The Legitimising Strategies of the Nazi Administration in Northern Italy: Propaganda in the Adriatisches Küstenland

GIANMARCO BRESADOLA

From September 1943 to 25 April 1945 all of Italy not occupied by the Allied forces was either controlled by the Fascist government of the Italian Social Republic (Reppublica Sociale Italiana, RSI) or was under German martial law under the leadership of Friedrich Walter Landfried, Reich Secretary of State for the Economy.[1] However, the two northernmost areas of Italy, contiguous operations zones known as Alpenvorland and Adriatisches Küstenland, were set apart from this regime and governed by Nazi civil administrators.

In what follows I shall first summarise the modus operandi of the Nazi military occupation in Italy, the status of the RSI and the general characteristics of the civil administration in the two operations zones. I shall then examine the legitimising strategies employed by the Nazis in the Adriatisches Küstenland and the way in which these were translated into propaganda, with particular attention to the German-language newspaper *Deutsche Adria Zeitung*, which gives a particularly clear idea of the Reich's plans for the future of the region.

Italy after the armistice: the German military administration, the Social Republic and the operations zone

From the early months of 1943, as the Fascist regime began to totter, the Nazi generals were already considering a possible military occupation of their Italian ally

Translated by Rosemary Williams.

[1] The structure of the German military administration in Italy was similar to that previously set up in other Wehrmacht-occupied European countries. There was a political leader (Reich Plenipotentiary Rudolf Rahn), a military leader (General Plenipotentiary Rudolf Toussaint) and a chief of police and SS chief (SS *Obergruppenführer* and police leader Karl Wolff). After the attempt on Hitler's life on 20 July 1944 General Toussaint was demoted and his powers transferred to SS-Obergrüppenführer Wolff, considerably extending his authority. Landfried was also replaced, by SS Grüppenführer Otto Wächter. The most important studies of the Nazi military occupation of Italy are E. Collotti, *L'occupazione tedesca dell'Italia occupata (1943–1945). Studio e documenti* (Milan: Lerici, 1963), and L. Klinkhammer, *L'occupazione tedesca in Italia (1943–1945)* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1993).

Contemporary European History, **13**, 4 (2004), pp. 425–451 © 2004 Cambridge University Press
DOI: 10.1017/S0960777304001882 Printed in the United Kingdom

if its government decided to pull out of the war. The Germans were not caught unawares by the 8 September armistice: they were ready with operation 'Alaric', as they called the occupation plan that had been drawn up in spring and summer 1943, and very soon seized control of most of the country. The aims of the occupation were primarily strategic and military, and secondarily propagandist: Italy was to serve as a warning to other allies of Germany who felt inclined to withdraw from the conflict. Moreover, the Germans saw central and northern Italy as a reservoir of manpower for the factories of the Reich, and a source of industrial and agricultural products for the German war economy. The very fact that an economist, in the person of Landfried, was chosen to head the administration reveals the Nazi's preoccupation with exploiting the human, material and logistic resources of Italy.[2]

Whereas the Nazi generals favoured a policy of occupation pure and simple and opposed the restoration of any Italian Fascist authority, others – backed by the Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop – advocated the creation of a nominally independent state which would perpetuate – in however limited a way – the alliance with the Reich and relieve the Wehrmacht of the tasks of internal policing and territorial organisation. The second alternative won out, leading to the constitution of the Italian Social Republic in Wehrmacht-controlled Italy.[3] It formed a government on 23 September 1943, headed by Benito Mussolini.[4] The Duce, and most of his political and military elite, envisaged the RSI as a bastion to preserve the pure and uncorrupted soul of Fascism, free at last from the curbs imposed during their twenty years of power by the forces of conservatism, the monarchy and the Church.

When it came to the practicalities of setting up and governing the new state, however, the Italian Fascists were baulked by the intransigence of the German authorities, which were determined to confine the RSI within the narrow limits of Nazi war aims. Symptomatic of the very different German and Italian views of the new Republic was the question of the Italian regular army. Marshal Graziani, Minister of Defence and Commander in Chief, had to grapple not only with the very limited success of call-ups and recruitment campaigns,[5] but also, and more importantly, with opposition from most of the German political and military leaders who were deeply and openly sceptical as to Italians' stomach for the fight, and would have preferred to see RSI manpower put to work for the Reich rather than sent to the battlefield.

[2] The final say on the objectives and political orientation of the military occupation was the prerogative of the agents of Albert Speer, Reich minister of armaments and war production, and the gauleiter Fritz Sauckel, Reich plenipotentiary for the employment of labour.

[3] The Italian Social Republic is also known as the 'Repubblica di Salò', after the town on Lake Garda which became the seat of government.

[4] After the coup d'état on 25 July 1943 Mussolini was arrested and imprisoned in the mountainous region of the Gran Sasso. On 12 September he was rescued by German parachutists and taken to Italy, where he met Hitler a few days later to agree the outlines of a future Fascist Italian state. See F. W. Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism* (London: Phoenix, 2000 [1962]).

[5] For his recruitment pool Graziani looked substantially to the annual call-up (announced on 9 October 1943) and to Italian soldiers interned in German camps. With considerable difficulty he succeeded in forming four divisions – San Marco, Monterosa, Italia and Littorio – which were trained in Germany but played only a very small part in military operations against the Allies; they were used mostly to combat partisan guerrillas.

On the economic side, again, the Germans allowed the RSI only the smallest margin of autonomy; Italian production was more or less controlled and managed by the Nazis. It was on the social side that Mussolini tried hardest to seize the initiative, with the main aim of regaining the support of the workers, who had become increasingly hostile to both the Republic and the Nazi occupation. But the Duce's ambitious programme of 'socialisation'[6] ended in failure: it was strongly opposed by employers and by the Germans, who feared that it might reduce productivity, and the workers did not give it the warm welcome which Mussolini and his henchmen had anticipated.

Although the sovereignty of the RSI was acutely constrained and it was effectively unable to make its own decisions, it was more than a mere Nazi 'puppet state'.[7] What it did was to supply Nazi-occupied Italy with an Italian government, administration and army which pursued, and strove to perfect, a totalitarian project in sympathy with the aims of Nazi Germany – aims in which the Fascists actively participated, for example as regards the persecution of the Jews.

Neither the RSI nor the German military occupation was extended to the two Italian regions bordering on the Reich, where Hitler was determined to set up a civil administration. It was no novelty for the Nazis to set up a civil administration in occupied territories: 'German civil administrations had been set up in other parts of Europe, particularly in territories which were formally or actually annexed to the Reich (e.g. Alsace-Lorraine or Luxembourg), or where such administration was considered as an interim measure pending a future annexation.'[8]

The first operations zone, the Alpenvorland (Foothills of the Alps), was officially set up on 18 September 1943 and included the provinces of Bolzano, Trento and Belluno. The civil administration was headed by the Tyrolese gauleiter Franz Hofer, who took the title of high commissioner. He enjoyed the widest judicial, legislative and executive powers and was directly responsible to the Führer.[9]

After a few weeks, during which German military units crushed partisan units that had sprung into renewed life after the disbanding of the Italian army units stationed in the eastern regions, a second zone of operations, the Adriatisches Küstenland (Adriatic Coast), was set up on 1 October. It included the provinces of Udine, Trieste, Gorizia, Pola, Fiume and Ljubljana. Its high commissioner was the influential gauleiter of

[6] This involved making workers responsible for managing their own factories.

[7] The RSI was for a long time neglected by historians. Apart from the works mentioned above – Deakin's pioneering study, and the works by Collotti and Klinkhammer, in which both focus on the structure of the German occupation and the relationship between the Nazis and the government in Salò – other studies are L. Ganapini, *La Repubblica delle camicie nere. I combattenti, i politici, gli amministratori, i socializzatori* (Milan: Garzanti, 1999); R. De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato. 1940–1945*, II: *La guerra civile (1943–1945)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1997); P. P. Poggio (ed.), *La Repubblica sociale italiana*, Annali della Fondazione Micheletti 2 (Brescia, 1986); G. Bocca, *La repubblica di Mussolini* (Bari and Rome: Laterza, 1977).

[8] E. Collotti, 'L'occupazione tedesca in Italia', in E. Collotti, R. Sandri and F. Sessi, eds., *Dizionario della Resistenza. Storia e geografia della Liberazione* (Turin: Einaudi, 2000), 47.

[9] The Alpenvorland zone has been little studied. See, e.g., R. De Felice, *Il problema dell'Alto Adige nei rapporti italo-tedeschi dall'Anschluss alla fine della seconda guerra mondiale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1973); K. Stuhlpfarrer, *Le Zone d'Operazione Prealpi e Litorale Adriatico, 1943–1945* (Gorizia: Libreria Adami, 1979); various authors, *Tedeschi, partigiani, popolazioni nell'Alpenvorland* (Venice: Marsilio, 1984).

Carinthia, Friedrich Rainer;[10] like Hofer, he had well-nigh absolute power over the political, social, juridical and financial life of his province and was directly answerable to Hitler.

Each zone was governed by a civil service led by a gauleiter; the Italian Social Republic had no authority. Officially, the administration of the Alpenvorland and the Adriatisches Küstenland was geared to military needs – the Germans had set up operations zones in other parts of Italy where fighting was in progress – and it was, in theory, temporary. In reality the Germans, ignoring repeated, albeit timorous, protests from a Mussolini now powerless to influence his Nazi allies, had incorporated the two zones into the Reich, and everything went to show that if the Axis powers won the war, all or parts of them would be permanently removed from Italian sovereignty.[11]

The prospect of permanently incorporating the two zones into the Reich required the Nazi administration to make far greater legitimising efforts than was usual in zones of temporary occupation, where the main aim was to minimise hostility on the part of the inhabitants. The civil administrations run by Rainer and Hofer not only had to win over the population in the short term – that is, until the end of the war – but to persuade them that their best option for the future (the best way to conserve their cultural traditions, maintain their ethnic and national identity and promote their economic and social wellbeing) was permanent inclusion in the territories of the Reich. Both administrations found themselves in the typical position of the occupying power in a state (or colony or protectorate) which has to constitute its own legitimacy largely or entirely on a basis of hegemony.[12] Although the intention to annex these regions was never openly declared, the legitimacy of their administrations depended closely on that of the National Socialist state, which, clothed in the majesty of an 'imperial hegemonic authority', stood as guarantor of their security and economic development.

The difficulty of creating this legitimacy was considerably greater for the administration of the Adriatisches Küstenland than for that of the Alpenvorland. In the latter, the presence (especially in the province of Bolzano) of a large German-speaking element with strong anti-Italian and pro-Austrian sentiments encouraged the gauleiter, Hofer, to introduce a tough policy of racial discrimination. He reversed the policy of the Fascists, who had tried to Italianise the Alto Adige and Trentino

[10] Rainer, an enthusiastic and militant Nazi, was appointed to the prestigious post of gauleiter of Salzburg after the Anschluss. In 1942 his considerable political acumen and contacts with Nazi leaders secured him the position of gauleiter and Reichskommissar for Carinthia, a province bordering on the Reich. In this position his chief concern was to Germanise the area, which meant destroying the culture, politics and indeed the persons of the Slovene-speaking population. See M. Williams, 'Friedrich Rainer e Odilo Globocnik. L'amicizia insolita e i ruoli sinistri di due nazisti tipici', *Qualestoria* 1 (June 1997).

[11] The final incorporation of the province of Bolzano, or Alto Adige, into the Reich seems to have been taken for granted because of the very large German-speaking population there; the fate of the provinces of Trento and Belluno seems to have been less assured. It seemed equally certain that Italy would lose Friuli and Venezia Giulia, both of strategic value to the Reich, which had no other outlet to the Mediterranean and was eager to increase its presence in the Balkans. On the other hand, racial and ethnic considerations would have hampered the absorption of the Adriatic coastal zone into the Reich.

[12] N. Bobbio, N. Matteuccia and G. Pasquino, *Dizionario di politica* (Turin: UTET, 1990), 556.

by expelling or marginalising the German speakers, and instead favoured the latter, flooding the civil service with ethnic Germans and encouraging their folklore and traditions, stimulating links with the Austrian Tyrol.[13] On the other hand, he sealed off the territory of the zone from the authority of the Social Republic (the Republican Fascist Party was not permitted to operate in the Alpenvorland) and marginalised the ethnic Italians, who, though in the majority, were relegated to a subordinate position. Thus he created a loyal following based on ethnic and nationalist criteria, which meant that in the short term the German administration could count on a secure (because politically homogeneous) consensus of approval for its policies. In the longer term this would surely have ended in the region – or at least the province of Bolzano – being incorporated into Austria and so into the Reich.

Because the population of the Adriatisches Küstenland was not substantially German-speaking – the German-speaking communities, none of them very large, were confined to some parts of Friuli and the province of Ljubljana – the high commissioner, Rainer, could not follow the same sort of legitimising strategy as his colleague Hofer. Rather he exploited the peculiar ethno-social composition of the region and the numerous errors in local Fascist policies in his – to a considerable extent successful – attempt to create a widespread consensus in favour of his administration. To understand the thinking behind Rainer's legitimising strategies, therefore, we must look at the whole ethno-social structure of the zone and recall its history from the advent of the Fascist regime to its fall in July 1943.

Ethnic composition, socioeconomic structures and Fascist government in the eastern provinces

With the exception of Udine, all the provinces in the operations zones had been incorporated into the kingdom of Italy after the First World War. Trieste,[14] Gorizia and Pola went to Italy just after the cessation of hostilities, Fiume in 1924 under the Rome Treaty between Italy and Yugoslavia. Ljubljana became part of Italy in May 1941 when Yugoslavia was invaded by the Axis armies. Although the province of Udine was predominantly Italian and that of Ljubljana almost entirely Slovene,[15] in the other territories of the region a variety of ethnic groups was living side by side: a census in 1939 showed that almost 40 per cent of the inhabitants of Venezia Giulia were non-Italian speakers (about 25 per cent were Slovene, and just over 13 per cent Croatian).

This striking ethnic complexity was matched by a very wide range of differing social structures, both among and within the ethnic groups. Most of the Slovenes

[13] In order to increase the ethnic German element in this zone of operations the Germans admitted to it those inhabitants of the province of Bolzano who, after the agreement between the Reich and Italy (the alternatives offered in October 1939) had chosen to leave Italy for Germany or Austria.

[14] Although Trieste was not included until 1921, after a period of extraordinary administration.

[15] According to the 31 July 1941 census the population of Ljubljana consisted of 339,751 Slovene speakers (93.8 per cent of the total), 13,580 Germans, 5,053 Croatians, 511 Serbs, 458 Italians and 1,376 other nationalities: see M. Pahor, 'La provincia di Lubiana', in Collotti *et al.*, *Dizionario della Resistenza*, 607.

were peasants or livestock farmers. Ljubljana was the poorest province in Slovenia, and its economy depended on agriculture and timber (40 per cent of the province was wooded and there were about 250 sawmills). Even in the predominantly Italian areas there was a sizeable rural population, principally in central Istria, which had the largest proportion of Croatian speakers, and in Friuli, whose economy was chiefly dependent on agriculture; what little industry there was had been struggling to recover from the effects of the First World War. All the towns of Friuli and Venezia Giulia had some sort of industry[16] and a fairly well-developed commercial base; hence their social make-up was more complex, with a modest working class and a substantial petty and middle bourgeoisie. Of all the towns in the region, Trieste unquestionably had the most complete economic and social profile: it had a large upper-middle-class sector engaged in commerce, finance and industry, a commercial and professional bourgeoisie, a vast white-collar contingent employed in administration and insurance, and a large working class employed in various industries, chiefly shipbuilding.

Fascism had emerged quite early in Friuli and Venezia Giulia, in 1919/20, but only in Trieste did it have a substantial presence;[17] in the other towns it remained inconspicuous for some time. The Fascist successes in the 1921 elections were striking, but did not obliterate the opposition parties, which, like the Slovene and Croatian parties, received a substantial portion of the vote. After the seizure of power by Mussolini, the situation changed: the reigning economic and political elites stampeded into the party so as to secure the leading government posts, and Fascism, thanks to skilful and pervasive propaganda, gained a very wide measure of consent among almost all social groups. Faced with the difficult task of postwar reconstruction and the integration of the regional economy with that of Italy, the Fascist government was generous with public money – especially where industry was concerned, though there were also ambitious projects for agricultural improvement and urban restoration.

The policy met with only modest success, but the local Italian population, beguiled by incessant and insistent propaganda, soon mustered under the Fascist banner; while the traditional elites were rewarded for their adherence by increased prestige in Italian politics and the Italian economy, the regime's ferocious nationalism and lavish promises also appealed to the middle and lower classes. The strength of 'border

[16] Monfalcone, Muggia and Fiume had large shipbuilding facilities; Udine, Pordenone and Gorizia produced mainly textiles.

[17] Fascism's first steps in Trieste had been spectacular and entered into the mythology of the movement. In early 1919 a Fascist movement developed there which in April constituted the Fascio Triestino di Combattimento. Trieste's Fascio ('band') grew rapidly: in 1921 it was the largest in Italy, with nearly 15,000 members. The membership was augmented by Italian immigrants who had come into Venezia Giulia after the Great War, including a large number of demobbed soldiers who had been drafted in to replace Austrian civil servants. From 1922 the Fascist Party absorbed the politicians who had hitherto governed the city as liberal-conservative nationalists; in their wake came the higher bourgeoisie of merchants, industrialists and financiers. The birth of the Fascio Triestino di Combattimento and the first ten years of the Trieste Fasicst Party are described in detail by D. Mettiussi in *Il Partito NazionaleFascista a Trieste. Uomini e organizzasione del potere 1919–1932* (Trieste: Istituto Regionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione nel Friuli – Venezia Giulia, 2002).

Fascism',[18] as far as these social groups were concerned, were its exaltation of the Italian spirit and its welfare programme. On the one hand, violent repression of the substantial ethnic minorities – particularly the Slovenes and Croatians of Venezia Giulia and Istria – satisfied the Italians' thirst for supremacy and seemed to herald a foreign policy of expansion into the Balkans which would put Trieste in a more central location and so enable it to fulfil its historic role as 'the Rome of the east'; on the other, a social policy based on lavish welfare payments, omnipresent mass movements and the reorganisation of public life had largely won the support of even the poorest elements in society.

However, while the regime was widely accepted, and very free with its promises, many of the lower ranks, particularly outside the big towns, were suffering real hardship, and there was no rapid overall economic improvement despite the huge government subsidies. The consequences bore particularly hard on the business sector, whose prosperity depended on the condition of the port of Trieste, which had always been the main driver of the regional economy but had been in deep recession since the early 1920s.

It was some years before these problems began to sap the mass popularity of Fascism, but, once Italy had entered the war, support for Mussolini's regime visibly declined. For a brief period following the Axis conquest of Yugoslavia in April 1941, the people of Friuli and Venezia Giulia appeared to regain confidence in the Duce and his regime: it seemed that Trieste would at last become the gateway to the Balkans, as Fascist propaganda had so noisily proclaimed. But this mirage of power soon vanished: a succession of military defeats, the explosive situation in the Balkans and the entry into the war of the Soviet Union and the United States – the great powers – produced disillusion and discouragement, and the region's population developed a positive aversion to the regime which had failed to provide them with a decent standard of living. Dissatisfaction with Fascist policies which had repeatedly failed to regenerate the region's economy was supplemented by intense impatience with the atrocious management of supplies, including the essentials of life – for which the Party had assumed the entire responsibility – and there was a 'growing distrust of the men in power . . . who were viewed as incompetent freebooters'.[19] After the invasion of Yugoslavia and the annexation of the province of Ljubljana the Yugoslav armed anti-Fascist resistance intensified and the problem of resistance in the eastern region assumed a wider import – not merely political, but nationalistic.

From the outset, the 'border' Fascists, organised into military-style 'civil self-defence squads', had distinguished themselves by their savage attacks on the Slav communities of Venezia Giulia and Istria. Scores of Slovene and Croatian organisations had their headquarters destroyed, the worst incident being the burning

[18] 'Border Fascism' (*fascismo di confine*) was the term applied to themselves from the outset by the region's Fascists so as to highlight the ultranationalist inspiration behind the movement.

[19] 'Rapporto del 31 dicembre 1942 del questore di Trieste al Ministero dell'interno, Direzione generale della pubblica sicurezza, Divisione affari generali e riservati', cited in G. Fogar, 'Trieste', in Collotti *et al.*, *Dizionario della Resistenza*, 600.

of the Narodni Dom, the modern cultural centre that symbolised the strong presence of the Slovene community in Trieste. As Anna Vinci has commented, this episode signalled the true birth of Fascism, and its approval by the local press showed the 'undoubted consensus between liberal nationalist groups and nationalists'.[20] With the Fascists in power throughout Italy, the brutality of the Fascist squads – which were actually illegal, though generally tolerated by the authorities – was replaced by repression by the state, which, far from disowning the worst outrages, backed the violence by taking radical steps to deprive the ethnic minorities of their national identity: clubs were shut down, Slovene and Croatian schools suppressed, 'aliens' were excluded from the economic and political elites, and Slav names Italianised. This despotic Italianisation – which propagandists dressed up as a triumph of Latin civilisation over primitive Slav peasants – was opposed from the late 1920s by various groups, consisting mostly of young Slovenes with a leavening of Italian anti-Fascists, who took up arms against the regime. The Slav partisans sought both social recovery and a national uprising against the Italian oppressor. The Axis occupation of Yugoslavia galvanised the Slav resistance, which under communist guidance assumed a degree of military organisation which greatly increased its combative capacity; the guerrilla war even reached into the towns and was a particular threat to Gorizia and Trieste. Mussolini ordered draconian reprisals – in April 1942 a Special Public Safety Inspectorate for Venezia Giulia was set up in Trieste and ordered to crush the partisans without mercy – but they could not overcome the Yugoslav organisation, which indeed strengthened its recruitment of young Slovenes and Croatians, and also, thanks to its solid political and ideological backing, attracted Italian anti-Fascists with communist leanings. The Slav partisans became a mass movement under the banner of national recovery, combining the prospect of socio-political revolution with that of revenge on the Italian state. From autumn 1942 the communist guerrilla leaders publicly announced their intention of removing from Italian control the Slovene and Croatian territories that had been incorporated into the kingdom of Italy.

The Italians of Friuli and Venezia Giulia, already suffering from an ill-managed war economy and discouraged by the disastrous military situation of the Italian army, were now further afflicted by the immediate day-to-day insecurity generated by resistance activity and the imminent prospect of losing their primacy as a national group. Like the rest of Italy, the whole region – even Trieste, which had been a hotbed of Fascism – produced no hostile reaction to the fall of Mussolini and his regime in July 1943; indeed, it was greeted with a certain relief. However, the collapse of the regime ushered in a period of profound collective disorientation, which, while common to the entire country, 'assumed a further dimension on the eastern frontier, since the disappearance of Fascism removed the foundation of their principal preoccupation, the defence of their national identity'.[21]

[20] A. M. Vinci, 'Il fascismo e la società locale', in *Friuli e Venezia Giulia – Storia del '900* (Gorizia: Editrice Goriziana, 1997), 226.

[21] R. Pupo, 'Crisi del regime, guerra totale e Resistenza', in *Friuli e Venezia Giulia*, 355.

Thus it was that Friedrich Rainer, at the helm of the Nazi administration in the Adriatisches Küstenland, was able to use the nationalist and ethnic tensions engendered by Fascist repression as a lever when developing his legitimising strategy, by offering attractive – albeit illusory – solutions to the many critical questions that the former regime had been unable to answer. He had a thorough understanding of the regional context and strove to find ways of encouraging each of its diverse ethnic and social groups to look to the Reich, and hence to the local Nazi administration, as the promoter of its national destiny, the guarantor of its socio-political security and the harbinger of its economic prosperity. The financial, commercial and industrial elite of Venezia Giulia – and indirectly, all Italians in the region – were promised a new dawn of prosperity from the revival of the Trieste port complex as part of Hitler's new continental order; the workers and peasants were to enjoy the benefits of the German welfare state; the petty and middle bourgeoisie would be safeguarded against the social revolution advocated by the communist resistance. And the Slovenes were given the prospect of reoccupying the important positions which Fascist de-nationalisation had denied them, together with new markets for their timber and agricultural products.

Propaganda and repression: the two faces of the Nazi civil administration

One of the most effective legitimising and consensus-building tools available to the German administrators in the Adriatisches Küstenland was propaganda. From the first days of the occupation they were determined to acquire complete control over every means of communication in the operations zone. On 10 November 1943 Karl Lapper, head of Section II – Propaganda, Press and Culture – issued an order that no news from an Italian source was to be broadcast unless it had been specifically authorised by his department. Before long Lapper, who had already worked with Rainer in Carinthia, had built up an efficient propaganda structure which permeated every corner of the territory, organised an intensive programme of radio broadcasts and (while reducing Trieste's venerable daily *Il Piccolo* to a mere bulletin) created a number of newspapers and periodicals targeting individual ethnic and national groups.[22] The Nazi propaganda machine in the Adriatisches Küstenland also embraced an illustrated German-language weekly known as the *Adria Illustrierte Zeitung* and a daily, the *Deutsche Adria Zeitung*, published by Europa Verlag and containing articles from both the Reich press agencies and the paper's Trieste-based editors.[23] The *Deutsche Adria Zeitung*, which was available in all the Adriatic provinces, is the best example of how Rainer's administration used propaganda to legitimise itself vis-à-vis the assorted national and social groups in the region, and of how the Nazis set about incorporating that region into the Reich.

While Rainer made extensive use of propaganda for the purposes of persuasion, to sustain and nourish the legitimisation strategies of the Nazi administration, the

[22] The magazines for Slovenes, Croatians and Friulians – respectively *Groiški List*, *Glas Primorja* and *Voce di Furlania* – were particularly successful.

[23] The first issue of *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* appeared on 14 Jan. 1944, the last on 28 April 1945.

incorporation of the Adriatic Coast operations zone into Hitler's planned New European Order was largely pursued by violence. Opponents of the occupying forces – Italians no less than Slavs – were persecuted and fought with a harshness almost unequalled in the rest of Nazi-controlled Italy; in fact Trieste housed Italy's only extermination camp, at Risiera di San Sabba, where more than two thousand Jews and political opponents perished. The commandant of the San Sabba camp was *Obersturmführer* Odilo Lothar Globocnick, who had been a fellow-Nazi militant with Rainer for many years in Austria; Rainer now appointed him chief of police and SS units stationed in the operations zone. Before coming to Trieste Globocnik had served in the Polish district of Lublin, where, first as local SS and police chief and then as the director of Aktion Reinhardt, he had been a prime mover in the extermination of the Jews.[24] He brought with him to the operations zone most of his Aktion Reinhardt associates, and with them the ferocious repressive methods that had been used in the war of extermination in eastern Europe: murder of prisoners, savage reprisals against the civilian populations and the destruction of entire villages if they were merely suspected of harbouring partisans.

In view of this extensive use of coercion – which accorded with the strongly ideological content of the value system peddled by the Nazi administration, however it might be dressed up – the use of concepts of consensus and legitimacy to give the idea that part at least of the population in the operations zone accepted the Nazi regional government is of critical importance. No power structure can be considered legitimate unless it is accepted by the majority of the population it governs; the value of that legitimacy depends on the freedom of their acceptance. While a significant proportion of the population of the Adriatic Coast was willing to accept Nazi government, and to be incorporated into the Reich in the medium term, it cannot be said that this was a free and fully autonomous choice from among a wider range of alternatives – and only in those circumstances can the exercise of power be deemed truly legitimate.

The future of Trieste in the New European Order

The first steps taken by the German administration of the Adriatisches Küstenland show unequivocally how determined the Germans were to sever the region's links with the RSI. Rainer removed the leading political and business figures who had had links with the former Fascist regime and brought in a large number of civil servants from Austria; he ratified a new legal order to replace the Italian system, put a tight curb on the Republican Fascist Party, stopped recruitment for Graziani's army and prevented the application of the RSI's social legislation. A good measure

[24] According to Hilberg, some 1,500,000 persons died in the camps of Belzec, Sobibór, Treblinka and Lublin, which were directly controlled by Globocnik, as head of Aktion Reinhardt, between September 1942 and October 1943. See Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 3 vols. (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985), II, table IX/8. There is a biography of Globocnik by Siegfried Pucher, '*In der Bewegung führend tätig*'. *Odilo Globocnik-Kämpfer für den Anschluss, Vollstrecker des Holocaust* (Klagenfurt: Drava Verlag, 1997).

of the Nazis' determination to cut off the operations zone from Italy is the fact that in the first few months of occupation the Reichsbank went so far as to propose replacing the lire with a new currency, the Adria-Krone, although the project was eventually given up as impracticable. The high commissioner proposed and intended to obliterate all traces of Italy and Mussolini's republican Fascist government from the horizon of the local population and turn their eyes wholly towards the National Socialist Reich. However, the new symbolic focus, replacing Rome, was to be not Berlin but Vienna, the capital of the former Austro-Hungarian empire which had ruled the region wisely and well until the end of the Great War, fostering its economic development and ensuring peaceful coexistence between national groups. The Germans christened the operations zone 'Adriatisches Küstenland' because this name had been used under the Austro-Hungarian empire to denote the lands north of the Adriatic, showing themselves to be 'shrewd manipulators of nostalgia',[25] using every possible opportunity to recall the happy and prosperous imperial past. At the heart of this drive to re-forge affective and cultural links with Austria was Trieste, a city many of whose inhabitants well remembered, if they did not actually pine for, the recent Austro-Hungarian past. An abundant series of cultural events was organised to celebrate the restoration of harmony between Vienna and Trieste, notably the 'Wien grüsst Triest, Triest grüsst Wien' programme which enabled leading Trieste musicians to visit Vienna and vice versa.

This pretence that Nazi Germany was the direct heir of the Austro-Hungarian empire was aimed principally at winning over the Italian middle class, who were crying out for a new and powerful interlocutor which, unlike the Fascist regime, would be capable of regenerating the region's economy and putting the port of Trieste at the heart of European commerce. Before the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian empire Trieste had been a hub of central European trade, but it had been isolated as a result of the geopolitical reshuffle determined by the 1919 Treaty of St Germain and the subsequent political and economic recovery of Germany. This loss of European markets could not be compensated for by the incorporation of Trieste and Fiume into the Italian trading system, in which context Trieste appeared peripheral and relatively unimportant. Despite repeated promises to turn it into one of Italy's most internationally important seaports, the Fascists had done nothing to prevent the volume of trade from diminishing. The local Fascists had proved equally incapable of dealing with the crisis in Trieste's trade: despite their early prominence, they had quickly lost influence and representation at national level.

Another serious blow to the economy of Trieste and Venezia Giulia was a consequence of Austria's absorption into the Reich: the customs union between the two countries, followed by the Anschluss, reduced imports and exports through Trieste to a trickle. By 1938 over half the overseas trade of Austria, Czechoslovakia and Hungary had been diverted away from Trieste – its age-old and natural outlet – towards north European ports. Without some reconfiguration of central European geopolitics, the decline of Trieste, ever more bound to a national economy which

[25] R. Spazzali, *Sotto la Todt* (Gorizia: Editrice Goriziana, 1995), 24.

tended to favour Genoa, Naples and Venice, seemed ineluctable. The consequences of Austria's annexation were not solely economic: the Anschluss also rekindled Austria's own aspiration, in the wake of Austro-Hungarian expansionism – now re-expressed as part of the Nazi project for a New European Order – to include Trieste in a Reich-dominated *Mitteleuropa*. The Italian government was uneasily aware of this Austrian expansionism, as Galeazzo Ciano noted in his diary on 9 September 1939: 'In Vienna they are already singing a song to the effect that "What we have we hold, and tomorrow we shall go for Trieste". Hatred of Italy is always alive in the German mind, although the Axis may have temporarily anaesthetised the feeling.'[26]

The region's political and business elites now saw the question of relations with the Reich, at this point reaching to their very doorstep, as one of capital importance. Even setting aside fears of possible annexation – which at the time was an idea confined to certain Austrian Nazi circles and was not part of official Berlin policy – their interest in events north of the Alps was increased by the obvious inability of Fascism to regenerate the maritime trade and economy of the region.

The need to define the political and commercial relationship between Venezia Giulia and Nazi Germany became particularly urgent in the second half of 1940, when the rapid and seemingly unstoppable advances of the Nazi armies on every front seemed to presage a Nazi victory in Europe. And the end of the war would bring about Hitler's New Order, a German-dominated political and economic system which would redefine the prerogatives and ambitions of both states and regions all over the continent: all would stand or fall according to their degree of integration with this German-controlled system. This was of fundamental importance to Trieste. If its port facilities were to be put at the service of the Reich, it would once again become a trading centre of European importance: it would regain its status as *Mitteleuropa*'s chief Mediterranean outlet. But if Germany preferred other ports, Trieste would soon be entirely marginalised.

The region's leading business interests were not slow in pressing the Italian government to examine ways of ensuring that Trieste would be at the heart of the continental trade focused on the Reich. In September 1940 the Comitato Triestino dei Traffici suggested that the government should 'offer German railways . . . access to its Trieste and Fiume routes' and suggested that in the near future 'the best plan would be to make [the port and city of Trieste] a free port'.[27] Although Nazi Germany seemed to offer an unmissable opportunity for the economic regeneration of Trieste and the entire Venezia Giulia, there was some anxiety about what an entry into the Reich might mean. Trieste's leading businessmen and financiers were particularly worried that Germany, pressed by Austria, would make territorial claims, and that massive penetration by powerful German finance and business interests would distort the local economy and jeopardise their own hegemony.

[26] G. Ciano, *Diario*, I: *1939–1940* (Milan/Rome: Rizzoli, 1947), 161.

[27] *Comitato triestino dei traffici. Esame della nuova situazione dell'Europa centro-orientale*, n.p., n.d. (must be Trieste, 1940), quoted in Elio Apih, *Storia delle città italiane. Trieste* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1988), 138.

The hopes and fears besetting Trieste entrepreneurs emerge limpidly in a letter sent by a leading businessman, Antonio Cosulich, to the prefect, Dino Borri, in November 1940. Cosulich argued that since Germany was clearly seeking a Mediterranean outlet, the Italian government ought to do its best to ensure that the Reich would choose Fiume and Trieste, since 'owing to their geographical location, [these cities] have been sacrificed to events that have undermined the economy and trade of their hinterland'.[28] If this did not happen, and Germany found an alternative outlet to the Mediterranean, 'then almost certainly all the currents of central and eastern European trade would, sooner or later, [follow] the same route, the same track, and this would deal a grievous blow to the ports of Trieste and Fiume'. Since, for obvious and well-rehearsed geographical reasons, Germany's interest would inevitably focus on Fiume and Trieste, Cosulich considered it absolutely necessary to anticipate requests from the Nazi government. Although the 'political and military comradeship of the Axis Powers' made it unlikely that Germany was aiming to incorporate Venezia Giulia into the Reich, Cosulich nonetheless believed that the Reich might aspire to 'a sort of corridor from the Alpine valleys, or more precisely from the borders of Germany, to the sea, with special conditions for rail traffic, customs and perhaps public safety'. Cosulich thought that such a claim would be highly detrimental to Italy's interests and to its European prestige, and would be tantamount to ceding territory, so the Italian government could only accept it for 'higher reasons that can be evaluated only at government level'. As a local businessman, Cosulich preferred the idea of declaring Trieste and Fiume a free port: in that way, Italy would safeguard her territorial integrity, Germany would have its Mediterranean outlet and, best of all, Trieste would at last recover its status as a commercial hub and a port of international importance.

Cosulich's idea – that Trieste should become a free port serving the Reich economy - was sparked by the emergency arising from the very recent upheavals in the European order; it was intended as the most balanced solution possible to what had been, over most of the previous century, one of the chief dilemmas of Trieste's history: 'the contrast between national aspirations and economic destiny',[29] between the desire to belong to Italy and the awareness that that choice might acutely restrict the city's economic and commercial ambitions.

But the war in Europe did not end as soon as anticipated, and from the second half of 1942 the Axis armies suffered a series of setbacks which put an abrupt curb on the prospects envisaged by Cosulich and the Trieste port authorities. The armistice signed on 8 September 1943, the breakdown of the Italo-German alliance and the creation of the operations zones abruptly refocused attention on the relationship between Venezia Giulia and Germany and radically re-presented the problem of the country to which Trieste and Fiume should belong.

[28] Letter from Antonio Cosulich to the Prefect of Trieste, Dino Borri, 8 Nov. 1940, Archivio dell'Istituto Regionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione nel Friuli–Venezia Giulia, VG busta L/fascicolo XIX. Subsequent citations are from the same document.

[29] Pupo, 'Crisi del regime, guerra totale e Resistenza', 347–70.

The German administrators of the Adriatic Coast were well aware that Trieste's business community wished above all to regain access to central European markets, and that many of its members had recently expressed a willingness to ally themselves with a Germany hegemony in the region. Hence the revival of Trieste as a commercial centre was one of the bastions of the Nazis' legitimisation strategy. While numerous business leaders expressed an immediate willingness to collaborate with the occupiers, and the high commissioner accordingly appointed German sympathisers to leading administrative and financial positions, the powerful propaganda machine harped continually on the regeneration of the region's ports as part of a new continental order, a renewal of the old Austro-Hungarian *Mitteleuropa*. 'Trieste, Queen of the Adriatic' (*Königin der Adria*)[30] was an alluring and flattering image which could become reality only if the city strengthened its links with the Reich-dominated European political and economic system; recent experience had shown that it would *not* become reality if Trieste remained part of the Italian state.

The very first issue of the *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* contained an article setting forth this Nazi vision and clearly explaining the Reich's plans for the future of the region. Trieste's commercial decline, it said, had been caused by global changes after the First World War and the subsequent recrudescence of German power, which had created a huge economic hinterland whose trade had flowed chiefly through Hamburg. When the European situation took a turn for the worse, continued the article, the Italian government – by which it quite explicitly meant the Fascists – had proved utterly incapable of sustaining the port of Trieste by incorporating it profitably into the pattern of Italian trade. The Reich, on the other hand, would be able to revitalise Trieste's economy: 'in the new Europe, after the war – Europe re-forged according to the Nazi design – all ports will be open to the world and Trieste will once again become the Europe's emporium for the south and south-east . . . the advantage of its closeness to *Mitteleuropa* and relative closeness of the Levant, which has benefited it so little since the end of the First World War, will surely prove positive for Trieste in the new Europe'.[31]

'The interests of a commercial centre like Trieste', explained the *Deutsche Adria Zeitung*, 'extend far beyond its immediate hinterland and indeed its nation. For [Trieste] a large part of Europe is a vital sphere of influence in which it must take the keenest interest.'[32] The people of Trieste could not stand aside from the destiny of Europe because their city's future depended on it: without peace and order north of the Alps, Trieste would never regain access to the vast continental markets. And only a Nazi victory could bring that about, re-establishing the natural geopolitical order of Europe and ending the 'unnatural national groupings'[33] set up in the Balkans by

[30] See 'Die "Königin der Adria". Triest in Krieg und Frieden', *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* 19 (1 Feb. 1944).

[31] 'Europas Fenster ins Mittelmeer. Die Hafenstadt Triest im Wandel der Zeiten', *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* 1 (14 Jan. 1944).

[32] 'Krise oder Chance', *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* 274 (15 Oct. 1944).

[33] 'Triestiner Perspektiven-Raumkräfte und Standortfaktoren der Hafenstadt', *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* 31 (13 Feb. 1944).

the victorious powers after the First World War. France and Britain, explained the *Adria Zeitung*, had used these artificial statelets to extend their economic power right into the heart of Europe; their policy was to foment ethnic and national chaos so as to impose their own supremacy, on the 'divide and rule' principle. It was in the best interests of Germany, on the other hand, to pacify peoples and nations and set up a harmonious politico-economic system that would sweep away the customs barriers, the crippling taxes and other obstacles imposed by outdated economic concepts. Only in such an international context could Trieste regain its natural commercial hinterland, 'which once extended as far as Frankfurt am Main, Prague and Warsaw'.[34]

The Germans had a clear idea of the city's future. If they won the war, Trieste would be incorporated into the Reich. No other view would satisfy Nazi Germany, and the propagandists took care to point out that no other would be satisfactory for Trieste. In spring 1944 certain voices began to call quite insistently for Trieste to be declared a 'free city' after the war. Immediately, an article appeared in the *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* arguing that such an option would have a catastrophic impact on the city's political autonomy and economic prosperity. To illustrate the awful consequences of any such false step, the German propagandists cited the plight of Danzig (now Gdansk, Poland), the old Hanseatic port that had been declared a 'free city' in 1919.[35] Far from becoming the fulcrum of eastern and central European trade, as it had wished, the internationalisation of Danzig had cut it off from the trade routes of the very countries that were supposed to constitute its economic hinterland: Germany had preferred its own ports (particularly Hamburg and Bremen), and Poland had set up its own trading centre, the port of Gdingen. Not until Danzig was reabsorbed into the Reich-dominated economic and trading system had it begun to flourish once again, or its population recover the financial and social security it had once had. The troubles of Danzig must serve as an awful warning to Trieste: if the latter wanted economic prosperity in future it must immediately abandon the will-o'-the-wisp 'free port' idea and seek the protection of a stable and powerful state that could provide it with a wide and wealthy hinterland. In view of Italy's previous failures and the recent collapse of the Fascist government, the only candidate in central Europe was the Reich.

Plans and models for a new welfare state

It was not only the rich who were offered prosperity by the Nazi Reich. All workers along the Adriatic coast would profit enormously from German government – explained the German propagandists – and the humblest would benefit most, because the Germans had set up the most complete, best-articulated welfare state that had ever existed. Rainer painted an idyllic picture of working conditions in Germany and indicated that very soon these would be extended to Adriatic workers. This enabled

[34] 'Handelszentrum Triest', *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* 122 (15 May 1944).

[35] 'Das Schicksal einer freien Stadt. Brief an einen Triestiner', *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* 111 (4 May 1944).

him to contrast the glowing prospect of life under the Nazis with the dire realities of the former Fascist administration.

Even before things had got worse owing to Italy's entry into the war, the living standards of most lower-class people in Friuli and Venezia Giulia had been profoundly unsatisfactory. In the countryside the rapid failure of *sbracciantizzazione* (a campaign to eliminate the class of *braccianti* or agricultural day labourers by giving them small plots of land) had reduced many agricultural workers to abject poverty, while factory workers had been savagely exploited. Working hand in glove with the regime, factory owners had pinned down wages, jacked up production and virtually ignored poor working conditions and considerations of safety. This exploitation of the workforce, thinly disguised under welfare initiatives brought in amidst a blaze of publicity by industrialists working with the Party and the Fascist trade union (every workplace had a unit of the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro),[36] triggered numerous protests and goaded some worker groups into organising clandestine anti-Fascist activities. In the most heavily industrialised parts of Venezia Giulia 'the prefects' anxious surveillance of the workforce . . . betrayed an awareness that a large section of the population did not assent to the dictatorship'.[37] Rainer, in an attempt to heal the breach between the regional government and workers in industry and ensure that the latter actively supported his regime, constructed a propaganda image of a Nazi administration sensitive to the needs of the poorest in society and ready to fly to their assistance.

The *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* admitted that a complete reform of the social system had to await the end of the war and the region's incorporation into the Reich, but Rainer's administration was aware of the Fascists' disastrous social policy and was paying the closest attention to the working environment; to this end the high commissioner had set up a special department, the 'factory workers' bureau'.[38] Its remit was to support workers in every way, from ensuring proper health and safety conditions to promoting cultural and recreational activities. It would start by providing workers with new clothes – from overalls to overshoes – because (explained the *Adria Zeitung*) it had been noticed that men were often forced to wear old, inadequate clothing. The bureau would also provide work canteens[39] which would be instrumental in overcoming the food problems caused by the war, ensuring that everyone got a full and satisfying meal. Finally, the bureau would distribute extra cigarette rations, since 'although some might think that cigarettes are not really a fundamental need of life, it must be acknowledged that they are one of the little things that make life a bit easier and more endurable. . . . Therefore the factory workers'

[36] This 'National Institute for After-Work Activities' was set up as a public body in 1925 to develop and manage welfare and recreation projects not only in factories but also in town and country. It was the model for the Nazis' Kraft durch Freude organisation, which was set up by the Deutsche Arbeitsfront. The best study of the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro (OND) is V. de Grazia, *Consenso e cultura di massa nell'Italia Fascista. L'organizzazione del Dopolavoro* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1981).

[37] Vinci, 'Il fascismo e la società locale', 241–2.

[38] 'Soziale Betretung der Schaffenden', *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* 188 (21 July 1944).

[39] The *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* devoted a long article to these work canteens, which, it claimed, came in under the German occupation: 'Werkküchen in Italien: Wermachtseinrichtungen für die Arbeiter', *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* 84 (6 April 1944).

bureau, in collaboration with the High Commissioner's business department, had always taken care to provide its protégés with an extra cigarette ration from time to time.' The German propagandists were anxious to stress that recreational and cultural activities in the workplace would always be seen as fundamental to the welfare system, rather than an accessory: 'Meeting the cultural needs of the workers is just as important as material assistance. To quote a well-known saying, man does not live by bread alone.'[40] The newspaper waxed particularly lyrical about the *Werkskonzerte*: regular concerts given during lunch breaks in the region's main factories, attended by workers, managers and representatives of the Nazi administration.

This new welfare and protection system on the German model would not be forced on the workers, explained the *Deutsche Adria Zeitung*: they would play an active part in its construction in collaboration with the Nazis. Commissioner Rainer himself liked to demonstrate his willingness to engage in productive dialogue with the region's workers. On 20 February, not long after the German administration was set up, the newspaper reported on a meeting between the gauleiter and a workers' delegation. Rainer had begun by making a speech of welcome in which he expounded a favourite concept of Nazi social ideology: the elimination of all social classes and distinctions. 'The supreme law of all true socialism', he said, 'should be that there is no privileged class and no one is entitled to live at other people's expense'. After which, reported the *Deutsche Adria Zeitung*, he held a long conversation with the workers, 'discussing economic and social matters and listening to their requests',[41] promising that the latter would receive the fullest consideration from the German authorities.

The real experience of workers in the operations zone was quite different from this rosy propaganda picture. No doubt Rainer was sincere in his desire to review wages and salaries, and he made a demagogic promise personally to ensure the creation of a welfare system; but the scanty measures actually taken were quite insufficient to guarantee workers, especially manual workers, a decent standard of living, and if improvements were made to working conditions in the factories, they merely papered over the cracks. Propaganda carried small conviction to people who endured daily privation and overwork; shipyard workers in particular – to whom communism had much more appeal than Nazism – were prominent in the Italian resistance, many of them joining the 'Garibaldi' brigades in the mountains of Friuli.

Conditions were particularly bad for those working for the Todt organisation, either on the impressive defences being constructed to guard against a potential Allied invasion of the Adriatic coast or on securing vital road and rail links, which were being continually damaged by partisan attacks.[42] While the propagandists promised new clothes and shoes, abundant food and generous wages, the Todt workers – ostensibly volunteers, but most of them under coercion – were forced to work in appalling conditions, dressed in rags, living in improvised barracks near the building

[40] 'Soziale Betretung der Schaffenden'.

[41] 'Arbeiter beim Obersten Kommissar', *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* 36 (20 February 1944).

[42] For a detailed account of the Todt organisation in the Adriatic Coast operations zone see Spazzali, *Sotto la Todt*.

sites, ill-fed and subject to implacable Nazi surveillance. The wages, it is true, were not to be despised, being rather above the regional average. But those who benefited most from Rainer's labour policies were not the manual workers but the numerous entrepreneurs who chose to collaborate with the Nazis and made huge profits out of munitions orders with the help of a thoroughly browbeaten workforce.

Besides wooing workers in the regional economy, the German propagandists had another primordial objective: to persuade as many local men as possible to go and work in Germany, either in munitions factories or for the Todt organisation. This recruitment of workers was a major preoccupation, vigorously pursued by the German occupiers all over Italy, not merely in the Adriatisches Küstenland: it engaged the attention of both the Reich plenipotentiary for the employment of labour, Friedrich Sauckel, and the Wehrmacht. When calls for volunteers proved unprofitable, from early 1944 Sauckel's organisation began to round up workers. But even forced recruitment did not yield the expected results: from 8 September onwards a mere 87,517 Italians went to Germany, whereas the Germans had expected to send at least a million and a half. As Klinkhammer has pointed out, this failure was partly caused by rivalry between various elements in the Nazi occupation apparatus, and partly by curbs imposed on German rapacity by the RSI, whose representatives were quite successful in frustrating deportation plans, at least at local level.[43]

In the Adriatisches Küstenland, the extraordinary concentration of power in the hands of the high commissioner, the lesser number of potentially rival German officials and the impotence of local RSI representatives made it very much easier to recruit manpower. Before satisfying the needs of the Reich, however, Rainer was anxious to ensure that organisations working in the zone, particularly the Todt,[44] had first call on the workforce; only then would he encourage workers to go to Germany, either voluntarily or under coercion. The propagandists – whose work is, once again, best represented by the *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* – then set out to laud the perfection of the Nazi welfare state and the very real benefits always available to German workers and Italians working in the Reich.

First and foremost, the *Adria Zeitung* trumpeted the social harmony that Germany had enjoyed ever since Hitler came to power. Without underplaying the profound differences between the situation in Germany and in Italy – where working-class agitation had precipitated the crisis in the Fascist regime – the newspaper declared that national socialism had won the hardest and most decisive battle: it had dismantled the

[43] On voluntary and enforced recruitment of Italian labour see Klinkhammer, *L'occupazione*, 131–77. Studies of the experiences of Italian workers in Germany include C. Bermani, *Al lavoro nella Germania di Hitler. Racconti e memorie dell'emigrazione italiana, 1937–1945* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1998); B. Mantelli, *'Camerati al lavoro'. I lavoratori italiani emigrati nel Terzo Reich nel periodo dell'Asse 1938–1943* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1992); C. Bermani, S. Bologna and B. Mantelli, *Proletarier der 'Achse'. Sozialgeschichte der italienischen Fremdarbeit in NS-Deutschland* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997); L. Ricciotti, *Gli schiavi di Hitler. I deportati italiani in Germania nella seconda guerra mondiale* (Milan: Mondadori, 1996).

[44] The primary importance of labour recruitment in the eyes of the Nazi administration is clear from Rainer's Order 8, issued on 29 Nov. 1943, governing military service in the operations zone: labour in the ranks of the Todt, or in Germany, was put on a par with joining the German army or the local defence militia. See Spazzali, *Sotto la Todt*, 85–7.

old, class-based social system – which inevitably generated civil strife, weakening the cohesion and strength of the nation – and replaced it with a single national community to which all could feel they belonged, irrespective of social status. Of course, this had taken continued persuasion and indoctrination: 'above all, national socialism has educated the German people into a conscious and responsible community of destiny and work'.[45] But education and persuasion would have been in vain if the Reich had not actually constructed a model society that could offer tangible benefits to every citizen, even the most destitute being covered by an extraordinary and unequalled welfare state. Sublimely ignoring the reality (which was very different), the *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* declared that German workers could truly call themselves fortunate, since they had full accident insurance,[46] all their needs were met by the welfare system, their health service was the best in the world,[47] their workplaces were salubrious and quiet and the German Labour Front (Deutsche Arbeitsfront) provided them with an indispensable programme of recreational and cultural activities that had formerly been the prerogative of the rich. The Reich had devoted particular attention to women workers: they worked shorter hours, in less taxing jobs, and were offered frequent breaks from work; those with children enjoyed so many advantages that they were guaranteed a level of protection 'unknown in any other country in the world'.[48]

The best witnesses to the wonders of the German welfare state were, of course, Italians working in factories in the Reich. Although not all the benefits of peacetime could be offered as long as the war lasted, the *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* assured its Italian readers that their compatriots in Germany had no reason to complain, since they received equal treatment with German workers in every respect, and undoubtedly enjoyed better conditions than their opposite numbers in Italy. The *Adria Zeitung* declared that recruits to the Todt organisation had also been warmly welcomed by their German hosts: from the choice of food – all imported from Italy – to leisure activities, everything in the Todt camps had been specially designed to make Italians 'feel at home'.[49]

Workers returning to Italy would of course give amazed and admiring accounts of the utopian conditions they had met with in German factories, to the envy of their stay-at-home colleagues. In March 1944, the *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* reported, a group of workers' representatives from Trieste had been invited to meet with Gauleiter Rainer to learn about German provision for workers in the Adriatic region. Their sole request was to be treated equally with workers in the Reich: 'All we want is to be like German workers. . . . Once again comrades of ours have returned from German and told us how German workers live. Why can't we have the same?'[50]

[45] 'Deutsche Sozialpolitik', *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* 95 (18 April 1944).

[46] 'Die deutsche Unfallversicherung', *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* 264 (5 Oct. 1944).

[47] 'Tuberkolose. Neuartige Untersuchungs- und Erfassungsmethoden', *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* 104 (27 April 1944).

[48] 'Deutsche Arbeitsschutzbestimmungen-Die soziale Stellung der Frau im Arbeitsleben', *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* 234 (5 Sept. 1944).

[49] 'Italiener in Deutschland', *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* 1 (14 Jan. 1944).

[50] 'Triester Arbeiter', *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* 52 (5 March 1944).

The *Deutsche Adria Zeitung*'s enthusiastic accounts disagreed violently with those of Italian workers who had gone to Germany in the late 1930s or later. A confidential memorandum of the Italian political police sheds light on the dire reality of life in the work camps:

> The Italians live in barracks and camps, with no facilities whatever, like animals, fed on a handful of potatoes and sauerkraut; they are watched incessantly and their every movement is observed. Most of them would like to come home to Italy, but they cannot; a few run away but are stopped at the frontier; even those who have worked out their six-month contract are forced to renew it for another six months . . . Even the unemployed are no longer tempted by the wages or the chance of adventure. The propaganda being spread by those returning from Germany is just too persuasive.[51]

The fact that verbal reports from returnees were more effective than official propaganda is demonstrated by the more or less disastrous outcome of the March 1944 call-up in the operations zone: of the 1,400 labourers summoned to Trieste only seventy-five showed up, suitcase in hand, at the Nazi command posts. The great majority of those who left the Adriatic coastlands for German factories went under coercion, not because they were convinced by the purple prose of propaganda.[52]

Propaganda and ethnic policies

Nationalist policies and their supporting propaganda were fundamental to Rainer's legitimising strategies. Whereas the Fascists had, from the first, pursued a policy of radical Italianisation, the Nazis preferred to accentuate the region's ethnic fragmentation so as to sever links with Italy and with Fascism, and present the Germans as the only force capable of ensuring that all the national groups lived peaceably side by side. To this end, the Germans also exploited the fiction of Germany as a natural entity, the heir of the Austro-Hungarian empire, which had been a rare example of a multi-ethnic state and had governed the northern Adriatic territories successfully by recognising the autonomy of all the national groups and limiting competition among them.

Rainer's complicated ethnic jigsaw included three major 'nationalities' – Slovenes, Italians and Friulians – and a number of ethnic minorities, including Cicci and Morlacchi. The ethnic mix was further complicated – or rendered even more chaotic – by Rainer's deliberate insertion of a substantial and pugnacious Cossack community from eastern Europe, which settled in the valley of the river Tagliamento. The Cossacks were entrusted with defending the territory against the partisans, and in return for this military service, and for their fidelity to the Reich, they were promised a permanent homeland in this part of the operations zone, referred to as 'Kosakenland' in German documents and propaganda.

The national group most favoured by the Nazis was the Slovenes, who had been harshly persecuted by the Fascists. While the Wehrmacht and the SS mercilessly hounded the partisan guerrillas, Rainer, anxious to create a solid front of Slovene

[51] Quoted in Bermani, *Al lavoro nella Germania di Hitler*, 159.

[52] Of the 659 men who left for Germany in April 1944, for example, only 33 were volunteers, 67 were called up and 556 were recruited by force (Spazzali, *Sotto la Todt*, 85–7).

loyalty and prevent the Slav resistance from turning into a nationalist crusade, reopened Slovene-language schools, set up collaborationist militias and put Slovenes into important local government positions. However, this attempt to construct a Slovene collaborationist front presented some insuperable difficulties: first, because the partisan movement that had arisen in late 1941 had substantial popular support and, second, because Slovenia, which was overwhelmingly rural, almost entirely lacked the trade- and industry-oriented middle class that would have seen Nazi Germany as an advantageous trading partner justifying collaboration. The creation of a Slovene collaborationist force under Nazi control was directed by the mayor of Ljubljana, General Leon Rupnik, who re-formed the militias attached to various Slovene anti-communist groups into the ranks of the *domobrani* (defenders of the homeland).[53]

Rainer's other concession to the Slovenes – in sharp contrast to the Nazis' traditional discrimination against Slavs – was also intended to demote the Italian element of the population by challenging its primacy in those areas that were most significant to those with nationalist and irredentist sentiments, having proved fertile ground for a Fascism which had nailed its colours to the mast of national recovery and disenfranchisement of the Slavs. In order to demolish the Fascist image of Friuli and Venezia Giulia as solidly and monolithically Italian, the Nazi propagandists stressed the fact that the region was deeply marked by its Slav past and that the Slav ethnic component was essential to its identity. In its first issue, the *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* set out to explain that at Trieste's very doors there were two completely different worlds, wholly opposed to each other in every way. Only twenty-five minutes' journey from the city lay the village of Opicina: 'here begins that part of the Adriatic Coast where the mother tongue is Slovene, and people have different names, look different, and live a different kind of life':[54] this part of the operations zone had almost nothing Italian about it, and everything bore witness that it was not part of Italy. On the other hand, the article went on, a journey of a few miles to the south-east of Trieste would bring one to Muggia, a place of glorious Italian traditions, with ancient Roman walls and an important early Christian church, a living witness to its Roman roots, wholly and entirely Italian.

To subvert the unity of Italian nationals and Italian speakers, the *Deutsche Adria Zeitung*, and the whole Nazi propaganda machine, stirred up the embers of Friulian separatism. Even the Fascists had celebrated the myth of Friulian identity, lauding the bravery shown by Friulians in the First World War, their robust peasant character and their glorious past under the Roman empire.[55] But Nazi propaganda followed a completely different tack: intent on dismantling the links between the regional minorities and Italian history and culture, the Nazis said nothing either of the Friulians' Roman past or of their heroism in the Great War, dwelling rather on

[53] L. Chersovani, 'Alcuni aspetti della politica del partito comunista sloveno (Pcs-Kps) nella zona d'operazioni Adriatisches Küstenland (1943–1945)', *Qualestoria* 1/2 (1995), 29.

[54] 'Von Opicina nach Muggia. Zwei Welten vor den Toren Triests', *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* 1 (14 Jan. 1944).

[55] Vinci, 'Il fascismo e la società locale', 241, 242.

their solid links with Germany. The *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* devoted a good deal of space to flattering articles about the uniqueness of Friuli's history and the greatness of its people, the ancientness of its traditions and the extraordinary beauty of its landscapes. In particular, it stressed the links between Friuli and the Hohenstaufen emperor Frederick II, recalling that even in those far-off days Friuli had been an integral part of the great German Reich and calling attention to the respect it had earned from German princes and from the emperor.[56] Friuli's long and glorious history, along with its rich cultural and ethnic heritage, entitled it to be considered as much more than just one element of the Adriatisches Küstenland. Its culture and traditions must not merely be preserved, they must be given the strength and vigour they deserved. To show the high respect in which the Friulian community was held by the Nazi administration – and the Third Reich as a whole – from May 1944 Radio Trieste broadcast a daily programme entitled *Die Stunde der Friulaner* (Friulians' Hour), which (according to the *Deutsche Adria Zeitung*) was always a big hit with the population. As another contribution to this positive reassessment of 'Furlanentum' – the Friulian nation – a weekly newspaper began to appear, under the title *Voce di Furlania*, full of local patriotism and separatist declarations, which 'must have had its effect, if it is true that this period gave birth to certain aspects of Friulian autonomist thinking – perhaps only the most petty and parochial ones'.[57]

Rainer's administration encouraged these concrete and propagandistic endeavours to exploit the ethno-nationalistic complexity of the region in order to present Nazism as a force for order, capable of soothing nationalistic antagonisms and restoring the harmony which the region had enjoyed under the Habsburgs but lost under Italian rule. Once again the German administration sought to legitimise itself through contrast with Fascist failures: whereas the Fascists had applied a misguided nationalist policy whose main achievement had been to destroy the region's ethnic balance, the Nazis would prove themselves able to govern this bundle of nationalities by acknowledging their individuality while ensuring that they lived together in peace and harmony. In the operations zone, explained the *Deutsche Adria Zeitung*, there were 'so many nationalities, so many different forces, that they inevitably clash from time to time'.[58] And these ethnic clashes could combine with political, religious and social divisions which the Fascists had not only failed to heal but had crassly exacerbated: one need only look at the Italian contingent to see how it had been internally split between 'the moderates, who reject all extremes, the Fascists, the Monarchists, the Bolshevists and the so-called patriots, who are against everyone else'. Nor could the Slavs claim to be united; they not only had political differences, but also ongoing dangerous religious conflicts. 'The hotbed of political and national passions' along the Adriatic Coast made it into one of the most fervid and unstable regions in the whole of Europe. Only the Nazis were capable of guaranteeing the peace and safety

[56] 'Der Hoftag in Friaul. Der Hohenstaufe Friedrich II und sein europäisches Reich', *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* 169 (2 July 1944).

[57] E. Collotti, *Il Litorale Adriatico nel Nuovo ordine europeo* (Milan: Vangelista, 1974), 45.

[58] 'Freundliche Zueignung', *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* 83 (25 March 1945). Further citations in the text are from the same article.

of these peoples: 'all these forces are wisely held in check by the German hand, one more proof that even at this – perhaps the most difficult and critical – juncture of its own history, Germany is the only true power that can guarantee order in Europe'.

Defending Western civilisation: the anti-partisan struggle as interpreted by the Deutsche Adria Zeitung

The Nazi high command was wrong in thinking that the British and US forces in Italy intended to attack the Adriatisches Küstenland from the sea: the region, in the charge of Wehrmacht general Ludwig Kübler, never saw any conflict between the German armies and the Allies. Apart from frequent massive British and US air raids[59] and a few small-scale diversionary raids by the British on the Istrian coast, the only enemies who threatened the Nazi government in the Adriatic region were Slav and Italian partisans. Resistance units – especially Slav ones, which were comparatively well organised and equipped – proved such a thorn in the side of the German army that in February 1944 General Kübler issued a harsh set of pronouncements authorising reprisals against the civil population if it were even suspected that they had given help to the partisans:

> This is war up to the hilt – it is our enemies who have decided it. . . . We have only one option, to use terror against terror, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth! . . . In war anything that leads to success is legitimate and necessary. I will endorse any pronouncement to that end. Captured bandits are to be hanged or shot. Anyone who voluntarily gives aid to these bandits, by giving them food or shelter, concealing their presence or in any other way, deserves death and must be eliminated.'[60]

This pitiless 'war up to the hilt' against the partisans – in which the Germans also used Italian army units stationed in the region – was backed by a huge propaganda campaign through which the Nazis not only sought to justify the unprecedented violence of the repression but also, and more importantly, proposed a further source of legitimacy for the German occupation. The struggle between the Nazis in the Adriatic operations zone and the resistance units was presented not as a war for control of the region – far less a 'war of liberation' from the partisans – but as a struggle between the defenders of Western civilisation and revolutionary proponents of Bolshevik anarchy.

The Nazi government of the Adriatisches Küstenland strove to win the support of the local people for a civil war not between communism and Nazism, but between revolution and stability, terror and order. The 'revolutionaries', as presented by the *Adria Zeitung*, did have an ideology, but their destructive fury was directed not against the German army, as the military wing of the local Nazi administration, or even against a politically distinct group, but against the entire civil community and all its most cherished social and cultural values. According to the Nazi propagandists the communist partisans would not stop at bringing down the Nazi administration: if

[59] According to research by Galliano Fogar, 'the bombing raids [on Trieste] caused about six hundred fatalities and thousands of injuries': see G. Fogar, 'Trieste', in Collotti *et al.*, *Dizionario della Resistenza*, 602.

[60] Collotti, *Il Litorale Adriatico*, 88.

they succeeded, this would fatally subvert the whole value system of Western society. The victory of the Resistance would mean a return to barbarism; only by accepting the legitimacy of the German administration and collaborating with the Wehrmacht would it be possible to maintain the moral, civic and ethical safeguards that the revolutionary enemy had sworn to destroy.

The stakes were so high that each and every citizen along the Adriatic coast must take part in the struggle: 'it would be unforgivably short-sighted for the local inhabitants to expect the Germans to protect their livelihoods and their future without themselves contributing to this task with equal force and dedication. Every citizen who wants to live in peace, enjoying the fruits of his labours and his family life, is threatened in both his material and his physical existence.'[61] No one could remain passive or wait on chance: it was up to 'every citizen, [every] reasonable man, to help all right-thinking people to frustrate these bandits and reject those who sit on the fence as eternally passive spectators' and begin to weave that web of personal relationships, of 'conscious private surveillance',[62] which would sooner or later bring down the enemies of justice and of liberty.

This call for collaboration was backed by clear and unequivocal threats of reprisals. While every partisan attack would inevitably be followed by reprisals against civilians and prisoners, the propagandists warned that anyone who did not collaborate wholeheartedly would be considered as an enemy and treated as such. In the midst of a civil war, there was no difference between someone who failed to stand apart from the partisans and someone who actively supported them:

> every reasonable man must contribute resolutely, to the limits of his strength, to the struggle against these bandits. Some attacks could have been averted if those who heard about such criminal plans had immediately denounced them, or tried to catch the perpetrators. It is shamefully cowardly and short-sighted of some people to believe that these bandit attacks do not concern them, just because it does not happen to be their house that is burning down, or they who have been hit by the bullets . . . In future we shall in every case take the harshest and most forcible measures against these bandits and all their accomplices.[63]

When ordinary warnings and intimidation proved insufficient, the Germans did not hesitate to use the direst threats and most terrifying propaganda. Any reprisals against civilians accused of collaborating with the partisans always received massive publicity. After one partisan attack, and the consequent reprisals, a poster immediately appeared which read:

> Men and women of the Adriatic Coast! For several months the German authorities have been informing you of numerous acts of destruction by Bolshevik bandits; these horrifying crimes could not have been perpetrated without the consent of the population and the authorities have shown

[61] 'Spaten und Gewehr. Ein Wort zu den Selbstschutzverbänden', *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* 76 (29 March 1944). The previous citation in the text is from the same article.

[62] 'Terroristen, Idealisten, Attentisten. Ein Appell an die Bevölkerung zur Wahrung der Ruhe und Sicherheit', *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* 107 (30 April 1944).

[63] 'Jeder Terror wird gebrochen werden! Deutsche Stellungnahme zu den Vorgängen in Opicina', *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* (8 April 1944). 'Criminal plans' refers to a partisan attack on German soldiers near Opicina, just outside Trieste.

you the right path to follow . . . On 15 February 1944, as punishment for the vile assault on a German – Italian column between Comeno and Rifembergo, 150 bandits were executed. The villages of Comeno, Tomasevizza, Dol Piccolo, Rifembergo and Britovac, and some houses in Scherbina, have been razed to the ground because they were sheltering the bandits; the population was evacuated and may return as soon as calm is restored and their ideas have been adjusted. Any future offences will be punished in the same way . . . It now depends on you whether your fathers, sons, brothers etc., now in German police protection, remain in custody or are restored to you. We shall resume our earlier mildness if the population helps us to restore law and order. BUT WE SHALL HIT BACK THREE TIMES HARDER, IF THIS WARNING IS NOT HEEDED. WE ARE THE STRONGEST.[64]

This practice of publicising reprisals, however brutal, was entirely typical of Nazi deterrent propaganda – the *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* published gruesome accounts and photographs of German vengeance – remained unofficial for some time, but was normalised and extended to the whole of Nazi-occupied Italy by order of General Albert Kesserling on 1 July 1944.[65]

Nazi anti-partisan propaganda was aimed at the widest possible swathe of the population, irrespective of social status, ethnicity or nationality, and even political orientation. Solidarity with the Germans was presented not as an ideological choice but as a civil and political one in the widest sense. Fighting the partisans did not necessarily mean espousing national socialist politics; it was the only effective way of defending Western culture and tradition against the menace of Bolshevik revolution. For example, explained the *Deutsche Adria Zeitung*, Nazi-organised defence groups or *Selbstschutzverbände*

have arisen not for ideological reasons but from the exigencies of self-defence. Anyone who thinks he can take part in the great ideological struggle without contributing to the defence of our country is deluding himself. Those who refuse to let themselves be slaughtered without a fight, and are resolved to defend themselves actively, need not fear being labelled with any sort of 'ism' that is not truly close to their hearts. Those who chose to join a self-defence group are not swearing allegiance to national socialism or any other ideology, but choosing their own party, the party of fellow-citizens united in their will to deliver their country from chaos.

The partisans were not regular soldiers, who would respect the civilian population, but *Banditen* and *Terroristen* – common criminals out to plunder the property of honest citizens and disrupt the even tenor of their lives. To oppose their spread, fight against them by joining one of the *Selbstschutzverbände*, and denounce them to the German authorities was the only course for anyone anxious to defend his own property and ensure that the safety of his nearest and dearest:

this is a fight for all you hold most dear, your life, your property, the happiness of your family! City-dwellers, you can do something to save the peasant from having to yield his crops to the

[64] Archivio dell'Istituto Regionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione nel Friuli – Venezia Giulia, busta IX, doc. no. 618.

[65] 'Wherever there is a substantial presence of partisan bandits, some of the local male population is to be arrested, the numbers to be decided ad hoc, and they are to be shot if any acts of violence occur. The population must be informed of this. If soldiers are attacked the village whence the shots were fired is to be burned. Criminals and ringleaders are to be publicly hanged.' Cited in R. Kaltenegger, *Zona d'operazione Litorale Adriatico* (Gorizia: Libreria Editrice Goriziana, 1996), 66.

bandits instead of bringing them in to market. Peasants, you can do something to ensure that your cows are not slaughtered by the bandits. You young men who now lounge about with your hands in your pockets can do something to prevent the door clanging shut on your future. And workers, your consciences should tell you that you must raise your industrious hands, now and always, to keep the bread in your own mouths and ensure that society can enjoy the fruits of your labours. God helps those who help themselves![66]

This apparently non-political and non-nationalistic appeal to defend local values and traditions was not peculiar to the Nazis of the Adriatisches Küstenland: it featured regularly in both operations zones. In the province of Trento, part of operations zone Alpenvorland, the Germans commissioned the local prefect, Bertolini, to set up a 'security corps', backed up by a propaganda campaign explaining that it was 'a militia in the service of law and order and local well-being' which would win the support of 'all who love their country and want it to come through these times without sinking into disorder'.[67] By promoting such volunteer groups, in whose constitution the Italian authorities apparently played the leading part by making personal appeals for recruits, the Germans not only procured additional forces to use against the partisans but also, and more importantly, suborned the Italian authorities to legitimise the Germans' role as defenders of the local community, its traditions and values.

Italian collaboration

How did the Italian population in the Adriatisches Küstenland respond to the Nazis' legitimising strategies? An idea can be gained from the conduct and motivation of the men who held the most important local government positions in Trieste under the Nazis.[68] It must be pointed out that while there was collaboration throughout the German-occupied areas of northern Italy, the two operations zones were in many ways exceptional. In other areas, those who took the German side could say that their collaboration was 'filtered' through the RSI, notionally an independent Italian sovereign state. But in the Adriatisches Küstenland and the Alpenvorland German power was unmediated by any Italian governmental authority, and those who chose to collaborate put themselves directly at the service of the occupiers, incurring a heavy burden of responsibility because they claimed to be representing the whole Italian community but in fact became part, however indirectly and in however subordinate a capacity, of the Nazi administrative machine.

In Trieste the two most important offices were conferred on prominent members of the upper middle class: the prefect was Bruno Cociani, the *podestà* was Cesare Pagnini, formerly president of the Italo-German Association of Venezia Giulia. After the war, like the vast majority of people who held public office under the Nazis,

[66] 'Spaten und Gewehr. Ein Wort zu den Selbstschutzverbänden', *Deutsche Adria Zeitung* 76 (29 March 1944).

[67] 'Per l'ordine', *Il trentino* 16–17 (November 1943), quoted in Ganapini, *La Repubblica delle camicie nere*, 359.

[68] On collaboraton in Trieste see G. Fogar, 'Capitalismo collaborazionista e guardia civica', *Qualestoria* (1976), 33–7; A. M. Vinci, 'Trieste 1943–1945: il problema del collaborazionismo', *Qualestoria* (1998), 91–108.

they both claimed that they had agreed to collaborate in order to 'mitigate the rigour of the occupation and oppose Nazi policies',[69] or to ease the grip of repression and safeguard economic interests under threat from the Nazis. Such may indeed have been the intentions of Trieste's prefect and *podestà*, but students of collaboration in the city have pointed out that their strategy had little success and was certainly not the only motive for collaboration. What principally inspired the 'institutional collaborators' of Trieste and its region was rather the desire – presented as an absolute imperative – to resist the communist-led Yugoslav liberation movement. Slav communist resistance not only threatened a revolutionary overthrow of the socio-political order, it also constituted a clear nationalist challenge: as far back as November 1943 the leader of the movement had expressed an intention to incorporate the majority Slav areas, and Venezia Giulia itself, into a resurgent Yugoslav state after the war.[70] To defend the region's Italian character and preserve its traditional politico-social orientation, Coceani and Pagnini, with the approval of the great majority of Trieste's business community, preferred to support the Germans, whom they saw as the only force capable of combating the Slav and communist partisans. But this pretence that the Italian authorities were defending national values, and their anti-Slav pact with the Nazis, proved substantially counterproductive, giving the impression that the local Italian population was radically, indeed violently, nationalistic and negating attempts by the Italian resistance to forge a national identity based on the defence of the political liberties destroyed by the 'border' Fascists.

Nationalism apart, some of Trieste's leading businessmen and financiers chose collaboration in the hope of reaping huge short-term profits from Nazi orders and, in the longer term, of re-establishing themselves at the centre of Nazi-dominated Europe, as German propaganda had promised they would do.

But it was when evoking defence against the partisan threat, and the region's commercial ambitions, that Rainer's legitimising strategy scored its greatest successes:

> social demagogy and the will to power can be seen as the common denominators of Nazi administrators, and this would ensure the collaboration of local groups (particularly ship-builders, insurance agents and forwarding agents) who were willing to adapt to the new conditions in the hope of securing a leading position – and their own future – in the south-eastern corner of the greater Reich. Of course there were serious conflicts of interest and of course the German take-over was not a painless one . . . but each and every potential conflict was suppressed by the determination to avoid overt clashes and acknowledge the common interest of defence against the Slavs and Communists. It is hard to imagine a more perfect fusion between class and national interests.[71]

[69] B. Coceani, *Trieste durante l'occupazione tedesca* (Trieste, 1959), quoted in Ganapini, *La Repubblica delle camicie nere*, 343.

[70] See T. Sala, *La crisi finale nel Litorale Adriatico 1944–1945* (Udine: Del Bianco, 1962); M. Pacor, *Confine orientale. Questione nazionale e resistenza nel Friuli Venezia Giulia* (Milan, 1964); G. Fogar, *Sotto l'occupazione nazista nelle province orientali* (Udine: Del Bianco, 1961).

[71] Collotti, *Il litorale Adriatico*, 62–3.