulated. But if unqualified contraband is being smuggled under cover of art, or if ideas which prove offensive to the national, religious, and social ethics of Fascism are disseminated under cover of science, the Ministry will become intransigent and publications of the foregoing nature will be suppressed without mercy."<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, the minister demanded an improvement in the standard of literary production for the sake of Italy's national prestige. The Nazis found themselves compelled to issue the same "order." They did not succeed, and neither did the Fascists. Creative activity cannot be coerced into a political mold.

Concerning the motion-picture industry, Ciano admitted its failure to produce tangible results. Since "the cinema, today, is perhaps the most powerful means for the esthetic, moral, and political education of the people," the state should take a special interest in it and, in some cases, itself be the producer. The cinema would never kill the legitimate stage, he added when talking about the theater department, and the state would see to it that the living theater and the opera were further assisted and encouraged.<sup>3</sup>

As for the radio, Ciano tried to justify the expansion of the

<sup>1</sup>"The Ministry of Press and Propaganda," speech by Galeazzo Ciano, *Società Editrice di Novissima*, Rome, 1936, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 20.

language divisions. This time (1936) saw an increased foreign propaganda on the part of Fascism. Ciano stated that it had been his aim "to cast a true light on the activity of Fascism, and to provide the world with a daily documentation on the trend of thought and the creative work of the regime. This is becoming more and more necessary as the ranks of foreigners who are drawing nearer to Fascism begin to swell, while barriers, consequently raised by opponents to hinder the trend of new and highly successful ideas require to be smashed."<sup>1</sup> Note that the minister stated in the same paragraph that propaganda was "not to interfere with the internal affairs of other countries."<sup>2</sup>

Two more institutions for the spread of Fascist culture should be mentioned. First, there were the Institutes of Fascist Culture founded in Bologna in 1925. They consisted of a decentralized organization with the purpose of spreading Fascist morale and of creating a uniformity of spirit throughout the country. These institutes became the purveyors of local Fascist "culture" in the same way that the *Deutsche Kulturbund*, German Cultural Bund, spread "culture" in the totalitarian spirit.

The other institution was the famous *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro*, a leisure-time organization, which combined the purposes of social welfare and political indoctrination.<sup>3</sup> The *Dopolavoro* was founded in 1925 on a "voluntary" basis. By the time Italy entered the war, millions of Italians had joined it. The services extended to the members were manifold: (1) physical education, sports, excursions; (2) artistic education and visits to theaters, operas, concerts, cinemas, and special radio programs; (3) folk and popular arts; (4) vocational education; (5) assistance in case of need.

There is no denying that this organization did excellent work and, as a result, won new recruits for Fascism. The Germans knew why they imitated *Dopolavoro*. Under democratic auspices, such an organization could be made to serve useful ends; but it would have to be divorced from ulterior motives of indoctrination. In Germany and in Italy, humanitarian purposes have been secondary

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17. Italics mine.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> *Dopolavoro*, "after work."



in the creation of welfare organizations, however excellent these may have been in practice. Their primary aim has been to collect members; to control those members individually by controlling their groups; to supplement their education to the advantage of the state; and, finally, to use their leisure time as well as the organization for additional indoctrination.

*Dopolavoro* gave much to those who became its members, but it asked even more in return. Other organizations of a social welfare character were also willing to help, but they, too, were very demanding. Membership was voluntary in theory, but compulsory in practice. There was perhaps only one organization which could not gain more members: the Maternity and Child Welfare Institute, whose replica was the German Mother and Child movement. The Fascist "battle for the increase of Italian population" was a losing battle. Bachelors were heavily taxed; government officials were practically compelled to marry under penalty of losing their jobs—but the Italians refused to obey. The fact that Italians did not receive as much money for a marriage allowance as the Germans can hardly account for a substantial decrease in the birth rate.

#### THE FASCIST SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

Italy had its first important educational reform in 1859. It was in that year that Gabriele Casati created a new educational system for the provinces of Piedmont and Lombardy, based on the French idea of centralization. This system was gradually adopted by other parts of the Peninsula and remained fundamentally intact until Gentile introduced his new Fascist schools and curricula.

The Casati reform was not uniformly successful because the responsibility for establishing and maintaining schools remained in the hands of the local communities which, in most cases, hesitated to spend money for education. Consequently, the percentage of illiteracy in Italy at the time of the First World War was amazingly high. In the south, only 30 per cent of the people could read and write; in the central provinces, about 41 per cent; in the northern districts, where the situation was better, about 89 per cent. Frequent attempts at reform did not produce tangible improvements.

In October, 1922, the newly installed Fascist government empowered Giovanni Gentile to revise the Italian school system thor-

oughly and to imbue it with the new spirit. A reform plan, presented and accepted in December, was carried out by Gentile. After his resignation in July, 1924, his basic plan remained in force but the details were repeatedly modified. This period of changes continued until 1939 when Giuseppe Bottai, then minister of education, ended what the Fascists called the "tragedy of retouchings." He introduced another reform whose character took into consideration the changes Fascism had undergone since 1922 in political, social, and economic respects.

1. *Fascist Educational Philosophy.* Education was naturally regarded as one of the most important instruments of Fascist indoctrination. Yet it is interesting to find that even the Fascist Charter of Education, issued in 1939 and designed to "fascistize" education to the extreme, did not abandon cultural education quite so completely as Germany. Italy is, after all, with Greece, the cradle of Western civilization. It is only natural that so venerable a tradition should have deeper roots than in Germany. Besides, a knowledge of the classics was obviously important in the eyes of a regime which cherished the dream of creating a modernized version of the old Roman Empire.

The fundamentals of Fascist philosophy were strongly reflected in Fascist education. The unitarian and centralized aspect of the new Italy was stressed, and the need of a common culture emphasized as a basis for the new nationalism. At the same time, education was not to be the same for all individuals. On the contrary, there was to be a sharp differentiation between the various types of schools, between elementary and higher education. Only those likely to be of particular service to the Fascist state were to be admitted to the higher schools. The selection of a political élite became one of the central problems of Fascist educational practice. Consequently, there was no equality of educational opportunities such as exists in America.

A careful distinction was made between elementary and secondary education because different results were expected from the two levels of training. Like the German, the Italian elementary school was designed to be the school of the masses. In its early stages, it remained purposely nonvocational and it was to foster the spiritual and cultural growth of the child through the teaching of religious

and artistic subjects. This reflected the "idealism" of early Fascism and its philosopher Gentile, who was vigorously opposed to rationalistic and scientific education. By contrast, the advanced elementary schools, which were meant for the children of the lower middle classes and petty officials, were highly differentiated along strictly vocational lines. Significantly enough, they were described as "informative" by contrast with the "formative" schools, the secondary schools preparing the élite.

Classicism ruled the curriculum of secondary schools; Latin, for example, was a compulsory subject in all of them. Like the seventeenth-century humanists, Gentile wanted the entire higher educational plan to be based upon a knowledge of the classics; while not eliminating religious teaching, he strove to direct former "sectarianism" into worship of the divine state and its high priest, the Duce. Religious teaching thus became the handmaiden of Fascist indoctrination. The Concordat under which religious training was made compulsory both in elementary and secondary schools turned out to be a Pyrrhic victory from the point of view of the church.

Italy still permitted private schools to exist, but these schools were under state supervision; they might use no textbooks other than those approved by the Ministry of Education. Their students were required to pass examinations before a state board just like students of public schools. While public schools, which were free, accepted students with high qualifications only, private schools accepted any students whose parents were in a position to pay. This situation within the Fascist setup may seem paradoxical. While many Fascists did not like private schools, they did not succeed in eliminating them. Even the Bottai reform of 1939 did not attempt to abolish them. Of course, no amount of money could help any student pass the very rigid graduation test, the prerequisite for entrance into the universities. Selection on the basis of Fascist orthodoxy remained a cardinal principle of the educational philosophy of Fascism.

Gentile's reforms reflected the trends of Fascism in its early stages. The Fascist doctrine had not even been definitely developed then. The situation was very different in the thirties when Fascism had achieved maturity. In consequence, the Gentile reform should be regarded as a partially successful attempt to reduce illiteracy,

to establish "idealism" in education, and thus to prepare for the introduction of some basic Fascist ideas in the schools of the new Italy. As time went on and political changes took place, many features of this earlier scheme proved no longer adequate and modifications were introduced. Finally, the Duce ordered Education Minister Bottai to reconstruct the entire educational organization and, this time, to make it "genuinely" Fascist. The new system was approved by the Fascist Grand Council on February 16, 1939, as the "birth certificate of the Fascist school." The outbreak of war prevented the scheme from being put fully into operation.

2. *The School System.* The Duce asked for an ambitious program. Gentile's reform had been philosophical and doctrinal; now Mussolini wanted a new school system, not merely a reformed one. After the new school charter had been accepted by the Fascist government, Bottai circularized his report, explaining that the application "of the principle contained in the school charter will result in a radical renovation of the school, Fascist in its system, method, structure and style."<sup>1</sup>

The most important aspects of the new school charter may be summarized as follows:

Since the Fascist doctrine was now definitely established and had put the whole nation under a total and unitarian rule, cognizance of this totality should be taken by the school in its form, methods, and curriculum content, and it should be related to the organs of Fascism for its sociopolitical training. (The relationship between the school and the youth movement was a closer one than in Germany.)

For vocational training, suitable types of schools would have to be found in accordance with the capacities of the pupil rather than with the desires of his family. This meant that "parents or guardians will no longer be able, for family or economic reasons, to exert undue influence on the selection of the professions of their children."<sup>2</sup> Talented students without means would be given the opportunity of studying at the expense of the state.

Cultural and social snobbery was countered with the introduction of manual training during the regular school periods and by

<sup>1</sup> Giuseppe Bottai, "Circular on Education," February 16, 1939, quoted by Howard R. Marraro, "Italy's New School Charter," *School and Society*, May 20, 1939.

<sup>2</sup> Marraro, *loc. cit.*

the requirement of "vacations" spent in (compulsory) camps. The camp work idea was apparently borrowed from the German Labor Service but largely modified.

Education began at the age of four when the child received some preliminary training in the *scuola materna* (kindergarten). Upon reaching six years of age, his three years of elementary schooling began. The child would then spend the fourth and fifth years of the elementary level in the work school (*scuola del lavoro*). After these two years of manual training, the ten-year-old child would face the question of what school to choose. Basically, he had three possibilities: he might take a three-year course to prepare himself for a trade; he might start a three-year vocational course in preparation for one of the technical schools that would lead to a job in a commercial or industrial enterprise; or he might decide to attend a three-year course in a junior high school (*scuola media inferiore*) with a view to entering the senior type of high school.

After finishing one of the three-year courses, the student had either to be recommended by the teachers or to pass an examination in order to be permitted to go ahead. Corresponding to the type of school, a choice of commercial, technical, agricultural, surveying, or nautical institute would be available. The top-ranking secondary schools remained the classical and scientific lyceums. They offered a five-year course which opened the way to the universities.

There was very little flexibility in this system. A pupil having elected at the age of ten to attend a junior high school might, at the age of thirteen or fourteen, decide to attend a technical or vocational school rather than the senior high school (*ginnasio* or *liceo*). After that no changing over from one type of school to the other was possible.

The end of the high-school period was marked by a very rigid state examination. The Board of Examiners considered not only the academic merits and the political reliability of the candidates but also the quota of university students. Their number was determined by the government and, as in Germany, restricted. Each type of senior high school prepared the students for particular university departments. No change was allowed.

The school system was primarily designed for boys. Girls, as a

rule, were not expected to go into higher studies. There were special high schools of commercial and technical character and teachers' preparatories for girls. Very few girls studied at classical lyceums and went to universities. The position of women in Italy has always been socially restricted. Church and tradition made the home the center of female activities. The Fascists had no difficulty in continuing and strengthening this tradition.

When Gentile was directing Fascist education, he wanted the universities to be and to remain scholarly institutions of free learning and free teaching. This worthy purpose could not stand up under the pressure of Fascist regimentation. The universities deteriorated in spite of the fact that legally they were regarded as autonomous and were entrusted with their own jurisdiction in the traditional way. The professors, being state employees, had to become members of the Fascist party and no new instructor was considered unless he had Fascist affiliations. In 1932, a professional oath was introduced pledging the professors to follow Fascist doctrine as their basic guide in teaching. Some famous educators refused to take the oath and resigned.

Fascism also captured the student body. The Fascist student associations were the most ardent supporters of Mussolini. Their relationship with the "Young Fascists," the oldest and most belligerent of the youth movement groups, was very close. Their activity was political rather than academic.

A law of December 31, 1934, ordered all education to be coordinated with later military training. "Military education is an integral part of national education," the law proclaimed, "it begins as soon as the child is capable of learning, and continues until the citizen is in a condition to take up arms for the defense of the country."<sup>1</sup>

The decree was one of the most significant expressions of the spirit of Fascist education. The emphasis on premilitary instruction was aimed at molding the mind of the children and adolescents, preparing the ground for political indoctrination. The close cooperation between the semimilitary youth movement and the schools was in keeping with the martial aspects of an education for death. It should be added that all these efforts of Fascism at capturing the

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Herman Finer, *Mussolini's Italy*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1935, p. 485.

allegiance of youth were successful up to a point only. A degree of passive resistance was met at the lower levels while in the higher strata, in the universities, the attempts at Fascist indoctrination often produced cynicism and scepticism rather than faith.

3. *Youth Movements.* The effort to capture the loyalty of youth was not confined to formal education. The *Balilla* organization was created as a semiprivate movement, subsidized by "voluntary" contributions. In 1926, the National Balilla Institute (*Opera Nazionale Balilla*) was founded. It became part of the Italian national system for the control of youth and was organized for the "assistance and physical and moral education of youth" under the sponsorship of the Ministry of the Interior. "Fascism considers the problem of the education of the young as one of the fundamental tasks of the Revolution . . ." stated the charter establishing the Balilla Institute.<sup>1</sup>

The Balilla Institute remained semiautonomous until 1929 when it was put under the control of the Ministry of Education. Youths between the ages of eight and eighteen were "invited" to serve in their respective groups; in 1934, six-to-eight-year-olds were added, and some time later, young people from eighteen to twenty-one were also included. The fundamental aim of training was to instill in the young the sense of military discipline, to instruct them in gymnastics and all kinds of sports, to educate them culturally, and to do some "religious" teaching as well. By 1938, the Fascist government had succeeded in enrolling about 65 per cent of all Italian youths, both boys and girls, in its movement. It may be assumed that the remaining 35 per cent were either physically unfit or regarded as coming from politically unreliable families.

The following table shows the organization of the various groups:

BOYS		GIRLS	
<i>Figli della lupa</i> (wolf cubs)	6-8	<i>Figlie della lupa</i>	6-8
<i>Balilla</i>	8-14	<i>Piccole italiane</i> (little Italian girls)	8-14
<i>Avanguardisti</i>	14-18	<i>Giovani italiane</i> (young Italian girls)	14-18
<i>Giovani Fascisti</i> (young Fascists)	18-21	<i>Giovani Fasciste</i> (young Fascist girls)	18-21

<sup>1</sup> Law of April 3, 1926, quoted by Finer, *op. cit.*, p. 427.

The entire organization was called *Gioventù Italiana del Littorio* (GIL).<sup>1</sup> Its motto was: *Believe—Obey—Fight*, which may be translated as faith, discipline, and action. The organization was a replica of the hierarchical organization of the Fascist party. It put “character” and “moral” training in the first rank, followed by a physical training which amounted to premilitary instruction. Various activities of a boy-scout nature supplemented the training. Military instruction began at the earliest age levels when wooden rifles were given to the Wolf Cubs; the *Balilla* used small army rifle models. Upon being transferred to the *Avanguardisti*, the boys learned to shoot with regular army rifles. Special groups were even instructed in the use of machine guns. The Young Fascists had already begun their army training; they were by now completely familiar with military conceptions, regulations, and technique.

During all these years of training, the boys were indoctrinated with Fascist ideals and Fascist conceptions about the position of Italy in the world. Their absolute loyalty to the regime was symbolized by the oath they had to swear upon entering the various stages of the GIL. The manuals for *Balilla* and *Avanguardisti* reminded the youngsters that they belonged throughout their lives to the Duce and the Fascist cause and not by any means to themselves. The oath was stressed repeatedly and was even printed on their membership cards.

The Young Fascists were the party members of the future. When they became twenty-one years of age, they would be admitted into the ranks of the party or, perhaps, into the militia, which was a special honor. Their importance to the party was indicated by the fact that the secretary of the party himself was their commander. (School teachers, who had to be members of the party, led the younger formations; militia men commanded the *Avanguardia*.) Their training was planned for war and violence; the emphasis was on shooting practice rather than on the harmless pleasures of youth.

The training of girls was not quite so military. The influence of the Catholic Church, the deeply rooted Italian ideas about the family and the position of women, and Fascism's own views, served to mitigate the belligerence of the girl corps. Augusto Turati, for-

<sup>1</sup> Italian Youth of the Lictor



mer secretary of the Fascist party, set forth as follows the purposes of the girl's training:

1. To fulfill her duties as daughter, sister, student, and friend, with cheerfulness and joy even though they be fatiguing
2. To serve the Nation as her other and greater mother, the mother of all good Italians.
3. To love the Duce who has made the Nation stronger and greater.
4. To obey her superiors with joy.
5. To have the courage to repulse those who give evil council and denude honesty.
6. To educate the body to withstand physical fatigue and the spirit not to show pain.
7. To abhor stupid vanity but to love beautiful things.
8. To love work which is life.<sup>1</sup>

Practically speaking, the girls in the youth organization received training in civics, physical education, Fascist ideology, and domestic sciences. Their goal was to be perfect wives and mothers, beautiful and healthy, and good Fascists.

Those who were to lead youth on the basis of GIL principles, received a special training course in a Fascist Academy of Physical and Youth Education. There was one for young men in Rome and a smaller one for girls in Orvieto. Male candidates had to pass a competitive examination after having been graduated from a secondary school; they had to be over twenty-four years of age, physically well developed, and not married; they also had to have a politically satisfactory record, and be members either of the party or of the Balilla Institute. Their final acceptance was based not only upon the examination and the physical test, but also upon the candidates' moral references and background. The course lasted three years.

The course for girls who wanted to study at the Orvieto Academy took only two years; high-school graduates between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one, unmarried, and members of one of the Fascist organizations were admissible. They would be active as leaders in the *Piccole* and *Giovani Italiane* sections.

A number of smaller organizations like the *Doposcuola* (after school) Institute for children whose homes could not provide suffi-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by H. W. Schneider and S. B. Clough, *Making Fascists*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1929, pp. 181-82.

cient care for them, or the Junior Red Cross Society for hygiene training, useful as they appear, all served the same ultimate purpose—to make good Fascists out of the children.

Nothing can better show the character of Fascist indoctrination than ten commandments which were hammered into the minds of both young and old:

1. Know that the Fascist and in particular the soldier, must not believe in perpetual peace.
2. Days of imprisonment are always deserved.
3. The nation is also served even as sentinel over a can of petrol.
4. A companion must be a brother, first, because he lives with you, and secondly because he thinks like you.
5. The rifle and cartridge belt, and the rest, are confided to you not to be ruined in leisure, but to be preserved for war.
6. Do not ever say "The Government will pay" . . . because it is you who pay; and the Government is that which you willed to have, and for which you put on a uniform.
7. Discipline is the soul of armies: without it, there are no soldiers, but only confusion and defeat.
8. *Mussolini is always right!*
9. For a volunteer there are no extenuating circumstances when he is disobedient.
10. One thing must be dear to you above all: the life of the Duce <sup>1</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

The comparison between Nazism and Fascism makes the latter appear as a milder form of totalitarianism. To a certain extent that is so. The greater mellowness and deeper roots of Italian culture, reflected in the traditions and character of the Italian people, account in part for the difference. It is true that, in actual effect, Fascism was not able to secure as firm a hold on the Italian people as Nazism on the German. But when it comes to the fundamental issue of an outlook upon life, the difference between the two is small. In a way, the seeming greater mildness of Fascism made it the more dangerous, for it gave it a greater "export value" than Nazism. Thus it is that many people in the democratic countries, blind to the fundamental vices of Fascist ideology, have allowed themselves to be impressed by a superficial—though much advertised—efficiency. This apparent efficiency, especially in the eco-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *Finer, op cit.*, p. 443.

conomic domain, has often been contrasted with the "impotence of democratic muddling." In addition, the Lateran Treaty did much to give Fascism the stamp of respectability. It has not been one of the lesser successes of Fascist propaganda to succeed in building up an association, in the minds of many, between Fascism and a presumed "law and order," especially in contrast with the fear for the safety of established institutions engendered by the discontent of the masses.

Of the two ideologies, Fascism is the older. In many ways it served to prepare the way for Nazism, which learned much from its teacher whom it was soon to excel. In addition, Fascism set in motion a wave of nationalism such as the world had never before experienced. A capital difference between Fascism and Nazism lay in the fact that the latter disposed of the much greater resources, and therefore power, of the German nation. This is what made it a far more dangerous and immediate threat to the outside world. By herself, Italy alone could never have been such a threat. But, to the historian of the future, the real significance of Fascism is likely to appear in the universal appeal of the new ideology, which cut across national boundaries; an appeal coming from the fact that it was a response to problems which are typical of our time. That is why, despite its demise in Italy, the danger represented by the Fascist ideology is anything but dead.

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