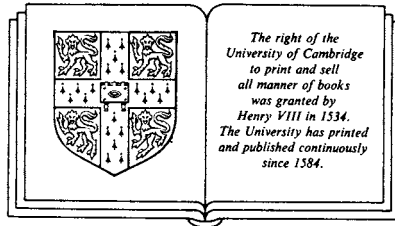


THE FASCIST
REVOLUTION
IN TUSCANY
1919—1922

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INTRODUCTION

The central Italian region of Tuscany played a major role in the rise of fascism to power. In the years leading to the March on Rome, only Emilia surpassed it in the number of fascist members and branches. Tuscan fascism, moreover, was second to none in its violence, organizational strength, and intransigence. Far from depending on outside support, Tuscan fascists undertook the export of squadristism to neighbouring Lazio and Umbria, even to distant Apulia.

Despite its prominent role in Mussolini's 'revolution', however, Tuscan fascism has been largely neglected by historians. The historiography of the postwar crisis and the rise of fascism has suffered from a pronounced northern bias. The experience of regions to the north of the Apennines has attracted a disproportionate scholarly interest, with an outpouring of excellent monographs on Emilia and the Po Valley. The same seminal period in the history of central and southern Italy has been underdeveloped. There is no extended study of the 'Red Years' and the rise of fascism in Tuscany. There are local studies of particular cities and provinces, but no attempt to explain the features that make the region as a whole a fruitful and substantial case study. This book is an effort to fill a large gap in the literature.

In addition to its importance as a region where fascism exploded in its most extreme and violent form, Tuscany has other claims upon the attention of the historian. The first of these is the unusual opportunity it provides of examining all of the chief components of fascist support within a single region. Other zones of fascist strength were overwhelmingly either agricultural or industrial. Tuscany is unique among Italian regions in offering the chance of confronting both agrarian and industrial fascism in their most powerful forms.

Tuscany was above all a major agricultural region. Rural Tuscany was dominated by the institution of sharecropping known as *mezzadria*. *Mezzadria* held undisputed sway in the countryside of the provinces of

Arezzo, Florence, Pisa, and Siena, and here especially squadristism flourished. The region was also, however, one of the foremost industrial zones in the nation. Livorno, Grosseto, Florence, and Massa-Carrara provinces were the sites of some of the leading Italian companies in such sectors as mining, textiles, steel, chemicals, shipbuilding, and marble quarrying. Tuscan big business, moreover, was unusual in the depth and enthusiasm of its involvement in reactionary extremism. An important task is to explore the profitability constraints and political calculations that informed the pro-fascism of so many industrialists in the region. Finally, the regional metropolis at Florence and the provincial capitals were major commercial and retailing centres, and this fact poses the question of the role of the petty-bourgeoisie in fascism.

Who then supported fascism in town and countryside, and why? To what extent did Tuscany conform to national patterns? What are the implications of the pattern of support for fascism in this important case for the wider interpretation of the movement? The attempt to answer these questions with regard to each of the major groups in Tuscan society has determined the structure of the book, which is organized thematically. Part I deals with agrarian fascism, turning first to the nobility and then to peasants and farm workers. Part II examines industrial and urban Tuscany, beginning with big business and then moving to the mass popular support for fascism, particularly within the ranks of the petty bourgeoisie. Fascism, however, could never have won power if it had relied solely on the strength of its membership. What enabled Mussolini's movement to win the civil war with the left so rapidly, to deploy a private paramilitary force with near impunity, and then to stage a successful March on Rome was the extensive collusion of the state apparatus throughout the region. Part III, therefore, explores the relations between the blackshirts and state officials.

Such a thematic approach facilitates the job of weighing the significance of the fascist militancy of particular social groups and classes with regard to some of the major issues of interpretation. Does the Tuscan evidence confirm the view that fascism was a weapon of big business in the defence of Italian capitalism? Was it a product of the extremism of the lower middle classes in a time of world war and social dislocation? Did the movement emerge as a product of modernization and the commercialization of agriculture? Is fascism simply a synonym for counter-revolution and repression? Was squadristism an extension of the divisions and methods of the First World War to domestic politics? Was it a 'parenthesis' in Tuscan history caused by 'accidents' imposed from without, or was it a possibility deeply rooted in the social structures of the region?

The period covered by the book requires some explanation. The chief

sources of Italian fascism lie in the frontal clash between landlords and peasants over the issue of control over the land, the labour market, and local government. In zones apart from Tuscany where fascism became a powerful force – the Po Valley and Apulia – this conflict gathered momentum from the first organized agricultural strikes at the turn of the century to the all-out confrontation of the postwar years. Fascism marked the violent suppression of the contest and the re-imposition of the prerogatives and power of property. To separate the final stage in this process from its long gestation period is to omit the deep, long-term origins of fascism. The struggle for power in the countryside was a continuous contest for the quarter of a century after 1900.

Tuscany, however, had its own very different tempo. There was no history until 1919 of a challenge by the peasantry to the power of the landlords. In the Giolittian era when there was turmoil in the countryside elsewhere in the peninsula, the Tuscan provinces remained untouched by agricultural strikes, land occupations, and the counter measures of landlords. In a sense that was unique in Italy, the history of the contest for power in the countryside of central Italy was confined to the four years 1919–22. This book is a history of the crisis of these years in Tuscan society, from the first mass strikes in 1919 to the end of labour militancy marked by the beginning of the fascist dictatorship. Every conflict, however, has a prehistory, and in the first chapter I attempt to define the long-term processes which silently prepared the post-war explosion.

The concluding date of 1922 has a similar explanation. The March on Rome marked a watershed in Tuscan history with the crushing of the labour movement throughout the region as a mass force for a generation. It is this process which is the subject of this study. I have not attempted to examine the means by which property owners took advantage of the dictatorship to secure their power and to prevent the re-emergence of labour unrest. The years after the seizure of power merit a full-scale investigation in their own right, and I hope to return to the fascist regime in Tuscany in a future work. The question here is not how fascism used its power, but how it gained it. This question too is complex, and the attempt to provide an answer for these eight provinces is the purpose of the pages that follow.