

The meaning and role of the concepts of democracy and corporatism in Italian neo-fascist ideology (1945–1953)

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While caution, tactics and compromise characterised the political practice of the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement in post-war Italy, a section of the Italian press took a less guarded approach to the 20-year regime (Fascism) and to fascism as a political idea (fascism). A lively debate began immediately after the death of Mussolini; Italians sympathetic to fascism opposed the new Italian republican settlement and their opinions were freely expressed in newspapers and magazines. Neo-fascism in Italy was represented by three main ideological currents (left-wing, moderate and right-wing), and this article gives an account of the different views of the issues of democracy and corporatism that were held by fascist loyalists. An extensive number of articles published in the period 1945–1953 are used as primary sources.

Keywords: Italian neo-fascism; ideology; democracy; corporatism; socialisation; Italian Social Movement (MSI)

Introduction

There are many historical accounts of post-war Italian fascism, commonly labelled ‘neo-fascism’ or ‘post-fascism’. Several authors focus on the history of the Italian Social Movement party (*Movimento Sociale Italiano*: MSI), set up by veterans of the Italian Social Republic (*Repubblica Sociale Italiana*: RSI) on 26 December 1946 (Almirante and Palamenghi-Crispi [1958]; Murgia 1975, 1976; Rosenbaum 1975; de’ Medici 1986; Ignazi 1989a, 1994; Tarchi 1995a, 1995b, 1997; Tedeschi 1996 [1950]; Nello 1998; Baldoni 1999). These authors explore the structure, political practice, parliamentary strategies, electoral support¹ and social links of the MSI in the period prior to the establishment of the National Alliance party. Later works by Antonio Carioti and Andrea Mammone have sketched vivid pictures of the youngest neo-fascists and of their clandestine activity (Mammone 2005, 2007; Carioti 2008). A recent comprehensive study by Giuseppe Parlato deals with the history of the Italian neo-fascists from the fall of the regime until 1948; this book charts their course into legitimacy in republican Italy (Parlato 2006). Parlato shows how the neo-fascists sought to create room for manoeuvre in the new post-war political situation and how they managed to avoid being punished for their political beliefs, given the fact that the Constitution did not permit the reconstitution of the Fascist Party. Their main strategy was to ride on the wave of anti-communism that swept the country.

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Parlato focuses on a number of crucial events that occurred around the time the MSI was formed: clandestine action in the south during the war, anti-communist activity, the formation of several underground organisations or paramilitary groups during the autumn of 1945, the summary executions of Fascists by partisans,² the negotiations before the referendum in 1946 on the amnesty extended by Togliatti to the neo-fascists, the struggle for survival for those who had more or less made compromises with the Fascist dictatorship and, finally, the various political strategies promoted by the MSI's two organisers, Pino Romualdi and Giorgio Almirante. Particularly interesting is the detailed account of the contacts, which were initiated before the war ended, between Italian neo-fascists, antifascist political representatives and members of the American secret services.

Generally speaking, however, historians have not shown a huge amount of interest in post-war fascist *ideology*. There are some exceptions. An article written by Ignazi, covering the period from 1946 to 1987, examines the political culture of the MSI. Here 'culture' is defined as 'raw material' essential for the elaboration of a systematic ideology (Ignazi 1989b, 431–65). Several articles deal with the MSI's foreign policy; these refer to the ideological debates concerning Italian entry to NATO and the European Community (Finotti 1988; Neglie 1994; Barera 2004; Parlato 2005). Also worth mentioning are recent works on the Traditionalist philosopher Julius Evola (Cassata 2003; Rossi 2007). In addition, Pietro Neglie (Neglie 1996) and Paolo Buchignani (Buchignani 1998) provide interesting insights into fascist post-war ideology. However, these studies primarily focus on the projects and ideas of those 'former Fascists' who moved gradually in the direction of the Communist and Socialist parties. An interesting account of Italian neo-fascist thought is provided by Francesco Germinario, whose study of prominent right-wing neo-fascists (Anfuso, Graziani, Borghese, Evola) and their writings covers 50 years of Italian history (Germinario 1999; Germinario 2005). Germinario's study, which opens the way to further research, shows that personal, autobiographical texts can provide a great deal of information on neo-fascist theory. Another interesting account comes from Giuseppe Parlato, who dedicates the last chapter of his book from 2000, which is about the Italian Fascist left, to left-wing neo-fascists (Parlato 2000). He gives us a useful tripartite classification of Italian post-war neo-fascism: a left-wing current linked to the RSI and concerned with social issues; a moderate, nationalistic and conservative current; a traditional right-wing current, drawing on the ideas of Julius Evola (Parlato 2000, 332). Yet Parlato focuses exclusively on the first group.

The present article discusses ideological developments within all the three different neo-fascist currents; this grouping is not necessarily identifiable with the MSI. I analyse the ideological content of a number of fascist-oriented newspapers and magazines published during the 1940s and 1950s. The article, which is based on a detailed analysis of primary sources, moves from a wide perspective to a narrow one. After a short presentation of what I consider to be the most important publications, I discuss the main factors that shape the post-war neo-fascist identity, an identity that is diffuse but discernible. Thereafter, I have chosen to focus on two crucial ideological issues: democracy and corporatism.

This study focuses on post-war fascist *ideology*. The history of the Italian Social Movement and the policies of this party, which shortly after the war managed to send six deputies and one senator to the Italian parliament, are not discussed. My analysis rests upon three assumptions. First, I consider it completely legitimate to study Italian neo-fascism as a movement of ideas characterised by heterogeneity, development and

contradiction. Second, I make a clear distinction between the 20-year regime (Fascism) and the fascist movement (De Felice 1975); I also assume a degree of consensus in civil society, both before and after the war. Third, the present study of democracy and corporatism as two key-concepts in neo-fascist ideology involves an *analysis* of the subjective opinions of the main actors that I have chosen to refer to. A *criticism* of these two ideological issues would have involved a comparative diachronic study (post-war fascist ideology versus the ideology of the twenty-year regime), or a synchronic one (fascist ideology versus other ideologies). I intend to concentrate on the post-war period, highlighting, where necessary, the points where the ideology of the 1940s and 1950s differs significantly from that of the regime.

The shaping of a new fascist identity in post-war Italy

The first fascist-oriented newspaper to be openly sold in post-war Italy was *Manifesto* (Manifest), whose first issue appeared in Bari in April 1945. In November 1945, the weekly journal *Rosso e Nero* (Red and Black), edited by the young journalist Alberto Giovannini, was published in Rome. Giovannini had begun his career by editing a newspaper published by the University Fascist Group during the regime and ended it as director of the MSI official press organ, *Il Secolo d'Italia* (Italy's Century), in the 1970s. More important, however, were a number of other publications. *Meridiano d'Italia* (Meridian of Italy) was published in Milan between 1946 and 1961 by the Fascist journalist Franco de Agazio and his nephew Franco Maria Servello, who was elected to the Italian Parliament in 1958. *La Rivolta Ideale* (The Ideal Revolt) was published in Rome between 1946 and 1953 by the journalist Giovanni Tonelli. *Lotta politica* (Political Struggle) was a weekly journal edited in Rome between 1949 and 1953 by Pino Romualdi, vice-secretary of the Republican Fascist Party in the Salò Republic and later elected to the Italian Parliament. *La Rivolta Ideale* and *Lotta politica* became in the late 1940s the official press organs of the MSI. The Roman satirical weekly *Asso di bastoni* (Ace of Clubs) was published between 1948 and 1957. There were also a number of magazines: *Architrave* (1948); *Europa Nazione* (1951); *La sfida* (1948–1949); *Cantiere* (1950–1952); *Imperium* (1950–1951; 1954); *Nazionalismo sociale* (1951–1956).

The total number of publications with a clear fascist-leaning message is impressive (Baldoni 1999; Bozzi Sentieri 2007). An interesting historical account of three of them, namely *la Rivolta Ideale*, *Asso di bastoni* and *Brancaleone*, is to be found in Giuseppe Pardini's book (Pardini 2008). I have based my analysis on some 70 publications, newspapers or magazines which were in circulation, both within restricted circles and among the general public, in the Italy of the 1940s and 1950s. There is no exact information regarding the number of copies sold and any figures we have are probably untrustworthy because they do not come from the editorial offices. Pardini refers to a document from the Ministry of Interior which states that *Meridiano d'Italia*, *Lotta politica* and *Asso di bastoni* sold approximately 20,000 copies of each issue at the beginning of the 1950s (Pardini 2008, 89).

Almost all publications came out regularly, yet many were subject to censorship on more than one occasion. In certain cases, editors and journalists were arrested and accused of defending Fascism;³ occasionally they were imprisoned but usually they were released. The editor of *Rosso e Nero*, Alberto Giovannini, was suspended from practising

BASE FONDAMENTALE DELLO STATO DEL LAVORO

LA SOCIALIZZAZIONE CORPORATIVA

ERNESTO MASSI illustra le linee programmatiche del M. S. I., dimostrando come sia sul piano sociale, e non nell'equivoco democratico o classista del socialismo, né in quello liberistico del capitalismo, la via della collaborazione e della valorizzazione delle forze del lavoro

A Meola, in una affascinante rivisitazione della storia, si è posto il problema di come si sia formata la società umana e di come essa si sia evoluta...

La questione sociale. Rispetto al fatto sociale, il socialismo non ha mai avuto un'idea precisa...

Accertazioni sociali. Il socialismo non ha mai avuto un'idea precisa del fatto sociale...

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Programma economico

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Invito all'azione

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Oltre Ferruccio

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Giustizia sociale

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GIORNATE DEL CONGRESSO

Il socialismo non ha mai avuto un'idea precisa del fatto sociale. Il socialismo non ha mai avuto un'idea precisa del fatto sociale...

Figure 1. Ernesto Massi 1948. La socializzazione corporativa. Meridiano d'Italia, July 11, no. III/23.

journalism and interned after publishing an article in defence of his Fascist past (Giovannini 1946). The weekly journal *Fracassa*, whose first issue was published on 7 November 1946, had its third issue confiscated; it contained a column entitled 'A Bloodbath' which listed the names of Fascists, or presumed Fascists, who had been assassinated in central and northern Italy since April 1945. Almost all these papers agitated for reconciliation between Italians and the abolition of the exceptional laws that deprived the former Fascists of their civil and political rights.⁴

The most interesting feature of these publications is their ideological content. A free press had been established in democratic Italy and this meant that the (neo-)fascist minority, which otherwise did not have many other channels of expression, was tolerated. Members of this minority were able to keep alive, and even reinforce their political identity. In the immediate post-war years these periodicals played a clear role not only in the founding of the neo-fascist MSI party (Di Meglio 1981; Barera 2003), but also in shaping a new Italian fascist identity. It was only in the fascist-leaning newspapers and magazines that authors could label themselves 'fascists' and say they were proud of their loyalty to the fascist idea and proud of being consistent; that is, of being 'fascist in the moral sense of the term',⁵ of not having betrayed Mussolini or opportunistically accepted any compromise with the invaders of Italy.

This re-appropriation of a (neo-)fascist identity involved an assessment and criticism of the Fascist legacy, a reinstatement of the main tenets of fascist ideology and the elaboration of new ideas and new analyses. A number of issues, themes and key concepts emerge from a study of the neo-fascist press (Wolff 2008):

- an analysis of the Fascist dictatorship (1922–1943) which shows both self-criticism and the will to stay loyal to the fascist idea or doctrine (though there is some debate about that doctrine);
- an evaluation of the events of 1943–1945 and of moral and political developments in Italian national life since *Risorgimento*;
- democracy as principle, ideal and method (political representation);
- the state, conceived of as dictatorial, totalitarian, organic, authoritarian or ethical;
- the Corporative Idea, which is connected to a fascist social doctrine and theories of the Third Way;
- nationalism, which includes a third-line strategy between the USA and Soviet Union, and Europeanism;
- revolution – political, socio-economic, moral or spiritual – and the myth of the New Man;
- fascism as a left-wing or right-wing movement;
- political strategy.

It is possible to analyse Italian neo-fascism by employing and further elaborating Giuseppe Parlato's tripartite categorisation. Let us look more closely at the three currents.

The first current was a left-wing radical one, concerned with social issues. Its members were firmly convinced that fascism as a political ideology was a viable alternative to both capitalism and communism; fascism was 'the third way'. They wanted the MSI to keep a distance from other political parties. Here we find a number of prominent individuals: Concetto Pettinato, journalist at *La Stampa*, who had criticised Mussolini and argued for deep internal reforms in the Republican Fascist Party in the Salò Republic; the journalist

Giorgio Pini, who had edited *Il Popolo d'Italia* under the regime; the jurist and philosopher Edmondo Cione, who had initiated internal opposition during the Salò period and set up the magazine *Nazionalismo Sociale* after the war; Ernesto Massi, professor of Economic Geography, who founded the magazine *Nazione Sociale* in the 1950s; the journalist Alberto Giovannini; the MSI activists Francesco Palamenghi-Crispi and Giuseppe Ciammaruconi; the editor of *Architrave*, Guido Scotto. We also find a number of other figures: the journalist and Fascist labour activist, Ugo Manunta; the head of the ministerial staff at the Ministry of Economy in Salò, Manlio Sargenti; the Salò social policy experts, Mario Marabini and G.V. Mortillaro.

The second current was a moderate, nationalist and conservative centrist one, in which political 'realists' operated who were willing to compromise and make alliances with other parties on the centre-right. They discussed issues of foreign policy, such as Italy's entry into NATO. Here we meet a number of Fascists: General Emilio Canevari; Ezio Maria Gray, MSI deputy and later senator in the Italian Parliament; the jurist and diplomat Filippo Anfuso, the only ambassador who joined Mussolini in Salò and editor-in-chief of the magazine *Europa Nazione* at the beginning of the 1950s; the jurist Carlo Costamagna, one of the most important theorists of Fascist law in Italy between the wars; Raffaele di Lauro, former leader of the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (PNF) in Caserta and now an MSI activist; the Fascist intellectual Massimo Rocca; the young Mario Tedeschi, who fought in Salò and participated in clandestine actions in Rome after the war; the journalist Giovanni Capasso Torre.

The third current was an elitist, radical right-wing one, associated with the Traditionalist philosopher Julius Evola. This group was convinced that fascism had to present itself as an alternative to both capitalism and communism, and that the MSI had to keep a distance from all other parties in post-war Italy. Here we meet well-known former regime intellectuals, such as Emilio Bodrero and Ardengo Soffici, as well as young volunteers who barely had time to join the Salò Republic before war ended and greatly admired the young German volunteers who had defended Berlin against the American and Russian armies. The young neo-fascists Pino Rauti, Enzo Erra and Silvio Vitale launched post-war magazines such as *La Sfida*, *Imperium* and *Carattere*.

These three currents had different opinions on the topics and concerns that I have outlined. They fiercely debated the issues of democracy and corporatism. A study of what they said and wrote forces us to conclude that it is difficult to arrive at a definitive and comprehensive description of Italian neo-fascist ideology.

The different neo-fascist currents agreed on a number of matters. They were very critical of the new ruling class and were convinced that the post-war pluralistic political system would soon collapse. The Italian Constitution of 1948 gave the country a liberal democracy based on universal suffrage and the *quantitative* vote of all citizens. The neo-fascists dismissed this. They claimed that liberal democracy was not a system in which the majority triumphs; it was rather a system where an organised minority asserts its authority. Universal suffrage does not result in the election of the best individuals in the country because the uninformed and poorly educated masses are easily fooled. The neo-fascists also opposed the system of proportional representation that had been reintroduced. They preferred the system of majority representation, based on single-member constituencies, and argued that proportional representation placed candidates under the control of the party from whose list they had been elected. Thus, voters have little influence on the choice of candidates for institutional offices. They were very clear on

this point. The proportional electoral system, in their view, not only allowed an uncontrolled number of parties to enter parliament, but also generated a dependency between the members of parliament and their parties, limiting the deputies' freedom to work in the national interest. The consequence was that, instead of democracy and parliamentarianism, there became established a 'partitocracy' (*partitocrazia*), in which the authority of the state was undermined by the power of parties and party secretariats. This left Italian democracy extremely vulnerable to dominant sectarian interests and totalitarian impulses. This was not the idea of parliamentarianism held by the neo-fascists. To them, parliamentarianism was not merely a system whereby the government is accountable to parliament; it was also a model in which deputies were able, in parliament, to freely oppose any programmes or policies imposed from above. This freedom gave parliamentarians the opportunity to arrive at decisions that could truly reflect the national interest. The neo-fascists did not believe that one could meaningfully speak of parliamentarianism in post-war Italy. In 1947, in *la Rivolta Ideale*, an anonymous writer argued that instead of parliamentarianism, one had 'stages on the way towards a dictatorship of parties'.⁶ Furthermore, they were convinced that the system of coalition governments created a state without authority, law or order. Though they did not express it openly, it is quite evident that they preferred a political system with a single unitary party.

So far, then, my description of the positions taken by the neo-fascists does not show any differences from those taken by the Fascists of the regime. However, when we come to examine their proposals for alternative political systems or their fundamental interpretations of democracy, we find that the three currents adopt different stances.

The first trend

The left-wing neo-fascists of the first current did not deny the validity of the principles of the French Revolution, or of political liberalism. They referred to *La dottrina del fascismo* from 1932, written by Giovanni Gentile and signed by Mussolini, where fascism means overcoming and *not* rejecting the concept of democracy:

The fascist opposition to socialism, to democracy, to liberalism, should not make one suppose that fascism has the desire to turn the world back to where it was before 1789, which we can regard as the first year of the demo-liberal century. One cannot turn back. The doctrine of fascism has not chosen de Maistre as its prophet. Monarchic absolutism is a thing of the past, as are all kinds of ecclesiolatry. (Mussolini 1937, 19–20)

Another important reference point was the definition of 'Democracy' in *Dizionario di Politica* published in 1940 in Giovanni Treccani's *Enciclopedia Italiana*, edited by the PNF.

The Neapolitan philosopher Edmondo Cione, who dominated the neo-fascist debate for a time before becoming a supporter of the monarchist Achille Lauro in Campania and the Christian Democratic Party, acknowledged that the egalitarian theory of democracy, which originated with Rousseau, Voltaire and Montesquieu, was an effective weapon against the feudal system of privileges of the *Ancien Régime*. He also acknowledged the impact of democratic ideology on the evolution of modern society (Cione 1949a, 1950). However, there were two specific elements of liberal and democratic ideology he criticised: the total economic freedom of *laissez-faire* capitalism and the purely arithmetical and quantitative interpretation of democracy. He referred to authors such as Georg Wilhelm

Friedrich Hegel, Jacob von Burckhardt, Alexis de Tocqueville, Francesco de Sanctis and others who were critical of mathematical and abstract egalitarianism (Cione 1949a).

The neo-fascists of the first current said it was necessary to review, not to reject, the idea of political representation. It had to be a representation that was 'organic and qualitative' rather than 'atomistic, mechanic and pettily quantitative' (Cione 1949b). They wanted to restore the corporative democracy that had been ideologically elaborated by the regime but only partly realised. This was a democracy founded on an organic, centralised state and on a political representation based on workers' groups (*categorie del lavoro*) rather than universal suffrage. Their concept of corporatism is not that of the system of 22 corporations established in the inter-war period;⁷ it is based on a principle, the Corporative Idea. This principle maintains that the two basic factors in the economy, capital and labour, should work closely together rather than be opposed to each other, as they are under liberalism and Marxism. The Corporative Idea means participatory cooperation between the classes, with the aim of achieving greater social justice and national well-being.

At the beginning of the 1950s, Francesco Palamenghi-Crispi asked whether neo-fascist socio-economic theory was not merely a revised and corrected version of Mussolinian corporatism (Palamenghi-Crispi 1950). He drew attention to the differences between the ideological principle of 'the Corporative Idea' and its imperfect practical realisation in 'the corporative regime', based on Fascist corporations (Palamenghi-Crispi 1950). Palamenghi-Crispi believed that the Corporative Idea was still valid in post-war Italy. In his opinion, its practical implementation during the regime, until 1943, had not fulfilled expectations because of 'flawed organisation, the force of events and the lack of will on the part of men' (Palamenghi-Crispi 1950).

Here it is important to note elements of both continuity and discontinuity with the past. The neo-fascists of the first current remained attached to corporatism as an essential and original element of the Fascist social doctrine. At the same time, they were very critical of the regime's political practice. They labelled the dictatorship imposed by Mussolini as 'a form of Caesarism'. They conceded that the system of corporations was suffocated by inefficient bureaucracy and that it was undemocratic and served capitalist interests. They also criticised the regime's practice of appointing candidates to all party and trade union positions from above. They advocated selection from below, from the democratic election of workers' representatives to the democratic election of trade unions' representatives to parliament.

In order to realise a new corporative democracy, they suggested a number of concrete economic and socio-political reforms. On the economic level they strongly supported the socialisation of enterprises. Italy's first socialisation law was passed during the Salò Republic, but was never really implemented.⁸ Technically, it stated that firms should establish elected *boards of trustees*, consisting of both workers' representatives and representatives of the owners and investors. These boards were supposed to be models of labour cooperation and ensure that workers would benefit from production profits and participate in management. The socialisation law was founded on article IX of the Charter of Labour and article 12 of the Verona programme, approved in November 1943.⁹ The law was immediately suppressed on 25 April 1945 by a decree of the Northern Italy National Liberation Committee; it was deemed anti-national and demagogic.¹⁰

In the very first years after the war, socialisation was a project many neo-fascists did not wish to give up. However, post-war Italy did not offer much scope for this type of

experimentation and, indeed, those calling for socialisation offered very different interpretations of the notion. Experts on socialisation from Salò and left-wing neo-fascists disagreed on a number of points. Was socialisation as a form of co-ownership (Marabini 1951) or only a form of co-management (Mortillaro 1951; Sargenti 1951b)? Was it primarily hierarchic and authoritarian (Cione 1953) or democratic (Massi 1948; Massi 1953a)? What was the role of the manager (Cione 1953) compared with that of the labour leader (Massi 1953a)? Did workers have the right to be represented by trade unions (Palamenghi-Crispi 1951)? What was the attitude of the MSI to the socialisation project (Sargenti 1951a)? Interpretations diverged also on how socialisation should be implemented.¹¹ Socialisation represented for the left-wing neo-fascists a link not to the regime, but to the Salò Republic, and they saw it as an idea that could be realised in post-war Italy. To them, socialisation had a crucial symbolic meaning. It was the basic ingredient of a (neo-)fascist social doctrine, indeed the very essence of fascist ideology, the revolutionary element in the late fascist movement that had to be defended in post-war Italy. They believed that socialisation was the realisation of the Corporative Idea – cooperation and participation – at the level of the workplace. This level had remained untouched by the corporative system under the regime. In the socialisation project democracy and corporatism are linked. The aim is to de-proletarianise wage-earners (from being an *object* to being a *subject* in the economy) by involving them in management and profit-sharing. Workers would become responsible economic *subjects* rather than mere *objects*. They must also have the right to democratically elect their representatives.

However, socialisation alone was not enough for the neo-fascists of the left-wing current. In order to realise a corporative democracy in post-war Italy, they also suggested a series of social and political reforms. First, all workers' organisations had to be unified, instead of there being three organisations (CGIL, CISL and UIL). Second, there should be new rules for the political independence of trade unions and internal democratic union reforms. They were convinced that the antifascist parties in post-war Italy (the Communist Party, the Socialist Party and the Christian Democratic Party) had adopted the bad habits of the PNF, imposing their policies on workers without democratic procedures. Third, they wanted a corporative parliament with political representation for workers' groups or at least the institution of one corporative chamber of parliament (the Senate). If one chamber had to maintain the traditional system of representation, the proportional electoral system should be replaced by a system of majority representation.¹²

In other words, the neo-fascists of the first current wanted a broad revision of the Italian Constitution. They believed that the corporative state they proposed – the State of Labour (*Stato del Lavoro*) – was not fundamentally undemocratic; on the contrary, it was the *only* truly democratic state. They believed democracy was compatible with a fascist ideology. They claimed at the end of the 1940s that they favoured democracy, 'not because of a last minute opportunistic conversion, but as the result of an ideological stance'.¹³

The Corporative State that was advocated had a number of essential features. It was organic, hierarchically structured, centralised and authoritarian, in the sense that it was the only instance that could make the law (Pini 1952a). Corporative democracy was also totalitarian in the sense it sought to bring about social unity and involve all citizens in the life of the state. Furthermore, it was ethical because the single party had an educational role. However, the left-wing neo-fascists intransigently rejected the multi-party system and universal suffrage. We may ask if they really understood the monumental political changes that came with the defeat of Fascism and Nazism in the war.

The second trend

These changes were probably understood by the neo-fascists of the second current, who clearly demonstrated a more careful and opportunistic approach to the issues of democracy and corporatism. There was a focus on practical politics rather on intellectual debate; members of the moderate current sat in parliament and showed an interest in establishing a dialogue with other parties, especially those of the centre-right (Christian democrats, liberals, monarchists). There is little source material that tells us about what they thought of democracy or liberal democratic political systems. There are many more sources that reveal their ideological stance on nationalism, with regard to Atlanticism and Europeanism, but this topic is not a focus of the present analysis.

However, the available material suggests that this current was not unconditionally loyal to the rules of representation outlined in the 1948 Constitution. In 1950, party secretary Augusto De Marsanich argued that the MSI had lawfully and democratically joined the contest between parties, and had organised itself democratically. He firmly rejected any accusations that the party was anti-democratic and totalitarian. But he also stated that party activists were committed to the struggle to change the form of popular sovereignty, so that an individualistic and undifferentiated franchise might be replaced by a corporative one (de Marsanich 1950). Similarly, when the moderate neo-fascists referred to corporatism, it seems that they were thinking of the system of corporations during the time of the regime rather than the corporative idea advocated by the first current (Costamagna 1950a). In fact, they were not especially interested in social issues or in a Fascist social doctrine.

The jurist Carlo Costamagna, a prominent regime intellectual and co-founder of the MSI, was one of the few members of the second current who wrote about socialisation and the corporative state; he also outlined his position on democracy (Costamagna 1950b, 1950c, 1950d, 1950e, 1950f, 1951a). Even though his contribution to the debate pales into insignificance when compared with the fierce discussions within left-wing neo-fascist circles, it would be wrong to ignore what he had to say. Costamagna favoured a corporative democratic system based on representation from below, but at the same time he was very critical of the socialisation project. He was not convinced that it could achieve the goal of reducing worker exploitation and making them more responsible towards their workplaces and the nation. He saw socialisation as a variant of the Marxist theory of profit sharing. He also rejected it because he felt it focused on class conflict. Moreover, Costamagna opposed freedom of trade union organisation and action, which in his view undermined the authority of the state (Costamagna 1951b, 1952b, 1952c). To him, the first priority was not the social question, but the re-establishment of state authority (Costamagna 1950g). His suggestion for a revision of the Italian Constitution (Costamagna 1952a) advocates a reform of political institutions in order to set up a corporative parliament (here he agrees with the proposals of the left-wing neo-fascists). He also calls for the abolition of articles 39 and 40, which guarantee the freedom to organise trade unions and the right to strike (here he is very much opposed to the neo-fascist left).

In post-war Italy, Costamagna vigorously supported the corporative policies that had been introduced in the 1930s, hoping that there would emerge a new national consensus on a common corporative project (Costamagna 1950a). There is no doubt he was thinking of the regime's 'corporative system', rather than the Corporative Idea advocated by the supporters of socialisation. In 1952, Carlo Costamagna accused a number of neo-fascists

of being extremists because they professed to be more left-wing than the leftist parties, and because they spoke of ‘socialisation’ and of the ‘Republic’ as if these ideas were the only elements of fascist doctrine (Costamagna 1952a). His criticism was clearly addressed to the national vice-secretary of the party, Ernesto Massi, and the architects of official MSI documents dealing with the ‘so-called socialisation’ (Costamagna 1952b). Massi replied, supporting those who stood by the ‘main part of the social programme of the MSI’ (Massi 1953b) and accused Costamagna of being himself an extremist and a conservative, since the system he advocated was outdated.

The third trend

A significantly different ideological stance towards democracy and corporatism is to be found if we look at the third current. At the beginning of 1949, just a few months before his death, the historian and philosopher Emilio Bodrero published three essays in *Meridiano d'Italia* (Bodrero 1949a, 1949b, 1949c). He drew upon theories and themes that antidemocratic thinkers had been familiar with since the eighteenth century, centred on criticisms of French *Encyclopédie* liberalism and the Enlightenment. Bodrero was aware that he belonged to the small minority that refuted the myth of the *Immortal Principles of 1789* (Bodrero 1949a).

Bodrero’s stance, however, was soon eclipsed by even more radical formulations from the philosopher Julius Evola. During the 1930s and early 1940s, Evola, who never applied for membership in the PNF, contributed to Giuseppe Bottai’s *Critica fascista* and was regularly published in Roberto Farinacci’s *Il Regime Fascista*, Carlo Costamagna’s *Lo Stato*, Giovanni Preziosi’s *La Vita Italiana* and Telesio Interlandi’s *La difesa della razza*. In the two last publications he defended a version of spiritual racism. In 1934 the publication of his book *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno* (Revolt against the Modern World) made him known within right-wing intellectual circles as the ‘philosopher of the Tradition’. After the war and his return to Italy from Vienna, where he had been in close contact with SS officials, he became the most influential ideologist for the young generation of neo-fascists in Italy, as well as in other countries (Cassata 2003; Rossi 2007).

In another context I intend to deal with the question of the continuity, or metamorphosis, of his philosophical message from the time of the regime to the post-war period. What I wish to focus on here are his writings from the late 1940s and early 1950s. The most striking feature of Evola’s thought is his absolute rejection of democracy, both as a political system and as a principle (Evola 1949a, 29–31; 1949b, 32–34; 1949c, 42–44). While the post-war Italian neo-fascists of the first current did not reject the ideas of freedom and equality and recognised the accomplishments of the liberal and democratic revolutions in European history, Evola was convinced that all of the subversive elements in European civilisation had their origins in the *Immortal Principles*. His writings from the 1930s described a process of regression, which had lasted for centuries. Now, after the defeat of Nazism and Fascism, he wrote:

The only thing that matters is this: today we are in the middle of a world of ruins. We should ask ourselves: are there still any men remaining on their feet among the ruins? Is there anything they must do, anything they can still do? (Evola 2000 [1950], 18)

In his view, democracy is incompatible with fascism. In the post-war period, Evola defined fascism as a supranational phenomenon. Fascism – and Evola takes here a normative

position because he believes the regime was not able to live up to its ambitions – is a right-wing movement aiming at restoring traditional values, such as authority, hierarchy and justice. It implies difference and inequality, the primacy of quality over quantity, order, a sense of honour, loyalty, courage and obedience (Evola 1952c, 60; 1952d, 123–125).

Evola's fascist state has little in common with the State of Labour of the neo-fascists of the first current. To them, the fascist state is organic, strong, just, based on hierarchy and responsibility and authoritarian because it makes laws. However, it is also democratic because representatives are elected and workers' groups are represented. In contrast, Evola rejected, as absolute nonsense, the idea that an authoritarian state could also be democratic. First, he stressed the role of hierarchy within the organic system. Second, he saw the concept of authority (*imperium*) in terms of the power to command, *absolute* centrality and sovereignty. Evola referred back to the anti-democratic systems of representation in force up to the time of Metternich. In other words, he advocated a pre-Enlightenment monarchic state, rooted in the aristocracy (Evola 1950a, 1950b).

In the early 1950s, the left-wing neo-fascist Giorgio Pini was very critical of Evola and his growing influence on young neo-fascists. He was unable to convince them that fascism could and should be democratic. Young men such as Enzo Erra and Pino Rauti, who later became prominent neo-fascist activists, were fascinated by Evola's radical message. The caption published beside the name of the periodical in all 1950 issue numbers of *Asso di bastoni*, where they often published articles, leaves no doubt:

In truth we represent the stark categorical definitive antithesis to the world of democracy and the Immortal Principles of 1789.

Who would be entitled to exercise authority in a new fascist state, according to Evola? He claimed that a caste of 'the best' had the right to stand out from the masses and demand obedience, absolute obedience. While in the inter-war period the best men were identified as a race of superior men – a super-race, the 'race of the fascist man' (Evola 1978 [1941], 266), in the late 1940s and 1950s they simply were identified as 'the leaders'. These born leaders have strong characters. They are the unbroken men, who can 'remain on their feet among the ruins'. They epitomise the true values of Tradition, and have the strength to oppose a modern world that is dominated by the materialistic and hedonistic ideologies of communism and capitalism. These men must be organised in an elite, an idealistic front, a sort of religious order (Evola 1949a, 29–31; 1949b, 32–34; 1952a, 56–58). Of course the political system in post-war Italy gave no scope for the realisation of Evola's dreams; the philosopher declined any personal involvement in politics and proposed no specific institutional solutions (Evola [1952b], 13). The importance assigned to elitism and anti-egalitarianism and the high degree of scepticism towards projects of *Realpolitik* characterised the positions of Evola and the neo-fascists of the third current, a group that became defined as intellectualist and aristocratic.

What was Evola's attitude towards corporatism? The philosopher was not interested in the corporative system of the regime or in socialisation, which he considered ambiguous, leftist and even crypto-Marxist (Evola 1949d, 48–51; 1950c, 74–76). Evola identified corporatism with a traditional society, an organic society organised according to the principles of authority and hierarchy, without any elements of class conflict. He openly referred to the corporations of Ancient Rome and those of the Middle Ages. Corporatism, according to Evola, was neither a synthesis of capitalism and communism nor a new conception that went beyond those two economic systems. It should be conceived of as a

return to origins, a return to a pre-modern economy. Central to the old corporatism was solidarity, a value that was compatible with a hierarchy. According to Evola, solidarity disappears in the modern world, where materialism and the pursuit of profit and the material well-being of workers dominate (Evola 1952e, 85). In post-war Europe, Evola was one of the few who still believed that Nazi Germany had sought to re-establish corporative solidarity.

However, Evola was, like many others, concerned with the need to de-proletarianise workers and he provided some original and innovative proposals as to how this could be achieved. As we have seen, the left-wing neo-fascists wanted to achieve this goal by involving workers in the running of firms and in the sharing of profits, without abolishing private ownership. They sought to build a neo-fascist democratic state with political representation for workers' groups. For Costamagna, it was a question of raising workers' awareness of the national economic importance of the productive sector. For Evola, a system that allowed the worker to become a shareholder was a good way of ensuring that he became a *subject* in the economic system. The philosopher believed that this measure would help to bring about the solidarity that characterises real corporatism.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a few points should be made. The neo-fascists of the first current, who clearly promoted the ideals of left-wing Fascism, were critical of the political practice of the regime. They wanted to go beyond the programme of the Mussolinian dictatorship, and showed a genuine interest in elaborating new social and economic policies that could address political and civil rights, such as liberty and equality. They developed democratic projects for firms and trade unions and acknowledged that at least one chamber of parliament should be elected through universal suffrage. Were they imagining a version of social democracy? Can the neo-fascist social doctrine in the post-war years be understood as a social democratic one? The left-wing neo-fascists, along with the European social democrats, believed that workers' emancipation was necessary and had to be initiated by the workers themselves. They both believed that the national interest demanded that the state be given a strong role in the country's economy. Moreover, they stressed the principles of equality and of individual freedom. However, attitudes towards democracy were fundamentally different. The neo-fascists advocated a model of corporative democracy; they believed that the judicial and formal idea of liberal democracy was an outmoded one (Scotto 1948).

They felt that fascism and the fascist social doctrine based on corporative democracy was not only the real third way between capitalism and Marxism, but also the Italian way to true socialism. They spoke of 'national socialism'. By this, they meant an anti-Marxist socialism that rejects internationalism, class conflict, determinism, materialism and the abolition of the state and private property. The left-wing neo-fascists ignored the German concept of 'national socialism' and the historical experience of Nazism, focusing instead on an Italian tradition that could be traced back to the ideas of patriots of the *Risorgimento* such as Giuseppe Mazzini and Carlo Pisacane, to the social doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, to early twentieth-century syndicalism (Filippo Corridoni's trade unionism) and to the revolutionary interventionism and nationalism of the First World War. They also drew inspiration from more recent developments, such as the

Charter of Labour of 1927, the 1943 Verona programme and Mussolini's Milan speech in 1944. In other words, their interpretation of fascism was a synthesis of nationalism and socialism. This interpretation appeared 30 years before Zeev Sternhell provided his well-known formulation (Sternhell 1983; Sternhell, Sznajder, and Ashéri 1989).

The neo-fascists of the second current were less open to self-criticism. It is difficult to say whether they really understood and accepted that liberal democracy was a fact of life in post-war Italy, or whether they said nothing about the concept of corporative democracy because they still believed it was possible, maybe through a *coup d'état*, to alter the course of Italian politics. Their references to the system of corporations from the regime and their proposals for the abolition of the right to strike indicate that they were strongly conservative. As late as 1953, Nino Tripodi criticised the *Immortal Principles of 1789* and in particular the myth of equality between men and 'the myth of simple arithmetic' (Tripodi 1953). Tripodi was a lawyer and one of the founders of the MSI. He had been one of the leaders of the Fascist University Groups during the regime and in post-war Italy he edited the neo-fascist newspaper *Rataplan*, where he took a moderate line. He entered the Italian Parliament as a deputy in 1958 and the European Parliament in 1984. Writing in 1953, he stated that equality was only an illusion because reality constantly shows that men differ in wit, talent and ability. He argued that even democratic systems based on universal suffrage implicitly deny the idea of human equality; 'the many' always delegate official duties to 'the few', presumably the most able. Tripodi also rejected the idea that the majority could run the state effectively; he doubted that the will of a majority always effectively furthers its interests.

The real radicalisation of neo-fascism occurred within the third current. Here we meet the youngest members, gathered around a philosopher who only a few years earlier had been a marginalised figure. The right-wing neo-fascists strongly adhered to some of the ideas that had pervaded Fascism: authority, order, obedience and the cult of the leader. Like all anti-democratic ideological European currents from Edmund Burke, Joseph de Maistre and others, they totally rejected democratic principles (Bayle 1950). They provided a new interpretation of fascism as a radical movement of the Right; this understanding was one in which Tradition stood against the modern world. They interpreted fascism both as a reaction to the values derived from the French Revolution, and as a cultural revolution that would replace nineteenth-century materialism and liberalism. They presented fascism as a new 'revolutionary' cultural paradigm of traditional values, 20 years before George Mosse set forward his theory (Mosse 1964).

The large amount of neo-fascist press material shows that the social left-wing current had a dominant role in the first years of Italian neo-fascism. However, its impact was short-lived; by the end of the 1950s, all of the prominent members of this current had left the MSI. The moderate centre current took over the party leadership and developed contacts with government parties. The young neo-fascists of the minority Evolian current also left the MSI at the end of the 1950s, but they returned later.

By comparing and contrasting different interpretations of the two concepts of democracy and corporatism within the neo-fascist Italian community, I have attempted to contribute to the study of the political ideology of neo-fascism in Italy after the death of *il Duce*. Based on my choice of sources, my study has been national, empirical and analytical. It has used an innovative methodology. I hope my approach will inspire further examinations of the phenomenon of Italian neo-fascism, for instance on the often problematic relationship between its ideological dimension and its political practice.

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Notes

1. In every election between 1948 and the end of the 1970s, the MSI came in fourth, fifth or sixth place. It came fourth in every election between 1972 and 1992.
2. There is disagreement over the number of Fascists who were executed in the first few months after the war, victims of summary executions by partisans, military and popular courts or murdered in acts of personal revenge. According to Giuseppe Parlato there were between 20,000 and 30,000 (Parlato 2006, 118) while Mimmo Franzinelli puts the number as being between 12,000 and 15,000 (Franzinelli 2006, 259).
3. The crime of 'praise of fascism', which was intended to suppress activity connected to the Fascist regime, was decreed by the law of 3 December 1947, no. 1546. Article 7 of the law read: 'Whoever publicly exalts, by means of the press or in other manner, persons or ideologies characteristic of Fascism, or publicly performs demonstrations of a fascist nature, is punished by incarceration from six months to three years.'
4. The decree law no. 195 of 26 April 1945 excluded former Fascists from all public offices. The Fascists who had had important positions during the regime or during the RSI lost their right to vote for a period, until 1953 (Clause XII of the *Final and transitional norms of the Constitution of 1948*).
5. This expression is to be found in a letter written by an anonymous former Fascist and published in 1946 on *L'Intransigente*, May 7, II, no. 4, with the following title: 'Domando la parola! Libera tribuna al servizio del pubblico'.
6. The article is signed 'X' and was published in 1947 on *la Rivolta Ideale*, June 26, II, no. 26, with the following title: 'Parlamentarismo'.
7. Law on corporations from 1934; Chamber of Fasces and Corporations from 1939.
8. The Law on Socialisation provided for factories involved in vital national affairs to be directly under state control. It also envisaged that the 'socialised management' of all other businesses would remain in private hands. The board of trustees (*consiglio di gestione*) would decide on all matters concerning production, in line with the national plan for the economy drafted by the state: the budget, profit-sharing, contracts with workers' organisations, regulation and protection of labour within firms. Board members were to include workers' representatives as well as blue-collar, technical and administrative employees. The Law also established a Head of the Firm (*Capo dell'azienda*), politically and judicially responsible for production before the state. In state-owned businesses the Head could be appointed by the government; in privately owned factories the position could be assigned to the entrepreneur himself or to a technical expert appointed by the board of trustees.
9. Article IX of the Charter of Labour: 'IX. State intervention in economic production may take place only where private initiative is lacking or is insufficient, or when are at stake the political interests of the state. This intervention may take the form of control, encouragement or direct management.' Article 12 of the Verona programme: 'In any enterprise (industrial, private, state-controlled, state-owned) the representatives of technical employees and workers will cooperate closely – through direct involvement in management – in the even sharing of the profits between reserve funds, investors and workers. In some of the firms, this may happen through a widening of prerogatives of existing works committees. In others, by replacing the Boards of Directors with Boards of Trustees composed of technicians and workers with a state representative. Furthermore, in others, under the form of labour union-controlled cooperatives.'
10. In post-war Italy the August 1947 agreement between *Confindustria* (Italian Manufacturers' Confederation) and CGIL (Italian Workers' Confederation) set up the so-called '*commissioni interne*', which were the only examples of socialisation policies. By 1947, there were about 500 *commissioni interne* in Italian firms, but these had been set up as a result of in-house agreements and workers sitting in them did not have any power. However, in the period 1945–1953, parliament did not pass any legislation on socialisation.

11. The MSI activist Elio Lodolini gives an example: having deducted expenses, investment funds, reserve funds and sinking funds, if a business makes a 25% net profit, the entrepreneur-worker would gain 10% interest on capital and 5% as pay for running the business, while the remaining 10% would be shared among workers. If, on the other hand, the entrepreneur provides only capital, then he would make only a 10% profit.
12. This paragraph draws on a considerable number of articles published on the neo-fascist press by left-wing neo-fascists. Some of them are reported as references.
13. The statement belongs to an article published in 1947 in *la Rivolta Ideale*, August 7, II, no. 32, with the following title: 'Noi, il socialismo e il fascismo'. The article has no byline.

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