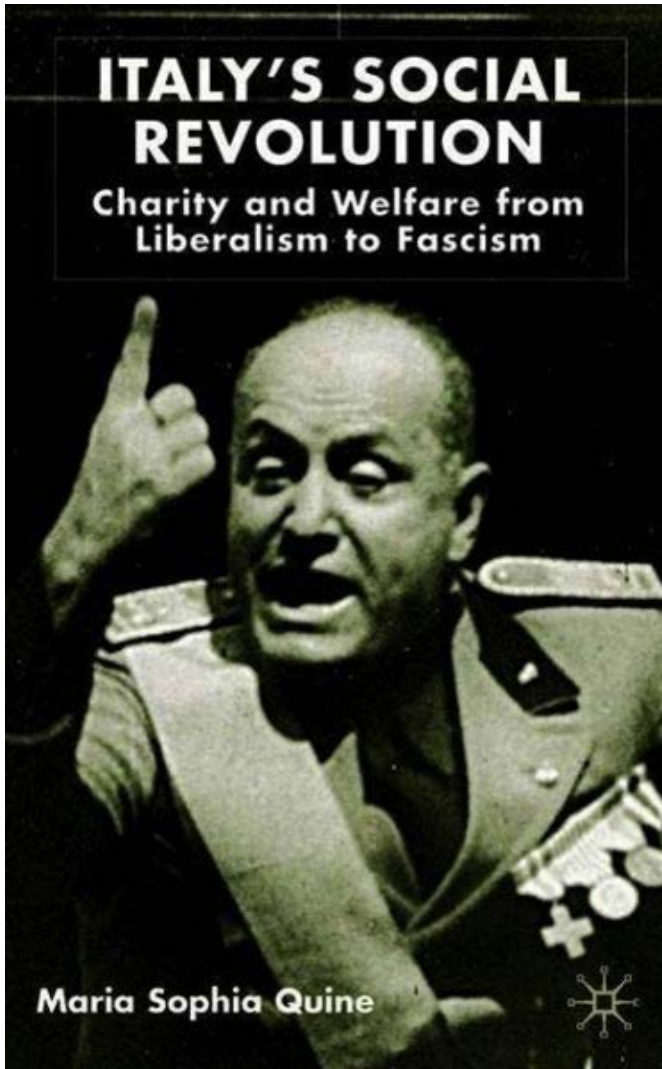


Italy's Social Revolution:

Charity and Welfare from Liberalism to Fascism

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MARIA SOPHIA QUINE

Abbreviations

I. Archival sources

ACR, ASS	Archivio del Comune di Roma, Assistenza e Servizi Sociali
ACS	Archivio Centrale dello Stato
ASA	Archivio di Stato di Alessandria
ASCR	Archivio Storico Capitolino, Comune di Roma
ASF	Archivio di Stato di Ferrara
ASM	Archivio di Stato di Milano
AST	Archivio di Stato di Torino
ASV	Archivio di Stato di Vercelli
IPAI	Archivio dell'Istituto Provinciale di Assistenza all'Infanzia Illegittima, Provincia di Roma

A. References to single holdings and their sub-divisions by category in the Archivio Centrale dello Stato and elsewhere:

AG	Affari Generali
CO	Carteggio Ordinario
CR	Carteggio Riservato
DN	Direttorio Nazionale
G	Gabinetto
GP	Gabinetto della Prefettura
P	Prefettura
Q	Questura
PG	Pratiche Generali
SA	Servizi Amministrativi

B. The archives and publications of government departments and the fascist party

MAIC, DGS	Ministero di Agricoltura, Industria, e Commercio, Direzione Generale della Statistica
Min. Interno	Ministero dell'Interno
GB	Gabinetto Buffarini
DGAC	Direzione Generale dell'Amministrazione Civile
DGSP	Direzione Generale della Sanità Pubblica
PCM	Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri
PNF	Partito Nazionale Fascista

SPD Segreteria Particolare del Duce, 1922–43

(b. *busta* (box) ; f. *fascicolo* (folder) ; m. *mazzo* (bundle) ;
P. *Protocollo* (protocol) ; sf. *sotto-fascicolo* (sub-file))

II. Government bodies

INPS Istituto Nazionale di Previdenza Sociale

ISTAT Istituto Centrale di Statistica del Regno d'Italia

ONMI Opera Nazionale per la Protezione della Maternità e dell'
Infanzia

III. References to journals

MI Maternità ed Infanzia, Bollettino Mensile Illustrato dell'
ONMI

IV. Parliamentary series

ApC Atti parlamenari, Camera dei Deputati

ApS Atti parlamentari, Senato

Preface

This book examines how Italian governments from liberalism to fascism attempted to build a welfare state atop a charitable foundation that was first set in the Middle Ages. In much of the literature on this topic, 'modern' state welfare is seen as the exact antithesis of 'traditional' church charity. Medieval Christian piety and beneficence produced a multitude of paternalistic forms of charity that were supposedly supplanted and replaced in the modern period by a secularizing state that was committed to the creation of a bureaucratic welfare system administered by professionals. But in Italy, the path to social modernity through welfare-state building was long and arduous. And the Italian welfare state that emerged in the twentieth century after decades of trial and error was such a peculiar blend of the old and the new, the traditional and the modern, the religious and the secular and the public and the private that even Titmuss would have had trouble describing it.

But those who are seeking an abstract generalization of the welfare state *all'Italiana* will be disappointed by this book. On the whole, I have tried to avoid discussing the numerous 'typologies' of the welfare state that, bafflingly to me, fascinate sociologists so much. I certainly have not been in the slightest bit interested in devising my own 'ideal type' of the Italian welfare state. Prescriptive constructs cannot capture the beguiling complexity of concrete forms. What concerns me in this work are the numerous questions that welfare policy and institutions raise about the history of modern Italy. I do not pretend to have answered any of them.

The first part of this book is devoted to the nineteenth century. Though I started this project with the intention of focusing only on fascist welfare, I realized that I needed to take the long view. To look at the fascist period in isolation from the past would be misleading and wrong-headed. Despite the pretension that all things it did were totally new and original, fascism did not start from scratch or turn the clock back to 'year zero'. Many of the social problems that the dictatorship tried to tackle had their origin in liberal Italy. So I went back in time.

What the makers of Italy hoped to achieve for the Italian people is the subject of two chapters. The first of these asks how Cavour envisaged what was then conceived as 'social progress'. Cavour inherited the Enlightenment dream of good government and a secular state, but he conceded to the church a far greater role in the relief of poverty and need than his many pronouncements on the social question suggested could be possible. Was the compromise between church and state that he solemnized in his construction of the laws and institutions of 'legal charity' the

product of his pragmatic search for the *juste milieu*? Or was there something fundamentally flawed about the social vision of nineteenth-century liberalism, even in its most utopian, pre-1861 form? Under Cavour's guardianship, the secularizing mission of *Risorgimento* statecraft shied away from assigning civil authority much of a role in the delivery of welfare to the nation. '*Carità legale*', after all, was little more than an oxymoron, since the institutions that formed the basis of the Cavourian 'social state' were 'public' in name only. Church charity and private philanthropy survived well beyond the liberal revolution's achievement of a unified nation.

The second chapter examines how post-*Risorgimento* liberals advanced the great social project of modern Italy. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, the gap between the governed and the governing class came to be seen as a permanent presence in the life of the nation by those who were disillusioned by the impact of unification on social conditions. The division between 'legal' and 'real' Italy was not just an aphorism used by contemporary critics of Italian nationhood. The distance between state and society condemned the majority of the Italian people to standards of living that were amongst the worst in all of industrializing Europe. Social 'backwardness' may be a politically incorrect term, but few others can more accurately describe liberal Italy's lowly place in the league table of European welfare providers. But were there missed opportunities and genuine possibilities for social development? Or are we to believe nineteenth-century liberals when they say categorically that the obstacles in the way of social betterment were simply insurmountable?

Part II of this book brings the study to the mass age of welfare, when the idea of centralized and comprehensive social programmes under the direction of an activist state became the ambition of politicians in democracies and dictatorships alike. Chapter 3 examines the social promises and actual achievements of Giolittian new liberalism in a comparative context. When set against the emergent welfare states of other nations, Giolitti's social insurance system seems ungenerous and slight. Was this due more to the poverty of the national economy than it was to the impoverishment of the political will of liberals? Even in their most progressive guise, new liberals failed to address the needs of rural Italy, the inhabitants of which comprised the bulk of the population. Nevertheless, the Giolittian state, for all its shortcomings, appeared to have found a way, albeit a temporary one, to integrate the industrial working class into bourgeois, capitalist society.

Chapters 4 and 5 look at the very different style of welfare that fascism created as part of its search for a totalitarian state, a corporate order, and a new Italy. Two different aspects of social welfare come under scrutiny here: the market-oriented kind that is based on the provision of social insurance for workers; and the pronatalist and familist sort that aspired to encourage procreation and defend the family by means of an extension in maternal and child care. Historians often explore these two pillars of the welfare

state separately. The tendency has been for older works on the welfare state to restrict their gaze almost exclusively to the emergence of national social security systems alone. Since early old-age, accident, and disability schemes affected such a tiny percentage of the population – mainly male, skilled workers in strategic industries, many classic accounts of the ‘foundation’ or ‘evolution’ of the welfare state are partial at best. In an attempt to address this shortcoming, feminist scholars have been writing new welfare histories which recognize the centrality to the modern state of policies affecting women, children, and the family. Many of these have presented ‘maternalism’, or the desire to endow motherhood, as an organizing principle of the welfare state. But some social policies spoke directly to women as workers, rather than as mothers, and attempted to regulate the conditions of their labour and the nature of their employment. Both the ‘labourist’ and the ‘maternalist’ perspectives have shed much light on the historical dynamics of welfare. But an integrative approach that does not bifurcate women’s experience, or ignore that of men, is necessary. Since both class and gender were determinants of the fascist welfare state, I have chosen to explore in tandem the two faces of the dictatorship’s social politics. The central question that informs this examination is the same. What was the impact of fascist welfarism upon Italian society?

What, rightly or wrongly, we have come to call the ‘welfare state’ is a product of historical developments over an extended period. For that reason, the third part of this book charts the slow and uneasy transformation of church charity into state welfare in Italy. I examine one aspect of social policy over the long term in order best to illuminate changes and continuities from one welfare regime to another. Both liberalism and fascism professed their commitment to reducing the mortality of society’s outcast infants and changing the terms of provision towards foundlings. As defined by contemporaries themselves, this project was a major modernizing enterprise with far-reaching significance for Italian society and culture. The Christian forms of relief that had emerged over the course of centuries encoded an entire subliminal universe of ‘traditional’ attitudes towards women, the weak, children, men, mothers, fathers and the family. The case study of illegitimacy policy concludes a book which, methodologically, makes no claims to being a survey of the history of *the* Italian welfare state. What I have attempted to do is explore some of the constituents of a changing complex of impulses, ideas, and institutions that reveals much about how well past states cared for their people.

MARIA SOPHIA QUINE

Part I

The Social Mission of Nineteenth-Century Liberalism

Introduction: The Old Charitable Order and the Promise of Good Government

‘Every well-regulated society abhors idlers and laggards,’ Lodovico Antonio Muratori wrote in his *Treatise on Charity*, a work published in 1723 whose aim was to counsel the faithful into giving more generously to the poor and needy.¹ Some people were simply far more deserving of *caritas* than others, Muratori admitted. The ‘shamefaced poor’ who had fallen on hard times through no fault of their own should rightfully receive assistance, as should those who had no family or friends to care for them. The sick and aged, lone women, orphans, widows and foundlings should be aided bountifully for they could not provide for themselves. Muratori advised his readers that some unworthy individuals would always try to exploit the good nature of others. But he also urged them to remember the single most important lesson from the teachings of the scripture and the saints. Charity, he stated, should always be boundless because this ‘queen of all virtues’ was an expression of one’s love of God. Not only was charity the supreme act of faith, he instructed, but also it was a duty and an imperative which Christ himself ordained. Good Christians should follow His example by being most compassionate and merciful. Pious and obedient servants of God, Muratori promised, will all be rewarded with eternal life in heaven.²

Muratori’s tract on charity was meant to be a call to the devout to embark on a ‘Catholic Reformation’ through a *riformismo caritativo* (charitable reformism). He wrote it at a time when the Catholic community in Italy began to feel threatened by the attempts of enlightened despots to claim and exercise a right to meddle in religious affairs. His treatise was also inspired by the belief that a charitable revival would lead to a regeneration of his beloved church. He recognized that some Catholics had forgotten their obligation to the poor and the Catholic Church had lost sight of its sacred mission to alleviate suffering. He urged followers of the one, true religion to reform Catholicism into a militant church devoted to the creation of the ‘city of God on earth’.³ Although Muratori was reacting to what he perceived to be dangerous secularizing forces in state and society, only after his death in 1750 did a real reforming impulse take root in Italy.⁴

From the 1760s, *lumières*, like Cesare Beccaria, Antonio Genovesi, Pietro Verri and Carlantonio Pilati increasingly sought to apply reason to public life and political institutions in the hope that a more perfect society might be created. They believed that the economy should be regulated by scientific laws. They thought that routine methods of crime prevention and punishment, such as torture and the death penalty, were contemptible and barbaric. They also came to support the principle that truly enlightened rulers must direct their most strenuous efforts to governing more humanely and to improving the common good.⁵ *Philosophes* embraced this utopian idea because they believed that the most worthy of human aspirations – reform – elevated national societies to ever greater heights of civilization. Sovereigns and their ministers recognized that they needed to invent and master new tools and methods of governance in order to maintain political power. In the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, for example, Leopold succeeded his father, Francis of Lorraine, in 1765 and initiated a prodigious project of autocratic reform from above that sought to destroy all vestiges of corruption, superstition, and medievalism from civil society and administration.⁶ Whether they were rulers or radicals, exponents of progress rejected tyranny and tradition in all their forms. They sought to modernize the administrative machinery of the *ancien régime* state by promoting the spread of a more rational, bureaucratic, and scientific organization of government.⁷

Reform activity within different Italian states led to an inevitable confrontation with the church. The wealth and privileges enjoyed by what many reformers believed to be a parasitic ecclesiastical establishment came increasingly under attack. After he acceded to the throne in 1735, Don Carlos of Naples was horrified to discover that the Church held a third of his lands, which were, therefore, exempt from all taxation. In the 1730s and 1740s, he began to whittle away at the special rights accorded the clergy in an attempt to expand the power and resources of central government. But the Church proved to be very resilient: in 1769, church holdings in Naples were still so vast that they generated a staggering income of 6373 million *ducats*; and in 1786, the Neapolitan kingdom possessed over 100 000 clerics out of a total population of 4.8 million inhabitants. That 13 500 of these belonged to monastic communities which many *illuminati* felt contributed nothing to society or the economy provoked calls for the abolition of religious orders.⁸ Progressives expressed repugnance at the very idea of an ever-growing 'black nobility' of nuns, priests, and monks enjoying great riches because of anachronistic customs and laws. The sense, too, that charity belonged to the outdated aristocratic society of the *ancien régime* also motivated reformers to decry how the landed nobility, in collusion with clerics, used philanthropy to extend their own influence and patronage in localities where pious institutions abounded.

The age of reason was also a time of famine, want, and hardship for many in even the most prosperous Italian states. While reformers exposed

the inadequacies of traditional almsgiving as a remedy to poverty, governments sought to cope with rising levels of pauperism. Despite its claims to a moral superiority over civil authority in matters relating to charity, the Church appeared to be doing very little to advance the Enlightenment's goal of material betterment for all. As far as many critics were concerned, ecclesiasts were an over-pampered and protected elite who lived lavishly off money that morally should belong to the people. Through generous donations, the patrimonies of some charities had become huge over the years, but many of these institutions seemed to be spending shamelessly little on the poor. Whether run by ecclesiastical associations or old Catholic noble families, charities dispensed relief at their own discretion. Bound only to adhere to their founding statutes and to the wishes of their devout benefactors, they provoked enmity in those who wished to abolish their corporate autonomy and to place them under state control.

Many reformers simply could not tolerate the religious character of charity. According to Catholic doctrine and practice, the virtuous almsgiver showed mercy towards the poor, and ministered to their physical needs, in order to save their endangered souls.⁹ Because of the underlying redemptive purpose of *carità*, mercy could and should be shown towards even the most idle of beggars, so that they might be rescued from sin and damnation. This salvationist zeal permeated the rituals surrounding the conferment of Catholic charity and resulted in the proliferation of numerous specialized institutions aimed at spiritual rescue: houses for repentent prostitutes, foundling homes, hospitals for the incurably sick, conservatories of female virtue, and many others of this kind met a recognizable social need, but, above all, served a Christian purpose that many reformers abhorred.¹⁰ Because it subjected the needy and poor to 'mortifications of the soul and pains of the flesh' in exchange for a mere crust of bread,¹¹ Catholic charity seemed to be little more than an outdated and dangerous form of bigotry to many critics who felt that *istituti pii* (pious institutions) should be made to adapt to *civiltà moderna* (modern civilization) through laicization. The persistence of the Church's influence over charity ran contrary to the very ideals of the Enlightenment, at the pinnacle of which stood the values and institutions of the modern secular state and society.

Many secularists also claimed that philanthropy and piety were actually responsible for perpetuating pauperism. Published in 1787, Lodovico Ricci's *Reform of the Pious Institutions of the City of Modena* is the best-known example of this great *idée-force* of the Enlightenment.¹² A chief weakness of clerical and lay Catholic charity, opponents alleged, was that it succoured the 'undeserving' poor, those who were healthy and robust, but terribly work-shy. By removing all incentive for self-reliance, traditional forms of assistance also corrupted the recipient and encouraged the lazy to descend into chronic idleness. Ricci and others believed that only the state and its agencies should be responsible for the distribution of what amounted to

vast sums of beneficent money; only government authorities were capable of halting the spread of pauperism by encouraging social misfits and professional beggars to fend for themselves. Nothing less than the complete secularization and modernization of the centuries-old charitable establishment seemed to be the aim of Enlightenment reformers.

This dream of a system of selective and rationalized public assistance seemed to be coming true. As poor relief evolved into a major public order issue, the second half of the eighteenth century saw the establishment of new institutions under central government control in different Italian states. These workhouses were different in character from traditional charities in that admission was compulsory for certain categories of the poor, such as able-bodied beggars and vagabonds. Their function too was not to assist but rather to confine and discipline.¹³ The rise of state-run *alberghi dei poveri* (poorhouses) and *case di correzione* (houses of correction), however, contributed to making the attack on the Church even more fierce because of the prevailing perception that old-style charity was far too generous in nature. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, reformers had come definitively to believe that state-building was a solution to social problems. If it were equipped with an efficient and impersonal bureaucracy, and if it were funded by the nationalization of Church property and assets, the modern central state, they argued, would be able to decide the scope and limits of *beneficenza* (beneficence) according to rational principles and economic constraints rather than whim and fancy. Poor relief was no longer envisaged as *ancien régime* governments had done so – that is, essentially only as a problem of law and order. Nor was it seen as the Church and its congregation continued to view it – as a private act of conscience whose higher purpose for both donor and recipient was the salvation of souls. Revealing that poor relief was now understood by an industrializing society to be a valuable means to increase the productive capabilities of the economy, the new workhouse regime actively exploited the labour of inmates.¹⁴

The Italian Enlightenment sparked enthusiasm for the transformation of Christian charity into what was called 'legal charity'. In the eighteenth century, the term legal charity came to embody the hope that the secular control of different forms of poor relief would lead to greater economy and efficiency. Usage of the term *carità legale*, moreover, marked an important shift in attitudes towards the problem of how society should respond to social need. It was predicated on the notion that public agencies would be far more selective than private ones in deciding who was worthy of relief. At the core of the concept of legal charity was implicit recognition of the policing, disciplinary, and repressive function of poor relief. If the deserving *povero* (pauper) had some nominal *diritto* (right) to increasingly bureaucratic, formalized, and impersonal help, he or she also had a *dovere* (duty)

to society at large. In contrast to what was perceived to be indiscriminate hand-outs by a church overwhelmingly concerned with the conquest of souls,¹⁵ legal charity implied that the individual seeking assistance would be evaluated, scrutinized, and reformed by the state.¹⁶ Rather than be subject to religious ritual and indoctrination, the recipient of aid was meant to conform to secular values and expectations. By discouraging wanton idleness, and encouraging greater industriousness, legal charity was congruent with the needs and aspirations of an emergent bourgeois society which elevated the economic principles of work and productivity to social virtues.

If the Enlightenment revolt against tradition put Italy on a path towards modern welfare state-building, the road ahead was to be long and arduous.¹⁷ Eighteenth-century science and philosophy gave momentum to what has become known as the 'secularization' of attitudes, as reformers questioned the Church's continuing hold over people's minds, bodies, and souls through its control of education, marriage, and charity.¹⁸ The ferment of ideas that agitated intellectuals in Lombardy, the Kingdom of Naples, and elsewhere during the eighteenth century gave rise to a grand aspiration that the ministering of relief would be made into an instrument of civic authority and good governance. Reforming autocrats took part actively in this process by resolving that the historic union consecrated between throne and altar should be dissolved so that a new secular state and society could be created. Enlightened despots pronounced the supremacy of civil government over the Pontiff and his Church; and they devised a model of public beneficence whose rationale was rooted in capitalism rather than religion. But even though newly-founded centralized monarchies attempted to extend state powers, Christian charity survived the challenges posed by Enlightenment ideals of social modernity. By the end of the century of light and reason, the most audacious autocrats in Italy and Europe had discovered the hard way that state-building was an expensive and difficult enterprise. The 'search for a new administrative order' ended in failure for many rulers in Italy as the economic crisis of the 1770s and 1780s provoked widespread social unrest and brought governments close to financial ruin.¹⁹

Still largely disorganized and unreformed, charities too suffered from the turmoil of the last decades of the eighteenth century as many saw their incomes and assets diminish due to decreased donations. Not enough is actually known about charitable institutions during the period of the Napoleonic occupation,²⁰ when, for over a decade, about a third of Italy came under French control. In theory at least, the Napoleonic system embodied the most radical ideals of the Enlightenment and Revolution; as scholars have shown, the emperor's style of conquest and rule was driven by a compulsion to obliterate the old order and to construct an entirely new one. Napoleon's functionaries imported their model of an activist and

centralized bureaucratic state and imposed a uniform administrative structure of departments and communes on a massive stretch of Italian territory. But, the enduring image of Bonaparte as the liberator of Italy, the bearer of the Napoleon Code, the destroyer of feudalism, the determined modernizer and the state-builder *par excellence* may have to be revised somewhat, however, at least as far as *bienfaisance* is concerned.²¹

For one thing, the motivating principle behind the French system of *charité légale* that was introduced in Italy was the repression of pauperism through the *dépôt de mendicité*.²² The Napoleonic police may have been very efficient at rounding up beggars, prostitutes, and thieves and consigning them to a regime of hard labour in houses of correction.²³ But, the attempt to combat mendicity and vagabondage by making able-bodied paupers work hard and pay for their upkeep did not succeed, for pauperism increased during the Napoleonic period, as did the costs of poor relief. Moreover, the administration of *istituti pii* with a purely charitable purpose came rather low down the list of the new King of Italy's social priorities. While central government under the French administered the workhouses directly, because of their perceived importance to the nation, the Napoleonic state devolved responsibility for the control of *opere pie*²⁴ onto local authorities by means of the *congregazioni di carità* (congregations of charity). Organized by prefects, these municipal bodies comprising local notables were created to reorganize and administer charities. However, these new agencies functioned primarily as a means for the government to gain control of the assets of beneficent institutions. Under the Napoleonic system, public authorities 'concentrated' the revenues and incomes of private charities. And the state abrogated many of the old privileges enjoyed by *opere pie*, some of which were fiscal, confiscated lands owned by private charitable foundations, and pocketed the proceeds from the sale of this private property. The paltry compensation meted out by government failed to remedy the real economic hardship that many charities experienced as a result of French rule.²⁵ *Istituti di carità* experienced financial crisis also because of the decline in charitable giving during this period; potential benefactors probably chose not to make donations which might end up in the hands of the emperor's bureaucrats.²⁶ Moreover, the administrative structure created by the French never assumed more than a superficial and supervisory character; though their budgets and accounts could now be scrutinized by public authorities, pious institutions remained unreformed by Napoleon.²⁷

For all his centralizing and authoritarian ambitions, Napoleon left only an ambiguous legacy for nineteenth-century state-builders in Italy. He may have put the rudiments of a system of public beneficence in place, but this was truly 'public' only in the sense that the *opere pie* which were its foundation served a public purpose. Even as the state began to extend its regula-

tory powers over charity under the French, *beneficenza pubblica* remained almost entirely run and funded privately. And, very importantly, the experience of French rule left many of the charitable institutions themselves unaltered, because the administrative 'revolution' was not implemented uniformly. In some areas, old notables retained their grip on the organs of local government and, in others, the ecclesiastical community maintained its control of charities. For example, the apparent achievements of Napoleonic institutional modernization (and, for that matter, of earlier Austrian reforms) amounted to little in Milan's foundling home, the *Pia Casa degli Esposti e delle Partorienti in S. Caterina della Ruota* (the Pious House for Foundlings and Parturient Women at Saint Catherine of the Wheel). In this *opera pia*, one of the largest of its kind in Europe, 'ancient custom' dating back to the fifteenth century continued to determine the nature and quality of care well into the nineteenth century. The survival of medieval institutions and ways, in the very capital of Napoleon's Italian kingdom, might not have posed such a problem were it not for the fact that Italy, like other European countries, experienced a veritable explosion in child abandonment from the 1670s to the 1860s.²⁸

A symptom of the long-term crisis of traditional agricultural society and the demographic transition to the accelerated rates of population growth associated with industrialization, the so-called modern age of poverty and pauperism provided the context in which mass infant abandonment took place. At Saint Catherine's hospital in Milan, for example, admissions increased substantially in the decades 1690–9 and 1730–49, but especially in the period 1780–1869. While the Milanese home (which was one of eight such institutions in Lombardy) admitted 343 406 abandoned babies from 1659 to 1900, more than half of this intake (54.7 per cent) gained entry between 1810 and 1869.²⁹ Through the centuries, the Milanese *brefotrofio* (foundling home) maintained its 'open-door' policy of admissions, despite the overwhelming influx of foundlings. The customary procedure of free entry survived Napoleonic attempts to clamp down on child abandonment, which had become a 'habitual practice' amongst the poor.³⁰ Even though foundling home authorities increasingly complained of a huge rise in the number of legitimate babies who were abandoned, they did not initiate efforts to prevent married people from disposing of their children. And, although their primary carers, wet nurses living in the countryside, became more scarce from the late eighteenth century, officials made no effort to transform the *brefotrofio* from a foster institution into a residential establishment. As wetnurse shortages became more acute, the home began to farm out as many as four or five infants to a single woman; it also came to rely upon 'artificial' methods of nourishment for those reared internally.³¹ With often disastrous results, young babies were fed milk from cows or goats which was untreated. Remaining very high until the end of

the nineteenth century, when a gradual decline began, Italian infant mortality levels during this period were more characteristic of the *ancien régime* than the modern age.³² And the mortality figures for foundlings were particularly staggering: at Saint Catherine's hospital, for example, 11 960 of the 15 418 foundlings admitted in 1800–09 died in care; and 14 964 of the 21 158 admitted in 1810–19 did so.³³

During the Napoleonic period, Italy's whole foundling home system began to strain under the pressure of dramatically increased demand. By the 1840s possibly as much as a third of all newborn babies in Milan were abandoned.³⁴ Left untouched by the reforming impulse emanating from secular society, traditional charities like St Catherine's in Milan simply could not cope effectively with the massive scale of modern social problems. This was all the more so since their endeavours to provide some succour to the needy, however inadequate they were at protecting infant life, went unaided by the state. Napoleon's legacy was uncertain in other ways too. The cavalier way that the French nationalized the private property of beneficent institutions, suppressed religious orders, and confiscated church lands provoked a deep hostility in many Catholics towards any kind of state interference in *carità*.

After the emperor's abdication at Fontainebleau and the return of royalty and the papacy to power, ecclesiastical authorities pressed for a full restoration of the former corporate autonomy and private identity of charitable institutions. Although a complete reprivatization did not occur, restoration rulers became less ambitious about encroaching upon ecclesiastical affairs and private charities than their predecessors had been. Even in Lombardy, where Napoleonic reforms had ostensibly been more effectively implemented than elsewhere, the Austrians abolished the supervisory congregations of charity in 1819, divided up the 'concentrated' charities, and reaffirmed the right of *opere pie* to govern themselves. In Venetia, this process of reviving the voluntary sector got under way in the 1820s, when Hapsburg officials dismantled Napoleon's skeletal bureaucratic apparatus of *assistance publique*.³⁵ The reluctance to retain what few public controls over private institutions the French left behind suggests that the revisionist view of Austrian administration and policies as 'progressive' and 'modernizing' should be qualified somewhat, at least as far as social welfare is concerned.³⁶ The Austrians seem to have been uninterested in continuing the great revolutionary enterprise of modernizing charity through state intervention.

The Restoration of 1815 to 1848 also produced few improvements to public administration in the south, where the sinews of state power over church charity were particularly tenuous. Through the centuries, the southern clergy retained a high degree of control over *istituti pii*, and though French-style reforms were introduced during the Napoleonic period, these were never fully implemented. After his return to the throne, Ferdinand IV

caused administrative chaos by decreeing firstly that the *consigli degli ospizi* (charitable councils) which were modelled on Napoleon's congregations of charity be destroyed and then ordering that they be reconstructed. The Bourbon monarchy placed its *alberghi dei poveri* under direct central government control, but allowed communal authorities to manage the finances of charitable institutions as they saw fit. As a result of their free reign, the municipal commissions that were reestablished after 1820 did not occupy themselves with reforming *opere pie*; they became notorious seedbeds for the embezzlement of private funds by corrupt public officials.³⁷

In one respect, however, the impact of the Restoration was far more positive; a revival in charitable giving and activity occurred in many parts of Italy during this period. Church and state may not have actually entered into a holy alliance during this period, but governments certainly did show a new willingness to abdicate authority over charity and restrict their own role in its administration. Writings about *carità legale* also reflected a growing uncertainty about the Enlightenment's belief in the desirability of an ever-expanding sphere of state action in the social domain. Writing in 1817, Melchiorre Gioia asked what the true cost of public assistance was. The Lombard political economist said the answer lay in the swelling ranks of the 'idle rabble'. Though he had earlier been ordained as a priest, Gioia had lost faith in the possibility of spiritual redemption through individual effort. Revealing a deeply pessimistic view of human nature, he attributed the abject misery of peasants and workers to their improvidence and laziness. And he doubted whether the state could elevate the masses morally and socially through legal charity. In 1836, the young Carlo Cattaneo, who prided himself on being sensitive to the plight of the poor because of his humble origins as the son of a blacksmith, vehemently opposed the principle of legal charity on the grounds that it encouraged the dissoluteness and degradation of the lower orders. Like many other moderate liberals at this time, he believed that economic development would gradually eliminate poverty.³⁸ Carlo Ilarione Pettiti di Roreto's *Saggio sul buon governo della mendicizia, degli istituti di beneficenza e delle carceri* (Essay on the Governing of Mendicity, Beneficent Institutions and Prisons) of 1837 argued that the essence of good government was minimal involvement in charitable activities.³⁹ Other commentators also believed that the state should endeavour only to administer the finances and budgets of *opere pie* so that indiscriminate alms-giving would be abolished and replaced by a more 'efficient' and selective system of poor relief.⁴⁰

On the eve of the *Risorgimento*, the question of what was to be done with Italy's labyrinthine network of pious institutions remained unresolved. Conflicting signals about the prospects for the future emanated from political developments. Between 1837 and 1842, Charles Albert published his homage to Napoleon the lawmaker, the famous Albertine Codes.⁴¹ Though deeply religious and illiberal in conception, this codification of penal, civil,

military and commercial law, together with similar initiatives in Naples and Parma, represented at the very least an affirmation of the principles of *gouvernement juste*. The civil code of 1837, however, conferred upon Catholicism the status of sole official religion and gave canon law full judicial parity with civil law. Despite this concession to the church, the Piedmontese government made some other tentative moves in the direction of *buon governo*. Charles Albert issued an edict on 24 December 1836 which subjected some charities, but not all, to a superficial system of government regulation.⁴² The act stipulated that potential benefactors had to seek government permission to found new charities. It also gave the interior ministry the right to investigate how the richest *opere pie* spent their money; and it created new bodies, the provincial commissions for the revision of accounts, which had the power to monitor the finances of some charitable institutions. However, the enactment exempted from accountability all *istituti di carità* which were directly managed by religious organizations. And, limiting state interference to matters relating to incomes and spending, the 'reform' left the charities themselves unreformed.⁴³ Old administrators remained in place; old statutes remained unchanged; the *ancien régime* remained alive. Like earlier Napoleonic initiatives, this enactment put into place only the bare skeleton of a system of legal charity. And like the monarch's civil code, this legislation was more a victory for the church than it was for the state, as it preserved ecclesiastical power over charity. In 1844, Charles Albert finally took as his motto the phrase *J'attend mon astre* (I am writing for my star), an indication to many hopeful patriots that when the time came, the monarch who had allied with Austria soon after his accession in 1831 would dedicate himself to the cause of Italy.⁴⁴ The death of the despised Pope Gregory XVI in 1846 also seemed to mark the birth of a new age. It was left to the architects of Italian unity to liberate Italy not just from foreign domination but also from bad government.

But whether the makers of Italy's national resurrection would also construct a *buon governo* which was willing and able to promote the welfare of the people still remained unknown. The task was enormous. In more than one sense, pious institutions were both a blessing and a curse for nineteenth-century liberal nation-state-builders. After centuries of ecclesiastical and philanthropic investment in beneficence, nineteenth-century Italy possessed a huge legacy of many thousands of *istituti pii*. Reformers, however, recognized that this inheritance posed seemingly insurmountable problems for a nascent state that was struggling to develop complex mechanisms for effective government administration and social innovation. A committed believer in liberalism's social mission to expand the sphere of state action and reform Church charity, Aristide Gabelli none the less understood the enormity of the enterprise when he called the charitable apparatus 'an immense and fearsome forest' that resisted even the most strenuous efforts at penetration and control.⁴⁵ Francesco Saverio Nitti used a similar

metaphor when he wrote that *opere pie* would not be laicized or modernized easily because of their medieval origins, fierce independence, chaotic organization, ancient traditions and cherished privileges.⁴⁶ Left unreformed, however, traditional charities would never be able to meet the growing needs of a modern society. Due to the vast wealth of the charitable establishment, the temptation for secular authorities was to regulate *istituti pii* without reforming them. Napoleon had set a precedent for this by treating the incomes and endowments of private institutions as part of the patrimony of the state. But Italy had to go far beyond the Napoleonic model, if good government and social betterment were to be achieved.

1

Reform and the *Risorgimento*

‘I believe that there exists an immense prejudice against the idea of legal charity, but I predict that all societies which have arrived at a certain level of [economic] development will necessarily resort to legal charity. I also believe that experience will show in a not-so-distant future that legal charity, which is administered well and is governed by sound norms, can produce immense [economic and social] benefits [for the nation] without resulting in those devastating [financial] consequences [for the taxpayer and the state] that many [conservatives and critics] fear.’

Count Camillo Benso di Cavour (from a speech delivered to the Piedmontese Senate, 17 February 1851)

‘This [law] will never produce the effects that legal charity has produced in countries [such as England] where the state, by governing charitable institutions directly, assumes all responsibility for providing for the poor. This [law] will never produce the effects that legal charity has produced in countries where charity, instead of being considered as a moral duty of the well-off classes, is seen as a legitimate demand of the needy. This [law] will never produce the effects that legal charity has produced in countries where misery ceases to be a claim to piety and becomes instead a right to public assistance.’

Urbano Rattazzi (giving assurances to the king about the effects of the Piedmontese law of 20 November 1859 on charities)

When Cavour fell ill for the last time on 27 May 1861, according to one biographer, he reluctantly took to his bed at his family’s *château* uttering the words ‘parliament and Italy need me’. Only in March had the newly unified kingdom of Italy been proclaimed, so the prime minister was justifiably preoccupied with political matters. The sick count did not get better in the days that followed, despite the efforts of his personal physician to cure him with repeated blood-lettings, mustard plasters, and ice

packs. By the fifth of June, Cavour determined to die like a good Christian, so he confessed to Fra Giacomo, who gave him absolution. Later that day, the friar returned to administer extreme unction. That night, after Cavour drank beef broth and a fine Bordeaux, he summoned Giacomo again, and supposedly murmured to him, 'Friar, friar, a Free Church in a Free State.' Cavour's last intelligible words were memorably optimistic. He is reputed to have said: 'Italy is made – all is safe.'¹

As the country went into mourning for twenty days after the death, and thousands wept at the sight of Cavour's body lying in state, only the Mazzinian *Italia del Popolo* publicly exulted at the passing of *Papa Camillo*. The Senate declared that no other Italian statesman had ever conceived and achieved 'so vast a design' as Count Cavour.² Cavour may not have seen the day when Rome and Venice finally entered into union with the rest of Italy, but, to a large extent, he did deserve to be remembered as the father of the nation. The unification of Italy was his greatest achievement. But the impact of this legendary figure extended beyond the realm of high politics and diplomacy. For Cavour and his followers, the *Risorgimento* was not just about the creation of an Italian nation-state. They believed that political unity was a means as well as an end. They aspired to nothing less than the regeneration of Italy and the whole of its people. *Risorgimento* liberalism set itself a task of immense proportions: it strove to promote the moral and social elevation of the masses. This goal was a founding principle of Italian nationhood. But how was this aim to be achieved?

Cavour believed that this aspiration would be realized by the creation of a strong unitary state. The most important possession of the state, he maintained, was its power. This power, however, was not tyrannical; rather it rested upon a written constitution and a body of law, which rendered the state answerable, and was directed at a single selfless purpose – fostering the common good of the people and the nation. For Cavour, the common good was synonymous with modernity. Cavour's imagined state would encourage the development of all the institutions of modern society which would help it fulfil its duty to the national collective. Cavour's liberalism, then, had a social mission. It also had a lasting impact upon the makers of the new Italy. Cavour's legacy could especially be felt in the endeavours of his successors in the Cavourian 'party' of the Right, which ruled Italy until March 1876. Influenced both by Cavour's ideal of good government and by German theories of the *Staatsrecht* (the constitutional state),³ Ricasoli, Minghetti, Sella and others attempted to bring to culmination their leader's project for a reformation of state and society.

Cavour and the good society

In 1834, a young Cavour wrote a study of begging in the kingdom of Sardinia which the English Poor Law Commission published. Outside of

some cities, he stated in this piece, the congregations of charity which the French introduced hardly existed at all; those which did exist, moreover, functioned badly. Because of the lack of government involvement in their activities, private charities were not satisfying the genuine need of the 'less fortunate classes' for protection from the terrible poverty and deprivation which afflicted them. Cavour concluded that the whole system needed a radical overhaul by means of increased state intervention.⁴ Cavour's depiction of the deficiencies of beneficence in his homeland contrasted sharply with the image first created in the Enlightenment of Piedmont as the cradle of Italian piety and charity. Cavour believed that Piedmont was socially backward by European standards. Increasingly, he attributed this failing to the 'long obscurantist *régime*', which had rendered it 'destitute of all the accessories of modern life', such as schools, hospitals, sanitation and communication.⁵ Only through progressive political change would social modernization be achieved.

At the behest of the Piedmontese government, Cavour also completed a study of the old Poor Law and the English Act of Amendment in 1834. The 'big question' facing all nations at this time in history, he wrote, was how they would resolve the problem of 'succouring all the genuine miseries of the poor' without 'encouraging idleness and improvidence'. He expressed approval of the English government's attempts to reform the system by taking power from local parishes, centralizing the control of funds destined for poor relief, and creating a single administration responsible for payments. In the interests of economy and efficiency, the state had to be directly involved in the dispensation of doles, he maintained.⁶ The New Poor Law of 1834 provided Cavour with an administrative model which he emulated. It established a central authority, the Poor Law Commission, which had extensive powers over local poor-relief institutions. This set-up appealed to him because it seemed to facilitate effective planning on a national scale and improve the way that authorities raised and distributed funds. The legislation also replaced the 'corrupt' local magistrates who monopolized control of poor relief with 'impartial' elected officials who governed groups of parishes. Cavour liked this framework because it embodied his ideal of legal charity. He believed that government would become good by expanding its activities in the social realm and developing the instruments of public administration. Cavour knew that in his own country this monumental change would occur only if the state claimed sovereignty over charity by means of ecclesiastical reform. Unless the relations between church and state were radically redefined, by decisive government action, then no reform of charity and social progress would be possible.

Cavour was so convinced of the necessity of reform 'from above' that the publication in Paris of a major two-volume study of pauperism by a critic of *charité légale* provoked his ire.⁷ According to its author, poverty was caused

not by low wages, high prices, or unemployment, but by the indolence and immorality of the working classes. So-called legal charity, Naville claimed, should be abolished because it removed all incentive for industry and work and imposed an intolerable financial burden on rate-payers.⁸ Cavour strongly opposed these kinds of rehashed Malthusian arguments against social reform. Influenced by the likes of Montesquieu, he believed in the principle of natural justice. Every society, he felt, should strive to develop a decent system of public charity. Cavour also maintained that the condition of poverty was so degrading and the level of assistance so low that poor relief provided no real stimulus to laziness. His understanding of the economy, moreover, convinced him of the weaknesses of theories which solely blamed the poor for their plight. He recognized that poverty had many causes: some individuals were wholly dependent on assistance or begging as they were unable to earn a living because of age and infirmity; others always teetered at subsistence because of low wages or casual employment; and others still experienced bouts of occasional poverty due to unavoidable personal or economic circumstances, such as illness and bad harvests.⁹ In some of his more substantive writings during this early period, Cavour developed these ideas further.

The young Cavour devoted much attention to the problem of social progress. One of the most important pieces of writing on the 'social question' that he ever completed was an essay on Ireland, which was originally published in 1844. He wrote at great length in this work about the tragedy of the Irish people.¹⁰ Interestingly, he did not blame over-population for their suffering. Cavour believed that Malthus had been wrong to attribute the cause of severe social deprivation to 'the prolific nature of man'.¹¹ The Protestant parson, Cavour argued, had exaggerated the extent to which a population tended to reproduce beyond the means of subsistence. In his opinion, Malthus had also underestimated just how much influence economic factors had on determining whether a people could sustain itself. Whether or not the Irish practised birth control seemed irrelevant to him. A primitive and inadequate agricultural system, Cavour explained, was the true cause of the extreme hardship which Irish peasants endured. A rural economy based primarily on the potato was bound to result in meagre consumption at the best of times, and widespread malnourishment at the worst.¹² What was needed in Ireland, he maintained, was 'a progressive transformation of the social order of the *ancien régime*' through land reform aimed at making the peasantry into property-owners and social reform aimed at protecting the poor from starvation. Sooner or later, Cavour argued, English rulers, like those in every other 'civilizing nation', had to recognize that they had a moral obligation to free all of their people from terrible misery and want.¹³ Although his commitment to social reform seemed genuine, Cavour, none the less, still had to define his vision for the future more clearly.

Cavour's stint in journalism gave him the opportunity to develop his ideas about the good society further. The great unifying theme of all his contributions to the moderate liberal journal, the *Risorgimento*,¹⁴ was reform in all its manifestations. The intriguing thing about his writings was that Cavour was working out for himself what the limits and scope of reform should be: uncertainties and hesitations permeate his ideas. In an article which appeared on 15 December 1847, Cavour outlined the aims of his great project of national resurrection. The 'political *risorgimento*' of a nation, he wrote, is never separated from its 'economic *risorgimento*' and 'social *risorgimento*'. 'The virtues of citizenship, beneficial laws that protect all rights equally, and good political systems, which are all indispensable to the betterment of the moral conditions of a nation, are also the principal causes of economic growth.'¹⁵ Cavour also clarified the importance that he attached to political reform as the catalyst for economic and social progress. Two reforming princes, he argued, had the courage and foresight to face the challenges of modernity: Charles III and Charles Albert wisely introduced opportune political reforms. Their efforts were rewarded by the prodigious economic development of their kingdom.

Cavour thought that modernity could only be attained through a complex and intermeshed process of political, economic, and social advancement. He possessed an immense faith in the ideals of the *Risorgimento* and professed a strong belief in the future of Italian industry to surmount any economic obstacle to social progress. He also asserted that the workers who contributed the most to increasing prosperity should be rewarded with material gains. The nation's resurrection must culminate in the creation of a better society for all. The rebirth of the Italian nation, he argued, will only ever really be completed once the idea of social responsibility is consecrated as a founding principle of a new order. The troubles afflicting England, he declared, should be seen as a valuable lesson to those in Italy who reject the notion that social reform is a 'sacred duty' of modern government. The colossal growth of English cities led to all sorts of new problems. But elected politicians and private citizens in the richest country in the world chose to do very little to alleviate the discontent of the *poveri*. The horrifying spectacle of public disorder and Chartist revolt in England, Cavour stated, have shown that Italians must find a 'peaceful and Christian solution to the great social question of the day'. 'The conditions of the working class' must be improved, Cavour asserted.¹⁶

Though still in his twenties when some of his first writings on pauperism appeared, the young Cavour seemed to show great promise as a prospective social reformer. He appeared to understand that the age of railways, steamships, and factories created social problems of such import and magnitude that governments could ill afford to remain passive; *le grand problème* of legal charity needed to be resolved. As a social thinker, he was far more prescient than many of his contemporaries. In the 1830s and 1840s,

few Italian intellectuals possessed Cavour's intuitive grasp of the importance of the social question to modern societies. The immense privilege and elitism of the majority of liberal patriots made them somewhat indifferent to the sufferings of the masses. It would take the revolution of 1848–9 to awaken a social conscience. But even after that dramatic wake-up call, many moderates would remain uninterested in social issues. They concentrated their efforts upon the great enterprise of unification, but remained detached from the very people whom national unity was supposed to serve. Before 1848, Cavour's efforts to give liberalism social goals that were practical and achievable were almost entirely solitary. For their own part, the democrats achieved little in this regard. The leading figure within the democratic movement, Mazzini is a case in point. Like Cavour and other students of the Enlightenment, Mazzini was a true believer in progress. But because of his faith in God and his devotion to Herder, Mazzini imbued the rationalist belief in progress with mysticism and spiritualism.¹⁷ Unlike many others in his generation, Mazzini expressed a love of '*la plebe*' which seemed quite genuine; it probably was since, in his mind, God, the Nation, and the People were one and indivisible. This trinity was the object of his devotion and the basis of his political faith. As his critics pointed out, none the less, Mazzini's social aims were too vague to be the making of any kind of workable political programme. And, however heartfelt they were, the demands of Mazzini's followers for a 'classless society' and a nation of enfranchised 'citizen-producers' could hardly have had much impact upon the many bourgeois and aristocratic liberals of the *Risorgimento*.¹⁸

Civil progress and civil society in a new Italy

One of Cavour's greatest aspirations was to promote the creation of a 'civil society'. Central to that concept was the goal of separating church and state and asserting the superiority of secular over ecclesiastical authority. Under the influence of Swiss Protestant ideas and English individualist thought, Cavour believed that the state possessed a moral purpose which consisted in its duty to protect personal freedoms and allow individuals to attain education, advancement, and fulfilment.¹⁹ He argued that religious tolerance and liberty should be the founding principles of all just societies. On the occasion of the opening of the sub-Alpine parliament in 1848, for example, Cavour wrote about the importance of preserving the right of worship and conscience in the new political order.²⁰ This stance prefigured his famous dictum of a '*libera chiesa in libero stato*' (a free church in a free state) – a phrase which he borrowed from French liberal Catholic thought. The idea of a religiously neutral state fostering the spread of secular values, like individualism, and liberal ones, like constitutionalism, clashed fundamentally with the aims of the papacy. Nineteenth-century popes sought to

free the church from the grip held by eighteenth-century rulers and to regain old rights and privileges. Cavour's ideas about the mission of the modern state also differed enormously from *ancien régime* attitudes, which ascribed to the state the rather limited tasks of raising armies, levying taxes, and defending order. For Cavour, an essential function of the state was to promote social modernization through secularization.

From as early as 1839 Cavour gave his unstinting support to attempts to secularize elementary schools in Piedmont. He defended his decision to do so by arguing that religious instruction really was the worst of all tyrannies administered to young minds. Church-controlled education was wholly incompatible with the needs of modern society and should be supplanted by a system of public schools. State education alone, he stated, could promote civil progress by meeting the needs of all social classes, freeing children from clerical influence, fostering the spread of modern ideas and elevating the people intellectually.²¹ Since they believed that schools should teach children to be *buoni cristiani* (good Christians) and *buoni sudditi* (good subjects), the king and his Catholic supporters had opposed what they saw as an offensive anti-confessional scholastic policy. It is not surprising that during the last years of his reign, Charles Albert had come to see Cavour as '*l'homme le plus dangereux*' (the most dangerous man of his kingdom).²²

The control of education increasingly played a large part in the political programme of nineteenth-century liberalism and figured as a prominent cause of much church-state conflict. According to the Church, the liberals' goal of a state educational system was nothing less than an evil plot to corrupt the minds and souls of Italian children. By contrast, the consensus amongst most liberals was that the clergy used the classroom to recruit papists. They also believed adamantly in the moral superiority of secular values over religious ones. To their mind, secular instruction constituted the very foundation on which a new civil society could be built and secured for future generations.

The deep sincerity and radical character of Cavour's beliefs about education as an issue of personal freedom and civil progress cannot be questioned. That he was prepared to compromise principle when he believed it to be necessary equally cannot be ignored. At the same time that struggles over public schools raged, disputes about the state's encroachments in private schools flared. In October 1848, the Piedmontese government assumed the right to intervene in the organization of teaching at seminaries. Officials justified this by arguing that since these institutions received government grants they should be willing to tolerate government regulation. When two bishops decided to revolt against this meddling by outside authorities by closing the doors of their seminaries to government-appointed professors, a number of parliamentarians wished to withdraw public funding for seminary education altogether. In a parliamentary discussion about these events on 14 March 1851, Cavour supported this proposal, but rejected the suggestion that the education min-

istry should create an inspectorate over seminary schools. Cavour reminded his colleagues that government had yet to establish its own system of even rudimentary schooling, let alone an inspection service, so it was hardly in a position to use public money for a bureaucracy aimed at providing better training for priests.²³

Quite at odds with what others stated during this debate, Cavour's position is revealing in a number of ways. Although he opposed religious education on principle, he also maintained that the church had a right to regulate its own institutions. Politicians should run government and bishops should teach theology. Statesmen should always recognize the limits of *potere civile* (civil power), he stressed, and seek to balance these with those of *potere ecclesiastico* (ecclesiastical power). For a man known for his realism, he seemed to possess a terribly naïve faith that the civil and the ecclesiastical could co-exist peacefully, even though their spheres of interests overlapped and their political aims conflicted. He also did not seem to grasp that civil power would have to expand considerably if civil progress was to be achieved. Moreover, he urged caution on financial grounds. The ideal of secular education would have to be put aside indefinitely, he believed, because its achievement was beyond the realm of possibility. Cavour resigned himself to the fact that *potere civile* was too weak for radical reforms to be introduced successfully.

Though he may have been regarded as a dangerous anticleric, Cavour was no Garibaldi. Radicals like Garibaldi believed that the ultimate aim of national unification was the destruction of the Church. To his mind, the national revolution to unite Italy had to be accompanied by a social revolution to create a secular and democratic society. During his 'dictatorship' in Sicily, Garibaldi attempted to liberate the people from the tyranny of priests and alms. He sought to create a system of 'public succour' by laicizing charitable institutions and taxing the rich.²⁴ Cavour, by contrast, never gave up faith in his policy of gradual and moderate reform. He could show fury at clerics in parliament who resisted the advance of constitutional government. And he fought fiercely for certain causes, like the expulsion of the Jesuits, whom he detested because of their reactionary advocacy of theocracy and despotism.²⁵ But Cavour adopted a stance of cautious hesitancy on many issues pertaining to ecclesiastical reform.

The first bitter struggle between church and state was fought over the controversial Siccardi Laws of 1850. These abolished the ecclesiastical courts for temporal causes, ended the right to asylum attached to churches, reduced the number of religious holidays and their protection by civil law and restricted the ability of religious organizations to acquire property through will or deed without the consent of government. Those like Agostino Depretis, a freemason, demanded more radical religious reforms, even if they were to be introduced without the concurrence of the Holy See. By contrast, Cavour felt that Piedmont was pursuing a risky policy of

challenging church authority at a time when other Italian states were seeking accords with the Vatican. He preferred to resist calls from the left for a revolution in relations between Church and State. Instead, he chose to adopt a piecemeal policy aimed at modernizing the Church without alienating Catholics and possibly undermining parliament.

Cavour did feel strongly though that the ecclesiastical establishment should be forced to recognize its duties towards society. He thought that it was 'disgraceful' that in 1855 the Siccardi laws had still not been fully implemented in Piedmont because of forceful clerical resistance from a 'minority of the population'.²⁶ He also objected on principle to the fact that the clergy should enjoy immunity from civil proceedings because of their clerical vestments. In a parliamentary discussion about the abolition of the right of asylum, Cavour recounted the memory of a time in his youth when he saw a monk who had been accused of a crime seek refuge in a convent. The undignified sight of soldiers and the police surrounding a holy place, wherein the monk took shelter because of some anachronistic privilege, Cavour attested, did more to bring the church into disrepute amongst the people than any secularizing legislation ever could.²⁷

The Church's response to the outbreak of cholera in 1854 proved to be a real turning-point for Cavour and his liberal supporters. As the epidemic raged, medical and government authorities in Turin discovered that they did not have sufficient facilities to isolate and treat the many victims. They asked the Church to help them combat the spread of the disease by granting permission for convents to be used as makeshift hospitals where patients could be quarantined. Though offered compensation by the state, ecclesiastical officials refused to open the doors of their establishments to the sick and dying.²⁸ Convinced that the Church was heartless and hypocritical, liberals determined to teach it a lesson. Rattazzi's bill on the suppression of religious corporations came out of that bitter experience of rejection. Significantly, however, Cavour still pursued the moderate course against the tide of opinion. When parliament discussed the project in February 1855, Cavour spoke out strongly against proposals from the left. Radicals wanted the state forthwith to abolish all religious orders and to confiscate their property and assets. Cavour, by contrast, wished to dissolve only those enclosed monastic communities that were devoted entirely to the contemplative life.

Cavour agreed that the state's financial support of the Church should be withdrawn immediately. He argued that the state should not have to pay poor parishes about one million *franchi* annually so that some miserable priest could have an annual salary of only 5–600 while many bishops lived in luxury on 20–30 000 a year. Cavour also admitted that he found the purely ascetic life 'distasteful'. The only useful things some nuns did, he stated, was make cakes and candies. But not all religious corporations, he contended, should be liquidated. Some did many good works for the

national community. Abolishing the Sisters of Charity, he maintained, would be a 'great error' because their hospitals were recognized to be of immense worth to society.²⁹

The church and its institutions, he stressed, had to be made 'to adapt to the modern world and to change with the times'. Ecclesiastical reforms were absolutely necessary 'to raise national wealth and improve the position of the popular classes'. 'We believe and hope that with the passing of time the conditions of the most numerous classes will continue to improve.' But this would only occur if two preconditions were met: 'that work become more productive' and that 'the education of as many of the people as possible continue'. These were the prerequisites for positive social change. Mendicant orders could not possibly contribute to the 'civil emancipation of the most numerous classes' because they propagated 'Christian dogma but not basic knowledge and skills'. Moreover, the government should not condone begging.³⁰ The idea that the mendicants were following Christ's chosen path by pursuing a life of poverty was anathema to a nineteenth-century Protestant liberal like Cavour. Although he wished to conserve orders which were dedicated to charity, he was less prepared to tolerate those, such as closed monastic communities, which contributed nothing to his cause of civil progress and social elevation. He advocated that the vast buildings and land of suppressed orders should be surrendered to the state and converted into much-needed hospitals, barracks, and prisons.

The bill on the suppression of religious orders won a big majority in the lower chamber, but was defeated in the senate because of fierce lobbying by Catholics and pressure from Victor Emmanuel II. The king tried to force its rejection by undermining parliamentary authority and asserting his royal prerogative. Cavour continued to press for its passage, and after he addressed the senate on 25 April, a small majority of senators voted in favour of the bill, which became law, first for Piedmont and then for the rest of Italy in the years 1860–66.³¹ The legislation brought about the dissolution of those orders which were not devoted to preaching, teaching, or almsgiving. Though it did not bring those immense financial benefits to the state which Cavour anticipated,³² and special hardship grants to the Church continued to be advanced by parliament, the reform did reduce public expenditure on the ecclesiastical establishment. The assets of suppressed orders became the patrimony of the *cassa ecclesiastica* whose funds were administered by government but were independent of state finances. The income of the fund went into payments to poor parishes, which the state no longer provided. More significantly, the enactment also restricted the exercise of mortmain rights by religious houses by forcing these to make annual 'contributions' to the *cassa* for all *mani-morte* benefices from abbeys, cathedrals, convents, seminaries and bishoprics. The legislation did not satisfy those like Cavour, who believed that all mortmain property was an economic waste and should be put on the market. But it was

sufficiently radical to anger conservative Catholics, who charged that the state had introduced a system of ecclesiastical taxation through the back-door. No amount of arguing by Cavour that church property did not enjoy the right to inviolability which private property possessed, because it was held on sufferance of the nation, could possibly convince opponents that this legislation was anything but a sacrilege.³³

Cavour wanted all vestiges of the confessional state to be destroyed, the religious and the civil to be severed, and the church to be changed so that society could move forward. Under his leadership, however, civil power sought accommodation with ecclesiastical power. Because of his own disposition, the constraints placed upon his actions by the monarchy, and his need to stabilize government, Cavour searched for the *juste milieu* in controversial religious issues. As a result, the process of constructing a secular society was destined to be a very long and difficult one. The Casati law of 1859, for example, made the study of religion compulsory in all state primary schools. Non-Catholics could only get an exemption if they promised to provide such instruction for their children privately.³⁴ Cavour's brand of liberalism proved incapable of becoming the total '*scuola di virtù civili*' (school in civil virtues) that he and other true believers in civil progress hoped it would be. The limits of Cavour's reformism are also strikingly evident in the uses to which he put the money raised from the suppression of religious orders. Not linked to any project for social reform, the profits made from the sale of Church lands were diverted into priority areas, like armaments, shipping, and railways.

None the less, however moderate they were, laic laws did assert the supremacy of the state and provoke the enmity of the church. Any encroachment upon the Catholic Church outraged the Supreme Pontiff because, as he himself explained in the Syllabus of Errors and its accompanying Encyclical, *Quanta Cura*, in 1864, the Holy See opposed anything associated with 'modern civilization'.³⁵ Pope Pius IX defiantly refused to be reconciled with progress, liberalism, and modernity. He condemned these as heresies because they posed an alternative vision of salvation and allegiance to his own. And they threatened his imagined personal infallibility in all matters of faith and discipline. The Vatican was prepared to defend by force if necessary the supremacy of the pontifical throne over the laws and institutions of civil authority.³⁶

Nineteenth-century secularists believed that a great deal was at stake in the war between church and state. When he coined the term *Kulturkampf* in 1873, Rudolf Virchow argued that the struggle for power between church and state was largely the result of a clash between two conflicting cultures. The rising civilization of secular modernity, which nineteenth-century political liberalism promoted, threatened to render the church obsolete. Bismarck reckoned that the conflict between 'kingship and priesthood', as he called it, was really a political contest. 'The goal which the

papal power has constantly had in mind is the subjugation of the secular power to the spiritual and this has an eminently political purpose'.³⁷ These views had resonance in Italy where strife between church and state grew particularly bitter. Italian liberal patriots ultimately won a political victory over the church when they achieved national unity at the expense of the temporal power of the pope. But at mid-century, the battle between civil power and ecclesiastical power over the control of society and culture had barely begun.

The moderate liberals of the *Risorgimento* probably did not foresee that their failure to resolve church-state conflict resolutely could jeopardize the success of their social mission. And more radical solutions to the ecclesiastical question might not have been possible, or even desirable, in *Risorgimento* Italy. After all, one of Cavour's main concerns after he became prime minister in 1852 was to defend the Piedmontese constitution from the threat posed by the ultramontist cause. Ultra-clerical reactionaries abounded in the senate, where, in collusion with the king, they acted as a powerful bloc against Cavour. And even in the chamber, where Cavour's support was solid and secure, conservative liberals defended the church's prerogatives in debates about ecclesiastical reform. Anything other than the piecemeal approach that Cavour favoured might have destabilized the entire political order. None the less, long after Cavour's death, the makers of Italy were still struggling to erect the edifice of civil society. The church continued strenuously to resist these efforts. And the papacy still waged war against liberalism. To many left-leaning critics of the *juste milieu*, these realities revealed the folly of Cavour's desire for reconciliation with the self-professed enemies of the state and its secular values.

Social progress during the *Risorgimento*

Social reform was so central to Cavour's thinking that even his more explicitly political writings focus on this issue. An article which appeared on 4 February 1848 took as its subject the new constitution promulgated by King Ferdinand of Naples. That this autocrat should make such a major concession seemed to be a sign that the age of absolutism was finally drawing to a close. Cavour affirmed his commitment to 'constitutional government' and stated that this system was the only one which was capable of promoting 'regeneration, progress, and prosperity'. Through this auspicious political reform, the king set the foundation for a 'new order' which now had to be consolidated through positive social change. For this to be done successfully, the ruling class had to rid itself of old aristocratic prejudices and privileges and participate in the creation of a civil society based on the high ideals of social responsibility and public service. Representative institutions should also begin to introduce progressive reforms, Cavour stressed, for these were the means to a continuous 'social revolution'.³⁸

Cavour expressed delight at the 'magnanimity' of Charles Albert when he begrudgingly conceded his *statuto* in February 1848. Cavour wrote in the *Risorgimento* that the legislative powers of the modern state were so extensive that real social betterment could come from the new constitution. A parliament and an electorate, which is 'as broad as possible', together could unleash this force to the good of the people.³⁹ Though Cavour's model of government was what he considered to be progressive,⁴⁰ it was hardly democratic.⁴¹ Both in this article, and in his involvement with the commission responsible for devising Piedmont's new electoral law, Cavour, like most nineteenth-century European liberals, showed a marked preference for government by an elite of intelligent and propertied people.⁴² The reform granted only one per cent of the population voting rights; the new Piedmont-Sardinia had improved upon its political institutions, but it had not exactly enacted much of a political revolution.

Notwithstanding its extremely narrow electoral base, a new regime had been attained at last. Was social reform now imminent? The signal for urgent government action in this direction came from France, where a popular rebellion in February 1848 resulted in the overthrow of Louis-Philippe. By the 1830s, Cavour had become preoccupied with the question of how nations could avert revolution from below. In the aftermath of the events in Paris in 1848, these concerns grew more urgent. Cavour expressed a strong conviction that the fall of the French king and the proclamation of the second republic were proof enough that the masses had to be liberated from their poverty and ignorance. Legal charity was one way to do it, he affirmed:

Almost all writers and statesmen on the continent are openly opposed to the idea of legal charity ... In the face of all this unanimous opposition, I must declare my absolute belief in the necessity for all countries which have achieved a certain level of wealth and prosperity ... to recognize their supreme social duty, which is to prevent any individual from falling victim to extreme misery.⁴³

Despite the strength of his feeling about social injustices and their political repercussions, Cavour left no doubt that he was anything but a moderate. Reforms must be introduced, he argued, so that the 'social edifice can be reinforced'; these must be 'prudent and wise', though, rather than radical. Suggesting that private charity would still form the foundation for his system of legal charity, Cavour stated that government should seek only to 'regulate' beneficent institutions. In no way should social improvements result in any 'heavy or unsupportable financial burdens for the state'.⁴⁴ Though genuinely committed to his idea of social progress and justice, Cavour set very clear limits to the kind of reform he envisaged. Perhaps he was not as much of a Benthamite as he believed he was.⁴⁵

He was also vague about when Italy should begin a programme of social reform. Cavour maintained that substantial demographic growth in the previous thirty years had 'provoked a rise in the affluence of all civilized peoples in Europe and America, without any exception'. Due to unprecedented economic growth, many societies had already produced sufficient resources to care more generously for their people. The only important issue now confronting them was to determine how best to distribute that wealth more fairly.⁴⁶ On the one hand, he argued that Italy had shared in that process of economic development and should now seek to promote social development. But, on the other hand, he suggested that Italy should endeavour to increase its capital resources further before embarking on any grand project of social modernization.⁴⁷ Clearly, he simply could not decide whether economic progress should precede or accompany social progress. Whether Italy would become a truly 'modern civilized nation' sometime in the near future remained problematical. There were other anomalies in his thinking about what he described as the most important political question of the day. Oddly, Cavour had not yet fully considered how his proposed 'advance of civilization' would be funded. Though he repeatedly argued that the ruling class should have more of a social conscience, he did not advocate that they make many sacrifices to help finance welfare betterment. He was, for example, a fierce opponent of the idea of a redistributive tax system.

No conscious redistributive system, he believed, would ever succeed at raising the standard of living of the most numerous classes to a more comfortable level if the entire nation suffered from poverty. Cavour was strongly opposed to the principle of progressive taxation because he thought that it was 'a kind of fine imposed on those who create wealth'.⁴⁸ Taxes graduated according to ability to pay, he argued, were a silly socialist invention and plot,⁴⁹ which, if introduced, would 'impede capital formation', 'stimy private property', and 'limit national wealth'.⁵⁰ If crackpots like *'il signor Proudhon'* had their way, he warned, 'capital accumulation would cease', 'wealth would remain stationary', and 'society would decay to the point where it faced certain ruin'. Perhaps not very surprisingly, given that he was a landlord and heir, he opposed the introduction of property taxes because, in his opinion, they penalized unfairly those who owned *'i palazzi e le ville'* with a duty on assets 'which produce no income whatsoever'. Although he expressed approval for an income tax, he stated that this should not be introduced immediately. Only after a 'very long period of time' would national wealth be high enough and the administrative structures be efficient enough for this additional tax to be introduced properly. In the meantime, parliament should foster greater tax uniformity throughout Piedmont so that the conditions would be right for any new measures in the future.⁵¹ In his youth, Cavour had expressed enthusiasm for the rather unconventional idea that a truly good government would

exempt food and necessities from tax so that the poorest could afford to feed their families. Young Camillo had advocated that the richest should support this radical humanitarian move by paying much higher duties on tobacco, alcohol, and other luxuries.⁵² It seems that the realities of power caused Cavour's early reformist zeal to diminish somewhat.

In general, Cavour's economic policies did not exactly endear him to the masses. The two military campaigns of 1848–49 and the Austrian indemnity that resulted from them weighed heavily upon the treasury. Despite the burden of war debts, Cavour took a 'tax and spend' approach to finance. During Massimo D'Azeglio's administration in 1849–52, Cavour spent profusely not just on the armed forces but also on public works. Although he was an advocate of classic *laissez-faire* economics, Cavour did not endorse the principle of the passive state. On the contrary, he maintained that government should provide the conditions that would be conducive to industrialization. After he took office as minister for trade and agriculture in 1850, he asserted in the chamber of deputies that 'the salvation of the country' depended on the ability of parliament to carry out a broad political programme to promote economic development.⁵³ So he prioritized the construction of railways, roads, and canals because he believed that the development of transport would benefit industry. However, a string of bad harvests and the outbreak of diseases affecting grapevines and silkworms were devastating Piedmontese agriculture. The food shortages and price rises that resulted caused extreme hardship amongst the poor. When he became premier, Cavour decided not to introduce price controls and export restrictions on agricultural products as possible remedies to the crisis. Even after a mob tried to storm Palazzo Cavour in protest, he remained true to his free-trade principles.⁵⁴ A great admirer of Robert Peel, he supported the cause of free trade because he held that the guarantee of 'commercial liberty' on the open market would increase prosperity. Cavour also favoured the introduction of a new tax regime which adversely affected an increasingly important source of assistance for the labouring classes. Taxed since 1850, mutual aid societies faced increases in their obligations to the state in 1853; Cavour justified these on the grounds that government needed to raise revenue in ways that could be unpopular.⁵⁵

Slow to develop in other pre-unitary Italian states, *società di mutuo soccorso* arose in Piedmont in the eighteenth century as artisans began to pool savings in order to protect themselves and their families from the risk of illness, incapacity, old-age and death. In the 1820s, skilled workers in craft-based industries who could afford to subscribe to a fund also began to found mutual aid societies. Piedmont's *statuto* granted freedom of association, and these voluntary organizations increased in number as a consequence of political liberalization.⁵⁶ Mazzini championed the idea that workers should share a corporate sense of their common interests and

should join together for the purposes of providence and companionship. In partnership with each other, he argued, workers should form cooperatives to collect contributions, keep capital in perpetual trust, and use it to the benefit of all members. He supported the foundation of *società operaie* because he regarded them as an effective instrument for the development of a new collective consciousness amongst the urban masses. Though seen by critics as socialist in inspiration, Mazzini's worker self-help clubs were closer in conception to the guilds of the past than the unions of the future.⁵⁷ None the less, Cavour's response to mutualism was decidedly chilly, perhaps because of its strong association with utopian democratic ideals. In a parliamentary discussion about whether the state should follow the French example⁵⁸ by regulating these private companies, Cavour said that there might not be any good reason to suppress them, but neither was there any good reason to support them. Although he was a great believer in the principle of individual liberty, Cavour approved of the idea of introducing legislation to limit the power and influence of mutual aid societies.⁵⁹

He supported this notion, despite the lack of any public provision for *assicurazione sociale*. Cavour acknowledged that the state did not provide social insurance for the working classes. Because the introduction of a system of *previdenza* would inevitably tamper with private industry, liberals had trouble embracing it as a fundamental tenet of their faith. Cavour believed very strongly that government should do nothing to deter capitalists from getting on with the important business of making the profits on which progress depended. Carlo Cattaneo shared Cavour's belief that governments should do all they could to secure the triumph of capitalism. So immensely influential upon liberals throughout northern Italy, Cattaneo was renowned for his astute insights into the workings of the economy. But, in his writings about Lombardy, he showed surprisingly little understanding of the conditions of the working classes. He drew an idealized and romantic portrait of his homeland, where property-owning peasants happily 'laboured with the sweat of their brow and brought up children to love the land'. Cattaneo was also remarkably complacent about the provision of poor relief. According to him, the boundlessness of Lombard munificence resulted in a proliferation of beneficent institutions which were 'open to all, without grace or favour, the one condition being infirmity or need'.⁶⁰

Risorgimento liberalism proved incapable of seeing social security as a right that should be enshrined in legislation. Consequently, apart from mendicity and mutualism, workers and their families possessed few means to insure their livelihood when sickness, bad harvests, or unemployment struck. Pawnshops did provide cheap credit to the poor, but these were too few in number to have a major impact on working-class living standards. First established in early modern Umbria, Tuscany, and Lombardy by lay

Catholic benefactors, *monti di pietà* arose out of a desire to protect Christians from having to turn to licensed Jewish moneylenders for cash in an emergency. These charitable institutions evolved into fully fledged banks for savings and loans as city governments became involved in their activities. Committed to good works, they ploughed profits back into the community when some natural or other disaster occurred.⁶¹ Before the nineteenth century, both the public and private sectors shared the financial and administrative burden of the *monti di pietà*. But new legislation in November 1853 in Piedmont-Sardinia devolved responsibility for these important establishments back onto private individuals or associations. Five years later, the Piedmontese parliament also withdrew local government support for the distribution by charities of firewood to the poor and aged.⁶² Where matters of low priority were concerned, Cavour saw the need to roll back the boundaries of the state.

In some cases, though, he tried to expand the social domain of modern government. Parliamentary discussions in March 1852 about a bill to endow all public employees with rights to contributory pensions reveal much about attitudes towards state intervention and social insurance. Cavour rejected the suggestion that parliament should do nothing more than raise the salaries of government workers high enough for them to make their own personal arrangements for old-age provision. To do so would be financial suicide, Cavour declared, because the state would have to equalize public sector pay with private sector rates. That option would cost more than the proposed scheme which limited the state's stake to the mere subsidization of employee contributions. Cavour went on to define the fundamental principles of his conception of the individual's relationship to the state. The state had to become the protector of its employees because it would be 'unjust' and 'inhumane' to allow those who have performed valuable public service to end up in the poorhouse.⁶³ But the paternalism of Cavour's ethical state had very clear limits.

In the future, when financial circumstances improved, he said, parliament would be in a position to take a very important step by increasing state social spending substantially. But at the present time, he advised, economic considerations had to inform every judgement by lawmakers. Cavour declared himself firmly opposed to the idea advanced by Daziani that the legislation should contain an article which specifically stated that all state employees who have either reached the age of sixty and accumulated thirty-five years of service or reached the age of sixty-five and accumulated ten years of service had an 'absolute right' to a pension. Forty years must be the minimum qualification, Cavour argued; and no fixed retirement age should be set.⁶⁴ Cavour also resisted the notion that employees had any social 'rights' at all. The only rights that people possessed, he reminded deputies, were the ones that the state in its bounty was prepared

to recognize. Because employee contributions would be insufficient to establish a viable pension fund, and the state had to assume some responsibility for provision, then the individual did not have a 'true right' to protection, he argued. Cavour was even more insistent that the widows and dependents of civil servants should be denied any explicit entitlement to a pension. Widows and orphans had no automatic right to gain control of money which they had not earned.

'By retaining a portion of his salary' as an insurance contribution, Cavour argued, 'the state incurs a duty towards its employee' and enters into a solemn contract with him. But a widow could not be considered a trustee of her husband's pension. Moreover, no principle of 'natural justice' obliges the state to pay a pension to all widows of civil servants. Rather than see the issue as a matter of rights, Cavour maintained, it should be defined as a 'humanitarian' problem. According to prevailing custom and values, he asserted, 'the state must act only when there is absolute need'. For that reason, only widows in straightened circumstances must be given the means of subsistence; but they should be encouraged to see this as a 'concession' from government rather than as an annuity owed to them. The commission which had been investigating the matter for some time wished to invest all widows and dependents of state employees with an equal right to pensions. In speech after speech, however, Cavour insisted that strict means-testing should be applied in order to avoid financial catastrophe. He also believed that the orphans of former public employees should receive the government 'subsidy' only until they reached majority age. Making the state pension into a universal benefit, he argued, would mean that its size would have to be very small. Likewise, too much liberality would lead to meanness. He wanted neither to stint the deserving nor to overstretch government.⁶⁵

To make his points particularly clear, Cavour mentioned a case involving someone within his acquaintance. The widow of a deceased diplomat had earned Cavour's esteem because she had the good grace never to ask the government for even a 'cent of pension money' after her husband's death. Though she was 'wealthy, but not rich', Cavour stated, she was not in need of a hand-out.⁶⁶ Together with his other arguments, this little vignette illustrated to what extent a statutory pension resembled poor relief in Cavour's mind. Cavour thought that the state should step in only when the husband-earner failed to make provision for his own family. He could not comprehend that this was an issue involving the rights of even male workers, let alone those of their dependents. Unable to fathom that new collective forms of social security were already making inroads in some countries, Cavour viewed the problem in a wholly unmodern fashion. Despite his self-perception as a pioneering social reformer, Cavour's thinking was stuck in the eighteenth century. In his mind, pensions were alms

dispensed by a beneficent state rather than rights secured in law. He could not leave the old world of charity and welcome the new age of welfare.

A new state and society?

Being a liberal did not prevent Cavour from believing in the power of state intervention and the importance of government legislation to encourage progress in all its forms. By Cavour's own admission, none the less, his ideas about the role of the modern state in society were far less radical than those of his Enlightenment forebears. He equated 'the liberalism which the encyclopedists professed in the boudoirs of Madame Pompadour' to a kind of 'absolutism'. It was just as absolutist as unreconstructed monarchism because it advocated that the state should be free from limits. And, even though it was commendably progressive in aims, Cavour stated, this *ancien régime* liberalism possessed a naive faith in the ability of the state to solve all problems. An 'absolutist' liberal state was not the only route to modernity.⁶⁷ Cavour saw himself as being no less enlightened and reformist than those who identified with the Jacobins of the 1790s or looked for their models of good government in the First French Republic. But he prided himself on being more realistic and practical than they were. He responded to the fierce polemics of anti-Catholic democrats, like Angelo Brofferio, with the conviction that civil power must suppress but not supplant ecclesiastical power. A perfect equilibrium between church and state could be achieved, Cavour maintained. And Cavour had a similar answer to the arguments of Giorgio Asproni, an advocate of radical social legislation. Whereas Asproni believed that the state should enact a 'social revolution' through 'good policies' aimed at 're-distributing wealth', Cavour favoured far more moderate reform. And he was utterly convinced that legislators had to strike a proper balance between public and private responsibility for welfare.⁶⁸

Cavour's attitudes arose not only out of principle but also out of recognition of the limits of the state's economic capabilities at mid-century. Before 1848, Piedmont's finances were in a fairly good position and taxation levels were low. As the situation deteriorated badly in the years from 1849 to 1861, Cavour became increasingly convinced that social reform could only emanate slowly in a steady but gradual manner. The struggle for unification also took precedence over other matters in Cavour's Piedmont. So too did the priority of economic development limit the scope of social reform. Cavour embraced the idea of economic progress as an article of his liberal faith. Like other optimists of his generation, he had faith in modernity and its ability ultimately to generate the wealth that was necessary for social modernization. Utterly fascinated by railways, he believed that they would become the most effective modernizing, nationalizing, and moraliz-

ing force for Italy. At a time when many considered trains to be an expensive and dangerous nuisance, Cavour championed the notion that locomotives and track could break through all barriers to national unity and economic development.⁶⁹ But the construction of an industrial infrastructure did not come cheaply, so many social problems simply went by the wayside during the *Risorgimento*.

For all his attention to the problem of legal charity, Cavour did very little to improve the system which he inherited. Since the eighteenth century, rulers had been tinkering with the administrative framework of *opere pie*. But still only minimally regulated by the state, *opere pie* awaited the major reorganization and modernization that had long been deemed necessary to bring them up to scratch. To say that Cavour took a cautious approach to this problem would be an understatement. When a reform bill came before parliament in February 1850, Cavour urged his colleagues to defer making any changes at all to the 1836 enactment until they had reflected at great length. Although he accepted that reforms were urgent and necessary, and agreed that the 1836 legislation had never fully been implemented, he argued that improvements were inopportune.⁷⁰ If parliament were moved to act hastily, Cavour stated, he hoped that they would introduce an important modification to the 1836 law. Unwisely, Cavour believed, that act had brought 'executive power' into the picture by giving the interior ministry the right to monitor how some charitable establishments managed their accounts. This 'excessive centralization', he advised, should be abolished entirely because it was onerous and 'inconvenient'. The full responsibility for the supervision of all but the very biggest charities should be assumed by provincial commissions. Cavour wanted to reduce the administrative and financial burden on central government. He reckoned that only those *opere pie* with budgets of more than 30 000 *lire* a year should come under scrutiny by the interior ministry.⁷¹

Eventually, Cavour got more than he wished. In March 1850, a new law devolved responsibility for the supervision of private beneficent institutions with an income of less than 10 000 *lire* a year to provincial authorities and left the interior ministry with the jurisdiction to monitor only the very richest charities.⁷² And Urbano Rattazzi's law on *opere pie*⁷³ of 20 November 1859 pushed decentralization even further by placing charitable foundations under the direct control of provincial delegations. Severely limiting the involvement of central government in charitable activities, this legislation gave the interior ministry only the authority to put a final stamp of approval on the statutes of pious institutions. Because Cavour and his supporters saw administrative uniformity as a precondition for political unity, they pursued a project for the Piedmontization of Italy. During the course of unification, they began to impose Cavour's model of legal charity on amalgamated regions, beginning first with Lombardy in 1859, Umbria in 1860, and Emilia-Romagna and the Marches in 1861. The new parliament

of unified Italy affirmed its commitment to disinvolve government even more when it amended the 1859 law in August 1862.⁷⁴ The parliamentary discussions leading up to the passage of this legislation revealed that the liberal left wanted to strengthen the regulatory powers of government over *opere pie* to such an extent that a true laicization of beneficence would be effected. Catholics mounted a fierce opposition to this idea. The Catholic press announced that any change of this kind would be tantamount to a declaration of war against the Church. According to the Jesuit-controlled journal, *Civiltà Cattolica*, the state had no moral or legal right to exclude the Church and its followers from running the very institutions which they had so graciously founded and funded.⁷⁵ The brainchild of Marco Minghetti and a parliamentary commission composed of committed decentralizers, the 1862 legislation curtailed even further the powers of direction and control exercised by central government. Despite their reputation for being authoritarian centralizers in other fields of public administration, Cavour's successors did not want to create a system of legal charity that would bear heavily upon central government. They preferred to devolve responsibility for charities onto local authorities. As a result, the 1862 enactment transferred what few supervisory tasks the interior ministry performed to provincial deputations. And it decreased the involvement of government at local levels in the management of *opere pie*. Allowing charities to govern themselves, the enactment gave lay and ecclesiastical Catholics the freedom from outside interference which they wanted. And by relieving government of any burden to invest money and resources in legal charity, the act also satisfied the Church's fellow-travellers in the liberal camp.

Francesco Nitti may have been right to claim that moderate liberals 'trembled' at the mere thought of implementing reforms that were 'too energetic' for fear that they would aggravate the struggle with the Church and alienate the Catholic noble families who remained the chief benefactors of charities.⁷⁶ But financial considerations also provided a very compelling reason to resist calls to extend the means of state intervention in the activities of charities. Cavour had long recognized that creating a system of legal charity would cost a lot of money. He, his contemporaries, and his successors knew that Italy's *opere pie* were in a mess. To rectify this, government would have to invest heavily in an administrative restructuring of the system that would involve, for example, the creation of an inspectorate and a bureaucracy. In addition, the charitable establishment needed an injection of cash to make institutions, many of which were cash-starved and badly run, more modern and efficient. All this was simply unthinkable during the *Risorgimento*.

So *Risorgimento* reforms failed to achieve the social progress which the young Cavour believed was essential to the process of constructing a modern society. In power, Cavour pursued the convenient expedient of leaving the existing charitable edifice intact rather than creating new state

administrative structures for relief. That course of action might have proven to be the best option had government decided to shatter the autonomy of *opere pie* and subject them to tight controls. But the Piedmontese model that was eventually imposed on the rest of Italy severely circumscribed the abilities of the state to reform pious institutions. Less caution and timidity were required to solve the persistent problem of legal charity. More foresight and daring were needed to break new ground in welfare state-building by pioneering altogether novel forms of publicly-run *previ-denza sociale*. Just when politicians seemed ready to make that great leap forward, fiscal considerations got in the way of any advance. The majority of *Risorgimento* liberals opposed the idea of compulsory social insurance on principle, but because a bill presented by Lanza proposed to introduce a voluntary scheme for old-age pensions, it succeeded at becoming law on 15 July 1859. As it called for the state's involvement to be limited to administration, the proposal did not violate the commitment of liberals to minimal public investment in welfare. The enactment invited all men and women of majority age to begin saving for their future in a cooperative fund that was to be organized by the state. As the insurance scheme required that participants make continuous, regular, and minimum contributions, it probably would not have benefited workers much, since most routinely experienced low wages and periodic unemployment. But it might have provided some protection to artisans and shopkeepers with disposable income. Because some public revenue was necessary in the initial stages in order to establish a bureaucratic administrative apparatus, however, neither the sub-Alpine parliament nor the post-unitary Italian parliament ever implemented the legislation.⁷⁷ Italian liberals trod along the proverbial path of social reform at the very slowest of paces.

Reformist ideas and policies during the *Risorgimento* show that welfare does not develop in an uninterrupted and evolutionary way. On the contrary, the period when Italy achieved unity was one of revision and contraction, rather than transformation and expansion in welfare. In part that was due to Cavour himself. Perhaps Massimo D'Azeglio provided the best explanation for the failings of *Risorgimento* social reform when he stated that Cavour knew how to rule, but not to govern.⁷⁸ And the fascist verdict on Cavour's achievements in social policy is also very telling. Cavour might have done more to modernize Italian society, one of Mussolini's technocrats declared in 1932, had he just believed less in evolution and more in revolution. Cavour kept waiting optimistically for social progress to occur, but it never did. According to Antonio Fossati, the fascists took a different approach. They believed that the state had to make modernity happen.⁷⁹

2

State and Society in Liberal Italy, 1862–1890

‘Who is eating all the money? The poor don’t seem to be benefiting much. What we need, gentleman, is a nationalization of the assets of charities and their deposit in the patrimony of the state.’

Francesco Crispi, criticizing *opere pie* for their corruption and mismanagement and justifying his bill on charitable reform (in an address to the chamber, on 30 November 1889)

The liberal experiment at state-building, like that of nation-building, was far from successful. Cavour’s utter faith in the ability of liberalism to create *buon governo* may have been misplaced, for the main beneficiaries of the *Risorgimento* were the liberals who controlled politics and the state. The people benefited little from liberal rule. Because living standards were so low,¹ millions of rural and urban Italians lived in indigence and misery. Social indices of quality of life can be a good measure of governmental performance. Perhaps the most compelling indicator of the scantiness of the liberals’ record of achievements, Italy’s infant mortality rate (IMR) was one of the highest in Western Europe. In 1861, 25 out of every 100 newborns died before reaching their first birthday. In the decade 1871–80, the IMR averaged out at 21.5 per cent; and in the years 1881–90, it still stood at 19.5 per cent. By comparison, the annual average IMR was 14 per cent in England and Wales in the 1880s.² Disease accompanied dearth and want. A symptom of the extent of abject poverty amongst the so-called ‘popular classes’, the often fatal illness of pellagra was endemic, particularly in the Veneto, Lombardy, and Emilia-Romagna, where the peasantry barely subsisted on a diet based on little other than maize.³ Other maladies caused by malnutrition, such as scurvy, rickets, and goitre, were also prevalent amongst peasants and workers.⁴ Right up to the 1930s, infectious diseases were more widespread in Italy than they were in other European countries. Pulmonary tuberculosis was by far the biggest killer of all age groups; it too

disproportionately affected the working classes in Italy because of their poor living conditions and general health.⁵ Typhoid fever, malaria, measles and diphtheria were also very prevalent. In the years 1887–91, typhoid caused 880 deaths in Italy annually per million inhabitants, but 6 in England.⁶ Extreme social deprivation, compounded by the lack of proper hygiene and sanitation, accounted for the persistence of both typhoid and cholera as major threats to human life. Transmitted by contaminated water, typhoid and cholera could be combated by treating sewage and cleaning cesspools, particularly in inner cities, where outbreaks reached epidemic proportions with devastating speed. Only very gradually did mortality from these diseases decline in Italy.⁷

In accounting for the disparities that characterized Italian society after 1861, commentators began to speak of the gulf between ‘legal’ and ‘real’ Italy. This phrase came to symbolize the enormous distance between the ruling class and the rest of the country. Governed by an extremely narrow oligarchy of Northern notables and an electorate comprising less than 2 per cent of the total population, Italy at the moment of unification seemed rather poorly equipped to enact a liberal social revolution ‘from above’. The failure of the liberal project of social development through state formation can partly be attributed to the fragility and changeability of the liberals’ commitment to using government as the instrument of progress. Liberal ideology could still exhibit some pronounced utopian traits in the decades after unification. For example, during discussions about the abolition of the death penalty in 1877, one liberal abolitionist declared his ‘total faith’ in the moral premise that the state should free the nation from barbarism by creating ‘a society that sanctified human rights’.⁸ Many liberals did perceive politics as a mission and government as an agent of change. Indeed, the great social ideal of nineteenth-century Italian liberalism has long been considered by historians as one of the education and elevation of the people to a consciousness of their dignity and destiny.

Support for this view can be found in educational reforms. There was widespread accord amongst liberals that religious instruction infringed upon the sovereignty of the state and impeded civil progress. Such sentiments led to the remarkably easy passage of the landmark Coppino law in 1877, which introduced (in theory, but not in reality for many years) free and compulsory schooling for all six to nine-year-olds. Faced with the enormity of the threat posed by state-run secular education, the pontiff and his press accused the government of launching a vicious *Kulturkampf* against the church.⁹ Despite very fierce Catholic opposition to the bill, however, only twenty deputies voted against it.¹⁰ The extensive support which the measure received reflected not just the strength of liberal anticlericalism, but also the depth of feeling about civil rights. Nineteenth-century liberals believed that the acquisition of literacy was a precondition of citizenship.

They saw education as a fundamental civil right which facilitated the exercise of other civil rights, such as equality before the law and equal suffrage. And they believed that mass elementary education would cement national unity by integrating peasants and workers into the polity, creating a collectivity with shared social values, and disseminating a common language and history. Despite the existence of a broad consensus on the issue of teaching in the nation's schools, conflicting attitudes about the nature and function of the state continued to prevail in many areas of social policy after unification. Legalistic in outlook, Italian liberals had a highly developed sense of the importance of civil rights in a 'good' society. However, their social consciousness left much to be desired. In the 1860s and 1870s, the governing class issued no great programme of social reform under the aegis of the new national state. Nor did Italian liberalism more generally produce its own principles of social rights or entitlements to welfare.¹¹ The absence of a strong labour movement during this period gave the liberals an opportunity to mobilize popular support for their cause; but an inattention to pressing social questions precluded the possibility that liberalism would ever create a mass following.

The lack of a common purpose amongst post-unification liberals posed as an obstacle to an expansion in the domain of the 'social state', a term which refers to the government's involvement in *beneficenza*, *assistenza*, and *previdenza*.¹² With regard to welfare provision, the liberal camp remained divided about whether 'civil power' should play an active or passive role in the organization of old-style *carità* and new-style *assistenza* and *previdenza*. How far the state should go towards laicizing private charities and creating secular alternatives to them remained controversial. Differences in outlook cannot easily be explained by reference to an assumed ideological divergence between Right and Left.¹³ The Cavourian Right may have given Italy 'a high concept' of the mission of the modern state,¹⁴ but Cavour and his successors did not always practise what they preached. And such a leading figure on the 'pure' Left as Francesco Crispi had an ambivalent attitude about the state. In the 1870s, Crispi extolled the virtues of the minimal state. But after his humiliating fall from power in 1878, he increasingly embraced what many of his contemporaries would have characterized as a very 'illiberal' idea. During his years in the political hinterland in the 1880s, Crispi came to believe that Italy could be saved from socialism and anarchism only by means of a powerful centralized state under the command of a strong leader with a clear social vision. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Crispi was astute enough to realize that once the masses had ceased to be passive, liberalism had to rethink its position on the state and social policy and devise strategies for political survival. Along with his imperialism, Crispi's statolatry would later appeal very much to the fascists. They saw him as the model of a 'man of action' and his style of governance as the model of a benevolent dictatorship.¹⁵

Even before the system of *trasformismo* began to blur distinctions between left-leaning and rightwing liberals after 1876, and parliamentary politics degenerated into factionalism, Italian liberalism was an amorphous and spineless mass of ideas and individuals lacking a social agenda. Having created their nation-state, post-unitary liberals simply did not know what to do with it. At the heart of their dilemma was the essential poverty of liberal thinking about the state. Many German liberals shared the antistatist attitudes of their Italian counterparts, but their equivocations had little impact after 1862, when Bismarckian *Realpolitik* reduced them to being an ineffectual party in opposition.¹⁶ In Italy, by contrast, liberals were (baldly speaking) the state, so their trepidation about its power, potential, and purpose was problematical. So long as they continued to fear and loathe the state, and adhered to their *laissez-faire* principles, Italian liberals would have difficulty completing their revolution from above. This was especially so since they did not possess any deep commitment to social reform through state policy. Even when advocating individual responsibility for welfare, German liberals formulated corporatist plans for social betterment which did not preclude support for collectivism under state direction.¹⁷ And in England in the 1860s, Gladstone successfully transformed liberalism into a people's party by embracing the principle that social reform was one of the highest duties of modern government.¹⁸

But in Italy, strict adherence to *laissez-faire* principles provided an ideological impasse against social and economic reform. The issue of railway organization caused repeated political upset in parliament from 1876 to 1885; the ongoing debate highlighted the diversity of liberal opinion about the desirability of state intervention not just in the economy, but also in society too. A minority of the Right fell under the influence of Hegelian theory and this group was represented chiefly by Silvio Spaventa, who presented a bill in March 1876 which called for public ownership and control of the entire rail system. But on two occasions, in 1877 and again in 1883, Giuseppe Zanardelli, one of the Left's most faithful devotees of personal liberty and private enterprise, resigned from government office in protest against moves to nationalize the railways.¹⁹ During Depretis's first ministry of 1876–8, the matter rose to the fore of politics. Different conceptions of the functions of the state emerged in parliamentary discussions of the problem. In an address to the chamber, Spaventa proudly proclaimed himself to be 'an adorer of the state'. 'The modern state', Spaventa stated, 'is founded on a conception of the legal state (*stato di diritto*), that is a state in which all citizens are equal before the law.' The state, he argued, had a moral duty to guarantee the 'civilization, unity, and welfare of the nation' by piloting social and economic advancement.²⁰

In his response to Spaventa, Crispi charged that it was wrong to ascribe such lofty ambitions to government. The state, Crispi reckoned, 'should be felt and seen as little as possible'. The state must guarantee defence and

justice, but should interfere in society and the economy only when absolutely necessary. At this time, Crispi feared what he called the 'tyrannical state' - one that 'destroyed all private enterprise and initiative'. Giuseppe Zanardelli, who was minister of public works, also expressed concern that modern government would grow too big and oppressive if its administrative functions increased unduly. Zanardelli argued that a true believer in liberalism should, as a matter of principle, defend liberty by opposing the idea of an 'authoritarian state' which interfered in personal matters or business affairs. Because Italy was so poor, moreover, 'governmental omnipotence' in social and economic development could never be more than an unattainable ambition. 'Here', Zanardelli said,

we have no empire, no industry, no navy. If we expunge every expression of private activity, what will we have left? We will become a nation of administrators; we will create a society enmeshed in the machinery of the state; we will have *l'impiegomania*, [employee-mania] which, already being so widespread and consuming, will end up impeding the functioning of ministries and departments and blocking the vital circulatory system of government.

The kingdom's excessive bureaucracy was already a problem, Zanardelli believed, and civil administration would grow too massive should the state decide to assume even more regulatory powers over society and the economy. Just as importantly too, the growth of government would lead to increased social demand for public services of all kinds. Zanardelli warned that the people would come to expect the state to do what they should be doing for themselves.²¹

The economics of welfare

Liberal idealists, like Spaventa, may have dreamed of the possibility of creating an activist state, but the pragmatic approach of Zanardelli and others prevailed in the decades after 1861, when fifteen years of orthodox economic policies of free trade, followed by ten years of limited protection, were paralleled by the pursuit of *laissez-faire* social policies which restricted the state's sphere of action. With regard to beneficence and welfare, the arguments of financial conservatives did seem to make a lot of sense, both to outright anti-interventionists and to those who believed that, even under the most propitious circumstances, the state should balance private and public interests carefully. As realists recognized, the people's welfare did depend, to a large extent, on the nation's wealth. The years from 1861 to 1896 shattered the *Risorgimento* illusion of an industrial and affluent Italy for they were a period of 'almost complete stagnation' in national income.²² And the governing class was only too painfully aware of the fact

that the liberal state was also a 'debtor state' which faced the ever present danger of total financial collapse.²³ In this unfavourable context, many liberals rejected the Enlightenment promise of perpetual progress as mere myth. As Cavourian principles of governance no longer seemed relevant, the idea that there was no natural progression of civilized societies away from individual to collective responsibility in care-giving gained ground.

Proclaimed on 17 March 1861, the new kingdom of Italy got off to a really bad start financially. Almost all the pre-unitary states that joined the union brought huge debts with them.²⁴ A hugely expensive undertaking, the *Risorgimento* set a pattern of heavy public borrowing and massive deficit-spending which prevailed from 1861 until the financial year 1898–9. Despite the high level of income from tax receipts, public expenditure commonly exceeded state revenue and budget deficits became a way of life after January 1862, when the kingdom's first unified budget was introduced.²⁵ In 1862, the deficit amounted to a massive 456 million *lire*, at contemporary currency levels. As spending on the military escalated, the 1860s saw the biggest budget deficits in the whole of the period from 1861 to 1898. By 1866, the deficit had ballooned to a mammoth 740 million.²⁶ In the years 1862–66, the deficit amounted to a total of 2.257 billion *lire*. Just servicing such a debt cost the government dearly in interest payments, which represented the single largest outlay in treasury accounts.²⁷

During the heyday of the historic Right, which led twelve governments from 1861 to 1876, the nation's rulers imposed a policy of financial austerity that aimed at bringing expenditure more in line with revenue. Beginning in the second half of the 1860s, severe cuts in public spending resulted in the achievement of more modest deficits; but a balanced budget still eluded the grasp of finance ministers. From a total of 994 million *lire* in 1867–71, the deficit fell to 377 million in 1872–6.²⁸ However, Cavour's political heirs paid a big price for their success at economic orthodoxy. The quest for a balanced budget led the Right to a policy of ferocious taxation and 'economy to the bone' which was one of the chief causes of their downfall in 1876. Initially, the Left in power also pursued policies of economic stringency, with the result that the deficit fell to 134 million in 1877–81. But during Depretis's second premiership, in the years from 1881 to 1887, it rose to 766 million. And during Crispi's first administration in 1887–91, the deficit again reached mammoth proportions: it totalled 1.431 billion in the period 1887–92. Only after a long period of depression came to an end did Italy experience its first budget surplus since unification in 1898–99.²⁹

Part of the problem of public finance in Italy was that an approved budget was no guarantee of actual expenditure since parliament could and often did approve massive increases. The separation of the budget into two separate sections, one covering 'ordinary' expenses and the other 'extraordinary' ones increased the temptation to live beyond means. Despite the risk of ruin, post-unitary governments got into the habit of approving huge

excess expenditure on high-priority items, such as military or colonial campaigns. They paid for these unexpected bills by means of the 'ingenious expedients' of high government borrowing, severe cutbacks in low-priority areas (*inutili*), such as social spending, and draconian 'desperation taxes', such as the despised grist tax.³⁰ The social costs of this style of financial management were enormous. Italy was a very heavily taxed nation in the nineteenth century, even though it had a low-wage economy.³¹ Because of constant fiscal pressures, and their own perceptions of what constituted the scope of government, liberal rulers spent very little on beneficence and assistance; throughout the period, welfare spending in these two areas hovered at around one per cent of annual public expenditure. In treasury accounts, expenditure on *beneficenza* and *assistenza sociale* appeared under the heading, 'other expenses', a reflection of the place of social welfare in the list of political priorities.³²

The pattern of deficit spending alone might not have posed as an obstacle to an expansion in social welfare had it not been accompanied by heavy regressive taxation and high state expenditure on the military and on the public debt. A fiscal strategy aimed at the re-allocation of societal resources, from defence to health, education, and welfare, for example, and the redistribution of national income by a range of transfers to the poor might have produced very different results, but this option was not within the realm of possibilities. The *Risorgimento* was an expensive undertaking, but once the process of national unification was complete, politics more than necessity determined budget allocations. For example, in its budget of 1886–87, the interior ministry allotted only 322 800 *lire* to public beneficence, a funding category which covered the numerous activities conducted by many thousands of institutions; that budget showed that the national state intended to spend almost as much (225 630 *lire*) on a single programme, the policing of prostitution. This revealed that the more repressive aspects of social policy came rather high on the list of government priorities.³³ In addition, the upper and middle classes, who constituted the whole of the citizenry until 1882, found the mere idea of a tax-based redistributive policy unconscionable. The political leaders from whose ranks they were drawn and on whom they relied for support also viewed redistribution as a contemptible socialist principle. So, compounded by the overall effects of what many historians still consider to be Italy's 'disappointing' rate of economic growth at the end of the nineteenth century, the realities of public finances and political choices acted as constraints against the development of the social state.

The Italian state was simply not addressing the needs of the small but growing number of workers in industry or of the mass of labourers employed in agriculture. In the final decades of the century, when the economy suffered from prolonged depression, pauperism appeared to be increasing dramatically. It is estimated that more than 6 million Italians, representing almost a quarter of the total population, received some form of

charitable aid in the 1880s and 1890s.³⁴ By trying to care for the needy, the *opere pie* which liberals criticized and neglected were filling a gap left by the state. Available data concerning private and public sector spending on beneficence also demonstrate that charities had a greater level of commitment to the people's welfare than did government. In 1880, local authorities spent a total of 53 111 851 *lire* on beneficence, while private charities devoted 84 918 079 to the same cause. In 1899, the expenditure of communes and provinces rose to 68 674 952 *lire*, but a year later, charitable spending amounted to 107 155 711.³⁵ Charitable giving also continued to play an important role in Italy. Between 1880 and 1889 alone, private benefactors bequeathed well over 154 million *lire* to charity; their donations during those years contributed to the foundation of 820 new *opere pie* with a combined income of nearly 68 million *lire*.³⁶ Only gradually did pressures emanating from below begin to have any impact upon the governing class. By making literacy rather than property the basis for voting rights, franchise reform in 1882 (covering national elections) transformed many members of the Northern urban and industrial workforce into citizens and increased the electorate (which numbered 419 thousand in 1861) to just over 2 million voters (about 7 per cent of the total population).³⁷ The transformation of the polity challenged liberals in new ways to meet their social obligation to the masses.

Public beneficence in the new Italy: the survival of the old order

The establishment of Italy's system of legal charity coincided with the creation of the kingdom. As part of their programme of administrative unification, Marco Minghetti and the parliamentary commission responsible for investigating the problem of beneficence made a modified version of Piedmont's law of 20 November 1859 on *opere pie* the model for the whole of Italy. Named the 'great reform' by its creators, the new law of 3 August 1862 (no. 752) actually subjected the nation's *opere pie* to only the most superficial interference by the state. Its makers retained the substance of Rattazzi's 1859 legislation by insisting both that government intervention be limited to the mere supervision of *opere pie* and that charities continue to be administered according to their original statutes, 'the pious wishes' of their founders, and their 'ancient customs'. But, because the 1862 law defined *opere pie* as private institutions with a public purpose, even those charities which the church and its clergy managed directly remained totally self-governing. The enactment, then, consigned the principle of laicization to the dustbin. Rattazzi's desire to strengthen and centralize the state had prompted Cavour to say of him in 1858: 'he is a liberal by conviction, but ... an absolutist by instinct'.³⁸ But, by his own admission, Rattazzi had not intended the 1859 legislation to be the basis for a system of legal charity

predicated upon active government involvement in the private affairs of *opere pie*.³⁹ When it came to beneficence, Rattazzi was a keen advocate of private initiative and the passive state. None the less, even he objected to the idea of a complete revocation of public control over *opere pie*.

As its critics realized, the 1862 legislation contained some important changes which signalled a new direction in national policy. Whereas Rattazzi's law had given the interior ministry a modicum of power over *opere pie*, the 1862 legislation placed what authority government still possessed almost entirely in the hands of provincial deputations, which were empowered to inspect the accounts (but not to control the budgets) of *opere pie*. Even though it had not been exercised assiduously, the right of approval over budgets had been an important provision in the 1859 legislation, because it gave government the means to ensure that *opere pie* were spending enough of their income on charity and not too much of it on less essential items, such as administration, buildings, maintenance and worship. Moreover, the 1862 legislation amended guidelines in the 1859 act by ending the involvement of the interior ministry in the process of financial auditing of institutions and by transferring the responsibility for appointing the presidents of local congregations of charity from the interior ministry to the municipal council. Thus, the *comuni* and their mayors in the nation's 8000 some odd municipalities gained control of the very representative organ of the state – the congregation of charity – which had access to the mass of private donations which made up the 'patrimony of the poor'. Presented as a concession to the Left, many of whom wanted decentralization, the diminution of state control at central level was really a means for the nation's leaders to offload the financial and bureaucratic responsibility for monitoring *opere pie* onto officials in the localities.⁴⁰

Though some deputies criticized Minghetti's project for being far too accommodating to the Church, the government pushed successfully for its speedy passage through parliament. In the chamber, Minghetti may have maintained that his principal concern was to ensure that 'private charity flourished in a climate of complete liberty', but little could hide the fact that the 1862 law was a quick solution and a political expedient.⁴¹ The government's intentions came out clearly in its related legislation on local government, a net result of which was to relieve the state treasury of much of the expense of civil administration. With unification, the administrative functions of local government expanded enormously as the national state drew up statutory specifications. The local government acts of 20 March 1865 (*allegato A*) and of 10 February 1889, together with the *testo unico* of 4 May 1898 (Royal Decree, n. 164),⁴² required communes and provinces to share the cost for the provision of a number of key public services, including sanitation, intercity roads and railways, port facilities and the upkeep of forests. With regard to beneficence and assistance, these rulings set a

number of guidelines. Communes alone were to be financially responsible for providing the poor with an adequate level of medical care by general practitioners, specialists, and midwives; and, until the unification of hospital administration began with new legislation in July 1898, the municipal authorities in a few places, such as Lombardy, the Veneto, and Tuscany, reimbursed hospital administrators for the cost of treating the poor. Provinces, on the other hand, were to be solely in charge of running the nation's mental asylums. Significantly, dispositions in each successive enactment that covered aid to foundlings were only intended to be temporary and provisional; for example, article 299 of the 1898 *testo unico* specified that 'until such time as an apposite law is promulgated, the costs for the maintenance of *esposti* will be shared by communes and provinces, in a proportion which will be determined by royal decree, after deliberations by provincial councils and the council of state'.⁴³

The framework established in these laws had a huge impact on the quality of public administration which the liberal state delivered. This system placed the financial onus of *beneficenza pubblica* entirely on provinces and communes. By being vague about the important matter of finance, it made disputes between municipal and provincial authorities about their respective shares of the costs almost inevitable. It reduced the role of central government to that of a mediator of those conflicts and provided no means or incentive for local governments to fund public beneficence more generously. By guaranteeing local governments considerable autonomy in interpreting their statutory requirements and determining their budget allocations, these arrangements precluded the possibility of any real administrative unification or nationwide uniformity in public provision. Much diversity in the amounts which different local governments allotted to beneficent funding resulted.

The creation of a new administrative culture and order remained illusory, and this had much to do with the fact that the liberal state increased the burdens on local government without increasing funding from the centre to the periphery. Liberal leaders assumed that they could modernize the system of governance by imposing *buon governo* from above. Excluding those still within papal territory, charities numbered 17 897 in existing 1861 lands and these institutions possessed an enviable fortune in patrimonial assets.⁴⁴ The problem, however, was that the 1862 legislation encouraged the very entrenchment of those institutions that liberals maligned so much. The decentralization and privatization of control introduced in 1862 discouraged a process of reform and reorganization that was needed, if charity were to improved and modernized, but which required central government support and local government initiative. The new guidelines stipulated that *opere pie* keep accurate financial records (of inventories, protocols, registers of sales and acquisitions, budgets and accounts) and

compile data for perusal by provincial officials; since institutions were not subjected to any enforceable sanctions, however, even the most cooperative amongst them had little incentive or compulsion to comply. As a result, few actually did conform.

According to government estimates of the state of affairs in 1874, 3218 *opere pie* did not have inventories of assets, another 5038 did not have working budgets, 2226 did not employ treasurers and 5108 kept wholly inaccurate financial ledgers. And in that year, a total of 28 000 accounts books, including some from past years, had not been presented for public scrutiny. But the fault did not lie solely with private institutions, for provincial deputations admitted that they had failed to enforce rulings on the financial accountability of *opere pie*. Because of insufficient resources, and the backlog of work, 13 700 account books still awaited inspection by provincial officials at the end of the year.⁴⁵ What was especially worrying to those who actually wanted to see some positive change, these statistics were probably just the tip of the iceberg, for as everyone involved in public beneficence knew, the government had no accurate information either about the true extent of non-compliance with the 1862 legislation or even about something as fundamental as the real number of *opere pie* in liberal Italy. Through successive government investigations, many of which were openly obstructed by *opere pie*, the picture that was beginning to emerge with greater clarity in the 1870s was that the 1862 legislation had been a total failure.

In the *mezzogiorno*, the 1862 legislation appeared to contribute to the very 'ungovernability' of the South that the Northern political class transposed into the so-called 'Southern Question'. The 1875–6 inquest on Sicily showed, for example, that many charities still did not keep proper accounts at all and had no intention of doing so. Fifteen years after its promulgation, the 1862 reform went largely 'unobserved' in Sicily because the vast majority of provincial deputations, by their own admission, simply did not have 'the time or the means to exercise their legal right of supervision'.⁴⁶ One of the biggest defects of the reform was that it burdened provincial authorities with a major task of administration, but gave them no financial backing from the centre of government to carry out their job of monitoring institutions. Under these circumstances, failure was hardly a surprise. Things might have been different, Sicilian prefects reported, had ecclesiastical reforms on the island been implemented properly. The national government had promised that a quarter of all proceeds from the nationalization of church holdings would go towards communes to help pay for improvements in education and beneficence.⁴⁷ But this had not happened in Sicily because of the corruption and inefficiency of local authorities, who organized auctions, blocked the distribution of property to landless peasants, and guaranteed that the lion's share went to their clients. The inquest revealed that 7931 lots of church land had been sold for a measly 43 896

lire since the laws of 7 July 1866 and 15 August 1867 on religious orders and ecclesiastical assets came into effect. And big *latifondisti* acquired large units of confiscated land very cheaply, in some cases at a price equivalent to about one tenth of its commercial value.⁴⁸ What few profits went into the public purse as a result of the sales, moreover, remained in the hands of local councillors and mayors, who used money destined for schools and charities for higher-priority items, such as the building of roads. Local government officials dispensed the public contracts for these projects to their friends and relatives.⁴⁹

Prefect reports to investigators disclosed that no good had come as a result of the 1862 'reform'. Because the 1862 legislation permitted *opere pie* to govern themselves without state interference, 'irregularities' commonly occurred, and some of these were quite serious. In his deposition, the prefect of Messina stated that it was an open secret that the 'pious' orphanage there routinely committed many abuses of a moral and criminal nature. According to its statutes, the institution aimed to protect its alumnae from immorality and prostitution. To fulfil that purpose, the governing board distributed sizable dowries to worthy female orphans so that they might settle into a respectable life.⁵⁰ It also found grooms and contracted marriage for its 'daughters'. A common and long-established practice, the gift of dowries and marriage symbolized the paternalistic role of *opere pie*, which acted in *loco parentis*.⁵¹ According to the prefect, the orphanage in Messina ran a racket whereby local women of 'ill repute' performed sexual favours for a 'genealogist' on the payroll so that he would confirm their eligibility for a dowry. In exchange for the dowry, the women consented to marry rich, but decrepit old men, who then rewarded the institution handsomely for their young brides. Whether or not the details of this scandal were accurate is less important than the fact that the prefect found himself utterly unable to do anything at all.⁵²

In theory, he, along with other prefects, could send inspectors to investigate alleged wrong-doings; but, in the absence of sufficient money and personnel, this was a complete impossibility. Herein lay an important weakness of the liberal state – the representatives of central government in the periphery, the prefects, were incapable of ensuring *buon governo* in the localities. Without the goodwill and cooperation of local notables, who controlled municipal councils, mayorships, congregations of charity and, in some cases, the *opere pie* themselves, even prefects with adequate resources remained powerless to enforce observance of laws emanating from the nation's capital. As outlined in the 1862 legislation, moreover, a royal decree was needed to effect any change in either a poorly-managed charity or one engaged in illegal activities; the process of acquiring one involved the council of state and the provincial deputation in a possibly very lengthy investigation.⁵³ Even after a dissolution order (*decreto di scioglimento*) was issued, however, the governing body of the charity had the

right of appeal to the prefect. And the royal decree authorized only that the governors of the charity be dismissed and new ones be appointed. As it made no provision for the forcible closure of such establishments, the 1862 law offered only the most 'miserable deterrent' to the mismanagement of charities.⁵⁴ The world of charity was one still characterized by secrecy from civil authority and immunity from government sanction.

The Left in power

After the election of November 1876, the Left finally attained power.⁵⁵ But those who were hoping that Agostino Depretis would inaugurate a new age of social reform were soon disappointed. With some justification, the torchbearer of the Right, Silvio Spaventa, described Depretis's regime as 'a government of the Right, but not so good'.⁵⁶ During Depretis's first ministry, much of the work of social reform fell to Giovanni Nicotera, a disciple of Mazzini. The prime minister did not seem to have much interest in delivering his modest political programme.⁵⁷ Serving as interior minister only until December 1877, Nicotera, however, had the misfortune of being one of the most dedicated but least successful of the relatively few social reformers which nineteenth-century liberalism ever produced. On 20 April 1876, Nicotera nominated a commission whose task was to study the problem of how the 1862 law could best be reformed. Although the work of this commission remained unfinished, Nicotera decided to act independently because he did not like the way the project was progressing. What he wanted was a radical overhaul of the system. On 22 November 1877, Nicotera attempted to redress years of governmental inaction by presenting the chamber with a bill on the reform of provision for abandoned infants. On 1 December, he presented parliament with another related bill on the reform of *opere pie*. When Nicotera left office shortly afterwards, these bills, along with many others on a range of important social and administrative issues, fell by the wayside.⁵⁸

It was during this period that governmental immobilism became a systematic pursuit and distinct feature of liberal parliamentary politics. The manifestation of this proclivity could be found in a succession of time-consuming and ultimately fruitless inquests on a range of pressing social issues and the failure of numerous bills even to reach discussion stage. Nicotera's two projects had little chance of success also because of their radical intent. For example, many of his more moderate colleagues found his bill on *opere pie* unpalatable because it just stopped short of recommending full-out nationalization and laicization.⁵⁹ Proposing that a national Superior Council of Beneficence be established, Nicotera made centralization a keynote of his project. He also recommended that governmental controls at all levels be extended by empowering the interior ministry, through its

prefects, to conduct inspections of institutions, by increasing the abilities of provincial and municipal authorities to reform institutions, and by imposing a formidable structure of public administration upon *opere pie*. Many liberals wanted to preserve the private character of charity, and others did not prioritize the issue, so parliament repeatedly came to an impasse. Just a few years before, the 1861 ministerial inquest on *opere pie* completed one of its tasks, a fifteen-volume statistical series published between 1868 and 1873.⁶⁰ The government deemed the results of this enterprise unsatisfactory, so on 3 June 1880 it decided to appoint another commission of inquiry to investigate the kingdom's *opere pie* and make recommendations for a reform of the 1862 legislation.⁶¹ As commissioners set about their work, the chamber decided to defer making any decisions affecting *opere pie* until the project was complete. At the same time that they suspended deliberations about the matter, deputies acknowledged the necessity of a total reorganization of the private charitable sector and affirmed their commitment to encouraging changes that were in absolute accordance with 'the criteria of modernity'.⁶²

Parliament would have to wait a long time to review the findings of the commission. Comprising twenty-one parliamentarians from both houses, the commission was placed under the presidency of Cesare Correnti, a friend of Depretis. Correnti quickly fell out with the secretary of the inquest, Luigi Bodio, over aims and methodology, so the commission did not get off to the best possible start. Things went from bad to worse.⁶³ Due mostly to the lack of sufficient resources and personnel at the prefectural level, the commission had to deal with masses of incomplete and inaccurate data. In addition to the bureaucratic weaknesses of the nation's prefectures, prefects had trouble gaining the trust and co-operation of local bureaucrats and elites because the vast majority of them were Northerners.⁶⁴ As a result of these problems, the commission took six years to publish the first volume of its results, which were organized by region; the last of the ten-volume series came out eleven years later in 1897.⁶⁵ And, in reality, the commission never completed its task of collecting and analysing all the evidence about the functioning of *opere pie*. Although a sub-commission, presided over by Correnti, finally got around to presenting a bill to parliament in January 1889, Crispi buried it before formally dissolving the commission one month later, just as he presented his own project on the reform of the 1862 law to the chamber.⁶⁶

The royal commission of 1880 may have encountered difficulties and obstructions which impaired their work, but their regional surveys provide a valuable source of reference. Of particular importance, the volumes give a very good indication of the vast wealth of the nation's *opere pie*. Those institutions which were officially registered as *opere pie* numbered 21 866 in 1880;⁶⁷ the patrimony of these charities, which included assets and estates, amounted to almost 2 billion *lire*. Moreover, these institutions had a gross

income of 90 446 446 *lire*;⁶⁸ almost impossible to conceive was the fact that their total revenue almost equalled the whole of state tax revenue in 1880, which was 1 050 billion *lire*.⁶⁹ However, at least a half of all *opere pie* comprised small private foundations with patrimonies of no more than 500 *lire*. And the vast majority of the wealthiest institutions were located in Piedmont and Lombardy. The north (Piedmont, Lombardy, Liguria and the Veneto) as a whole possessed the largest share of the patrimonial pie (48.3 per cent of the patrimony; 37.1 per cent of the total population), while central (29 per cent of the patrimony; 24 per cent of the total population) and southern regions (22.7 per cent of the patrimony; 39 per cent of the population) had much smaller portions.⁷⁰ Partly because of this disequilibrium in resources, the south and the islands (comprising Abruzzi-Molise, Campania, Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria, Sicily and Sardegna) were disadvantaged, despite the fact that, for example, Sicily had more institutions than Piedmont, and the region as a whole possessed a great many *opere pie* (see Table 2.1). As far as net *per capita* devotional spending went, southern regions all fell below the national average of 3.07 *lire* and some of the poorest, such as Basilicata and Calabria spent pitifully little on charity.⁷¹

Low levels of charitable expenditure did not result solely from the varying economic circumstances of institutions and regions, for the kingdom's *opere pie* spent a nationwide average of 17.4 per cent of their gross income on administration alone. That figure rose to a massive 42.8 per cent, when all administrative costs, including those for worship, are added to the sum of what was diverted from beneficence. Some of the biggest spenders in this regard were in the south, where public controls over the finances of *opere pie* were very tenuous. The distribution of congregations of charity, for example, showed great regional diversity: while the north had the heaviest concentration of these agencies (Piedmont had 959 and Lombardy had 423), the south had the lowest (44 in Basilicata, 12 in Calabria, and 8 in Sicily, for example).⁷² While most Sicilian *opere pie* were

Table 2.1 The number of *opere pie*, by region (out of a nationwide total of 21 866) and *per capita* charitable expenditure in *lire* (in parentheses), 1880

Piedmont	2462	(4.22)	Latium	693	(6.06)
Liguria	456	(5.18)	Abruzzi-Molise	1863	(0.65)
Lombardy	3954	(4.32)	Campania	2916	(3.06)
Veneto	1350	(3.03)	Apulia	1327	(1.42)
Emilia	1468	(4.36)	Basilicata	207	(0.59)
Marches	751	(2.65)	Calabria	527	(0.54)
Tuscany	628	(3.56)	Sicily	2711	(1.83)
Umbria	403	(2.71)	Sardegna	150	(0.64)

Source: A. Cherubini, *Beneficenza e solidarietà*, tables 5.1 and 5.2 on pp. 42–4.

administered privately, 2166 of the 3954 institutions in Lombardy were run by congregations of charity. The clergy governed only 690 charities in Lombardy, while the rest were administered by various kinds of private foundations.⁷³

The 1880 inquest also revealed the total lack of geographic uniformity in the provision of public beneficence. While Sicily possessed many *opere pie*, the most common types of these were hospitals, orphanages, and poor-houses. As was the case in all regions, the vast majority of these charities were located in the big cities (Messina, Catania, and Palermo). All of the island's congregations of charity were found in Palermo, where pious institutions abounded.⁷⁴ The majority of Italy's 80 foundling homes were located in Tuscany (13), Lombardy (11), Piedmont (11) and the Veneto (11): Sicily had only 2, Calabria had one, and Basilicata and Abruzzi-Molise had none at all. Charities were unevenly and patchily distributed throughout the nation: there were only 83 agencies which gave poor pregnant women financial assistance and 76 of these were in Lombardy; there were only two institutions providing relief for rachitic children and both of these were in the north; there were 13 mental asylums and only two of these were in the south (Campania and Sicily). Over 87 per cent of the kingdom's communes lacked a hospital and thousands of poor municipalities lacked charitable institutions of any kind.⁷⁵

Nineteenth-century Italian liberals justified their encroachments on church property and privileges as a means to 'nationalize' private wealth and release money for beneficence and assistance. In keeping with these plans, legislation in 1855 and 1866 led to the dissolution of over 26 000 monasteries which were intended for public use.⁷⁶ The ecclesiastical establishment protested that the state was confiscating church property and assets in order to wage wars and build roads. At the Congress on Public Hygiene and Beneficence in 1880, Count Di Campello opposed laicization on these grounds:

Certain reformers invoke the spirit of the times and the changed social conditions of our nation to justify their actions. All this means nothing. The reality is that, with the suppression of ancient legacies, the conversion of private foundations into public institutions, and the expropriation of the revenue left by pious benefactors, liberalism has destroyed overnight what the charity of our fathers has taken centuries to amass.

He challenged liberals to show what they intended to put in the place of private charity.⁷⁷ Not without some cause, the church and its supporters accused liberals of using little of the profits raised by expropriations for the benefit of the people. While spending on transport and communications rose from 9.77 per cent of the central state's budget in 1862 to 13.51 in 1880, expenditure on welfare (excluding education) fell from 1.52 per cent

to .36 per cent in those years; and social spending increased to only .62 per cent in 1900.⁷⁸

The Crispien revolution? The law of 17 July 1890 (n. 6972) on beneficence

On 18 February 1889, Crispi presented his bill on the reorganization of *opere pie* to parliament. The first reading of the bill began on 28 November 1889 and lasted eighteen days. In his address to the chamber on 30 November, Crispi tried hard to gather support for his project. He did so by stressing the financial incentives for change. He addressed the interests of conservatives when he stated that an increase in the authority of government over *opere pie* would allow the state to untap a 'national treasure of untold wealth' and avoid assuming any new fiscal commitments. And he appealed to the anticlerical instincts of left-leaning liberals by accusing the nation's charities of being parasitic, corrupt, and wasteful. The kingdom's *opere pie* were immensely wealthy, he explained, but they misspent an intolerably large portion of their incomes on administration. The primary cause of the *malgoverno* of charities was their autonomy. The state needed to run charities directly, so that mismanagement and abuses would be prevented. Crispi also criticized his predecessors for doing nothing to reform institutions which had charitable status, but were devoted solely or mainly to worship. He focused especially on confraternities, lay pious institutions of late medieval origin which sometimes sponsored charitable activities for the wider community, but specialized in the provision of mutual aid and spiritual assistance to members and their dependents.⁷⁹ Crispi charged that *confraternite*, some of which were very rich foundations, spent the majority of their capital on feasts, prayers, and candles. He remarked that out of a nationwide total of 12 684 confraternities, 9 464 lived comfortably off their own endowments, while the remainder relied on donations for survival. The total income of confraternities was more than 302 million *lire*, he argued, but only a little over one million of this went annually towards poor relief of some kind. This miniscule amount represented only 2.5 per cent of their resources. The rest of their fortunes, he said derisively, went up in smoke.⁸⁰

To remedy the situation, Crispi called for an immediate 'nationalization' of the assets of *opere pie* so that these might be administered more efficiently by government. The budgets and accounts of beneficent institutions must be subjected to scrutiny by public authorities, he contended, so that 'abuses' and 'errors' could be prevented. Although 'public beneficence' was a 'necessary attribute of the modern state', he said, the treasury simply could not afford to increase funding for it. Unless the state harnessed

private institutions, by abolishing their corporate autonomy, Italy would continue to lag behind other European nations as a welfare provider. What Crispi envisaged was a rationalization of *opere pie* by means of their ‘concentration’ in reconstituted and reformed congregations of charity. The centralized chain of command that he sought to create would begin at municipal level, in these *congregazioni di carità*, then proceed upwards through provincial governments and the prefectures, which would be given additional supervisory functions; and it would stop at no less than the interior ministry, which would have ultimate executive authority. Moreover, Crispi wanted the state to use its expanded powers to ‘transform’ and even ‘suppress’ institutions which it deemed to be inefficient, corrupt, or merely ‘superfluous’ because of their cultural or religious mission.⁸¹

The guiding principles of Crispi’s vision of a reformed system of public beneficence, the words ‘centralization’, ‘transformation’, ‘concentration’ and ‘suppression’ caused alarm. Many opponents voiced strong criticisms of the ‘authoritarian’, ‘Jacobinic’ and ‘illiberal’ idea that the state should rule, not just regulate charities. In the chamber, Bruno Chimirri represented the views of the moderate right when he accused Crispi’s commission of designing a system that professed to ‘concentrate’ but would actually ‘crush’ the *opere pie* that would be subjected to public control. The deputy objected most strongly to article 58 which gave the interior ministry the right to reform the statutes and the scope of charities: ‘Everywhere you look in this bill’, Chimirri said, ‘there is excessive government centralization and interference.’ By granting government expanded powers to dissolve ‘useless’ institutions and expropriate their assets, article 60 roused much fierce opposition from those who called on fellow parliamentarians to respect the Church’s ‘proprietaryship’ of *opere pie* and the ‘sanctity’ of private charities. Despite the ferocity of debate, however, the chamber voted overwhelmingly to support the bill (196 for and 98 against).⁸² This initial success incited renewed Catholic protest. Lay Catholics presented the senate with a petition with 150 thousand signatures. The Catholic clergy and press condemned the bill for being a crime against religion. Many prominent Catholic aristocrats, such as Count Carlo Del Pezzo, who directed a charity for paupers in Naples, joined the crusade to defend the final frontier in the struggle between church and state. And Pope Leo XIII accused liberals of doing Satan’s work by ‘persecuting the faith’. He defined efforts to reform the Church’s *opere pie* as an expression of liberalism’s ‘mortal and implacable hatred of Jesus Christ’.⁸³

In senate discussions, commentators discussed some of the more practical difficulties of implementation. Some senators pointed out reasonably that the exercise of state power was actually conditional upon the capabilities of government at central and, more importantly, at local level. Senator Costa maintained that it was important for statesmen to examine and

determine the concrete situation of the prefectures and provincial administrations before attributing any draconian authority to government. He raised an important issue when he stated: 'The government and its supporters keep talking about concentrating and transforming institutions of beneficence, but they say nothing about how they intend to bring these changes about.' Despite criticisms, however, the bill also had a fairly easy ride through the upper house, whose members approved (106 for and 54 against) it, but not without making amendments. Crispi interpreted this as an outright victory, for he claimed that their proposed modifications affected the form, but not the substance of his project.⁸⁴ In accounting for this surprising amount of parliamentary consensus on the matter, senator Moleschott believed that the law's stated objective of laicization was the deciding factor in its favour. He spoke of the 'historic mission' of liberalism to 'secularize everything'. Before the senate vote, he urged his colleagues to have the courage of their liberal convictions: 'Our job here today', he stated, 'is to demonstrate faith in our own ability to deliver a liberal programme whose guiding light is this law.'⁸⁵ Senators seemed to have embraced their claim to be the protectors of the liberal credo of social progress through secularization. In reality though, the delivery of progressive legislation was far more problematical than Moleschott and others believed.

During the second reading by the chamber, which began in May 1890, one of the most contentious issues to emerge was the bill's proposal to allow women to be members of the communal congregations of charity that were to be invested with expanded directive powers over *opere pie*. Opponents of this idea based their case on the premise that permitting women to assume political and public roles would be contrary to the pursuance of their essential biological functions and 'true vocation' as wives and mothers in the family and home. Supporters of the notion of women's eligibility, by contrast, argued that the physical and psychological constitution of the female sex was particularly suited to *beneficenza*. Women's compassion and charity accounted for the long history of their involvement in good causes. To deprive women of this opportunity would be an injustice to them and a disservice to the institutions which could benefit enormously from their experience. The senate also anguished over this issue, but finally decided to support the principle that women should be entitled to hold positions of social leadership in local communities. However, senators also stipulated that married women be required to obtain permission from their husbands before standing for office. Some deputies found this condition unconscionable because it would deprive married women of the same employment rights enjoyed by single and widowed women. They objected too on the grounds that many husbands would simply refuse to grant marital authorization to their wives. Moderate opinion eventually prevailed, however. When it finally obtained approval in July, the law gave

married women with permission from their husbands the right to enter public service as administrators of *opere pie*.⁸⁶

The issue of whether clergy should continue to be excluded from membership in congregations of charity also provoked discussion. The government intended to follow the precedent set by the 1862 legislation by excluding clerics from office. A small but vocal minority of parliamentarians, however, questioned whether the state actually had any legal or moral right to deprive the church of its authority over *opere pie*. Those in favour of allowing ecclesiasts to administer charities justified this on the grounds that priests could be trusted to act in the public interest because they were generally 'non-partisan'. Odoardo Luchini, who spoke for the government, mounted a spirited attack against arguments for inclusion when he asserted that the Catholic church was a 'political institution' which demanded 'blind obedience' from its servants. He also reminded his colleagues that the church was currently 'at war with the state'. In his intervention on this matter, Crispi gave the anticlerical line the upper hand when he asserted forcefully that the interests of the church were totally incompatible with the sovereignty of the state. He affirmed that 'the duty of the modern state' was to expand its 'social power' by usurping the church's traditional role in education and beneficence. Crispi and his supporters maintained that there were distinctions between public law and private rights and civil society and the state apparatus. They believed that while the church should be permitted to support charitable giving and activities, it should not be allowed to create an 'ecclesiastical state within a lay state'. By virtue of their purpose, *opere pie* were public institutions over which only the government exercised jurisdiction. Despite the loud protests of some deputies and senators, the majority resolved to support the notion that the clergy should be barred from discharging any of the politico-administrative functions of the secular state.⁸⁷

In approving the bill, parliamentarians appear to have affirmed some of the most radical principles of nineteenth-century liberalism. Many contemporaries hailed the 1890 law as a fulfilment of the historic mission of liberal statecraft. This progressive piece of legislation, they asserted, would lead to the social renovation of the nation by means of the modernization and rationalization of charity by the state. Just months after the promulgation of the law, Crispi himself pronounced it to be one of the most 'audacious' pieces of legislation that any unitary government had ever passed. According to Crispi, the liberal state, in one stroke, had revealed its infinite powers of intervention in civil society and had rendered the nation's institutions of beneficence 'utterly malleable'.⁸⁸ Some historians have agreed with this verdict.

Franco Della Peruta has argued that during his government of 1887–91 Crispi used his power base in the *blocco storico* to hasten the passage of radical laws which transformed state, economy, and society. The crowning

glory of the Crispian revolution, the 1890 reform of *opere pie* unleashed the full force of a newly strengthened and totally centralized Italian state.⁸⁹ Raffaele Romanelli has also concluded that Crispi completed the task of consolidating the unitary state by reorganizing its structure and expanding its functions. In Romanelli's opinion, Crispi solved many of Italy's worst social problems by introducing global administrative reforms covering local government, public security, and hospital provision. Inspired by a conception of 'authoritarian democracy of Bismarckian ancestry', Crispi presided over the passage of some of Italy's first examples of protective factory legislation. And he finally resolved the question of public beneficence by means of his far-reaching reform in 1890. According to Romanelli, this single enactment represented the ultimate victory of the liberal social revolution and the long-awaited triumph of state over church. By vastly extending the purview and authority of government, and changing the old charitable order into a new system of assistance based on public law and citizenship rights, the 1890 act finally created a 'social state' in Italy which rivalled that of Germany.⁹⁰

In reality, however, the legislation did no such thing. For one thing, Della Peruta, Romanelli, and others exaggerate the revolutionary aspects of the enactment and its subsequent regulation.⁹¹ Crispi's reform represented the end rather than the start of an historical period and process. It was the culmination of a series of laws on the church and on *opere pie*. Its origins, ideology, and aims lay in the *ancien régime* rather than the modern world. It sought to perfect the system of *carità-legale*, but not to found a social state. For another thing, the legislation had only a limited impact. To break the remarkable continuity in public policy towards private charities in nineteenth-century Italy, the reform needed to be implemented effectively.⁹²

State-building in nineteenth-century Italy

Antonio Salandra seemed to sense that the law on *opere pie* had little chance of success. In a discussion about the budget in the chamber in May 1890, he expressed admiration for the government's efforts to introduce legislation which aimed at promoting 'civilization and progress'. He also observed, however, that the execution of a reformist agenda depended upon the 'will and means, the personnel and the resources' of government at all levels. According to Salandra, the 'inexorable weakness' in Crispi's thinking on the social question was the misconception that the state could deliver ambitious reforms without increasing its spending massively.⁹³ Salandra knew that the attempts of Crispi's finance ministers, including Giolitti, to achieve a balanced budget by cutting public expenditure jeopardized prospects.⁹⁴

The civil servants who were responsible for interpreting the 1890 reform and translating its abstract recommendations into concrete procedural guidelines also found many flaws. Working out the details of just how ‘public’ *opere pie* were supposed to be confounded them at every turn. Some of the most distinguished legal minds in Italy had difficulty figuring out how the legislation’s vague prescriptive norms could ever be applied successfully. They could not determine with any precision or ease what the law actually said about the extent, character, and limits of state power over charitable institutions. The final judgement about the impact of the enactment came in 1910 from the man at the very top of the civil service department that governed the nation’s institutions of beneficence. Twenty years after the passage of the law, the director-general of civil administration at the interior ministry admitted that he and his predecessors had ‘scarcely’ even begun to implement the reform. Alberto Pironti complained of the frustrating uncertainty, unclarity, and impracticality of many of the act’s dispositions. Given the fact that the majority of nineteenth-century liberals were jurists and lawyers, Pironti’s criticism of their inability to design workable legislation was a very damning indictment indeed.⁹⁵

In theory, the 1890 legislation established a high degree of centralized state control that emanated downward. Although the administration of public beneficence fell within the purview of the interior ministry, the decision to ‘dissolve’ any charitable institution or congregation of charity which failed to meet its obligations rested with the Council of State, which could appoint a royal commission to investigate individual cases. The mandate to force closure came in the form of a royal decree. In reality, however, the central government’s authority over *opere pie* could only be as extensive as that of the peripheral organs of state upon which it rested. The long arms of government in the localities, the prefectures, were the fulcrum of the system; through them, the government exercised its powers of vigilance and control. Accountable to the interior ministry, prefects had to ensure observance of the law and report on the functioning of public beneficence. They had the mammoth task of overseeing the activities of provincial and communal governments, the congregations of charity, and all the institutions of beneficence within their jurisdiction. Functionaries within prefectural accounting departments had the continuous and heavy burden of scrutinizing the financial records of charities, local governments, and the congregations. And, prefects were responsible for creating inspectorates in every province which would verify data and conduct investigations. The essential problem with these arrangements was that for some years the unitary state had been expanding the functions of the prefectures without sufficiently increasing their number of personnel or their financial resources.⁹⁶

In theory too, the 1890 enactment amplified considerably the authority which provincial governments exercised over *opere pie*. It required, for

example, that charities submit their estimates of expenditure in advance, as well as any other information concerning property, treasures, bequests and estates, for approval by provincial administrative councils (*giunte provinciali amministrative*), which possessed the power to veto any action affecting the patrimony of an *opera pia*. At the local level, the congregations of charity were meant to be the conduit of civil power. Through them, the state would realize its aim of destroying the autonomy of *istituti pii* and transforming them into truly public institutions. The 1890 reform gave the *congregazioni* extensive and multiple powers: for the purposes of rationalization, they could 'regroup', 'reform', and 'dissolve' institutions. On paper, one of the most innovative features of the 1890 legislation was that it empowered congregations of charity to change the statutes of *opere pie*. Legislators hoped to promote the development of certain kinds of institutions, which conformed to their perceptions of social utility – such as hospitals, orphanages, workhouses and foundling homes – and to eliminate *opere pie* which they believed no longer had a place in a modern society, in particular those that specialized in the dispensation of alms and doles. By giving congregations the right to alter or ignore what the original testators and founders of charities wished, the law was rightfully seen as an assault on the private and ecclesiastical character of *opere pie*. Significantly too, congregations controlled and pooled the revenues and resources of the institutions over which they presided. The purpose of this financial 'concentration' was to render the collection and distribution of charitable donations more efficient, to make savings in the administrative and bureaucratic expenses of beneficence, to reduce the financial burden of social provision on communes and provinces and to improve the functioning of *opere pie*.⁹⁷ A problem not foreseen by those who designed the 1890 act was that congregations could become instruments of corruption, clientelism, and electioneering in local communities because they were, in essence, largely self-governing quangos with access to large sums of money. Their efficiency depended a lot on the honesty of the mayoral councils (*sindacati*) who appointed members to them.

Those responsible for implementing the 1890 law soon discovered that many of the congregations of charity that were in existence were not serving the public's interests well. To remedy this, Antonio di Rudinì presented a project in May 1897 which aimed at imposing new standards of practice upon congregations and at encouraging their growth in rural areas; his bill, however, did not even reach the discussion stage before it disappeared without trace. Because of the inadequacies of the system, institutional transformation proceeded very slowly. In 1902, for example, administrators at the interior ministry discovered to their dismay that congregations had suppressed and assimilated only 144 confraternities nationwide.⁹⁸ Part of the reason for this delay was the successful resistance of the church to state encroachments. Because ecclesiastical officials benefited

financially from confraternities, which employed clergy and supported the church, the Vatican and its brethren fought hard to maintain their autonomy. Well into the twentieth century, government still knew very little about how many of these institutions actually existed and what their real incomes and assets were.⁹⁹ The liberal state did not succeed at compiling statistics about confraternities, let alone at gaining control of them. Even in the north of Italy, where congregations of charity had more experience and success at meddling in the affairs of *opere pie*, confraternities mounted a successful resistance to state encroachments. As late as 1920, a congregation of charity in Piedmont was still struggling to transform these devotional associations into beneficent institutions. When authorities tried to ‘nationalize’ the patrimonies of the various *confraternite* in their jurisdiction, they discovered to their horror that the governing bodies of these, in an effort to prevent the state from profiting, had cleared the coffers and pumped all their assets into church building and restoration works. Though the interior ministry and the prefect were informed of the campaign, they proved unable to stop it by asserting their authority.¹⁰⁰

Even when nineteenth-century liberalism’s drive towards *statalizzazione* was more successful, public controls over private institutions did not necessarily lead to greater efficiency in the administration of beneficence. In the aftermath of the 1890 act, many irregularities and abuses on the part of government officials came to light. One such case involved actions pertaining to the appropriation and conversion of the *Pia Unione dei Miseremini* (the Pious Union for the Wretched) in Palermo. This immensely wealthy confraternity, with a patrimony valued at over half a million *lire*, devoted only one thousand of its annual income of 50 000 to the poor. From 1893 to 1894, the city’s congregation of charity administered the *opera pia* directly, while a dissolution order lay pending. Members seem to have used it as a big gravy-boat for the profit and pleasure of themselves, their friends, family and ‘clients’. After the takeover by the congregation, the number and cost of the institution’s employees increased dramatically, as uncles and brothers of *congregazionisti* went on the payroll. And, almost 30 thousand *lire* mysteriously went missing from the coffers of the ransacked *pia unione*. Investigations subsequently revealed that the treasurer’s wife had committed the theft. Only after lengthy proceedings did the pious institute succeed at restituting about two-thirds of the stolen cash.¹⁰¹

Some congregations of charity, like those in Milan, had impeccable reputations for managing the public’s patrimony, but they seem to have been the exceptions.¹⁰² Even there, however, public officials could take a casual approach to their jobs. In 1915, the provincial commission for beneficence in Milan complained to the interior ministry that one of its congregations of charity was in complete disarray; its directors did not even bother to keep up any pretence of being efficient or motivated enough to ensure that poor people received a minimum of public assistance.¹⁰³ The appalling state

of the nation's prefectures posed just as serious a hindrance to the speedy and successful implementation of the 1890 legislation as did problems with the congregations. Deficiencies in personnel accounted for much of the problem. In Turin, for example, three under-paid employees in the beneficence division had the unenviable task of reviewing 812 budgets and as many accounts, so no matter how dedicated they were, their work, so essential to the aim of vigilance and control, could never be more than superficial. Ten years after the introduction of the law, the office of the prefect of Naples had not even begun to examine the books of the 595 beneficent institutions in the province, including that of the *Albergo dei Poveri*, which was one of the largest poorhouses in all of Europe. Still waiting for the 'approval' of the prefect were 5048 registers of accounts, some of which dated back to well before 1890. Because of the huge amount of paperwork involved in the bureaucratic management of public beneficence, overworked prefects and their low-paid employees did not have the time or the inclination to take full advantage of their right to move to shut down those institutions which abused the 'public faith'. In the years 1891 to 1900, for example, prefectures in only five provinces initiated proceedings for the closure of *opere pie* on the grounds of gross malpractice. The prefectural inspectorates envisaged by the 1890 reform never really materialized either because of insufficiency of resources.¹⁰⁴

Because of the many weaknesses within the state apparatus, many *opere pie* simply evaded public scrutiny of any kind after the introduction of the 1890 reform act. Within institutions, moreover, the controlling presence of philanthropists of noble and bourgeois extraction stayed strong. And so too did the church, particularly in the south, maintain its grip over the institutions which were now rather erroneously called 'public'. The revenues and assets of *opere pie* may have been nationalized in the course of the nineteenth century, but many of these institutions remained unreformed by the same people who condemned the church for its *malgoverno* of charity. Significantly, calls for a reform of the landmark legislation of 1890 began to be heard before very long.

Giolitti seemed attentive to some of the most serious weaknesses of the system of *beneficenza pubblica*. In a senate debate on beneficence on 27 December 1901, he observed that throughout the nation the state's 'control' of the budgets and accounts of *opere pie* was a fiction. He admitted that the government, particularly at the prefectural level, was doing a very bad job of monitoring the activities of *opere pie*. He also noted that the royal commission's inquest on Naples, which began work in 1899, had uncovered a mass of evidence revealing the deficiencies of the liberal state. Government had 'an absolute duty to regulate charities and impede errors and abuses which compromise or diminish their patrimonies'. But the personnel and resources of public administration were 'totally insufficient' for this task. Dramatic structural and administrative changes were necessary

before the 1890 law could become a reality. Increased funding for the bureaucratic expansion of prefectures was necessary if *opere pie* were to be made accountable to public authority.¹⁰⁵

Giolitti responded to demands for a major reform of the 1890 legislation by presenting parliament with a bill on beneficent institutions in May 1903. After speedy discussions beginning on 19 June, parliament approved the bill on 18 July 1904. The new law introduced a number of innovative features concerning the administrative organization of public beneficence. Following the lead of Nicotera's 1877 project, the legislation called for the establishment of a *consiglio superiore di assistenza e beneficenza* at the interior ministry. During the heady days of the Roman Republic in 1848, when anything seemed possible, Terenzio Mamiani went so far as to plan the creation of a separate ministry for beneficence. His reasoning was that the problem of legal charity was so complex that a specialized department of government should have competence for it.¹⁰⁶ Giolitti's solution was in keeping with his preference for amplifying the roles of existing ministries rather than dividing up the functions of government. The 1904 legislation also sought to improve the functioning of government bureaucracy by creating new branches of civil administration, the special provincial commissions for beneficence over which prefects would preside. Very importantly, the measure stressed the need for an extensive inspectorate designed specifically to make *opere pie* truly accountable. The feeling was that it simply was not good enough to examine published accounts and statute books, which, after all, could be inaccurate; public officials needed to gain entry to the institutions themselves in order to assess their performance.¹⁰⁷ This was a laudable aim.

However, Giolitti did not conceive of his law as a reform: for him, it was nothing more than a tinkering with the Crispian model. Nor did he wish to create an overbearing '*stato-padrone*' (boss state). In fact, his idea of legal charity was more in keeping with the spirit of the 1862 legislation than with the tone of the 1890 act. He wanted the state's role to be restricted to the 'co-ordination' of the activities of what in his mind were categorically private charities rather than public institutions.¹⁰⁸ He also did not have high hopes for the prospects of his modest programme of improvements. In a parliamentary discussion of the budget on 15 March 1904, the socialists pressed the government to begin implementing the new law so that some of the major weaknesses of the system of public beneficence could be remedied. One socialist deputy accused liberals of having done next to nothing to solve the old problem of legal charity; as a result, poor relief, civil hospitals, and foundling homes were in a terrible state. 'We believe', he stated,

that public beneficence must become a function, indeed a service provided by the state ... We believe too that beneficence should be a form

of justice, rather than a form of charity; we believe that when the benefactor state cares for an abandoned baby, it must prepare the foundling dutifully and lovingly for the battles of life. In the same way, when it assists an elderly person, it must reward him for the hard work that he endured for the benefit of society.

Giolitti did not exactly find the notion of a 'benefactor state', providing bountiful assistance from the cradle to the grave, very endearing. He responded by saying 'you socialists want a big welfare state', but 'all the good intentions and all the good laws will remain dead-letters unless the financial power of the state improves'. When he was reminded that his own project had been passed on the understanding that government would at least try to implement it, Giolitti affirmed his commitment to improving mechanisms for the public administration of beneficence. But he admitted that this would not be easy. He agreed that legal charity was Italy's oldest problem; but, almost resigning himself to failure, he said that it was also the nation's most intractable one too. What the socialists did not seem to realize, Giolitti stated, was that when a country like Italy had such limited economic resources, governing almost always came down to 'taking money from one essential area and spending it on another'.¹⁰⁹

Despite what Giolitti said, money troubles were not the cause of his pragmatism. His era was blessed by economic prosperity and balanced budgets. Giolitti's oddly defeatist position says more about him than it does about the possibilities for reform in the new century. Like many of his predecessors, Giolitti did not think that government had a duty to keep the 'public's faith' by providing the means for the execution of its laws. His indifference to the urgency of reform meant that the system of public beneficence which the liberals neglected reached breaking-point during the First World War. The war placed new burdens on *opere pie* and strained the old institutional fabric of charity. When military authorities began to requisition hospital places for wounded and shell-shocked soldiers, they discovered the gaps and the weaknesses within the entire infrastructure of public relief. Despite the promulgation of reformist legislation under Crispi, many of those hospitals which were not affiliated to a university medical school still maintained their medieval character as refuges for the chronically sick and the dying. Investigations in 1917 revealed that there were insufficient numbers of hospital beds and specialized wards. When prefects were enlisted to find spaces in other types of *opere pie*, such as foundling homes, mental asylums, and orphanages, they uncovered just how tenuous the institutional foundation of public beneficence was. The prefect of Alessandria reported that he could locate no available beds because of the scarcity of beneficent institutions in the province. The prefect of Campobasso related that his province lacked a mental asylum and a foundling home; it possessed three small district hospitals, but these had

insufficient resources to meet local needs, let alone satisfy external demand. And the only orphanage in the area was already too overcrowded to be of any use to the military. The prefect of Grosseto wrote that the province's orphanage was also overflowing because conscripted soldiers who were widowers left their children in care. The same story was repeated over and over. Even when the government resorted to moving chronic patients from mental asylums to entirely ill-suited facilities, including prisons, they could not cope with the pressures.¹¹⁰

Authorities working within the system spoke of a complete breakdown of public beneficence due to the increased pressures of war. When parliament discussed the issue of the deterioration in social assistance, Giolitti once again affirmed his commitment to doing something about it. On 14 December 1920, he told senators that he was contemplating introducing a 'beneficence tax', like the English poor relief rate, to help finance the 'salvation' of the kingdom's *opere pie*. Because of the disastrous state of local government finances, provinces and communes had not been meeting their obligation to contribute to the costs of providing essential services for foundlings and the sick. As a result, *opere pie* had to make up for the shortfall from their own revenue and investments. Giolitti stated that his government was 'profoundly preoccupied with the problems besetting *opere pie*' and would do 'everything in its power to intervene on their behalf'. He promised that he would not allow the nation's chief endowment, the patrimony of *opere pie*, to be further depleted.¹¹¹ But, on the eve of the fascist revolution, it was too late for the liberals to found a workable system of legal charity.

And, by then, Giolitti's promises no longer rang true. In the decades after unification, something peculiar happened to Cavour's liberal faith in civil power. The realities of post-unitary Italy had destroyed the ideal of a state animated by a profoundly noble moral and social purpose. After the 'poetry of the *Risorgimento*', the 'prose of everyday existence' spelled the death of aspiration.¹¹² And the most prosaic feature of Italian politics was parliamentarism. Stripped of its high-minded principles and values, Italian liberalism was nothing more than a coterie of men dedicated only to the pursuit and preservation of political power. Almost ironically, over a century after the Napoleonic occupation, liberals had yet to consolidate two of the most important institutions of public administration – the congregations of charity and the prefectures – which they had inherited from the French. They had failed in their mission to create a modern state apparatus capable of regulating society more effectively and governing more extensively than before.¹¹³ The essential difference between Cavour's age and that of Giolitti was that by the twentieth century few liberals even cared.

Part II

State Welfare in the Age of the Masses

3

The Rise of Giolitti's 'Insurer State'

'Italy finds itself at the beginning of a new period in its political life. For the first time since the creation of the kingdom of Italy, public opinion is profoundly troubled, strong and audacious extremist parties have emerged, new social problems challenge us, the masses have entered into political life and parliamentary institutions have fallen into crisis. All this reveals the start of a new period of profound transformations.'

Giovanni Giolitti (from a speech to voters in Busca, 29 October 1899)

In Italy, the age of the masses began when formerly passive Sicilian peasants revolted in 1893–4 and newly organized workers rioted in Milan and other cities in 1898. Seizures of land by the landless, violent demonstrations for bread, arson attacks against tax offices and other symbols of misgovernment and oppression, strikes over high rents and low pay and the issuance of demands for proper contracts and fair treatment by agrarians and employers dramatically ushered in the new era. Pope Leo XIII heralded the dawn of the new age when in 1891 his encyclical, *De Rerum Novarum* (Of New Things), spoke in favour of improvements in workers' wages and welfare and the protection of child and female labour.¹ Launching a crusade against the evils of socialism, the Papacy pledged to fight for the rights of workers and Catholicism posed as the champion of the cause of Christian democracy. The Italian ruling class, however, did not heed the message that the poverty and misery of the masses under industrial capitalism should be alleviated by concessions. In the 1890s their attempts to combat 'subversion' by the suspension of civil liberties and the use of strong-arm tactics resulted in unnecessary bloodshed and violence. The brute authoritarian solutions to class conflict concocted by Crispi and Di Rudinì failed to prevent the rise of socialism. And they brought the liberal political order and its binding principles into disrepute.² During Italy's *fin di siècle* legitimization crisis, a new schism appeared within liberalism, as a growing number of 'progressives' broke free from the *ottocento* traditions of

the historic Right and Left. The supreme leader of this populist faction, Giovanni Giolitti disowned the outmoded politics of his predecessors. Believing that the interests and aspirations of the working classes could no longer be ignored or suppressed, Giolitti sought to steer the ship of state towards a safe 'third way' between reaction and revolution.³ The formation of Zanardelli's cabinet on 15 February 1901, which included Giolitti as interior minister, drew the era of state-organized repression to a definitive close and prepared the way for the ascendancy of this new liberalism.⁴

Giolitti himself best summed up the spirit of the 'new course' in his famous speech to the chamber on 4 February 1901. This address took the form of a polemic against the old liberalism. In it, Giolitti affirmed the right of workers to political organization and representation. He argued that liberals had to adopt a conciliatory approach towards moderate parliamentary socialists, who, in obstructing the extreme reactionary measures proposed by General Pelloux in 1898–1900, had defended the liberal constitution and state from the threat of dictatorship. He also urged his colleagues to embrace the principles of his variant of social liberalism. In the new epoch, he stated, politicians needed to 'persuade the popular classes, and persuade them with facts' that 'every legitimate interest of theirs will be protected by government'. 'A government which intervenes (in disputes between capital and labour) in order to keep wages low', he warned, commits a 'political error'. Bias towards their bosses turns the working classes into 'enemies of the state'. The state should remain neutral in class struggles because its 'impartiality' gives it the authority and the means to act as a 'pacifying force' in conflicts. Giolitti also promised that progressive social reforms would alleviate acute discontent amongst the masses and strengthen liberal parliamentary institutions.⁵ In effect, Giolitti articulated a new liberal theory of the modern capitalist state as an impartial, but not passive mediator of class relations. He made it very clear that he intended to pursue a Bismarckian policy aimed at binding workers and their leaders to the state in order to stabilize and conserve the political system.⁶

As Giolitti astutely realized, a programme to promote class collaboration seemed achievable. In 1897, the socialist congress of Bologna approved a resolution calling for a two-pronged attack on capitalism; the economic action of organizing strikes and disputes had to be accompanied by the political action of agitating for the passage of social legislation to defend labour. The party resolved that, from time to time, its members would design and endorse bills which expressed the collective will of workers and their representatives. Leaders of the reformist tendency within the party, Filippo Turati and Anna Kuliscioff argued in the pages of *Critica Sociale* that bourgeois democracy could lay the basis for socialist society.⁷ In January 1900, they wrote that 'the famous conquest of power will be the *final* act' of the 'daily work of revolution'; opening schools, improving the conditions of work, and securing better lives for the people had to be seen as

essential components of the class struggle. Responding to the charge that reformism was opportunistic and futile, Turati and Kuliscioff argued that socialism had to shun meaningless 'verbal revolutionism' in order to be effective. Because of the immaturity of the socialist movement, and its unpreparedness for power, social reform was a sensible short-term goal.⁸ By the Rome congress in September 1900, the *Partito Socialista Italiano* (PSI) had adopted both a 'revolutionary' maximum programme, which emphasized that the ultimate aim of the movement was the seizure of the bourgeois state by the proletariat, and an 'evolutionary' minimalist programme, which outlined the movement's commitment to the realization of immediate practical aims. At the top of the list of goals that were seen to be attainable within the existing capitalist order stood a whole set of such fundamental reforms as protective labour legislation and social security provision.⁹ Though it eventually provoked a split within the Italian Socialist Party, the adoption of a reformist platform made cooperation between parliamentary socialists and progressive liberals possible.¹⁰

The reformist principles of new liberalism found adherents on the socialist left; but they also provoked opposition from the liberal right. One of the fiercest critics of liberal progressivism, Sidney Sonnino questioned the purpose and logic of the new current in politics. On 16 September 1900, the Tuscan deputy published an article in *Nuova Antologia* that was pointedly entitled 'Quid agendum?' (What agenda?). In this piece, Sonnino stated that liberals should be fighting against, not allying with socialist and other extremists. In quick response to this challenge, Giolitti issued a 'Programme of the Liberal Government' on 21 September which outlined his aims in the 'new historical period'.¹¹ At a time when 'class struggle was at its most bitter' and the political order was crumbling, a 'period of social pacification and government activity' was needed to 'convince the nation's poorest classes of the utter seriousness and iron will of the state to improve social conditions'. There was no doubt in Giolitti's mind that Sonnino was right to warn that a moral and physical sickness afflicted Italy. But as far as Giolitti was concerned, the old political establishment rather than the new mass parties were the immediate cause of Italy's malaise and discontentment. Giolitti stated that impoverished Sicilian peasants who revolted in 1893 and 1894 showed their commitment to the 'collectivity' by invoking the name of the king in their protests. But the politicians in Rome continued to be deaf to calls for social justice. They imposed all sorts of taxes, like those on salt, grain, and petroleum, which unfairly burdened the poor. The rich had to prepare themselves to make some sacrifices so that the government would no longer need 'to mobilize the army every two or three years in order to maintain internal order by force'. Giolitti vowed to free Italy of the threat of both revolution and reaction. His political mission was to inaugurate a new era of 'solemn promises and grand reforms'. Despite his certainty about the urgent need for a pre-emptive reformist strategy, and

about its potential palliative effects on the social and political order, Giolitti was, as Sonnino sensed, somewhat at a loss when it came to defining the precise details of his agenda. Giolitti admitted that

because there are so many social injustices to remedy, and all of them are very grave, and because we can only scrape at the surface of them, due to spending excesses and the sad conditions of our budget, the only real question is where do we begin the process of reform.¹²

Over the course of his long reign as the 'boss' of Italian prewar politics, the stark realization that there was so much to be done would confound Giolitti on many an occasion.

According to many observers, the 'Giolittian Age' (1901–14) marked a new stage in the development of modern Italy as neo-liberal government embarked on a search for stability and the pursuit of change.¹³ Giolitti and the clique of 'Giolittians', who ruled Italy with few interruptions in the prewar period, seemed to be very responsive to the need for a different political direction.¹⁴ As increasing numbers of workers and peasants organized to defend their interests, domestic policy became more accommodating to the needs of the masses. Sustained economic growth and expansion from 1896 to 1908 increased the financial capabilities of the state enormously and made substantial social reform seem attainable.¹⁵ The rise of modern industry and a mass proletariat in the north of Italy motivated politicians to devise new types of protective legislation to secure political legitimacy and social peace. The nation's most progressive liberals appeared to be genuinely seeking ways to make the capitalist system more democratic and just. But what were the real achievements of *Giolittismo*?

Social security before Giolitti

Where to begin was, indeed, an appropriate question. At the turn of the century, social provision hardly existed at all in Italy. Compared to Bismarckian Germany, which introduced compulsory insurance for sickness, accident, maternity, disability and old-age (but not unemployment until 1927) in the years 1883 to 1889, as well as extensive legislation aimed at regulating the conditions of work within industry, Italy's record was poor. At a time when strong currents within the liberal zeitgeist opposed the idea of an enhanced governmental role in assistance, through the transfer of functions from the private to the public sector, Bismarck made the precocious development of a statutory social security system a peculiar feature of German modernity. While liberals offered self-help as the answer to Germany's social problems, and conservatives saw private charity as the only way forward, the chancellor pushed for a centralized, collectivized, and compulsory social insurance system that was organized and subsidized

by the state. To achieve his ends, Bismarck broke with the liberals in 1878 and used his new political leverage to great effect. He exploited the pre-existing traditions of employer paternalism and trade association corporatism, close ties between capitalists and the state, activist (and unfettered) government, protective labour legislation and efficient bureaucratic administration. On this solid foundation, he constructed a thoroughly modern social state that was responsive to the profound dislocations caused by rapid industrial growth and had no counterparts in Europe or America.¹⁶ Why was there no Italian Bismarck? Many of the advantages and impulses that influenced Bismarck's radical departure from traditional policy choices and his pioneering social legislation quite simply were absent in late nineteenth-century Italy.

In Imperial Germany, the rise of social democracy and the welfare state was more than a coincidence. Although his social security system owed little to direct working-class pressure, Bismarck sought to use it to counteract the influence of the labour movement and the social democratic party and to integrate workers in a national community under the patronage and control of the state.¹⁷ Tellingly, he never once disputed the claim by his critics that his social policies were revolutionary in content. He strongly believed that a bit of 'state socialism' was just what Germany needed.¹⁸ Compared to their German comrades, Italian workers enjoyed little real bargaining power with their employers and with the state. Because of the relative tardiness and slowness of industrialization, Italy's working class remained comparatively small, its labour movement fragmented, and its socialist party weak. With the exception of metal and print workers, Italy's proletariat had no associations which were comparable in size or strength to British or German trade unions, some of which acted as national pressure groups.¹⁹ The prolonged economic crisis at the end of the nineteenth century further undermined the organizational strength and political clout of Italian labour. The kingdom's chronically low-waged economy also precluded the development of a sense of social responsibility on the part of the Italian industrial bourgeoisie. With a plentiful supply of cheap labour at their disposal, Italian industrialists had no stake in welfare development at a national level and no compulsion to promote employer welfarism in their own factories. In nations as diverse as Germany, France, and America, variants of welfare capitalism arose as employers in certain companies or strategic industries pursued economic efficiency and productivity through paternalistic schemes aimed at eliminating trade union influence and rewarding privileged groups of 'loyal' workers. Although some of the most generous welfare capitalists opposed the idea of rival public schemes, others supported it because they wanted the state's financial assistance. Importantly too, their various initiatives from the 1840s to the 1880s, such as family allowances in France, compensation funds in America, and workers' pensions in Germany, provided governments with effective

models of modern management styles and gave them institutional precedents for new types of social policies affecting employment and the labour market.²⁰ The structure of the Italian economy inhibited the growth and spread of employer paternalism. The predominance of small and medium-sized firms within the Italian industrial landscape meant that the heavy concentrations of labour, employer organizational ties, large-scale plants, big business interests and financial resources that were essential prerequisites for welfare capitalism were mostly absent. Apart from some notable exceptions amongst the biggest employers in textiles, mining, printing and manufactures, Italian *padroni* were opponents of any kind of labour protection and impediments in the way of welfare state-building.²¹ Political and ideological factors also contributed to Italy's time-lag with Germany and its reluctance to embark upon a 'take-off' into new realms of state-directed social planning and regulation. Unable to choose policy options that would increase the financial and administrative burdens on the state, Italian liberal politicians in the late nineteenth century failed to make breakthroughs along Bismarckian lines.

Despite the existence of growing pressure from below and of some parliamentary support for reform, late nineteenth-century Italy made few inroads into the development of *legislazione previdenziale*. Not one of the reforms that were introduced, moreover, became part of a conscious government policy of political stabilization or national integration through welfare state-building. One of the earliest priorities of reformers was to compensate workers for lost earnings in the event of death or disability due to industrial accidents. Reform advocates built their case on the growing body of evidence which showed that the industrial system placed workers at very great risk of injury. The relentless pressure for speed, productivity, and efficiency, together with the inherent dangers of motorized machinery and equipment, took their toll in numerous casualties and fatalities. Government investigations revealed that in 1879–81, a total of around 2091 manual labourers died because of fatal injuries which they sustained at work. And in the 1880s about one third of all strikes involved some element of protest over unsafe working conditions and environments.²²

In 1879, Pietro Pericoli began a legislative process that was to last two decades when he unsuccessfully sponsored unified Italy's first bill on workers' compensation for industrial accidents. Domenico Berti, the minister of agriculture, industry, and commerce, and Giuseppe Zanardelli, the minister of justice, presented a similar project in 1881 that placed full responsibility for workers' injuries squarely on the shoulders of employers. Because of employer resistance and parliamentary obstinacy, a total of eleven different projects failed to become law between 1879 and 1896. Despite the fact that proponents stressed how social reforms of this nature might be able to 'distance' the working classes from 'subversive theories', liberal purists strongly rejected the suggestion that the state should inter-

vene in private industry. They feared that an acceptance of workers' rights to even a minimum of protection might hinder economic growth and diminish industrial profits. Antonio Salandra summed up conservative opinion of these reform efforts when, in 1881, he fulminated against the threat of an 'insurer state' and denounced the 'vulgarity' of left-leaning liberal politicians who professed to be 'defenders of the lowest classes' in order to enhance 'their popularity and careers'.²³

At the initiative of Luigi Luzzatti, one of the Right's keenest supporters of the idea of state intervention in civil society, an enactment in July 1883 instituted a voluntary scheme for occupational injuries insurance under the management of the *Cassa Nazionale di Assicurazione per gli Infortuni degli Operai sul Lavoro* (the National Insurance Fund for Workers' Occupational Injuries). This followed the German precedent of 1868, which was based on the Benthamite notion that workers and employers should insure themselves against the risk of injury or claims for compensation. The state's role was limited to providing the legal framework in which banks would guarantee the capital and manage the investments of participating mutual aid societies and employers' organizations. The overriding consideration was to offer individuals opportunities to protect their own welfare in a free market that was organized, but not regulated, by the 'invisible hand' of the state. Like their British and German counterparts, Italian liberals elevated self-help and self-interest to the highest virtues. And they favoured private insurance over publicly funded benefits. But they were particularly resistant to the idea that government involvement, however strictly limited, should be encouraged, even when individual initiative and industry proved inadequate and an incontrovertible need for state action existed. A project presented by Berti in November 1881 called for the state to establish a voluntary scheme for workers' old-age pensions. Berti rejected the idea of direct state involvement in the provision of pensions on the grounds that it would 'weaken individual energy and diminish the saving impulse of the most industrious workers'. Because the proposed national insurance fund required an initial investment of public money, however, the bill was never even discussed before it eventually fell with the closure of the legislature in April 1886. Five more bills on voluntary pensions followed Berti's in quick succession and none of these ever reached the discussion stage either.²⁴

On 11 February 1886, the Italian post-unitary parliament introduced its first major piece of labour legislation. With unification, all pre-existing protective laws (such as the 1859 Piedmontese mining act, which prohibited the employment of children under ten in pits) were nullified. The new reform of 1886 prohibited the employment of children under nine in factories, mines, and quarries employing more than ten workers; it limited the hours of work of children under twelve to eight hours a day; it restricted the permissible night-time working hours of children aged between twelve and fifteen to six hours; and it banned the employment of children under

fifteen in unsafe or unhealthy work. As in other industrializing countries, the terrible exploitation of child labour, particularly in mining, provided the impetus behind this reform. Luigi Luzzatti pressed parliament to pass legislation modelled on the English Factory Acts, but what he got was one of the most weak, defective, and timid child labour laws in all of nineteenth-century Europe. Successive legislation in Britain from 1844 to 1874 gradually ended the hegemony of free-market principles and extended strict controls over the employment of children. Eventually these measures became part of a broader commitment to keeping working-class children out of wage labour entirely and to providing them with a rudimentary education instead.²⁵ Similarly, France raised the legal age of employment to 12 years in 1874; and Switzerland increased it to 14 in 1877. But in Italy, an estimated 34.3 per cent of all children aged between 5 and 14 were enrolled in state-run schools in 1875; and by 1901, the percentage had risen to only 38.2.²⁶ In Italy, the importance of child labour to parents and employers contributed to a high level of employment amongst minors. The peculiar features of Italian industrialization made the survival of poor families and capitalist enterprise seem dependent upon children's presence in the labour force. Without strong government backing for a speedy introduction of educational and industrial reforms, large numbers of Italian children would continue to be used as cheap labour. The 1886 legislation showed that the political will to improve the position of child workers just was not present. Particularly heavily reliant on child labour, for example, agriculture, homework, shopkeeping and artisanal crafts remained outside the purview of the 1886 law. And, very significantly, employers in industry were allowed to get dispensation on 'technical' grounds. Even though it was quite modest in aims, and it still permitted employers to subject even young children to dangerous tasks and excessively long working days, the enactment had a very limited impact. In other countries, factory legislation was accompanied by the simultaneous creation of new forms of public regulatory controls and bureaucratic structures over industry. In Italy, by contrast, the factory inspectorate which came into existence in 1879 had so few personnel and resources that it was entirely unable to act as any kind of law enforcement agency. Long in the making, the 1886 reform quickly became the object of strong criticism by bourgeois reformers and labour leaders alike because of its many inadequacies and loopholes.²⁷

The exclusion of women workers from protection was a major weakness of the legislation. For much of the nineteenth century, women 'supplied the nascent forces of capitalism with a nearly inexhaustible supply of labour at low cost'.²⁸ According to a census published in 1878, women comprised 62.37 per cent of the kingdom's industrial workforce; the percentage must have been higher still though, since the investigation did not include domestic or small-scale manufacturing, both of which used female labour extensively.²⁹ National statistics from the period 1876 to 1885

showed that textile manufacture, and particularly silk production, was the single largest branch of industry, as well as the biggest employer of women and children of both sexes. But women also did 'men's work' too: they hauled huge slabs of slate and alabaster in Ligurian quarries; they worked both as carriers and as underground labourers in Sicilian sulphur mines; and they toiled as navvies, excavating earth and building roads and railways. Though it was overwhelmingly seasonal, badly paid and casual (like ironing, washing, and sewing), the work that rural and urban women did within and without the home was absolutely 'indispensable' to the survival of their families. So too was the labour of children integral to the family and national economy. Though the majority of working children were female, boys were also heavily employed in early factories and domestic occupations. According to contemporary sources, poor parents routinely put children as young as four to work at home and employers in industry thought nothing of hiring children as young as six to do even heavy and dangerous tasks. These realities made the 1886 legislation seem all that much more feeble.³⁰

Labour gained little from other social reforms too. In April 1886, the government decided to grant legal recognition to mutual aid societies, which provided their members with a range of insurance coverage in a number of key areas, such as sickness, accident, unemployment and maternity. The intent and effect of the new legislation was not to stimulate a growth in self-help through mutualism. Rather, by requiring that *società di mutuo soccorso* register with government authorities, and thereby open up their rule books to public scrutiny, the law aimed to ensure that they were fulfilling a purely provident function. These organizations were hardly instruments of proletarian resistance and solidarity, however. The working class, strictly defined as manual labourers in industry, did not comprise the bulk of the membership of benevolent associations. The upper and lower middle classes in trades, crafts, industry, farming, the professions and business were in a position to contribute regularly to funds, but most workers simply could not afford even a bare minimum of protection. And neither did peasants have the disposable income that was necessary to insure themselves against life's risks. In contrast to Britain, moreover, the number and membership of friendly societies remained very small in Italy throughout the liberal period. And, increasingly in the 1890s, as mutual aid societies became more and more bourgeois and moderate in political outlook, rural and urban workers turned to their own chambers of labour to provide the institutional means for social assistance and class solidarity.³¹

After twenty years of debate about this issue, parliament finally approved Italy's first scheme for compulsory social insurance. The law on occupational injuries that was passed in March 1898 and introduced in January 1899 was a much amended and watered-down version of the bill which inspired it. None the less, it established an important principle in public

law – the idea of a worker's right to be insured against employment-related risk – and it rendered the observance of that right obligatory on the part of the employer, who was held responsible for taking out insurance, either through the national fund or private companies, against the consequences of accidents at work. By making insurance (for an accepted occupational risk) rather than compensation (payable because of employer fault) the basis for protection, the enactment sought to strike a balance between the rights of workers and the responsibilities of employers. It freed the employer from the burden of liability for accidents and the threat of civil lawsuits. And it also freed the worker from the near impossible task of having to prove that employer negligence was the cause of personal injury. However, the law was severely limited in scope and impact. Though workers were exposed to numerous occupational illnesses or diseases, which rendered them incapacitated and unemployable, the measure covered industrial accidents alone.³²

And though risk, and hence entitlement, was determined on the basis of the extent of the use of mechanized or animal-driven machinery in any occupation, only workers in industry, mining, building and construction gained the right to recover a portion of lost earnings. Agricultural and home workers were excluded from any entitlement (and remained so until August 1917), even though machines were used extensively in these sectors too. Importantly, the compensation offered for all the various categories of death, permanent disability, and temporary total or partial invalidity was recognized from the start to be wholly inadequate. In the catastrophic event of death or permanent and total disability, for example, the worker or the dependent survivors could receive an indemnity equivalent to five years of wages, rather than the entire estimated sum of lost earnings. And in the case of temporary injury, the accident victim could claim an amount that was equal to only 50 per cent of daily wages and was payable from the sixth day of leave. More seriously, the act exercised no preventative function. As industry remained entirely unregulated, workers possessed no real protection from harm in the form of essential guarantees of safety at work. And, significantly too, legislators made no provision whatsoever for the effective implementation and enforcement of new norms. According to the law, employers were solely responsible for the payment of insurance premiums and the disbursement of benefits. Because of the weaknesses of the factory inspectorate system, however, the means did not exist to ensure that employers discharged their duties properly.³³

By the time neo-liberalism came to power, hardly any progress had been made in the field of pension reform, which remained just as contentious an issue as it had been in the 1850s. Proposals to introduce a statutory system of workers' pensions came to grief on the principle that compulsory employers' and employees' contributions would undermine the social ideal

of the freedom of saving. Friendly societies and hard-core liberals rejected the notion of compulsion on these grounds. The labour movement also initially opposed the introduction of compulsory social insurance by the state because leaders saw it as an encroachment on the autonomy of workers. They might have had different views had a state pension scheme financed solely through taxation been mooted, but the level of state involvement which this kind of massive social programme would have entailed was never considered a serious option. Even after socialist reformists came around to the idea of a compulsory system, many revolutionaries still clung to the belief that any form of state intervention or private initiative should be resisted because reform would divert the attention of the proletariat from the class struggle and would divide workers by creating a stratum of privileged *assicurati* with a stake in the capitalist system.³⁴ Despite the lack of agreement amongst different social groups, there was a growing parliamentary consensus that something should be done, if only to keep Italy in line with other nations. As far as the European-wide experience of social insurance legislation is concerned, liberal Italy was neither a late-comer, nor a precursor. But neither did it seem to have much inclination to join the ranks of the premier league of generous providers. Like others in Europe, the Italian government regularly reviewed the nature and progress of social legislation in different countries. Some liberals were sensitive to the implications of the growing social gap between Italy and other nations.

Thirty-nine years after Piedmont's voluntary old-age pension scheme was put on the statute books and then ignored, the Italian government decided to make Cavour's dream a reality. The watershed of sorts was finally reached in April 1898, when parliament approved a bill calling for the creation of the *Cassa Nazionale di Previdenza per la Vecchiaia e l'Invalidità degli Operai* (CNP; National Workers' Old-Age and Invalidity Insurance Fund). 'The nobility of this new law is incontestable,' one liberal supporter declared proudly to his colleagues in the chamber. 'Italy's first grand experiment in the field of social legislation' promised 'to produce beneficial effects of great import to the nation'. The law that was promulgated on 17 July 1898 (n. 350) did justice to 'the glory of Italy and of its creator, Count Cavour', the 'people's apostle' and the 'inspiration' behind the great reformist project on which the kingdom just momentarily embarked. The enactment was 'far superior' to the German legislation which preceded it, deputy Cottafava argued, because it founded a voluntary, rather than a 'coercive' system. However, he admitted that a 'young and poor nation like Italy' could not possibly introduce 'a perfect system' because of the 'inability to impose too heavily upon the state's finances'.³⁵

As Cottafava recognized, the guiding principle of the enactment was in keeping with liberal ideals in that the *cassa*, devised as a self-governing body under the ministry of agriculture, industry, and commerce, offered

private individuals and associations the opportunity to join its voluntary and contributory pension plan. However, the 1898 legislation did deviate from liberal precedents somewhat by requiring that the fund be subsidized by the state. Honouring its obligation, the government allocated an initial subsidy of 10 million *lire* to cover the cost of organization; and it promised to make annual contributions from income drawn from the surpluses of postal savings banks and other sources. Legislators intended the reform to have a big impact upon society. Membership in the fund was open to all workers, of either sex and even of minority age, so long as they were engaged in some kind of manual labour (in industry or agriculture), which was remunerated on either a daily-wage or a piece-rate basis. The work, however, had to be 'habitual', a requirement which automatically disqualified from entitlement the many thousands of women in casual and seasonal work. The annual individual contributions could range from a minimum of .50 to 100 *lire*, but savings had to total at least 6 *lire* annually for the state quota to be added. Each member's personal account could be closed on completion of at least 25 years of contributions, providing that the insured person had reached the minimum retirement age of 60 years. In the event of disability, the annuity could be drawn after five years from the date of registration. The board could also absorb the funds of mutual aid societies, workers' co-operatives, and other private associations which wanted to subscribe. Despite the promises of state backing and capitalization, the national fund proved to be unpopular. By 1900, only 8074 men and 2206 women in total had joined; and, as a result of poor management, excessive administrative costs and very low take-up, the pension fund went into deep financial crisis. The future of pensions depended very much on the ability of new liberalism to reform the system and to attract a mass following. To accomplish those tasks, liberals would have to go beyond the *ottocento* idea of self-help and the outmoded model of a benevolent state which encouraged providence and thrift by maximizing free market forces.³⁶

New liberalism and social reform

In the build-up to the 1906 general election, which brought his party to power on the back of a landslide victory, Lloyd George spoke of 'a new order coming from the people in this country ... a quiet, but certain, revolution'. In 1907, Winston Churchill, who had emigrated from the Conservative to the Liberal Party a few years earlier, revealed his thinking about social priorities to the editor of the *Westminster Review*: 'minimum standards of wages and comfort, insurance in some effective form or other against sickness, unemployment, old age – these are the questions and the only questions by which parties are going to live in future.'³⁷ Churchill's

pragmatism led him to believe that the German model demonstrated that the whole 'tendency of civilization' was moving 'towards the multiplication of the collective functions of society'.³⁸ Individual liberty could not guarantee individual welfare. Politicians had to grasp the reality that the old era of individualism was over and the new age of collectivism through state intervention and social legislation had begun. The Liberal Governments that ruled Britain from 1906 to 1915 may not have had a specific reformist agenda at first, but it did have a sense of purpose and an appreciation of the importance of social issues to the political order. During this period, many reforms that had seemed unattainable even a few years earlier became reality as a paradigmatic shift in politics occurred: measures concerning working conditions, non-contributory pensions, school meals, the abolition of the committal of minors to prison, labour exchanges, medical services for children, minimum wages for certain industries and the expansion of public housing successfully passed through parliament, despite the certainty that they would increase public finance commitments massively. Britain's own brand of new liberalism chose to finance improvements to the conditions of the working classes through an extension of the principle of progressive taxation. By taxing 'the wealthy few for the benefit of the penurious many', new liberals hoped to raise sufficient revenue for major social reforms. As Lloyd George explained, his 'People's Budget' of 1909, which provoked a constitutional crisis because of its radicalism, sought 'to wage implacable warfare against poverty and squalidness'.³⁹

Conceived in the years 1908–9, the liberal project for some kind of national insurance system fell far short of Lloyd George's expectations. But even Bismarck, who, with the crown's support, seemed indomitable, had had to make some compromises. Lloyd George steered his bill safely through the tide of vested interests, hostile public opinion, and political opposition that threatened its survival.⁴⁰ In 1911, the chancellor got a National Insurance Act covering health and unemployment which, just like Bismarck's very different grand scheme, had many faults and limitations.⁴¹ However 'gendered' and flawed their vision was, however, progressive liberals in Britain had a record of achievements which their counterparts in Italy could not match. They succeeded at introducing an impressive array of reforms. They devised innovative social policies that demanded an unprecedented level of state action and financial commitment. And, they launched an ambitious social experiment that aimed at bringing the 'most good' to the 'greatest number' of the labouring poor: British social legislation from this period had a far greater impact on the working class than did comparable reforms in Italy. Part II of the 1911 act, which founded 'the world's first compulsory state unemployment insurance programme', for example, dispensed only the most parsimonious and begrudging relief to the unemployed. By 1914, none the less, 2.3 million people, comprising

mostly male, skilled workers in strategic industries, were insured against unemployment.⁴² That is 2.3 million more than could draw any such benefit in Italy.

Under Giolitti's tutelage, prewar Italy never embarked upon a course of sweeping social reforms. His predecessors may not have produced a Bismarck, but neither could Giolitti claim to be a Lloyd George. Despite the growing intensity of public and political debate about the need for activist government and the succession of bills on various forms of social insurance which appeared before parliament, the period 1900 to 1914 saw little legislative progress. The reforms which were introduced, moreover, were fragmentary. In terms of the development of social policy, the Giolittian era was characterized by more continuity with the past than at first might seem apparent. With the notable exception of electoral reform, which was part of a conscious political strategy of national integration through increased democratization, new liberalism propounded no coherent *politica sociale* (social politics). Despite the relative longevity of neo-liberal rule, Giolitti's distinct brand of *trasformismo*, resting as it did on fairly stable but diffused and changeable coalitions, made the formulation of decisive policies a political impossibility. And his 'style of politics', rooted in factionalism, corruption, and electioneering, precluded the emergence of a reformist agenda serving the national interest.⁴³

With regard to pensions, for example, the changes that were introduced were timid and piecemeal. Successive reforms in July 1901, May 1903, and March 1907 tinkered with various aspects of the system, and introduced certain improvements, such as a reduction in the pensionable age of women to 55, but they left unmodified the substance of the 1898 legislation. In an effort to make insurance more popular with the working classes, legislators decided to admit workers' representatives from co-operatives and friendly societies to the governing board of the *cassa*, which had hitherto comprised mainly bankers and insurers.⁴⁴ Attempts at creating a mass base of self-insured workers did not succeed, however. The modifications introduced in 1903, for example, aimed to encourage employers to establish company-based pension schemes for their workers, but only a handful of the big bosses actually did so. In the era before collective bargaining (1910–20), few manual workers had the means to secure contractual rights or better conditions.

If 'coverage' is any index of the success of Italy's choice of voluntary provision, then the national insurance fund performed badly. While only an estimated 1 per cent of the Italian labour force belonged to the *cassa nazionale* in 1905, 51 per cent of the German workforce was covered by compulsory pension insurance that year. Compared to the 8 million German workers with pensions in 1908, a mere 250 000 Italian workers had them. Twenty years after its creation in 1898, Italy's national pension fund had 659 700 subscribers, 20,800 pensioners, and investments worth 465

million *lire*. But only a negligible part of the working classes had joined the scheme; and with a potential pool of subscribers numbering over 9 million people (with 2.5 million of these comprising industrial workers), the fund was doing badly. The size of the pension on offer hardly gave workers any incentive to join. And the extent of poverty amongst the labouring poor acted as the most powerful argument against the voluntary insurance principle. Historians have estimated that more than half of all adult female workers in Italy at the turn of the century received wages that were far below individual subsistence. Wage differentials between men and women were huge in all occupations; for example, the available data suggest that female factory workers aged 15 and over earned about 43 per cent of men's pay. And even women white-collar workers, who tended to be far better off than their blue-collar sisters in other countries, earned very little more than manual workers in Italy. The majority of the Italian male labour force in industry earned enough to support themselves, but not to keep a family (defined as the 'typical' working-class family of two parents and three children under 15).⁴⁵

In parliamentary discussions about reforming the system, liberals were reluctant to acknowledge that widespread poverty might explain why so few waged workers embraced the bourgeois ideal of prudence and thrift. But even Luigi Luzzatti, one of the staunchest supporters of the idea of self-help on liberal principle, eventually came to believe that the system was failing miserably to provide even a bare minimum of protection to a significant proportion of workers. At the Eighth International Congress on Social Security, held in Rome in 1908, he lamented the fact that Italy seemed to lack 'the economic, moral, and politico-legislative prerequisites ... which are indispensable to the creation of German-style social programmes'. Voluntarism, Luzzatti charged, was a symptom of a state and society devoid of any sense of social justice. The government had to take a more active interest because most workers did not have sufficient income to subsist at a decent level, let alone save money for the future. The subsidies offered by workers' mutual aid societies were too small to be of much use in times of need. So the only option available to families in distress was legal charity. Luzzatti also called into question the whole purpose of the liberal insurance project when he alluded to the fact that many of the members of the workers' national insurance fund were not working-class at all: salaried functionaries and employees, he charged, comprised the bulk of the nation's insured population.⁴⁶

Giolitti and the *giolittiani* had their reservations about the nation's ability to sustain even a voluntary insurance programme in the future. Making the meagre earnings of 'manual workers' the backbone of a insurance system seemed financially unviable. As an arch fiscal conservative on social policy issues, however, Giolitti was unprepared to contemplate a massive increase in public commitments or an extension of the compulsory principle into

new types of state intervention. When in January 1903 Conti presented a bill which proposed that the law on compulsory insurance against accidents be extended to agricultural workers, Giolitti opposed it on financial grounds. Agriculture, he argued, could not possibly support such a burden. Giolitti also feared that he would lose his bloc of support in the south, if he endorsed a plan that landowners disliked intensely. Not motivated by the same concerns for 'national efficiency' as prevailed in prewar Britain, Italian new liberals chose to privilege only certain categories of workers rather than implement the kind of comprehensive programmes that their British counterparts perceived to be in the nation's best interest.⁴⁷ For example, the permanent staff employed by private railway companies which ran lines under government contract were granted statutory disablement and old-age insurance in 1906. The compulsory scheme extended to inter-communal tramway workers in 1907 and naval shipyard workers in 1910. And, as Luzzatti alleged, white-collar workers and salaried employees did gain more from state-run social insurance than waged workers did. In the years 1904–10, government began to extend benefits to its own 'dependents'. Select groups of salaried employees in the public sector (such as watchmen in hydraulic works (1904), staff in the state salt works (1905), forestry workers (1912), and lower ranking-personnel in central government administration (1912) were gradually given the contractual right of automatic and compulsory membership in the national insurance programme.⁴⁸ Social policy under new liberalism was beginning to show a marked tendency towards clientelism and favouritism.

It was not becoming more expansive and generous, however, since, in many cases, organized pressure from the workers themselves forced the 'benevolent state' to make concessions to its own employees. In 1904, the predominantly female workers within the publicly owned tobacco industry finally won a long struggle, which had lasted over twenty years, to obtain statutory pension rights from a state which earned over 50 million *lire* annually from its monopoly. Organized in a national labour federation, Italy's *tabaccaie* finally got a *cassa-pensioni* which, like those funds which were already in existence for the military, civil service, and other male-dominated categories of public employment, entitled them to a pension after twenty-five years of service. Despite their demands for fair and equal treatment, however, the women tobacco workers who had organized the pension campaign were treated badly; those who were in post before October 1899 qualified for a minimum monthly pension of 35 *lire*, while their male counterparts qualified for one worth a minimum of 70 *lire* a month. The 'male breadwinner model' was not confined to Britain.⁴⁹

Bourgeois reformism under new liberalism had very strict limits. A revolt by conservative liberals against the socialistic tendencies within 'the party' led to the fall of Zanardelli in 1903. Giolitti took the helm, but he had a difficult balancing act ahead of him as the centrifugal forces of conser-

vatism and progressivism, clericalism and socialism, and radicalism and republicanism all threatened to pull his regime off course. Too preoccupied with winning elections and maintaining majorities, Giolitti often lost sight of the need to advance his reformist programme.⁵⁰ Parliamentary socialists experienced their own trials as the revolutionary intransigents won a major ideological victory at the regional congress in Brescia in 1904. The whole Giolittian enterprise was predicated on the belief that proletarian revolution could be averted by reform from above. But the syndicalist offensive, which had its apogee in the general strike of 1904, called the logic of new liberalism into question. As strike activity intensified in subsequent years, and the government turned a deaf ear to their calls for a return of the politics of repression, agrarians and industrialists lost their fragile commitment to neo-liberalism's conciliatory policy. These realities acted as constraints upon the Giolittian social experiment. The economic crisis of 1907–9 brought the problem of unemployment to the fore, but, in the face of growing opposition, the government proved unable to take any remedial action. Very few benevolent societies, labour leagues, or craft organizations provided any kind of unemployment insurance for members, so workers were almost wholly without any kind of protection. Giolitti gave his lukewarm support to a very modest bill presented by Luzzatti in 1910, which called for the state to make a small contribution to help provident societies and private companies establish unemployment relief funds for workers. Though the chamber approved the project (168 for, 106 against), the senate roundly defeated it on the grounds that any state involvement in such a scheme would create a 'financially and socially dangerous precedent'. The proletariat would come to expect the state to do what individuals should be doing for themselves.⁵¹

The socialists were partly responsible for the halting pace of reform. The doctrinal and tactical struggles of those years consumed the energies of leaders, impoverished the socialist programme, and diminished the effectiveness of the party.⁵² Just as neo-liberalism lacked a coherent agenda, so too the PSI had no strong social vision. Social legislation confused and divided socialists. Their commitment to Marxism made them feel more ideologically comfortable with issues pertaining to the hours and conditions of work. And those basic and fundamental shop-floor matters caused less dissent and division than social legislation did. While maximalists openly despised the idea of social reform, the reformists never really resolved their own ambivalence towards it. Reformists were painfully aware of the fact that the advancement of social reform necessitated collaboration with bourgeois democracy and threatened to dilute the class struggle. The 'tragedy' of German social democracy brought the dangers of reformism home to them. They feared that, as in Germany, organized social insurance would subordinate workers to the state and give them a vested interest in the perpetuation of the capitalist system. In the early years of Giolitti's rule, no parliamentary

socialist ever made a programmatic appeal for social insurance. The reformists were tepid about accident insurance for agricultural workers and uncertain about pensions and unemployment insurance. They regained control of party doctrine at the Florence congress of 1908. But only in 1913 did Angiolo Cabrini mount a spirited parliamentary campaign for the adoption of a German-style compulsory social insurance scheme against accidents, sickness, maternity, disability and old age-age that would be funded by the mechanism of the triple contribution by workers, employers, and the state.⁵³ By then, however, it was too late. Giolitti's regime was disintegrating and Italy's mini-economic miracle was over.

The 'protection' of women and children

Extensive social insurance coverage and effective factory legislation were the cornerstones of Imperial Germany's welfare state. In 1878, the government granted the reformed Factory Inspectorate new powers to enforce observance of its protective laws and industrial norms. The labour of women and children played a critical role in the drive to perfect the instruments of state intervention. After all, 'protective' legislation aimed at controlling the hours and conditions of female and child labour could be used to reinforce the primacy of the male provider, weaken women's ties to the labour market, secure educated children for the future and safeguard working-class family life. No outcry accompanied the decision by the *Bundesrat* (Federal Council) in 1894 to give self-employed women in home-weaving the entitlement to disability and old-age pensions. By then the idea that the state should endeavour to regulate society and construct a corporate order had become a cherished social ideal.⁵⁴ The neo-liberal capitalist state in Italy did not assume anywhere near the same kinds of broad but deep regulatory powers and functions.

In France, protective labour legislation was designed to ensure that female workers did not attempt to combine wage work with childbearing to the detriment of the firm, their families, and the nation. The impulse for this came from the fact that France had one of the highest rates of female employment in all of Europe in the period 1870–1914 and one of the lowest birthrates around from the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁵⁵ But, in Italy, the state had no incentive to intervene actively in industrial social relations. A number of factors explain why this was so: the comparatively low level of women's economic activity; the peculiarity of the prevalence of women's casual and seasonal work (for example, with such a major employer of women, such as silk production, providing only 3–4 months of work per year); the dominant pattern of interrupted working lives (with the marked tendency for women to leave regular paid work upon marriage, to absent themselves from regular employment during periods of childbear-

ing, and to experience long bouts in the 'unofficial' labour market, which revolved around a multitude of domestic employments); the diminishing level of female participation in the 'official' workforce and the rising rate of female underemployment (the percentage of economically active women out of the total female population fell from 32.5 in 1901 to 29.1 in 1911 and 27.2 in 1921; and the percentage of women in the industrial and agricultural workforces also declined from the 1880s); the high degree of sex segregation in Italian industry, with some sectors, such as textiles, being almost completely 'feminized' (79.45 per cent of the labour force in textiles was female in 1901); the 'ghettoization' of women and children in the most easily exploitable and the lowest-paid occupations; the pronounced social inferiority of women in general and, consequently, the relatively high degree of tolerance towards sexual discrimination at the workplace and elsewhere; and the continuing priority of family responsibilities over work commitments in women's lives.

All these characteristics gave the impression to those in power that the Italian economy was already regulating itself 'naturally' to the benefit of employers and the male 'breadwinner'. They also account for the fact that Italian labour organizations, unlike many of their counterparts in the United States, Germany, France and Britain, made no concerted attempt to introduce restrictive practices to remove women from employment: given the structure of the economy, they simply had to reason to see women as a threat to the security of their jobs and pay. Indeed, it was not until the First World War, when unprecedentedly high numbers of females penetrated the male preserves of public employment, which was undergoing expansion, and heavy industry, which needed them to 'stand-in' for male conscripts, that loud complaints about the menace of women's work were first heard.⁵⁶ There was widespread recognition amongst liberal politicians of the critical importance of cheap female and child labour to the profitability and competitiveness of Italian industry. So when factory acts came, as they did rather belatedly, to Italy, they were very substantively weak and purposively geared to the needs of employers. Furthermore, parliament begrudgingly conceded these pieces of legislation because of socialist pressure.⁵⁷ And, the government did not try very hard at all to enforce the reforms which it introduced under duress. So, though legislators justified their measures by referring to the need to protect the procreative capacity of women workers and to safeguard the health of future generations, these pronouncements were little more than rhetorical flourishes: in the legislative process, economic imperatives actually took precedence over 'racial' objectives.

Presented to parliament five times before it was even discussed, a project on 'women's work and the protection of maternity' was finally passed on 19 June 1902 after considerable modifications were imposed. The law that came into effect on 1 July 1903 contained some provisions covering child labour: it extended the legal working age from 9 to 12 (but not to 15, as the

socialists had wanted), but gave the government the right to decide which 'dangerous and unhealthy' occupations 12- to 15-year-olds would be permitted to do. The law also banned the employment of women of any age in mining; it limited the maximum number of working hours for women to 12 per day; but it prohibited the employment of only female minors in night-time work.⁵⁸ The law also made an unpaid maternity leave of four weeks after the birth compulsory for female industrial workers. The socialists had tried unsuccessfully to attract cross-party support for their proposal that all women workers in commerce, industry, and agriculture be given a mandatory maternity leave of six weeks before and six weeks after the birth and a subsidy for lost earnings amounting to seventy-five per cent of their pay.⁵⁹ The PSI presented a strong case that women should not be forced to abstain from work, and hence be denied the means of subsistence, without any financial recompense. Employer associations, however, fiercely resisted the idea that they should bear the cost of pregnancy, which, as far as they were concerned, was a matter of personal choice that had nothing to do with the workplace. Industrialists would not finance any scheme unless the state contributed too, so the decision about maternity pay was deferred indefinitely.⁶⁰ Many of the modest provisions of this legislation were not even implemented. In 1903, the *Consiglio Superiore dell'Industria e Commercio* (the Superior Council for Industry and Commerce), under pressure from industrialists, approved guidelines which limited the sphere of action of the law. And, after the promulgation of the legislation, a vigorous debate ensued amongst jurists about which occupations and enterprises were actually covered by the act; they realized that greater clarity was needed before the enactment could be implemented effectively.⁶¹

Parliament partially extended the provisions of the 1902 enactment on 10 November 1907, when a new law banned the night-time work of women of any age. To gain employment, women and children were required to obtain from municipal health authorities medical documentation proving that they were fit to work. The maximum permissible hours of work for women and children was reduced from 12 to 9 per day; and a weekly day of rest, officially designated for 'family and domestic pursuits', was made mandatory. For the first time, provision was also made for a significant category of female agricultural employment; rice workers were legally obliged to abstain from work from their eighth month of pregnancy until one month after the birth. Only in principle, however, did this legislation extend the legal protection provided by the 1886 and 1902 acts. Under pressure from employers, law-makers decided to defer for two years the application date of the law. More importantly, this protective legislation, like the others which preceded it, was almost entirely unenforceable. New standards of employment practice had no chance of being realized because the measure did not lay down specific punishments or fines for

employers who violated the law. And government lacked the political will to force compliance with its own guidelines.⁶²

The government's own investigations revealed that in 1907 textiles had the longest working day of any industry: the vast majority of the mainly female workforce in silk production and cotton manufacture, for example, worked for at least 11 hours per day and often for far longer. By contrast, an average 10-hour day was standard in male-dominated industries, such as mining, metals, and construction. And the predominantly male machinists in printing, who were amongst the best paid of all workers, also enjoyed the shortest working day, which averaged 9 hours (in 1900).⁶³ The 1902 and 1907 acts would do little to improve the conditions of exploited labour. In comparison with even the first Factory Acts in Britain, the impact of the Italian laws was very slight. Government frequently granted employers, particularly those in textiles, legal exemptions from the ban on women's night-time work. Child rather than female labour was employed extensively in the mines, so the ban on women's employment in dangerous jobs, including work at the pits, offered little protection to those who needed it the most. Though officially 'illegal', long working-days would continue to remain the norm in the textile industry for the foreseeable future, as would night-time work, especially for cotton-spinners; the employment of children below the legal age in even very dangerous and unhealthy occupations, such as machine repairs and pit mining, had yet to be abolished as a common practice. Significantly too, protective legislation was suspended for the duration of the war and only re-introduced in 1923, so this generation of workers at least did not experience any positive change in their working patterns.⁶⁴

Not until 17 July 1910 was the principle of paid maternity leave established in a law, which came into effect on 6 April 1912. The foundation of a *Cassa Nazionale di Maternità* (National Maternity Fund), under the management of the CNP, brought entitlement to a paid leave to married and unmarried women between the ages of 15 and 50 who worked as wage labour in establishments covered by the 1902 legislation. Factory workers in seasonal industries, like textiles, and private and public employees on a salary below the maximum allowed were also included, while agricultural workers, home workers, and those working in small establishments remained excluded. Contributory in nature, the scheme required that workers and employers each pay half of the annual subscription rate of one *lira*, for workers aged 15 fifteen and 20, and two *lire*, for those over 20. Under penalty of a fine, employers were required to deduct the workers' contributions from their wages and to pay this amount, plus their share, into the *cassa*. The law's defects were very apparent from the start. The exclusion of significant categories of female employment, amidst protests from women's labour organizations, underscored just how selective

working-class gains were in the prewar period. More seriously still, law-makers responded to pressure from employers, whose prime interest was to keep profit margins high and labour costs low. Rather than provide an allowance as a portion of wages lost, the law stipulated that workers be given a flat-rate subsidy of 40 *lire* in the event of childbirth and miscarriage after the third month of pregnancy. The amount of compensation, then, bore no relation to the age, the salary, or the need of the worker. Neither did it come close to covering the full cost of pregnancy and childbirth. Furthermore, once a woman left work for whatever reason, she lost all rights to the subsidy and received no recompense for past contributions. This was the aspect that most annoyed women's groups, who, like their counterparts in Britain, unsuccessfully lobbied for the introduction of a state benefit to be given to all mothers whether they worked or not.⁶⁵

Given the inadequacy of the subsidy as an income support, it is hardly surprising that some women workers resisted the scheme. One of the main problems with the legislation was that employers, sometimes in agreement with their workers, flouted the law. Younger and older women workers resented having to pay dues when pregnancy seemed a remote possibility.⁶⁶ But the simple fact that a compulsory maternity leave of only one month meant a loss of earnings that few working women and their families could comfortably sustain provided a real economic incentive to return to work immediately after childbirth. That the allowance was payable in two instalments, with a portion given during the first week of absence and the remainder at the end of the obligatory 'rest period', increased the chances of delays in payment at a time when women most needed financial resources. Just as importantly, the job insecurity that was such a chronic feature of women's work, outside the state industries, made a levy on wages appear all the more unfair to women who, in all probability, would be fired when they began to show signs of pregnancy. Italian labour law provided absolutely no protection to those women who were dismissed by employers because of pregnancy. Neither was there any guarantee in this legislation or any other that employers would be forced to keep jobs open for women returning from leave. Since workers gained little from this reform, and employers were keen to avoid having to contribute to the fund, it is hardly surprising that implementation of the law proved to be such a difficulty. Annarita Buttafuoca estimates, for example, that of the '1 397 607 women potentially covered by this insurance scheme only 476 722 were registered with the National Fund' by the First World War.⁶⁷

Employers and workers, however, were not the only ones to blame for this failure. The state had done little to ensure observance of its labour laws. In 1894, 1895, 1898, 1899, 1900, 1901 and 1904, bills calling for an expansion and reorganization of the Factory Inspectorate appeared before parliament, but these failed to get approval. In 1904, the government pub-

lished an inquest on the effects of protective legislation within the workplace. The findings of the report showed that while employers had begun to observe guidelines on industrial accident insurance, they continued to resist regulations on child and female labour. In 1905, a major government study of the female industrial workforce revealed the extent of exploitation of women workers, particularly in small firms, which predominated in textile production. And in 1908, another official investigation highlighted the terrible working conditions of women industrial workers. Part of the reason for the scarce impact of social legislation was that employers did not wish to bear the financial cost of improvements. The leadership of *Confindustria* (the General Confederation of Italian Industry, founded in 1910) told the government that unless the state contributed more, members would continue to obstruct factory reforms. And in 1908, the General Confederation of Labour (created in 1906) expressed the opinion that the state would have to introduce comprehensive and compulsory social insurance, based on the tripartite contributory system (employers, workers, state), in order to secure for all workers 'a more decent and humane level of protection'. But even where there already was compulsion, such as in the areas of maternity leave, the government had not guaranteed employer compliance. Despite repeated revelations about the failure of the liberal regime of industrial self-regulation, parliament did not give the go-ahead for a new Inspectorate of Labour until December 1912. But even after 1912, few of the deficiencies of the old system disappeared.⁶⁸ Above all else, the factory inspectorate continued to function primarily as an investigative body deprived of any power to sway recalcitrant industrialists. The single most important defect of the whole old and new liberal conception of social protection remained in place after the 1912 reform: the utter lack of recognition of the need for law enforcement.

The state monopoly over life insurance

During his last prewar ministry from 1911 to 1914, Giolitti's programme rested on a 'liberal-labour' platform; the issues of electoral reform and the state monopoly over life insurance dominated debate about internal politics. Francesco Nitti, who served as minister of agriculture, industry, and commerce, presented a bill to the chamber on 3 June 1911 which outlined the government's plans to establish a national life insurance company, the *Istituto Nazionale delle Assicurazioni* (the INA or National Assurance Institute); that same month, the government's suffrage reform bill also went before parliament. While the domestic agenda aimed to satisfy socialists, foreign policy sought to appeal to nationalists. The declaration of war on Turkey in September 1911, followed by the abolition of Turkish rule in Libya and the conquest of a north African 'empire' in the next two months

were audacious actions that appeared somewhat out of character for Giolitti. But the prime minister explained that his external and internal policies served a single integrative purpose: their object was to achieve class and national unity. 'Democratic politics', he affirmed, 'do not have to be weak and impotent'. On the contrary, 'governments which know how to represent the interests of all social classes are also the best custodians of the grand interests of their nations'. His foreign policy brought the whole of the 'people' together in a common struggle to defend the '*patria*'. And by extending 'the rights of the proletariat', his social policies also benefited 'the ruling class' by securing the necessary conditions for sustained 'social peace'.⁶⁹ Neo-liberalism's great triumph, the introduction of almost universal manhood suffrage in June 1912, completed the transformation of Italy into a mass, but not fully democratic society, as women were still denied voting rights.⁷⁰ While his project on electoral reform passed quickly through parliament and gained majority support in both chambers, Giolitti's plans for a nationalization of life insurance aroused much hostility.

The parliamentary political contest began on 24 June and lasted until 8 July 1911. The project for a state monopoly provoked fierce criticism from conservative liberals, who organized a very public campaign to discredit both it and Giolitti. Head of the opposition, Antonio Salandra represented the interests of the insurers and bankers who felt threatened by the state's take-over bid. In the heated parliamentary debates about the matter, Salandra took the opportunity to call into question the entire Giolittian experiment in consensus-building through what he called 'odious state interventionism and paternalism'. Mustering all the eloquence which he possessed, Salandra accused the prime minister and his faithful of advocating policies which were fundamentally 'illiberal' in nature. All 'disciples of Cavour and Mazzini', he exhorted, should embrace the 'cult of liberty' as the 'political religion of the new Italy'. What Giolitti proposed patently violated the sacred liberal creed of individual freedom and the minimal state. He charged that Giolitti envisaged nothing less than the creation of a 'monstrous state entity', resting atop an excessive bureaucracy, which would suffocate all private initiative and enterprise. The public appropriation of the life insurance industry, Salandra argued, would make government even more 'oppressive' than it was already; it would also produce an intolerable form of 'state capitalism'.⁷¹

In an equally powerful speech to the chamber, which was perhaps one of the clearest statements on record of his social thinking, Giolitti condemned his critics for using divisive tactics which undermined the integrity of the liberal 'party'. He referred to the opposition's use of the press to foment anti-government sentiment. Addressing Salandra directly, he also said: 'We are all liberals here, even though we mean different things by the term liberalism.' Giolitti maintained that his opponents were wrong to allege that

the idea of public ownership and administration transgressed liberal principles; he reminded them that the state already had a monopoly over other economic activities, like tobacco production and the postal service. Moreover, even liberal states had to protect the collectivity, he affirmed. Italy had not yet begun to solve many of its seemingly 'infinite' social problems; nor had parliamentarians grasped the enormity of the long-term problem of the development of state-funded welfare programmes. The national interest was at stake in this debate, he stressed: the passage of the bill would secure the financial future of the state and consolidate its emerging social security system. By providing individuals with a guarantee of the safety of their investment, the proposed INA would encourage many more people to buy life insurance. The institute could be the makings of a practical and effective redistributive system whereby the premiums of the better-off would help pay for the provision of pensions for the poor. Giolitti spoke enthusiastically about his plans to transfer all proceeds from the state company to the old-age and invalidity fund.⁷²

Despite the potential feasibility of the government's project, Giolitti succeeded only in obtaining the approval of a few of the bill's articles before the end of the legislative session that summer. Because of the Libyan war, parliament did not resume discussions until February 1912. By then, the liberal opposition, which gravitated around Sonnino, had gathered enough support to push successfully for a compromise solution. They were assisted in their efforts by the fact that at least a dozen deputies, a handful of ex-deputies, and scores of senators opposed the government's plans because they sat on the boards of major insurance companies and had a vested interest in preventing nationalization. In March, an overwhelming majority of 266 (79 against and 1 abstention) out of 345 deputies finally approved a modified version of the bill. After it passed successfully through the senate, the new law that came into effect in 1913 resulted in the creation of the INA, but not in the achievement of a state monopoly.⁷³ Parliament had made a big concession to private insurance companies by stipulating that they be allowed to continue operating, alongside the public agency, for ten years; after that probationary period, their performance would come under review. The defeat of the original project was a personal one for Giolitti; and it contributed to the dissolution of his regime by exposing his inability to command a stable and broad majority.⁷⁴ But it also had wider implications. The measures that were eventually adopted precluded the consolidation of the financing of pensions. It is impossible to fathom what Giolitti would have done, had his scheme been approved. When it came to issues pertaining to social reform, his true level of commitment should always be questioned. But, one thing was certain. The current and future solvency of state-run insurance schemes remained very much in jeopardy.

Winners and losers under new liberalism

How did the working class fare under new liberalism? In some respects, not as well as might be expected. In Italy, admittedly, fiscal constraints on welfare development remained very pronounced, even during the Giolittian age; the nation's relative poverty, however, was not an insurmountable obstacle to an expansion in social provision. Economic and social indicators, though linked, are not always so in a direct and causal way. After all, Britain experienced its first 'big spurt' in welfare-state building under new liberals at a time when the economy's rate of growth started to decline dramatically. But British liberal reformers made very different political choices from their Italian counterparts. Much-needed tax reform may have generated more income for the kinds of British-style redistributive policies that superficially captured Giolitti's interest. But Italian neo-liberalism chose not to introduce a more equitable system of progressive taxation to help finance social betterment.⁷⁵ And the successive administrations which professed repeatedly that Italy was too poor to be generous to its people did enjoy over a decade of budget surpluses in the years 1898–9 to 1908–9 and lower interest payments on the national debt after 1906.⁷⁶ Italy also experienced a prolonged period of economic growth and prosperity during this period, as industrial production increased by 87 per cent between 1901 and 1913 (thereby surpassing the European average of 57 per cent) and the volume of foreign trade rose by 118 per cent between 1900 and 1914 (outstripping Germany's growth rate of 98 per cent).⁷⁷ Government grew bigger too, as public administration multiplied its functions and increased its personnel.⁷⁸ In Britain and Germany, the development of welfare was closely linked with bureaucratic expansion and differentiation, but this was not the case in Giolittian Italy, since most of the new forms of government activity in 1900–15 extended the state's role in economic, rather than social management.

The years 1900–10 were a missed opportunity, and perhaps a missed revolution, for Italian new liberals, given the auspicious, but temporary economic circumstances in which they found themselves. Under their leadership, the boundaries of the social state remained very narrow. Despite the salubrious state of public finances and the national economy, social expenditure increased only very slightly in the prewar period. In the years 1913–14, for example, social assistance accounted for only 1.12 per cent of the budget, while defence consumed 36.43 per cent of it. In relation to European averages of social spending as a percentage of GNP (Gross National Product), Italy under Giolitti failed to achieve levels that other nations, such as Germany, Britain, and France, had already reached or gone well beyond in the nineteenth century.⁷⁹ At the end of the Giolittian age, the kingdom still had a lot of catching up to do before it could hope to join the league of big spenders. The dramatic increases in public welfare funding that began to close the

'social gap' between Italy and other major Western European countries did not occur until the 1930s. A regime ostensibly devoted to welfare spent a staggering amount of money on warfare. Financed largely through government borrowing, the Libyan campaign, which cost 1.015 billion *lire* between 1911 and 1914, played a major role in undermining the financial bases of Giolittian Italy, as it heralded the return of the kind of huge budget deficits that had not been seen since the 1860s.⁸⁰

In the period 1900–15, some definite progress was made towards elevating living standards, but the working class as a whole did not experience material gains equally. Those who enjoyed marked, if not lasting, economic advantages from the Giolittian system were the male workers who participated in northern Italy's 'second industrial revolution'. The men who joined the ranks of skilled, waged labourers in iron and steel production, electrical engineering, automotives and chemicals benefited the most in the prewar period. But the increases in real wages that the new urban proletariat enjoyed lasted only until inflation cancelled them out during the First World War. The salary rises of the prewar era also appear slight, given the phenomenal rate of economic growth after 1896. Moreover, they were not substantial enough across the board to change the nature of the peculiarly 'Italian style of capitalism';⁸¹ the economy under Giolitti still rested on low wages and consumption for many. And, in comparative terms, the Italian working class was still amongst the most poorly paid and least insured of all in Western Europe. Under Giolitti, private charity rather than public welfare continued to provide a worker's best protection against illness, old age, and unemployment. Italy's new urban proletariat in the northern industrial triangle was fully integrated into the political nation by electoral reform, but only partially incorporated into the social citizenry by the investment of statutory insurance rights.

As new industries grew in national importance, traditional ones, like textiles, lost their pre-eminent position in the economy. The female industrial labour force began to contract and to get noticeably younger in age composition. In this context, social insurance programmes (like maternity benefit) which were based solely upon labour market participation lost their relevance, as older, married women found themselves being increasingly 'squeezed out' of regular employment.⁸² The peasantry too did not have a large share in those few conspicuous improvements that were made during the Giolittian era. The state gave them almost nothing by way of social policy; and they had to struggle to secure those collective wage contracts that really could make a big difference to the quality of their lives. And, in the south, mass emigration from the 1880s played a greater role in balancing the precarious subsistence economy than did any form of government action.

The legislative achievements of this period were very limited, especially given the regime's professed commitment to social betterment through government action. On the eve of Italy's entry into the First World War,

the only forms of compulsory protection were accident and maternity insurance and both of these had a very limited impact. Insurance coverage against injuries, for example, saw little expansion during this period: it grew from about 5 per cent of the labour force in 1900 to about 11 per cent in 1915. The limited effectiveness of even such modest reforms as voluntary pensions further undermined the integrity and impact of the entire Giolittian experiment in a new style of social politics. In their current form, voluntary pensions were proving to be a bit of a political embarrassment as the coverage rate increased from a mere 1 per cent of the labour force in 1905 to only 2 per cent in 1915, a year when 57 per cent of German workers belonged to the state's compulsory pension scheme.⁸³ Even France, which, like Italy, was somewhat reluctant to introduce big, costly programmes on the German or British model, decided in 1910 to make its system of voluntary pensions compulsory for all agricultural and industrial workers. Anything less than an obligatory system just seemed outdated and iniquitous. It mattered little to French politicians in the 'Radical Republic' that the majority of workers resisted the idea of state pensions (because they already benefited from their own company schemes) and the system quickly proved to be entirely dysfunctional.⁸⁴ What concerned them more was that they had sanctified the principle of compulsion in public law, had strengthened the authority of the state over the private sector – and were *seen* to be doing so by their European rivals. For, at the end of the nineteenth century, European nations began to compete with each other socially, just as they were economically, politically, and militarily, as the extent of their social legislation came to be seen as an index of their grasp of progress, civilization, and modernity. The idea of a powerful and all-encompassing 'welfare state' became more attractive to those political leaders who did not want their nation-states to be branded as socially backward weaklings.

During this period of European expansionism, one of the greatest ideals of the twentieth century – the welfare state – first became an aspiration that was to dominate the social politics of many different persuasions until the 1980s. But in Italy the age of the masses did not usher in the age of mass welfare. The prewar political regime failed to create those comprehensive, compulsory, nationwide and collective arrangements to insure citizens against poverty and misfortune that were so integral to the process of welfare state-building in other countries.⁸⁵ If one of the essential tasks of good government in the late modern period was indeed to apply 'the instruments of social insurance on behalf of increasing numbers of citizens to ever greater varieties of risk and ill fortune', then Giolitti advanced this project just slightly, for, within his system, only a few select groups of Italians became 'social citizens' invested with 'rights' to even a minimum of protection from the state.⁸⁶ Though rudimentary, Italy's social welfare state under Giolitti already exhibited a distinct structure and unusual char-

acteristics: rather than aspiring to be as monolithic, egalitarian, comprehensive and universalistic as some of its European counterparts, the Italian variant strove to be selective, fragmented, clientelist and particularist.⁸⁷ When extending the compulsory principle into new areas of social insurance, Giolitti played favourites. The paternalism of his state was highly restricted, as only certain 'dependents', such as public employees, were given the privilege of statutory pensions. For the rest of the working population, Giolitti offered membership in one of the new public/private institutional hybrids, the CNP or the INA. These social policy choices reflected the broader impulses behind the great master's political *oeuvre*. Because it carved up the citizenry into political constituents and social clients, Giolittianism, as its critics realized, was ultimately divisive, segmenting, and disunifying for the nation.

Salomone once wrote dryly that Giolitti 'was neither better, nor worse than many Italian and non-Italian politicians, but certainly better than those who succeeded him'.⁸⁸ Salvemini looked back on the Giolittian period with some regret that he had been one of its fiercest critics. The rise of fascism had taught him that however defective prewar Italian democracy was, it was vastly superior to fascist dictatorship.⁸⁹ And from the perspective of post-fascist Italy, when the Christian Democrats seemed to have created their own perpetual 'parliamentary dictatorship', Togliatti reminisced fondly about an era when the left actually influenced national politics.⁹⁰ But Giolittianism brought neither the sweeping change that defined 'social Germanism', nor the steady reforms that characterized Britain's 'quiet revolution'. The most that can be said about the system of welfare which Giolitti left behind is that it was only slightly less imperfect than the one that he inherited. According to his many supporters, Giolitti was the ultimate 'modern' and 'realist'. But by the post-war period, the whole Giolittian project seemed very dated. In 1911 he said triumphantly that he had 'relegated Karl Marx to the attic' and transformed the PSI into a 'liberal party with a socialist banner'.⁹¹ He had been wrong about that. And the 'last Giolitti' of 1920–21 also monumentally misunderstood fascism. He naively thought that, by bringing fascists into parliament, he could tame those 'patriotic young men' in the same way that he believed that he had domesticated socialism.⁹² What Giolitti did not seem to realize was that fascism represented an entirely new force in Italian politics, one that was determined to destroy his parliamentary 'gerontocracy' and, by means of a 'national revolution', build a different order in its place.

4

Fascism's New Deal: Social Insurance under a 'Totalitarian' State

'The liberal century had landed itself with a mass of Gordian knots and tried to untie them by the slaughter of the [First] World War. Never has any religion ever imposed upon its votaries such a monstrous sacrifice. Did liberalism's gods thirst for blood? Now, today, the liberal faith is about to close the doors of its empty churches because people think that its lack of principles in economics, politics, and ethics leads—as indeed it has led—to the sure and certain ruin of states ... [But] political ideologies pass away, while peoples remain. This, we may consider, is the century of authority ... a Fascist century. For if the nineteenth century was a century of individualism, and liberalism always means individualism, we may regard this century as the century of collectivism, the century of the State.'

Benito Mussolini (on 'The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism', published as Part II of the 'Fascism' entry in the *Enciclopedia italiana*, XIV, 1932)

At the very core of the ideology espoused by fascism was a peculiarly 'fascist'¹ conception of the modern state as the highest expression of civilization and culture. The state was not only a living reality of the present, but also a link with the past and, above all, with the future; it was the embodiment of the continuity of a people's language, customs, and values through the centuries. The forms in which states manifest themselves changed, fascist belief dictated, but the necessity for such forms was eternal. The 'Fascist State' was unique and superior to all other formations: 'the ethical state of the Fascist is no longer the agnostic state of the old liberalism', Giovanni Gentile declared.² The Fascist State derived its moral and spiritual nature from its higher purpose: its mission was to weld the nation into unity by harmonizing opposing interests and inculcating a national consciousness. 'The State is the will of the nation writ large,³ and hence its potentially immeasurable power could not be limited without sacrificing the interests of the millions whom it served. The 'New State' created by the

'fascist revolution' was the guarantor of the well-being of its people, the source of national unity, the educator of its citizens in civic virtue and the transmitter of the spirit of the race.⁴ Though subservient to the state, the individual under fascism 'was not annulled, but rather multiplied', according to Mussolini. As the Duce explained, parliamentary regimes offered their citizens the illusion of equality by means of periodic elections; but these so-called democracies did not take real collective responsibility for the masses of needy men and women who waited vainly for benefaction from above. Though it destroyed 'all useless and possibly harmful freedoms', fascism created an 'organized, centralized, and totalitarian democracy' which gave the people true empowerment by transforming the myth of the popular will into a political reality.⁵

The fascist conception of 'totalitarian democracy' may have been a contradiction in terms, but it did embody the desire that the state should, in Mussolini's words, be 'a strong and organic body' which rested upon 'broad and popular support'.⁶ Through its laws and institutions, the fascist state organized all areas of public life, including the political, social and economic forces of the nation. As a higher intelligence, the state alone interpreted the will of the people, who owed its authority total obedience. But in return for their loyalty, the state promised to elevate the material and spiritual standing of the people. The 'Fascist Ethical State' was founded on a deep commitment to 'social justice', which Mussolini claimed was unparalleled in history. While the nineteenth century had marked the triumph of capital, fascism would ensure that the twentieth century would dignify the 'power and glory of labour' by means of 'guaranteed work, fair wages, and decent homes'. Fascism pledged to use state power to strive ceaselessly for a 'continuous evolution and improvement' in the living standards of workers that would, eventually, lead to nothing less than the eradication of abject poverty in Italy.⁷ The atomistic and selfish individualism of the old liberal order had left workers defenceless in their daily struggle with capitalists, who seemed singularly bent on increasing their own profits at the expense of the people and the nation. The passive 'economic state' that liberalism had created cared only for the market; it left workers with little protection from the risks of unemployment, sickness, destitution, old age and disability. But the interventionist fascist state was a 'social state' which would increase the productive power of the national economy without sacrificing the rights of each individual worker to a life free from misery and want. Under liberalism, the poor were subjected to the odium of private charity and the paucity of state relief. But in the promised new order, the deserving masses who toiled for the advancement of the race would be generously rewarded by a 'total welfare system' which met their every need.⁸

The fascist state was a 'corporate state'⁹ which promoted collectivist ideals in its deep commitment to social security and social peace. According to the regime, the corporate system was a novel creation of

fascism, a totally new kind of economic organization in which the state mediated relations between capital and labour so that every Italian worker would be protected by labour contracts, trade unions, and arbitration boards, as well as full social insurance coverage.¹⁰ Radical fascist ideologues tried hard to present corporatism as a genuine expression of 'fascist socialism'.¹¹ When the Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Corporations presented a speech to fascist dignitaries in May 1927, he applauded the creation of a corporate order in Italy and promised that the regime would use it to better the conditions of the working class. Collective labour contracts, Giuseppe Bottai stated, were the pivot of the new system, whose founding principles were the right of the state to intervene in the private sphere and the responsibility of the employer to protect his workers. A great achievement of fascism was to have transformed the labour contract from a private agreement between labour and capital into a public law with binding powers. Bottai also reminded his audience that in sheer numerical terms women comprised a majority of the nation's working class. Fascism, he declared, did not ignore the silent struggle of millions of Italian women who tried daily to balance the conflicting demands of work and family. The regime, he argued, was determined to protect Italian women at home and in the workplace.¹²

The dictatorship marked the official celebrations for Fascist Labour Day with the proclamation of a Labour Charter on 21 April 1927 and presented this document as a grand statement of the regime's high-minded social principles.¹³ A eugenicist, priest, and scholar, Agostino Gemelli saw in the charter the confirmation which he sought that fascist corporatism was motivated by the same deep concern for social justice that inspired the Catholic Church to struggle ceaselessly on behalf of the working class. The fascist regime was the first government in Italy which 'recognized' and 'proclaimed' that workers possessed certain 'fundamental rights'; the rights 'to work, to earn a fair wage, and to meet the basic requirements of life' were enshrined in the *Carta del Lavoro*. For him, fascism's 'new order' was a long overdue fulfilment of the ideals of social Catholicism.¹⁴ Many supporters of fascism eagerly interpreted the charter as an indication that the regime was, indeed, moving in the direction of creating Italy's first 'workers' government', a true 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. In the 'organic corporate community' that they envisaged, class conflict would simply cease to be a problem and the condition of the working class would improve immeasurably. For when there was 'disharmony' in the relations between the classes, true believers affirmed, the fabric of society disintegrated and the productive capacity of the economy degenerated. In the interests of the collectivity, fascism pursued 'consensual' policies that were aimed at binding the nation together as one and at making it an indestructible force in the struggle for industry and empire.¹⁵

The regime's goal of improving the living standards and quality of life of working-class men and women was a dominant theme in the vast commentary on the 'social question' that fascism engendered. Advocates of the dictatorship's social legislation claimed that it served not only the interests of the New Italy's foreign and economic policies, but also the cause of Mussolini's demographic campaign. A broad extension of social welfare by a strong state, they argued, would create the right conditions for the 'physical betterment of the race' and the 'birth of healthy future generations'.¹⁶ Even the most elementary improvements in workers' statutory rights and benefits would help to increase the size of the population and the '*sanità della stirpe*' (health of the stock).¹⁷ Mussolini himself stated that he wanted to make 'greater prosperity', 'improved well-being', and the 'fullest opportunities' possible for the masses, so that he could see his 'tireless wish' for many more 'newly born and newly reborn Italians' come true.¹⁸ In Mussolini's thinking, the loss of workers' freedoms under fascism would be more than compensated by their communion with the state, their involvement in a great national revolution, and the immense social benefits that awaited them in the promised new fascist epoch.

Worship of the state and its power was the essence of fascism. For without a 'totalitarian state' to organize, mobilize, regulate, control and revolutionize the various collective entities which comprised 'national society' (such as families, classes, men, women, communities and corporations), there could be no rebirth of the Italian people.¹⁹ Fascist statolatry served as a justification for dictatorship. The 'mythic core'²⁰ of ideas surrounding the 'utopia of the totalitarian state'²¹ also functioned as an important means of attack against liberalism. Fascists prided themselves on having a highly developed appreciation of the state – not just as a metaphysical abstraction, but as a concrete conglomeration of laws, institutions, and administrative structures – and accused liberals of being afraid of the state because of their foolish belief in individual liberty. In fascist ideology, the liberal state was the exact antithesis of the fascist state: it was weak, lazy, decadent, unprincipled, amoral, mechanical and disorganized. Its legacy was an incomplete *Risorgimento* and a lot of other unfinished business which the fascists vowed to remedy. The liberal revolution had ended in failure. But fascism possessed the ability to modernize, transform, and empower the ineffectual state which it inherited. This transformation was essential to the fulfilment of fascist aims; it was the *means* of the fascist revolution. And one of the most important *ends* of the fascist revolution was the creation of an entirely new society – a society which was united like no other in recent Italian history, a society which was bound together by a solemn social contract between classes and masses and the state, a society which was dedicated to the realization of fascism's New Deal for Italy. Just like the German variety of generic fascism, the Italian one possessed a

'socially revolutionary ideology' which was bound to its ideals of a new society and its perception of its own transformative powers.²²

Indeed, Italian fascism saw social revolution as being so central to its aims that it invented the term *politica sociale* (social politics) to convey the message that social policy in the dictatorship was no longer going to be a peripheral and undervalued form of politics, as it had been under liberalism. The realm of 'the social' was all-important to fascism. Fascists believed that liberalism collapsed not just because the state which it created was so weak. According to fascist beliefs, liberalism's underdeveloped social ideology and its primitive conception of society as an aggregate of (alienated and anomic) individuals precluded the emergence of an effective consensus-building strategy. Mussolini explained one of the reasons why social welfare was so important to fascism, when he stated: 'The factory worker and the tiller of the soil must be able to say: if I am actually better off today, I owe it to the institutions created by the Fascist Revolution.' Fascism had to convince the masses, 'by deeds and actions', that it was worthy of their deep loyalty.²³ But social welfare was more than just a bid to buy off the working class: it was an organizing principle of society; it was an instrument of the state-building project; it was a way to preserve capitalist class society and still convey the message to the people that fascism stood for social justice; and it was a means to promote, manipulate, and mould social change according to fascist specifications. The fascist state was not just a totalitarian state; it was also a '*stato nuovo*'²⁴ (new state), a '*stato sociale*' (social state), and a '*stato assistenziale*' (welfare state). In their depictions of the old order, however, Mussolini and the fascists did not acknowledge that the liberal state which they inherited was not socially passive or 'agnostic' at all. The war and its aftermath had done what the pre-war Giolittian system had failed to do. They had inspired one of the most innovative and original periods in the admittedly limited liberal experience of progressive social legislation. Liberalism and its state in their *diciannovista* (1919-ish) forms were radically different from their post-unitary and pre-war predecessors. They would be a hard act for fascism to follow.

Workers, welfare, and war

As in other belligerent nations, the Great War marked a turning-point for society in Italy. Mobilization caused profound social disruptions. Arms manufacturers throughout the nation's 'industrial triangle' enlarged their plants, diversified operations, and hired more workers in an attempt to meet the production targets set by the ministry of arms and munitions. Factory workers faced long hours on the shop floor and were placed under military discipline; the government also imposed restrictions on strike activity and labour mobility. Mechanization and standardization in war industries intensified the labour process and increased the exploitation of

workers. But, in general, relatively high wages and job security for industrial workers engaged in war production initially compensated somewhat for these harsh conditions. Not until the end of 1916 did the effects of inflation, food shortages, and the rationing of bread and pasta begin to hit the Northern working class particularly hard. Dramatically reduced consumption of basic foodstuffs in cities resulted in widespread disturbances, which intensified the following year.²⁵

In May 1917, bread riots broke out in Turin and demonstrations led to violence. A wave of agitation spread throughout important industrial centres and continued the following year. In many cases, women initiated and led these struggles. Significantly, protest often took on a political dimension, as it did in Lombardy, where women's collective anger over the cost of living, increased disparities in male and female earnings, and worsening labour conditions resulted in industrial action that spilled out into the piazzas of Gallarate and Busto Arsizio. While menfolk remained at work, groups of female strikers from textile firms marched through the streets calling for an immediate end to the war. Insurrection spread throughout the region and eventually broke out in Milan itself as peasants and workers demonstrated for peace. Only a declaration of a state of siege by the authorities averted a general strike.²⁶

Women had good cause to be militant. Food shortages and rising inflation increased the difficulty of feeding families within a budget. Shifts in the nature of female employment also increased the exploitation of waged women: official statistics estimated that a total of 198 000 women and 60 000 children were recruited into direct or auxiliary war-related work between 1915 and 1918.²⁷ The government anticipated a mass entry of women and children in male-dominated heavy industry with directives which suspended laws regulating hours and conditions. These measures encouraged an influx, but this was concentrated mainly in munitions, where females comprised 27 per cent of the total workforce by 1917. Subject to long hours with compulsory overtime, an extended work-week, job segregation in unskilled and repetitive tasks, discipline by male supervisors, frequent speed-ups of the production process, the high risk of sickness and injury and very low hourly pay rates, Italian women did not see their participation in mobilization as a liberating experience. The growing problem of absenteeism among women munitions workers was testimony to the pressures which they faced.²⁸

As some 60 to 70 per cent of Italian troops were from peasant backgrounds, and some 2.6 million men over eighteen years old left the agricultural labour force to fight at the front, the war also had profound repercussions in the countryside.²⁹ The financial burden of caring for families fell onto women who, together with men who avoided the draft because of their age, had to work longer hours in factories and fields. Since soldiers were paid poverty wages and suffered great hardship, they could

contribute little to the income of those on the home front. High demand by the military for silk meant that the predominantly female labour force in that rural industry had to endure compulsory overtime and continuous production. This intensification of the labour process, which eroded time for family and leisure, often led to discontent amongst workers, despite the pay rises they were given by employers.³⁰ Those not swayed by the dubious attractions of better wages, but appalling conditions, in heavy industry could still find casual and intermittent work in traditional manufactures which were located in many provincial towns. However, textiles continued to decline during the war as the supply of foreign materials and markets shrank after 1916. While job insecurity increased, pay rates dropped within branches of the textile industry. Land tillage drew increasingly more rural women into the ranks of the economically active population. Amazingly, the loss of the millions of male peasants and labourers who joined the army did not adversely affect food production, which remained just below pre-war levels during the war. Due to requisitioning, however, the profitability of agriculture declined, as the military paid prices that were far below market levels, and levels of consumption dropped to new lows.³¹

The Italian urban and rural working classes made huge sacrifices during the war which were not accompanied by immediate government concessions. In some European countries, state-run welfare programmes expanded considerably during the First World War, as authorities sought to facilitate economic mobilization and maintain social peace.³² By contrast, the Italian government did not launch a policy of 'war socialism', so the kingdom did not traverse much new legislative ground during the hostilities. In July 1915, the government decided to provide, at its own expense, emergency relief to fishermen, who lost their livelihood because of war-time fishing restrictions along the Italian coast; though this provision functioned as a kind of unemployment benefit, it was seen to be a temporary measure, rather than an incremental step towards general insurance for the unemployed. The only comprehensive social legislation during the war was passed on 23 August 1917 as a kind of payment to peasants for the contribution that they were making to the war effort. The reform gave peasants (of either sex who were aged between 9 and 75) the right to occupational injuries coverage, either through the national insurance board or recognized provident societies and private companies. This measure brought a previously unprotected category of workers into the restricted ambit of compulsory social insurance provision. However, the date when the legislation was to come into effect was constantly brought forward by parliament because of the strength of resistance by big agrarians; not until May 1919 did the process of implementation actually begin.³³ From 1915 to 1918, the prosecution of the war was the chief priority of a nation which was forced to borrow heavily to finance its involvement in the hostilities.³⁴ Totally unrestrained military expenditure, which caused a massive rise in the

indebtedness of the state, precluded any generous increase in social entitlements for the duration of the conflict. Despite the huge cost of the war, however, plans for reconstruction did include social policy targets which required increased public investment in welfare. The gravity of the post-war crisis brought home to elites the reality that they would have to take drastic action to try to stabilize the social system.

The end of 'total war' thrust the economy into profound crisis, as public debt, rising prices, falling wages and a weakened currency began to take their toll. The spiralling cost of living and shortages of foodstuffs and essential supplies caused social discontent and unrest to reach new levels. During the 'red years' of 1918–20, the socialists massively increased their support in the general election of 1919 and the local government elections of 1920 and working-class militancy erupted in a prolonged wave of strikes, riots, and violence in cities and the countryside. Demobbed ex-servicemen demanding jobs, land, and rights joined the growing ranks of the discontented.³⁵ For the first time, trade unions began to put acute pressure on political leaders to extend social insurance and make it compulsory for all workers. Authorities believed that demobilization was causing unemployment to rise sharply, thereby deepening the post-war crisis; official estimates, though unreliable, suggested that as many as 2 million people were out of work at the end of 1920. The economy's traumatic conversion to peace-time conditions, post-war disruptions to international trade, the return of masses of veterans, and the expulsion of women from armaments industries made conditions within the labour market changeable and uncertain. No one really knew the true extent of the unemployment problem, its real causes, or whether it was a permanent or temporary phenomenon. The political implications of the deepening economic crisis, however, were absolutely clear to politicians. Elites responded to the unprecedented intensity of working-class insurgency with legislative initiatives which aimed at preserving the liberal order and restoring social stability. The dramatic extension of social entitlements during this period formed part of a conscious political strategy of 'bourgeois stabilization' through legislative, institutional, and social innovation.³⁶ Panic-stricken liberals introduced truly path-breaking legislation with uncharacteristic haste as part of their post-war settlement with the Italian masses. They succeeded at doing so largely because they did not subject projects to parliamentary scrutiny; because of the perceived urgency of social questions during the post-war crisis, the government issued decrees rather than attempting to pass laws.

At the initiative of the government, a royal decree law of 19 October 1919 (no. 2214) introduced a state-run system of compulsory unemployment insurance for male and female waged workers (aged between 15 and 65) who were in regular, full-time employment in industry and agriculture. The enactment, which came into effect on 1 January 1920, was a major

advance for those Italian workers who qualified. The inclusion of agricultural labourers, in particular, was ambitious and innovative, in international terms. This provision made the Italian legislation far broader in scope than its British predecessor; with this major reform, Italy became the very first country in the world which offered agricultural workers unemployment benefit. However, the precise way that legislators marked out the boundaries of eligibility hugely disadvantaged working women, because those who were engaged in domestic service, seasonal employment, or home-based work (which all had heavy concentrations of women workers) were excluded from entitlement; so too were non-manual workers earning over 350 *lire* per month (raised to 800 *lire* in 1921), civil servants on permanent contracts, and all local government employees, for whom separate rulings were already in place or were being considered. What percentage of the nation's workforce was actually in 'fixed' and 'stable' employment was unknown; however, by making regular employment a criterion for coverage, legislators demonstrated that they intended male workers suffering from cyclical unemployment to be the main beneficiaries of the scheme. They also showed that they were unprepared to help alleviate the chronic unemployment and underemployment of women workers. Following the principle that unemployment should be 'involuntary' in order to merit relief, the legislation further specified that workers who became unemployed either because of their involvement in strikes or lock-outs or because of their 'addiction to idleness or alcohol' would automatically lose their right to benefit and their past contributions.³⁷

The enactment signified a change in attitudes towards the reality of unemployment: politicians who had previously seen it as a problem best solved by massive emigration rather than public policy now accepted that unemployment had to be tackled effectively for society and the economy to function properly. The reform expanded considerably the domain of the state as central government assumed responsibility for organizing assistance for the unemployed on a nationwide level. The scheme was to be managed by the *Ufficio per il Collocamento e la Disoccupazione* (National Placement and Unemployment Bureau), a semi-autonomous agency within the Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Labour, which was responsible for setting up peripheral bureaux in every province. In 1920–21, the state contributed an initial subsidy of 40 million *lire* to help establish the fund centrally; it also promised to pay an annual annuity to the organization and make this allocation a 'permanent item' in the Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Labour's budget.³⁸ The British scheme of 1911 made employees solely responsible for contributions. But according to the Italian reform of 1919, unemployment relief was to be financed through equal contributions by workers and employers; the amounts of these were proportional to the pay category of the wage earner. Inscription cost 'class 1' workers, who earned up to 4 *lire* per day, .35 *lire* per week, 'class 2' workers, who earned between

4 and 8 *lire* per day, .70 *lire*, and 'class 3' workers, who earned 8 or more *lire*, 1.05 *lire*. The employer had the responsibility of issuing and stamping the worker's contribution card and making payments on his employees' behalf to participating occupational funds or local branches of the employment office. Any employer who did not comply faced a maximum fine of 10 000 *lire*.³⁹

Though the legislation set a new precedent, the coverage which it provided was actually very restricted. The period of relief and the amount of aid were severely limited. The benefit was to begin a week after dismissal and was to last for only 90 or 120 days (excluding public holidays), depending on whether the worker had paid contributions for 48 or 72 weeks before the onset of unemployment. The assistance consisted of a daily subsidy which corresponded to past contributions: class 1 workers would receive 1.25 *lire* daily, class 2 workers 2.50, and class 3 workers 3.75. But in no case could the benefit exceed 50 per cent of the contributor's daily wage. Though the legislation aimed at liberating workers from the indignities of pauperism and charity, it also aspired to do no more than guarantee an absolute minimum income. The protection from destitution which it provided was to be temporary and conditional. Anxiety about the potential pauperizing effects of relief was alleviated by the inclusion of substantial guidelines for the prevention of unemployment through labour market regulation by the state. A key component of the reform, the mandatory establishment of labour exchanges in the localities, showed that a significant aim of the government was to get workers off benefit as quickly as possible. Under the terms of provision, the claimant had to 'register for work' with a local unemployment benefit office within 24 hours after dismissal. Officials there would attempt to regularize employment and rationalize labour supply and demand in local communities. The beneficiary had to show willingness to work in order to qualify for aid and be prepared to accept any job (even one located outside his or her place of residence) or be disentitled. Fraudulent claims were punishable by very heavy fines. Moreover, agencies could carry out investigations about the character and worthiness of the claimant and use police reports to determine whether payments should be made. In reality, so-called 'obligatory' relief was actually very discretionary in nature.⁴⁰

Though deficient in many respects, unemployment insurance established in law the principle of a worker's statutory right to protection. Other reforms were also introduced in the immediate post-war period. A large surplus in the National Maternity Fund's budget allowed the government to raise the amount of the benefit in April 1920 in order to bring it more in line with inflation. By far the most important reform concerned compulsory pensions. Presented to parliament on 28 November 1918 by the Minister of Industry, Trade, and Labour, a bill on compulsory pension insurance became 'Decree 603', an urgent transitory measure which was

issued on 21 April 1919 (with effect from 1 July 1920) and was intended to be replaced by subsequent legislation. Just about all manual and non-manual workers (aged between 15 and 65)⁴¹ who earned below 350 *lire* a month (raised to 800 on 27 October 1922) gained entitlement, at age 65 (reduced to 60 on 22 October 1922 by a royal decree law), to an old-age pension after making at least 240 fortnightly contributions; disability pensions could be drawn after 120 fortnightly payments. Public employees, for whom separate rulings were already in force or were being contemplated, were exempt. Significantly, the 'self-employed', a disparate category which included artisans, shopkeepers, and home-workers, could take advantage of the benefits offered by a national, state-subsidized system by making voluntary contributions of no more than 200 *lire* a year. And from January 1920, share-croppers, tenant farmers, and Italian citizens working in the 'colonies' could join the scheme on a voluntary basis. Even 'housewives' who earned no taxable income could become members (thereby taking advantage of the state subsidy, which would amount to about 100 *lire* for every pension awarded), if they were able to set aside the necessary annual minimum investment of at least 30 *lire*. The government's intention was to cover as many of the estimated 10.3 million eligible people (of whom 6.4 million were agricultural workers) as quickly as possible.⁴²

Italian legislators followed the example of Germany by creating a system based on equal (fortnightly) contributions from employers and workers; these were to be scaled according to six different classes of earnings. Italian lawmakers planned for their scheme to be more generous than foreign models. They intended that the total insurance cost would amount to between 4 and 5 per cent of the wage bill; the aim was to guarantee, after 40, 30, 20 and 10 years, a minimum pension that was equal to 50, 43, 33 and 23 per cent, respectively, of average earnings in each class. The state also contributed an annuity, which was initially fixed at 50 million *lire* for a preliminary ten-year period. The decree made provision for survivors' pensions and supplements for dependents; and it also stipulated that widows and orphans (under 15 years of age) be awarded a monthly allowance of 50 *lire* for six months (half of which was contributed by the state) when insured persons died before qualifying for a pension. To ensure greater equity, moreover, the decree permitted contributors to intermit, without losing their pension rights, during periods of military service or protracted illness. With the transformation of voluntary self-insurance into compulsory state-run insurance, the National Workers' Old-Age and Invalidity Insurance Fund was re-organized and re-named in 1919. The newly-formed *Cassa Nazionale per le Assicurazioni Sociali* (CNAS-National Social Insurance Board) was designed to be the institutional fulcrum of the wholly new 'global' system of comprehensive and integrated social security which was rapidly emerging in Italy.⁴³ Preparations for a complete re-foundation of Italy's rudimentary welfare state proceeded very quickly as gov-

ernment embarked on an urgent mission to modernize outdated and malfunctioning modes of social protection. In 1920 and 1921, the Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Labour published a two-volume study of medical and hospital provision in Italy, which concluded that the old Crispian system should be scrapped because it was failing the people and a new, totally laicized and nationalized health service should be constructed in its place. The plan was to entrust the management of all the new forms of compulsory insurance, including the prospective one for sickness, to the national insurance board and to place governmental responsibility for the unified direction of the publicized schemes within a new ministry.⁴⁴

In organizing their pension arrangements, lawmakers in Italy could have chosen a different model to follow. They did not, for example, opt for a British-style universal system based on the principle of equality of access to a flat-rate pension. Contributory schemes, by their very nature, disadvantaged waged women, the bulk of whom did not spend their working lives in regular and uninterrupted employment. And, since the size of the pension depended on the amount of contributions that a worker paid, there was no in-built provision for the general population to enjoy a guaranteed minimum standard of living in old age. Even though legislators contemplated that the national board would have to make adjustments to bring the pensions of the low-waged closer in line with the average, many pensioners would still receive benefits that consigned them to poverty or charity. The arrangements that Italian reformers established rewarded those who earned more and saved regularly over the long term. None the less, Italian workers gained a great deal from liberalism in its last years in power. Whilst only 2 per cent of Italy's workforce was covered by some form of voluntary occupational pension plan in 1915, for example, 38 per cent of Italian workers were insured through the state-run scheme in 1920. Though the 1920 coverage rate was below the government's target and below that of Germany (which, at 57 per cent, was the highest in Western Europe), Italy had made great strides in a relatively brief period of time.⁴⁵

Despite its weaknesses, the legislation that was being implemented in the immediate post-war period was a watershed in Italian history. The 1917–19 reform of accident insurance broke a persistent pattern of systematic exclusion that had emerged in post-unitary and pre-war social policy. By granting agricultural labourers the right to compensation for injury at work, the act extended social entitlements to a group which had hitherto been socially marginalized. Attempting to ameliorate relations within industry, much earlier social legislation, including, most notably, that of Giolitti's ante-bellum regime, had been targeted selectively at the northern industrial working class. But the war revolutionized the rural masses, and bourgeois liberal reformism of the last hour responded to this challenge by broadening the class basis of the welfare state. With unemployment and pension insurance reforms in 1919, liberals also showed a new willingness to

forsake their strong attachment to private and commercial forms of individual self-help. The abandonment of liberal orthodoxy's commitment to voluntary protection was a necessary precondition for welfare expansion along the lines pursued by other nations. In 1919, the Italian state entered a new stage of evolution as central government became directly and financially involved in the delivery of statutory entitlements based on a democratic conception of social rights and citizenship. In a short period of time, Italian social insurance legislation moved closer to the European norm and the kingdom's still fragile welfare state finally entered the modern age. The Italian state came to maturity when its guardians, rather belatedly, decided to create a civil society based on the values of the collective good, public responsibility, and social justice. *Buon governo* had finally arrived in Italy. But it came too late to save liberalism from the fascist onslaught.

Social security under fascism?

As many scholars have recognized, fascism lacked a coherent doctrine and programme in its early years, when the aims of the movement focused on the conquest of power.⁴⁶ Fascism underwent a difficult transition from movement to regime; it worked within the existing framework of the liberal system from 1922 to 1924; it consolidated its dictatorship in 1925–27; and it was still constructing its own political system in 1927–29 by the twin processes of *fascistizzazione dello stato* ('fascistization' of the state) and *statizzazione del fascismo* ('statization' of fascism).⁴⁷ With the exception of the ideologically driven demographic campaign, which began with the creation of ONMI in 1925,⁴⁸ fascist social policy during this transitional phase was not grammatical in character. Only very gradually did the regime formulate a set of goals in the sphere of social insurance, demonstrate clear direction in policy decisions, and start to plan initiatives strategically; and only in the 1930s did a social security system with distinctly 'fascist' characteristics and features begin to emerge.⁴⁹ Although the regime began to re-structure the system it inherited in the second half of the 1920s, only in the 1930s did developments in the organization of social insurance inaugurate what can meaningfully be called a 'fascist social policy'. During that decade, the regime moulded the social security system to fit its own image of the 'totalitarian state'. And though some pre-fascist legislative traditions survived the fascist era, many of the dictatorship's institutional initiatives of the 1930s became the foundation of Italy's post-1945 democratic welfare state.⁵⁰

Early pronouncements seemed to suggest that fascism sought to pull back the boundaries of the liberal welfare state. In his first speech as a deputy in the chamber on 21 June 1921, Mussolini announced that he favoured the abolition of the 'collectivist state' that the war had engen-

dered and a return to the minimalist 'Manchester state' of the old liberal order. At the Rome party conference in November 1921, the Duce affirmed that in economic matters fascists were 'liberals'; the newly formed PNF, moreover, stood firmly opposed to the notion of a 'paternalistic, monopolistic, and bureaucratic state' with excessive social obligations towards its people. In November 1922, the Duce repeated his pledge that he would dismantle the 'provident state'. That same month, the Council of Ministers decided to reject long-standing plans for a state monopoly of control over life insurance, which had been pending since Giolitti's day; the decision to re-privatize, which was confirmed by new legislation in April 1923, seemed to indicate that fascism had less than totalitarian ambitions in some areas of social policy.⁵¹ Despite all the hype about it, the Charter of Labour was actually quite vague about some of the most substantive issues affecting workers' welfare. The charter was replete with strong words about the 'duty of labour', the state's interest in national production, and the need to regiment the workforce. But it made only passing reference to the government's plans for social insurance. 'Insurance', article 26 proclaimed, was an expression of the 'principle of class collaboration'; 'employers and employees must bear proportionate shares of its burdens', but the state will strive only 'to co-ordinate and unify as far as is possible the agencies and system of insurance'. The fascist state's financial stake in social insurance, the charter suggested, was to be very limited. Article 27 perfunctorily announced that the fascist regime was working towards the following aims: 'improvements in accident insurance; improvements and extensions of maternity insurance; insurance against occupational diseases and tuberculosis as a step toward insurance against all forms of illness; improvements of insurance against involuntary unemployment; and the adoption of special forms of endowment insurance for young workers'.⁵² In its early years in power, the regime actually worked towards dismantling the form and substance of post-war liberalism's progressive social policy. It did so with the support and approval of the nation's employer class. Many agrarians and industrialists resented the liberal state's imposition of binding social insurance accords which committed them to investing in their workforce. They blamed the 'insurer state' and its reforms for increasing production costs, decreasing profit margins, and empowering 'subversive' workers. They opposed the principle of compulsion and detested unemployment insurance, in particular, which they saw as an unnecessary evil. The cuts and contraction in social programmes which fascism introduced found favour with employers, who looked to the regime to render the working class politically, economically, and socially powerless.⁵³

As soon as fascism seized power, the Confederation of Employers in Agriculture, and southern landowners in particular, began to beseech the government to rescind the social rights which agricultural workers had gained in 1919. With Roberto Farinacci's support, landlords succeeded at

convincing Mussolini to instruct the Ministry of the National Economy to devise new norms on compulsory unemployment insurance. Even without the pressure brought to bear by the agrarians' lobby, the government would almost certainly have moved to limit the scope of the 1919 social security enactments because of the enormous cost involved (for both employers and the state) in providing mass coverage under the terms of the liberal reforms. The regime's spokesmen were careful to present the new royal decree of 30 December 1923 (no. 3158) as a minor modification to unemployment insurance, but it was actually very radical and regressive. Article 2 stipulated that the scheme 'does not cover agricultural workers'; that one phrase set back the Italian welfare state by decades. Agricultural workers would have to wait until 1949 (the new legislation of that year was not actually implemented until 1955) to regain the legal right to insurance-based unemployment benefit which they first obtained in 1919. Home-workers (even those who were not self-employed, but worked for others) and domestic servants remained excluded from coverage in the 1923 package. The 'reform' restricted the field of application of the 1919 royal decree even further when it gave very precise guidelines on how regular employment had to be in order to be liable for insurance; all persons who were employed for fewer than six months per year could not be insured, the measure stipulated flatly.⁵⁴ Only industrial workers in fixed employment retained the right to unemployment benefit in fascist Italy.

The regulation of 7 December 1924 (no. 2270), which contained the administrative guidelines governing the application of the 1923 decree, maintained premium and benefit rates at their 1919 levels,⁵⁵ kept the length of the assistance period at 90 to 120 days (depending on contributions over the previous two years), and retained most of the technical dispositions of the liberal reform. However, it did make the preventative function of unemployment relief far more explicit and extensive than the original decree intended it to be. The *regolamento* amplified the powers of local agencies to compel the unemployed to attend 'back-to-work' vocational training programmes and to participate in state-run public works schemes. The measure also gave welfare a new political purpose by making the insurance book and application process into instruments of social control. The insured worker had to present a detailed insurance record and employment history to officials in order to claim benefit; and he or she was subjected to a now heavily bureaucratized procedure that enlarged the ability of both party and state to uncover potential opponents of the regime and to discriminate against 'unworthy' applicants. The introduction of the compulsory *libretto di lavoro* (worker's passbook) in 1933, which contained extensive personal details about individuals, increased the information available to the various organs of the state and allowed employers to make choices about whom they should hire based on a worker's date of membership in the PNF (*Partito Nazionale Fascista*—National Fascist Party),

life history, and military record. But even before the introduction of formal identity cards in 1933, the corporate state in action showed a marked tendency to use even seemingly mundane forms of documentation as a way to 'observe' the population and uphold internal security.⁵⁶

The fascist state also failed to practise what it preached about ethics, corporatism, and egalitarianism. The royal decree of 30 December 1923 transferred the management of the unemployment insurance fund to a semi-autonomous council of administration within the *Cassa Nazionale per le Assicurazioni Sociali*. The national social insurance board was 'fascistized' as bureaucratic re-organization and the proliferation of peripheral branches in all provincial capitals permitted the appointment of party loyalists. Very significantly too, the regime decided, with effect from 1 January 1924, to abolish permanently the 'guaranteed' state subsidy (provisionally fixed at 50 million *lire* per year) to unemployment insurance altogether. Thereafter, the regime contributed nothing to the scheme. As employer and employee contributions to unemployment insurance amounted to 618.87 million *lire* from 1 July 1922 to 31 December 1927, while benefit payments came to a measly 197.89 million, the fund was performing quite well anyway; partly because of the huge gap between contributions and benefits, the fund amassed patrimonial reserves which totalled 668.9 million *lire* in 1927. In 1925, the governors of the unemployment administration within the *cassa nazionale* agreed to the regime's request that the unemployment and pension funds be unified. The fascist take-over was completed in 1927, when the Ministry of the National Economy imposed a single administration, with direct links to the government, over the united funds of the national board. These institutional transformations gave the state access to the assets of its parastate organization; the dictatorship took advantage of this 'harmonious co-ordination' by 'borrowing' heavily from the national board. By 1929, the National Social Insurance Institute had made 'loans' worth half a billion *lire* to the state treasury; the dictatorship used the money drawn from the 'people's patrimony' to finance public works and private industry. The unemployment relief fund paid for many of fascist Italy's new bridges, roads, and aqueducts. It helped salvage the declining silk industry. And it also invested heavily in state bonds, since the regime required it by law to set aside about a fifth of its available capital for this patriotic purpose.⁵⁷

In the area of pensions too, the regime made some significant early decisions which revealed the true nature of its social agenda. Soon after Mussolini attained the premiership, pro-fascist Italian jurists began to question the constitutionality of 'decree 603' on the grounds that it had been introduced hastily by a temporary caretaker government. In 1923, the Supreme Court of Cassation rejected the provisions in the 1919 decree which concerned the imposition of severe fines and penal sanctions against employers who defaulted in the payment of their contributions to the

pension fund. By deciding to deprive the National Insurance Board of its most important means of enforcement, the tribunal gave employers a major concession and placed the very principle of compulsion in jeopardy. A royal decree of 30 December 1923 (no. 3184) introduced a major change to the 1919 reform by depriving share-croppers and tenant farmers of entitlement to compulsory old-age and disability insurance. They were, however, permitted to make voluntary provision by opening up their own individual accounts with the National Insurance Board. The new executive regulations of 28 August 1924 (no. 1422) raised the pension age to 65, but left the amount of pensions unchanged. On 13 December 1928, however, a new law (no. 2900) came into effect; this revised the method of computation and raised the levels of pensions (which ranged from between 574 to 2015 *lire*) to a new minimum of 1035 and a maximum of 2548 *lire*. The reform, which undoubtedly benefited the 172 000 people on state-managed pensions (in 1928), was, none the less, introduced at the expense of disabled workers. The regime had gone to great pains to defy actuarial projections concerning disablement; it had so dramatically reduced the number of disability pensions which the National Insurance Board agreed to pay that it realized enough of a surplus to finance the increase and pose as the 'protector of working people'. By sacrificing disabled pensioners, fascism destroyed one of the most important ideological features of the liberal pension system – the commitment to the collective rights of all actual and potential beneficiaries. And, amidst great propagandistic fanfare, the increment was introduced as a discretionary reward from a benevolent state; in democratic countries with publicly funded schemes, the state assumed a legal obligation to make automatic adjustments to pension payments or to recommend them to parliament on an annual basis. The increase in old-age pensions was modest, moreover, when economic recovery after 1924, the growth in the national economy, and the assets of the national social insurance fund are considered. In the nine years since its creation in 1919, the capital reserves of the *Cassa Nazionale per le Assicurazioni Sociali* had grown from 849 175 000 *lire* to 5 393 765 000 *lire*.⁵⁸

Although fascism had no particular policy on social insurance when it came to power, it began quickly to transform the organizational structure, ideological content, and social aims of the system which it inherited. The dictatorship introduced its first 'fascist' form of compulsory social insurance in 1927. Liberals had implemented tentative measures against tuberculosis when a law of 24 July 1919 (no. 1382) encouraged banks to issue state-guaranteed loans to provincial and municipal governments for the construction of sanatoria. The fascist 'battle against tuberculosis' officially began in June 1924, when the government called for the creation of party-run anti-tuberculosis consortia, whose task was to undertake action and propaganda within provinces. Partly because of its ideological commitment to the demographic campaign, the regime decided to introduce new legisla-

tion on 27 October 1927 for compulsory tuberculosis insurance for those workers who qualified for incapacity and old-age pensions (and for merchant marines, who had their own disability fund). Because of the contagiousness of the disease, the co-habiting spouses and dependents of insured persons were also covered against the risk of illness. Since about 60 000 people a year were diagnosed with the disease, and about 80 per cent of these fell within the 'productive' age group (those aged between 16 and 50), fascist policy-makers regarded tuberculosis as a major problem from an economic, eugenic, and social standpoint. However, compulsory and contributory mass coverage for a single illness could also be seen as an indirect form of taxation by a state which was unprepared to finance improvements in healthcare from treasury funds.⁵⁹ By 1929, 8.5 million workers were each contributing about 35 *lire* a year from their wages to the government's anti-tuberculosis campaign. Since the national board managed the tuberculosis insurance fund, its executive committee had free reign to spend the proceeds from workers' premiums as it saw fit. As a result, the programme achieved results only very slowly. The construction of convalescent homes and treatment centres was the chief priority of anti-tuberculosis campaigners, but the building initiative took a long time to get off the ground. By the end of 1939, the national insurance institute administered 49 sanatoria with a bed capacity for 16 212 patients. However, many of these institutions, such as the Ramazzini Sanatorium in Rome, which opened in 1939, were built with the assistance of philanthropic donations. And the International Red Cross also contributed resources to fascism's patriotic struggle for effective 'social prophylaxis'. The fascist state was expert at blurring the distinctions between private and public welfare. The dictatorship also actively exploited the propagandistic potential of health campaigns. The various battles against alcoholism, cancer, drugs and leprosy that formed part of the pronatalist drive for racial hygiene generated a great deal of legislation, but produced few positive, quantifiable effects. However, they were an important means for the regime to validate itself and to project an image of a dynamic, committed, and activist government.⁶⁰

Social insurance in action during the depression

One of the peculiar distinctions of the inter-war Italian economy was that it went into a nose-dive two years before the Wall Street Crash plunged it into deep depression. The impact of the prolonged economic crisis from 1927 to 1932–4 (recovery varied by sector), and, importantly, of fascism's response to it, was disastrous for working-class living standards.⁶¹ Unemployment rose from 181 493 in December 1926 to 414 283 in January 1927, according to government sources; in February 1933, 1 229 387 were out of work. Even after recovery began, 1 011 711 remained jobless in

January 1935.⁶² The extent of the problem of unemployment in fascist Italy, was far greater than these figures suggest, however, as only those (predominantly male) people who registered at job placement offices appeared in official statistics; chronically underemployed women, women in casual and home-work, and many female textile workers who simply left the 'official' job market after they were fired were not counted.⁶³ One recent investigation posits that the unemployment rate fluctuated between 11.4 and 15.5 per cent of the total workforce in the years 1931–4.⁶⁴ A series of government-imposed wage cuts between 1927 and 1934 brought real wages in agriculture and industry down by an estimated 20 per cent in the four years from 1927 to 1930; and with respect to the levels of 1920–1, real wages in industry declined by as much as 15–40 per cent (depending on the branch) in 1927–34.⁶⁵

Some fascist commentators, who were ideologically committed to the goal of social revolution, were prepared to admit that unemployment benefit was far too low to keep the unemployed and their families at a level of bare subsistence. They pointed out that rising rates of poverty would adversely affect the health of growing numbers of children and this would have a long-lasting 'diseugenic' effect on the race. It made sound demographic sense, they argued, to invest more generously in the maintenance of the poor at a decent standard.⁶⁶ PNF political leaders, however, ignored calls for an increase in the amount of aid given. The government could comfortably have afforded to raise the benefit without increasing insurance premiums since the unemployment fund ran at a huge surplus. In the years from 1922 to 1929, the unemployment fund collected 966.367 million *lire* in contributions, but it paid out only 365.829 million in benefits, thereby accumulating a surplus of 600.537 million. In 1930 to 1934, which were years of big spending due to mass unemployment, the fund accumulated 607.603 million *lire* in contributions and disbursed 708.272 million in benefits. The surplus of 499.868 million in 1934 rose to 601.339 by 1938, as contributions totalled 615.732 million and benefits 514.261 million; when added to the reserves, the surplus increased the size of the fund to over a billion *lire* in 1938. The 'welfare gap' between the burden of premiums levied upon workers and the amount of aid distributed by the regime was enormous.⁶⁷

Official statistics revealed that only a small percentage of insured people actually received the benefit to which they were entitled. Authorities simply refused to make payments, even when claimants had contributed regularly to the scheme. Refusals could be made on almost any grounds, including political ones, as insurance became more arbitrary, selective, and discriminatory and officials came under increasing government pressure to reduce the number of able-bodied workers who were 'living off the state'.⁶⁸ In

January 1933, for example, only 814,747 of the 1,229,387 registered unemployed were on the dole. In each and every year from 1922 to 1940, official unemployment levels exceeded by hundred of thousands the numbers on benefit.⁶⁹ This discrepancy was not due, moreover, to the success of the regime's 'back to work' programme. The Ministry of Public Works organized thousands of projects during the depression, but these did not substantially affect unemployment levels. In 1929, for example, the following numbers of the unemployed were working on government contracts: 98 636 in January 1929; 81 121 in February; 109 451 in March; 136 076 in April; 154 402 in May; and 153 352 in June.⁷⁰ Because they provided workers with casual and temporary jobs, moreover, public works schemes were not a solution to structural and long-term unemployment. The very low take-up rate of unemployment benefit was very much a product of the institutional transformations and political imperatives promoted by a fascist regime which increasingly extended its hold over the social security system.

With the foundation of the *Istituto Nazionale per la Previdenza Sociale*⁷¹ (the National Social Insurance Institute) by royal decree on 27 March 1933 (no. 371), fascism began a major structural reorganization of social insurance provision that culminated in the promulgation of legislation on 4 October 1935; the new regulation of 1935 defined the INPS as an '*ente di diritto pubblico con personalità giuridica e gestione autonoma*' (a public body recognized as a legal person and having an autonomous administration).⁷² The parastate agency, under the control of the Ministry of Corporations, replaced the *Cassa Nazionale delle Assicurazioni Sociali*; and it absorbed and managed the funds for unemployment, invalidity and old age, tuberculosis and maternity insurance. One of the most unusual features of the 1935 'unified text' was that it stipulated that the INPS had to be a financier of the state; article 35 clearly stated that the institute had to make its capital available to central and local governments and any consortia carrying out state projects for the purposes of public works, land reclamation, and imperial conquest. Accordingly, members of the INPS's 'council of administration' were all political appointees; by law, the board of directors comprised representatives from employers' and employees' organizations, the Ministry of Corporations and Finance, the PNF and the interior ministry's departments of colonies, agriculture and forests, public works and transport.⁷³ Hailed by fascists as proof of the regime's commitment to modernizing and improving the system of social insurance, the centralization of control of compulsory forms of social insurance gave the dictatorship access to vast sums of money. After the structural change, the regime regularly siphoned off money from the INPS to pay for the cost of the construction of settlements and the 'demographic colonization' of its East African Empire⁷⁴ or whatever else it fancied: from 1933 to 1940, according to one estimate, the INPS spent 4.47 million *lire* on public works and social housing, 3.48

million on land reclamation, 1.34 million on public transport, 209 million on electricity plants, 390 million on credit institutions for industrialists and 490 million on economic organizations. Fascism used the insurance contributions of workers not just to subsidize its own social programmes, but also to invest in private industry too, as IRI (*Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale* – Institute for Industrial Reconstruction) became a main beneficiary of INPS cash in the second half of the 1930s. At the same time that the regime was regularly plundering the INPS, it was also limiting its own direct investment in social security provision; the state's contribution to the national pension scheme dwindled away gradually in the 1930s.⁷⁵

As the state extended its control over the administration of *previdenza sociale*, the vulnerability of welfare clients increased because of the discretionary nature of fascist social insurance. Respect for the statutory rights of insured persons seems to have come very low on the list of priorities of those who ran the INPS in the localities. Surviving personal testimonies suggest some of the ways that insurance officials evaded making payments to those who had contributed to schemes. With regard to invalidity pensions, it was easy for the INPS administrators to reject claims on medical grounds since they required claimants to be examined by their own doctors. One woman who was aged 52 made a formal complaint to the prefect when the INPS repeatedly refused to grant her an early disability pension when their doctor declared that she was 'not sick enough' to stop working. Under the scheme, claimants had no right to appeal against decisions. The woman expressed bitterness that she had worked 'all her life' and had saved for a measly pension that bureaucrats were unfairly denying her.⁷⁶ In another case, INPS authorities refused to pay a disability pension to a female factory worker because they felt that she was exaggerating the extent of her illness. Maria M., aged 42, complained to the prefect that her own doctor had diagnosed her with 'heart trouble' and the INPS doctor had not even examined her properly. She did not want to leave her job, she stated, but was too ill to continue working. Her husband was unemployed and she had two children, only one of whom was bringing in a wage packet. The bills went unpaid, she explained, and the family would find it hard to live on her disability benefit. Even though the INPS doctor eventually confirmed that she was too weak to work, the institute managers said that she was too young to retire.⁷⁷ Other sources illustrate the consequences of exclusion from compulsory insurance. The effects of this could be devastating for women and their families. One woman, Maria B., sent a letter to her mayor which revealed that she had repeatedly pleaded with the INPS to provide her with the opportunity to contribute to the unemployment benefit scheme. She stated that she had been fired from her job as a domestic servant in private employment because she had fallen pregnant. The INPS's refusal meant that she was now forced to live in poverty. Having found a few hours of cleaning in a butcher's shop, she continued to

work throughout her pregnancy, but could not make ends meet after the baby was born since her husband was unemployed too. She asked the mayor for a one-off subsidy of 100 *lire* to pay the midwife who had attended the birth. The mayor rejected her request on demographic grounds, having taken note of the fact that, since this was her first and only child, she was hardly an 'exemplary mother' and fitting candidate for government support.⁷⁸ In the hands of those with power over people's lives, pronatalist ideology could be used as a way to discriminate against certain categories of the 'unworthy' poor.

Under the old order, paupers begged for alms. In the new era, the unemployed masses were reduced to petitioning for government hand-outs. Letters to fascist officialdom requesting subsidies in times of personal crisis or family tragedy are full of pathos and deference. The Italian masses knew the language of supplication; under fascism, the state tried to replace the church as the benefactor of the people. Public welfare schemes encouraged the needy to feel dependency and submission towards party and state. From October 1930, PNF *federali* (provincial party leaders) in depressed northern towns began to organize a winter-relief programme aimed at maintaining public morale. By the spring of 1931, the party's welfare activities became institutionalized with the creation of the *Ente per le Opere Assistenziali* (EOA—Agency for Assistance Works); provincial EOAs became responsible for the distribution of essentials during the winter months, when unemployment reached its highest levels, due to the lull in the agricultural cycle. They also launched a free summer holiday programme for the children of the unemployed. Significantly though, this assistance to the unemployed was partly funded by workers themselves through their various syndical organizations, some of which deducted compulsory contributions to the EOA directly from wages. Employers associations, commercial banks, and private citizens comprised the other sources of funding for PNF social provision, which, according to Philip Morgan, 'amounted to a kind of party levy or tax' since it was financed privately.⁷⁹

In his *Lectures on Fascism*, Palmiro Togliatti portrayed the EOA as an especially ingenious device to ward off popular discontent during the depression.⁸⁰ Unless it was substantial enough to affect living standards, however, social welfare could not be relied upon as an effective means by which to cultivate consent. In reality, party agencies controlling the EOAs doled out a derisory amount of assistance annually; in 1937, which also happened to be the year when they were dismantled, EOAs spent only 8 million *lire* nationwide on the unemployed and their families.⁸¹ Though organized on a mass-scale, party welfare was dispensed to individuals on a one-off basis. The small scale of *per capita* spending, together with the fact that relief took the form of small subsidies or benefits in kind instead of substantial and sustained financial aid, revealed EOA activities to be a propaganda exercise rather than a real attempt to alleviate misery. In some provinces, the PNF

also raised money through private donations for special hardship grants to unemployed parents with lots of children. In the province of Livorno, the prefect initiated this programme in 1933 by advising party and police authorities to select deserving 'fascist families' from the unemployed masses. In making their selection, officials closely scrutinized the behaviour and reputation of candidates. Each chosen family was to be rewarded with a subsidy of 20 *lire* at Christmas to help pay for presents for the children. In December 1933, officials distributed a total of only 5 000 *lire* to 250 local families.⁸²

Between 1933 and 1939 the fascist Council of Ministers also administered a special national assistance fund whose purpose was to respond to the numerous 'begging letters' which the Italian people sent regularly to the central offices of the party, government, and even Mussolini directly. Applicants asking for money were careful to include biographical details which emphasized their state of destitution and strengthened their case; whether they were war orphans or loyal fascists influenced the decision-making process. Recorded as 'casual expenses', the subsidies paid out by fascist officialdom were between 50 and 250 *lire* each and numbered a few hundred a year. The total expenditure incurred by fascism was minimal.⁸³ None the less, the Duce and his entourage perceived this kind of benefaction as an important means for fascism to touch the daily lives of Italians directly. In order to keep the myth of the March on Rome alive in the hearts of followers, the national directorate of the PNF also operated an emergency fund for ex-squadristi who were unemployed. Though not fixed, these subsidies too were small. Party leaders were unprepared to make exceptions to the rule that beneficiaries had to be out of work. With the support of the party head in Brindisi, Giuseppe L., an *ex-squadrista*, appealed the decision of the national administrative secretary of the PNF to reject his application for help on these grounds. Giuseppe L. described his predicament in the most pitiful way: according to his account, he was employed as a school janitor, but he earned a 'miserable stipend' of only 500 *lire* a month; he possessed no other source of income, as his wife did not work; he had five children under the age of ten to support, one of whom, a lovely little girl, was gravely ill; the rent on the family's flat cost 100 *lire* a month; he could not afford to buy clothes or food for his wife and children; most days, the family ate only a little dried bread; with such a poor diet, his little girl seemed to be getting worse. Unmoved by the suppliant's testimony, the PNF administrator in Rome refused to change his mind.⁸⁴ Meted out as it was to the 'worthy poor', this type of welfare was nothing more than a revamp of old-style charity; like the Catholic Church had done for centuries, the fascist party and state were dispensing alms in an attempt to keep the faith of the fold.

In other areas, government policies to deal with the economic crisis proved to be wholly ineffective. During the depression, the regime took

credit for having increased the purchasing power of poor families by means of its successful *battaglia dei prezzi* (battle for price control). However, huge discrepancies in the prices of basic foodstuffs which merchants charged still existed due to the lack of any system of effective national control. The Fascist Confederation of Merchants began in 1927 to implement a system of 'price fixing' in order to boost internal demand for goods. In theory, the prices of a whole range of essential items were set by provincial federations of merchants, and members were bound to display and maintain these by penalty of a fine or the revocation of a licence. Organized on a voluntary basis, however, the self-regulation of shopkeepers and retailers clearly did not work. National confederation leaders admitted that their own investigations revealed that numerous infractions took place regularly throughout the kingdom.⁸⁵ The police were aware that the public mood was bad in working-class neighbourhoods, where the majority of people survived the depression only by severely restricting consumption.⁸⁶ Part of the problem was that the Italian working class had become progressively dependent on the retail market in the 1920s. The post-war period saw a massive decrease in the number of worker co-operatives which sold low-cost meat and vegetables.⁸⁷ A typical working-class family in Turin, for example, could cut about 20 *lire* from their weekly food bill if they shopped at wholesale co-ops, but more and more of these enterprises were going bankrupt.⁸⁸ Families on a tight budget inevitably suffered as a result. Every *lira* counted since working-class incomes were so small. In 1930–5, a male peasant wage-worker earned at most just over 9 *lire* a day (for a maximum of 187 days per year) and a skilled male factory worker earned between 300 and 400 *lire* a month. But starvation wages were far from uncommon: women who picked olives in Lazio earned 6 *lire* a day for a ten-hour day (while male workers doing the same job earned 12 *lire*) and child farm labourers earned on average between 2 and 5 *lire* a day.⁸⁹

Policing the poor

Given the extent of unemployment and the paucity of its relief, the regime felt compelled to police the poor in order to maintain public order. The hardship which the unemployed faced was compounded by the regime's 'battle against urbanism', which gave party and state organs full powers to restrict internal labour migration.⁹⁰ The Interior Ministry's Department of Public Security, which was responsible for the implementation of this policy, justified it on demographic grounds. According to its official dispositions, the campaign aimed at combating urban growth because rural people 'become infecund once they leave the village'. 'The depopulation of the countryside', moreover, had economic repercussions since the depletion of the rural workforce threatened the future of agriculture.⁹¹ Officially launched by new legislation on 24 December 1928, the *lotta contro urbanes-*

imo gained a new political purpose during the depression when fascism used repression in order to keep the indigent off the streets of big cities. A major public order priority, this policy was implemented by prefects, the police, labour exchanges and mayors, who were all enlisted to keep a close watch over population movements, particularly in areas of high unemployment, and to report monthly to PNF headquarters in Rome. The police played a key role by enforcing orders for the forcible 'repatriation' of migrants to their commune of origin.

In Turin, where officials were told by Mussolini to step up the campaign in 1929, the policy was targeted specifically at unemployed *braccianti* from outside the city and neighbouring provinces. Documents pertaining to the conduct of police round-ups reveal the extent of the desperation of job-seekers who failed to find any waged work. Issued authorization from their local employment offices to seek jobs elsewhere, these migrants were, none the less, banished to their place of residence because they were an embarrassment to the regime – a visible reminder of the problem of rural and urban unemployment. In the short period from 7 May to 6 June 1933, a total of 732 people were repatriated to a single commune outside Turin, a rural community where there were no jobs to be found.⁹² In July 1933, the prefect of Turin reported to the interior ministry that a total of 1685 people had been repatriated from the city since May, amongst whom were 1029 women and 656 men. The vast majority of women migrants had looked unsuccessfully for regular employment as domestic servants, while the men had been willing to do the most menial and casual labour for cash.⁹³

Significantly, the regime's use of the campaign against urbanism as a weapon in the war against the poor continued after the worst effects of the depression of 1929 had passed. In a major industrial city like Turin, which attracted many peasant migrants who travelled relatively short distances seeking work, repatriations continued throughout the 1930s. This policy exposed the myth behind the regime's claims that it was strengthening the economic standing of the peasantry. Concerns about public order took precedence over any regard for the welfare of unemployed workers who were forced to return to villages blighted by high male and female unemployment, both seasonal and long-term. Intensifying their efforts after 1933, fascist officials in Rome ordered the prefect in Turin to work through local labour exchange offices to ensure that the unemployed would be refused the necessary papers to migrate legally. With channels of rural flight closed, the Piedmontese countryside became flooded with thousands of the jobless and the hungry. The regime's attempts to 'depopulate' cities put acute pressure on the Italian countryside, which had long suffered from overpopulation, a shortage of land for peasants, low wages and limited jobs.

The Council of Ministers, who monitored the success of the programme, revealed that an important objective of the policy was to localize and contain discontent. To prevent an escalation of class conflict in a volatile

region like Piedmont, the urban and rural working classes had to be kept isolated from each other as much as possible. In the popular neighbourhoods where they flocked, newly arrived rural migrants communicated their frustrations to urban residents, who themselves had grievances against the regime. Any 'mass spectacle of poverty' was also undesirable and dangerous, according to ministerial directives from Rome. The crack-down was crucial to the maintenance of social stability because the regime's reputation suffered in cities where the sight of peasants going from door to door begging for work was a common, if unedifying occurrence. Visible expressions of its own failures were anathema to the dictatorship.⁹⁴ In his own correspondence to the prefect, Mussolini gave further clarification about why this policy was such a priority for him. The masses of the rural unemployed, he stated, had no chance of finding jobs in cities. The Duce was prepared to offer the families of returning migrants a small cash subsidy to ensure their compliance with the scheme.⁹⁵

The suppression of rural migration by the regime did not put a stop to the process of urbanization in the interwar period; indeed, cities like Milan, Turin, and especially Rome, continued to grow at an inexorable pace. Much of this growth was due to southern immigration to the north. Since the government began to restrict emigration to America and elsewhere in 1927, Southerners were compelled to seek opportunity closer to home.⁹⁶ Many of them flocked to Turin, where homelessness amongst immigrants was becoming a major social problem. Fascist housing policy simply could not cope with the rising demand for cheap accommodation in metropolitan Italy. When Mussolini came to power, cities were already suffering from a shortfall in low-cost dwellings. Since 31 May 1903, when new legislation came into effect, central government had encouraged municipalities and so-called 'autonomous institutes' to build *case popolari* by means of earmarked cash subsidies and tax exemptions. The war halted the expansion in residential building, but successive legislation from 1919 to 1921 generated a post-war boom in the market as the state gave loans to local authorities and housing associations involved in the construction of urban apartment buildings for working-class people.⁹⁷ Despite increased public and private investment, the shortage of affordable housing remained acute in liberal Italy; significantly too, the housing crisis in the major cities worsened as a direct result of fascist policies.

Homes for the masses

New directives in August 1925 and March 1926 led to the abolition of government control over housing regulations. The regime hailed deregulation as a stimulus to the private ownership of houses, and claimed that its ultimate aim of providing *una casa per la famiglia* (a home for the family) conformed to the requirements of demographic policy and the cult of the

family. In the New Italy, fascist ideologues argued, those who had the means should be encouraged to buy their own home rather than rent or share a dwelling. Homeowners felt especially secure and settled, and were more likely to start a family early.⁹⁸ Deregulation, however, worked to the detriment of working-class families in cities, most of whom lived in rented accommodation. During the post-war recovery period, which lasted from 1924 to 1926, many municipalities and associations sold inner-city properties in their possession to developers who transformed old tenements into office blocks or converted them into plush flats for middle-class occupants. Others took advantage of the boom in prime property prices and rents by diverting resources to the construction of commercial sites rather than social housing. To compensate somewhat for the loss of residential property in urban centres, the dictatorship began a campaign for the construction of affordable accommodation for the 'popular' classes. As part of its public works policy during the depression, the government encouraged building by granting private investors low-interest credit and tax exemptions. By 1935, a total of 6512 apartment buildings with more than 52 000 flats had been built, but only 24 000 of these were *case popolari*; this term designated two to four-room residences that were let to selected low-income families, particularly those with many children, since authorities showed *famiglie numerose* preference in waiting lists. The other 28 000 were purpose-built as the somewhat more upscale 'economy type' apartment with three to six rooms; these were created specifically for public employees and lower middle-class families.⁹⁹

Fascist building works simply did not keep pace with the urgent rise in demand for affordable housing. Nor did the construction of *case popolari* under fascism match the volume of growth in the number of grand *palazzi* that were inhabited by the affluent middle class. Deregulation encouraged the privatization of the housing market, despite the hype which surrounded the fascist public works programme. The historic centres of major cities in the north and centre were being 'gentrified' in the 1920s and 1930s as working-class people were pushed to the peripheral *borgate* that were being developed by financiers with government backing. In Milan and Rome, this was especially true; the urban proletariat was forced to move to the outskirts of the city into dreary rented accommodation in areas that often lacked transport facilities, other public services, and even basic amenities, like roads and drainage.¹⁰⁰ This represented a major social change which had a huge impact on the urban landscape and on established working-class communities and identities.

Other government initiatives had adverse consequences on the availability and quality of low-cost urban housing. In response to the economic crisis, the regime issued repeated mandatory rent reductions along with pay cuts between 1927 and 1934; the last one on 15 April 1934, for example, introduced a 12 to 15 per cent decrease in rents. Had these been enforced

firmly, the urban working class would have benefited enormously, since rents in cities had risen greatly in the post-war period and housing costs weighed heavily on any tight family budget. But the government's failure to monitor rent control, together with its deregulation of controls, created opportunities for evasion and abuse. The 'imperial' city of Rome grew at a faster rate than any other European city in the interwar period, and this growth profoundly affected the living standards of those on a fixed or low income; in the 1920s rents in the nation's capital became the highest in all of Italy because of scarcity and speculation within the housing market. Sources reveal that housing associations, which had been created with a progressive purpose in mind, namely the provision of affordable but decent housing for the urban poor, were fully exploiting new opportunities for profit-making. This situation was all the more alarming because reformers in Rome, in fact, had started the pre-war movement for social housing by founding the kingdom's first *istituto autonomo per le case popolari* (autonomous association for popular housing) in 1904. One of the most renowned of Italy's housing associations, the *Istituto Romano di Beni Stabili*¹⁰¹ fell into disrepute during the fascist period when its management lost sight of its mission. Though it benefited from tax immunity and occupied premises which were donated by the commune, the association was a colossal capitalist concern which was making huge profits through government contracts for cheap housing. In 1931, the directors of the institute decided to evade the imposition of rent controls in their properties offering low-cost accommodation by forcibly evicting tenants, some of whom were long-standing residents of twenty or more years, and selling their apartments to the highest bidders. Residents were offered the 'opportunity' to re-locate to one of the institute's apartment complexes in the suburbs. One of these developments was located in the infamous 'Valley of Hell', a reclaimed swamp converted hastily into a 'model fascist community'. On this isolated stretch of humid wasteland, without proper roads or lighting, blocks of flats gave little more than shelter to the working-class 'settlers' who ran an increased risk of malaria, respiratory infections, and rheumatism because of their dank surroundings.¹⁰²

The fascist welfare state

The traumatic experience of the depression, which thrust government social policy into confusion and chaos, propelled the regime towards a new 'totalitarian' phase of 'organic co-ordination', which was characterized by major initiatives aimed at the centralization of state control over the social insurance system. In the early 1930s, the regime began to consolidate its welfare state by encouraging the proliferation of parastate agencies. With their national, provincial, and local branches, these big *enti pubblici* had extensive horizontal and vertical linkages to the organs of the state and the

party, private institutions, and social groups, who were organized into their distinct clienteles. In the field of industrial accidents, for example, the process of re-structuring the administration of social provision was evidenced by a new law in December 1929, which gave the state an insurance monopoly. Subsequently, party syndicates organized this type of relief. Then in 1933, the state accomplished a complete take-over when it converted the old *cassa nazionale infortuni* into the new *Istituto Nazionale Fascista per l'Assicurazione sul Lavoro nell'Industria* (INFAIL – the National Fascist Institute for Insurance in Industrial Work).¹⁰³ Organizations like the INFPS and INFAIL typified the curious kind of ‘contradictory modernization’ of welfare which fascism promoted.¹⁰⁴ Lasting institutional and social innovation occurred in the 1930s, but it was contradictory because it was directed at expanding the organizational potential of the ‘totalitarian’ state in order to maximize private investment in the insurance system. Moreover, modernization occurred within the context firstly of economic crisis, during the depression, and then, in the second half of the 1930s, of economic development which delivered poor living standards to the working class. As it expanded the scope and range of its welfare state, the regime asked workers to pay an ever larger portion of their pay towards social entitlements. In return, fascism gave them low wages, limited consumption, and meagre benefits.

Because one of the regime’s top priorities was to consolidate the social insurance system financially, tight-fistedness was a feature of the fascist welfare state. Like the unemployment fund, the pension fund ran at a huge surplus during the fascist period. In 1939, for example, only 508 million (representing 38.58 per cent) of the 1.319 billion raised in contributions that year were actually spent on pensions. This low rate of payment was not the result of any financial constraints. The amount of awards in 1939 totalled less than 10 per cent of the pension scheme’s patrimonial and reserve funds; and with administrative costs running at about 15 per cent, there was plenty of money around for the regime to distribute to the nation’s pensioners. But after 1928, the regime permitted pension benefits to become ever more inadequate to the needs of recipients for a safeguard against poverty in illness and old age. Only after 1947 did the administrators of the INPS succeed at equalizing annual contributions and benefits; and only after the formation of the democratic republic did the Italian state begin to contribute substantially to the pension scheme. The state’s contribution to pensions (as a percentage of total contributions) rose from an annual average of 3 per cent in 1935–40 to 21.16 per cent in 1950–5; and it was 25.16 by 1960–5.¹⁰⁵

Far from destroying the *ottocento* liberal principle of mutuality, the fascist welfare state depended upon it. The example of family allowances illustrates the distinctly fascist conception of the character and aims of the welfare state. In Italy, family allowances arose primarily because of the

failure of the regime to solve the problem of unemployment. The government believed that a reduction in the average 48-hour working week would help alleviate unemployment in industries that were operating at diminished productive capacity and, by cutting the wage bill, would give Italian exports a competitive edge. By an agreement concluded on 11 October 1934 between the fascist confederations of industrial employers and workers, the dictatorship introduced the 40-hour work week (with effect from 16 April 1935; made permanent on 23 June 1935) affecting between 30 to 60 per cent of the industrial workforce, with the share of burden falling disproportionately upon industries with a preponderance of female workers. In the months immediately after the reform, about 200 000 unemployed workers were re-absorbed into industry. Although the 40-hour week was accompanied by decreased earnings (through shorter hours, no pay rises, and the abolition of over-time) and, in some cases, by an increased intensity of the work process, the regime presented it as a 'conquest' for labour. Family allowances acted as an instrument of the general policy of wage restraint; the regime opted to give wage supplements to only some workers rather than pay rises to all of them. In order to offset the effects of decreased earnings for workers with families, the 1934 accord instituted the National Workers' Fund for Family Allowances. Though there were French and Belgian models, the Italian state-run system of family allowances had its own native precedent in a collective labour contract covering the predominantly female wool-workers of Biella.¹⁰⁶ Introduced in December 1933, this contract stipulated that all the owners of wool factories in the area had to group together and found a trade-wide *cassa* for the payment of family allowances.¹⁰⁷ The system which fascism introduced on a nationwide basis, however, modified the Biella initiative in important ways: under the Biella agreement, women became beneficiaries and employers paid the cost of the programme exclusively. But under the new 1934 scheme, only 'breadwinners' could benefit from family allowances. As the regulations concerning the 40-hour week stipulated that in employment men were to be substituted for women and children where possible, the pursued objective was to limit entitlement to male heads of families (*capifamiglia*) and to reinforce the patriarchal foundations of the family and the economy.

The purpose of the national family allowance system created in 1934 was to grant only those male industrial workers who worked no more than 40 hours a week a supplement of 4 *lire* for each dependent child under 14 years of age (though workers with only one child were excluded). The income of the fund derived from a contribution of 1 per cent of earnings from workers on a 40-hour week (and a contribution at the same rate from employers) and a contribution of 5 per cent of the wages drawn for the hours worked in excess of 40 hours for all workers on a longer working week (and a contribution at the same rate from employers). Therefore, the principle in action from the first was to re-distribute the premiums from a

mass pool of workers and employers to a minority of the workforce. Some 2.25 million workers contributed to a scheme which would initially benefit, according to the government's own estimates (based on the 1931 census), at most 540 000 male workers. The equalization of burdens over a vast occupational territory was a distinctive feature of 'corporative' social insurance. The first imperative of fascist welfare was to accumulate a huge reserve of funds.¹⁰⁸

Between 1934 and 1936, the whole politico-ideological impetus for the family allowance system shifted as the regime tied this form of insurance to the demographic campaign. Using social entitlements to reward prolific and productive workers became a priority for government. Similarly, the regime extended maternity insurance to home workers and domestic servants, white-collar workers on a low income, and agricultural workers (including farm labourers, tenant-farmers, and share-croppers) in 1934-7, improved benefits and provision considerably as part of its drive to protect Italian mothers, and then rescinded these gains completely by transforming this form of *previdenza sociale* into 'marriage and birth premiums' (*premi di nuzialità e di natalità*) by a royal decree law of 14 April 1939 (no. 636). The new legislation emphasized the pronatalist purpose of the 'bonuses', politicized the function of this kind of social insurance and made it an integral part of the regime's family policy, which aimed at severing the tenuous ties between women workers and regular employment. With this enactment, the dictatorship destroyed the historic importance of maternity leave provision as a right of the working mother and converted it into a reward for pregnancy and birth. Under the new scheme, all workers, regardless of their sex, paid contributions into a fund managed by the INPS; by extending the field of application to both men and women, the regime increased the funding pool and divorced the benefit from its original purpose. Insured persons received a nuptiality premium of between 400 and 1000 *lire*, depending on their sex and occupation (with male employees receiving 1000 and female employees 700; male wage workers receiving 700 and female wage workers 500; men employed in agriculture receiving 500 and women employed in agriculture receiving 400), when they married before their twenty-sixth birthday (or, in the case of male white-collar workers, before their thirtieth birthday). According to the scheme, workers also received a natality premium at the birth of each child (stillbirths during the third trimester of pregnancy were included): white-collar workers and industrial workers were entitled to 300 *lire* for the first child, 350 for the second and third, and 400 for each subsequent child; but agricultural workers were entitled to only 150, 175, and 200 respectively. Because of the high fertility of rural people, the regime decided to grant agricultural workers lower rates of birth premiums in order to keep a tight reign on expenditure.¹⁰⁹ Class and gender both determined the level of benefits offered by the fascist welfare state, which graded individuals and

groups according to their placement in the labour market and meted out rewards commensurate with their perceived utility and value to the regime.

The new demographic importance attached to *assegni familiari* was reflected in legislation which overhauled the whole system. With a royal decree law of 21 August 1936 (no. 1632), the INPS absorbed the family allowance fund and took over the management of it. The legislation also made provision for a state contribution amounting to .60 *lire* for every benefit paid by the INPS. And it clarified the definition of a 'family breadwinner': for the purposes of benefit allocation, a *capofamiglia* was the 'father'. A woman could receive benefit only under the following restricted circumstances: when she was a widow or separated from her husband and had children to support; when her husband was permanently disabled; when she was an unmarried mother with children who were not legally reclaimed by the father (workers could claim for adopted and illegitimate children and those from previous marriages); when her husband had deserted her; when her husband was unemployed (providing that he was not receiving unemployment benefit) or was serving in the armed forces.¹¹⁰ The patriarchal impulse behind reforms that were linked to fascism's new *politica della famiglia* (family policy) found expression too in 1940, when a new law of 6 August (no. 1278) governing family allowances gave insured workers the right to claim wives as dependents.¹¹¹ Whether they were in regular or casual employment, working-class women contributed to their family's income and survival; but they were treated by the system as if they were all 'housewives'. The regime had not delivered its promised 'decent family wage', so women had to supplement the meagre pay packets of the male 'heads-of-household' in whatever way that they could.

Family allowances were also extended to all workers in industry, whatever their weekly working hours; and the terms were changed so that wage-earning *capifamiglia* with one child qualified. With legislation in January and June 1937, new categories of workers (earning below the maximum limit of 2000 *lire*), including salaried employees and agricultural workers, joined the scheme; typically of fascist social insurance principles in action, though, white-collar workers were given more favourable terms under separate agreements. Between 1935 and 1939, the fund for family allowances collected 269 988 million *lire* in contributions and distributed 235 717 million in contributions, thereby making this branch of compulsory insurance the best performer in terms of the rate of delivery of payments to the insured.¹¹² Workers with one child received 3.6 *lire* a week, those with 2–3 children received 4.8 per child, and those with 4 or more received 6 per child. For the 800 000 or so workers (with 1.2 million dependents) who received them, family allowances probably did make a difference, even though the wage supplements were not large enough to cover the true cost of raising children. And, by the government's own calculations, working-class families simply could not survive on income from a single wage.

Moreover, the war cancelled out any positive effect that family allowances had on workers' living standards.¹¹³

Because Italian workers were so badly paid, the fascist welfare state bore down heavily upon them. In 1929, social insurance coverage cost the worker 3.25 per cent in deductions from pay, while employers in industry paid 5.75 per cent of their annual wage bill. After the creation of the INPS, and the unification of insurance for disability and old age, tuberculosis, maternity and unemployment, workers were paying between 4.2 and 5.6 per cent of their wages, depending on their wage category. And women workers who were subject to maternity insurance paid an additional annual subscription fee of 3 *lire*. With further increases in subsequent years, due to the rise in the rate of contributions for pensions (introduced in April 1939) and the addition of family allowances, and marriage and birth premiums, workers were paying between 8 and 10 per cent of their earnings to the INPS by 1939, while the employers' share rose to almost 20 per cent.¹¹⁴ And what did the working class receive in return for this drain on their income? They got episodic, selective, fragmentary, discriminatory and insubstantial 'protection' from life's risks, some of which, like unemployment, the regime's policies actually increased. The hard-earned cash that they pumped into the 'corporate social security system' paid the dividends of an unemployment benefit which was fixed at a level of starvation wages for a maximum of four months a year, a pension that was set well below subsistence level for low-earners (the maximum pension came to about a third of average earnings in each wage category), access to a tiered system of health care which confined them to third-class treatment as tuberculosis patients in 'popular sanatoria' and a few one-off marriage and birth 'bonuses' for their conformity and prolificity. The dictatorship halted a process of welfare-state building which post-war liberalism began belatedly by moving towards the creation of a universal and comprehensive system of social security. For political, ideological, and economic reasons, fascism introduced significant changes to the social insurance system which it inherited. Many of its big parastate institutions, such as the INPS, INFIL, and INAM, and social programmes, like family allowances, survived the collapse of dictatorship and became the foundation of the democratic welfare state which replaced fascism's corporate order. But the enduring legacy of the fascist welfare state is not a measure of its quality.

5

Racial Regeneration through Welfare: The National Organization for the Protection of Motherhood and Infancy under Fascism

‘Maximum natality, minimum mortality; these two aspects of fascism’s demographic policy are interdependent.’

Benito Mussolini (from his essay on ‘Il numero come forza’ [Numbers as Force], which first appeared in *Gerarchia* on 1 September 1928, and was also published as a preface, accompanying that of Oswald Spengler, to the Italian translation of R. Korherr’s *Regresso delle nascite: Morte dei popoli* [Birthrate Decline: The Death of Peoples] of 1928).

The Ascension Day Speech of 26 May 1927 marked the transformation of fascism as a movement, a party, and a government into a regime, a state, and a dictatorship.¹ In this parliamentary address, one of his longest on record, Mussolini defined for the first time the programme and aims of the political order which he had been gradually consolidating since the seizure of power. Chief amongst his objectives stood the goal of population increase. Because of fascism, the Duce argued, Italy had entered a new resplendent stage in its evolution; but there were symptoms of degeneration that could not be ignored without imperilling the race. The life or death, prosperity or deprivation, and the sovereignty or servitude of the nation depended on whether birthrate decline could be halted. To lend force to his pronatalist arguments, Mussolini placed the kingdom’s vital statistics on a demographic battlefield with those of his European neighbours. Forty million Italians compared unfavourably with 90 million Germans and 200 million Slavs. France posed a threat as a mighty military power with a combined colonial and mainland population numbering over 130 million people. And the British ruled over a huge empire of over 500 million inhabitants who could be mobilized to defend the realm.² The sheer size of the armies that other nations could muster proved to be a disquieting thought for a dictator with expansionist aims.

Mussolini the socialist had been a believer in the power of birth control to liberate women from the tyranny of unwanted pregnancies and to free the working class from abject poverty. Mussolini’s support of ‘Malthusian’

theory extended beyond his conversion to fascism. He explained to those who assembled to celebrate the 'birth' of fascism in March 1919 that Italy was a poor and over-populated country which could barely feed its people. Excessive population increase would cause misery and hunger to increase because of the absolute limits of Italy's economic endowments.³ And in December 1924 Mussolini complained of the nation's deficiencies of land and resources, which were a natural hindrance to demographic increment, in his estimation. Italy could ill afford to sustain an annual increase of over 440 000 people, he asserted then to the senate.⁴ But in his address on Ascension Day in 1927, Mussolini repudiated these sentiments. He now argued that a nation transformed by fascism could comfortably accommodate at least 10 million more citizens. Rural development schemes would make Italy 'unrecognizable in ten years' time'. Reclamation projects to clear cultivable land and agrarian reforms to modernize agriculture would increase agricultural output and lead to national self-sufficiency in food production. And the 'demographic settlement' of a future empire would absorb any excess population. 'Certain people with little sense say that there are too many of us. Sensible people reply that there are too few'.

In the speech, the Duce also explained the importance of population policy to his imperial aspirations. 'In order to count for something in the world', Italy had to have a population of not less than 60 million by the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century. 'I am the doctor who does not neglect symptoms ... and these are symptoms which make us pause to think very seriously about the destiny of the race ... If a nation diminishes, gentlemen, that nation does not found an empire. It becomes a colony.' A steady decline in the birthrate caused a latent demographic crisis which fascism hoped to remedy in 'tempestive and aggressive' state interventions to increase fertility. During the 'first phase' of the demographic campaign, the regime would focus on positive incentives to increase the quantity and quality of the Italian population. Fascism would intensify the efforts it was already making in the struggle against drugs, malaria, tuberculosis, alcoholism, suicide and all the other social maladies afflicting the race. It would also devote energy and resources to the development of the *Opera Nazionale per la Protezione della Maternità e dell'Infanzia* (ONMI National Organization for the Protection of Motherhood and Infancy).⁵ At the regime's bidding, this 'most fascist of institutions' had already embarked upon a therapeutic mission to cure the race of its moral and physical decadence. By making the development of welfare programmes for mothers and children a top priority of its *politica sociale*, the dictatorship hoped to improve the health of the Italian people. But positive encouragements and rewards had to be matched by negative measures against the social contagion of sterility. The regime had already introduced a celibacy tax with new legislation on 19 December 1926. Should Italians not become more prolific, the Duce warned, fascism would have to contemplate further

repressive laws to punish 'voluntary infecundity'. A tax on childless couples could become a reality in the not-so-distant future.⁶

In his essay on 'Numbers as Force', Mussolini continued his attack on 'Malthusianism'. He introduced the idea of a 'horrifying demographic deficit' between births and deaths: 'Italy's cribs are empty, but its cemeteries are overflowing,' he stated dramatically. The young were the 'vital lymph glands of the nation'. Deprived of plentiful births, many European nations, including Italy, were growing old and weak, while the coloured races of the world were multiplying prolifically. Mussolini also provided an economic argument against the limitation of births. 'Malthusian' fears of over-population were unfounded, he declared. Contrary to the outmoded ideas of an Anglican clergyman, who wrote over a century earlier, Mussolini argued, population increase would not cause unemployment to rise or famine to ensue. Unemployment did not depend on shifts in the supply of labour, but rather in fluctuations in the demand for labour. In Mussolini's opinion, fewer workers spelled economic stagnation and industrial decline. Chronic under-consumption was one of the most troubling weaknesses of the Italian economy. Mussolini claimed that this problem was a symptom of the failure of population increase to keep pace with economic progress. While the nation's factories reeled off goods at an ever quickening rate, a sullen birthrate stunted the growth of a home market. On the question of the impact of population increase upon living standards, the Duce remarked that Italy's 42 million people lived better and longer in 1928 than the country's 27 million residents had done back in 1871. Sustained demographic growth, Mussolini affirmed confidently, would increase national wealth and manufacturing productivity and generate progressive improvements in the health and welfare of all Italians.⁷

In an article entitled 'Is the White Race Dying?', which was based on a section of his 'Numbers as Force' essay, Mussolini adopted an explicit racist approach to the problem of demographic increment. Gobineau-esque in its crude understanding of the determinants of race and in its alarmist tone, Mussolini's argument rested on the presupposition that 'Western civilization' faced the very real threat of racial extinction.⁸ He emphasized, moreover, the importance of the 'battle for births' to the regime's expansionist foreign policy agenda. He reaffirmed the principles of both Spengler's concept of 'prolificity as a political force' and Korherr's theory of a 'racial war' between the 'white race of Europe' and the 'yellow and black races of Asia and Africa'.⁹ In the piece, Mussolini asserted that

the whole white race may come to be submerged by the coloured races which multiply at a rate unknown to ours. Are the black and yellow races at our doors? Yes, they are at our doors and not only because of the development amongst them of a national consciousness which will affect their future in the world. While, for example, the whites in the

United States have a wretched birthrate, which would be even more miserable if it were not for the infiltration of more prolific races, such as the Irish, the Jews, and the Italians, the Negroes of the United States are exceedingly prolific, and already number fourteen millions, that is, a sixth of the whole population of the Republic of the Stars and Stripes. The alarm bells are ringing. Those who can see a little farther than tomorrow (I believe that no one has a right to govern a nation who is not capable of seeing at least fifty years ahead) are very anxious.¹⁰

With these pronouncements, Mussolini declared his commitment 'to defend the imperial destiny of the Italian stock'.¹¹

A part of the authoritarian plan to alter Italian fertility involved the introduction, beginning in 1928, of a series of measures favouring fathers of large families with tax breaks and preferential treatment in public housing allocation and job placement.¹² This 'campaign of incentives' culminated in August 1937, with the introduction of Nazi-style marriage loans.¹³ Mussolini's effort to make peace with the Catholic Church by presenting fascism as a force seeking to revive religious sentiment and moral values formed a vital component of his *politica della famiglia* (family policy), which was linked to the 'battle of births'.¹⁴ The Duce's firm stand on marriage, abortion, infanticide, prostitution, contraception and pornography paid court to the values of a confessional nation. When he asked himself, in his 'Numbers as Force' essay, whether his *politica demografica* (demographic policy) would actually succeed, Mussolini stated that he did not know the answer, but it was important to try to change people's reproductive behaviour, because the problem of birthrate decline had become so very 'desperate'. He hoped that fascism's 'morality and laws' would be a 'goad to custom' (*pungolo al costume*).¹⁵ In common with other interwar fascist movements, Italian fascism considered the family to be the 'germ-cell' of the nation. Fascism's family policy was the basis of an agenda for a conservative modernization of Italy in that it aspired both to protect the family and to politicize its functions.

And women, of course, were central to fascism's attempts to increase the birthrate. They were the servants of the fascist state and the front-line foot-soldiers in the battle of births. One fanatical party loyalist and local ONMI leader described the role of women in the fascist social revolution in the following terms: 'The regime does not want women to be simple baby-making brood-mares (*fattrici*). Fascism has transformed the traditional woman into a modern woman. In the new order, the mother-breeder has become a technical assistant, whose job is to ensure the rational and scientific development of her progeny.'¹⁶ The Fascist Woman of the Future would be as fecund as her rural counterpart of today, but she would also be a much better mother, since the regime wanted high-quality offspring. A key component of the campaign to teach Italian women the skills of good

mothering was the attempt to promote breastfeeding as the norm. The government deployed contemporary science and statistics in its efforts to present breastfeeding as the patriotic duty of all women. Evidence compiled by public health authorities seemed to confirm fears about a progressive decline in breastfeeding as a customary practice.¹⁷ Post-war data collected at one paediatric clinic showed that a growing generational divide in women's attitudes towards nursing was occurring. Published results of a long-term study noted that older women giving birth to second or third children during and after the war breastfed as a matter of course, while younger women giving birth for the first time during the same period preferred both the commercial and home-made alternatives.¹⁸ Other studies pointed to class and geographic variations in feeding practice. One such investigation charted the rapid diffusion of 'modern methods' in northern regions, where women were most heavily employed, but concluded that in the south 'artificial' feeding by bottles remained scarce, while 'mixed' methods were only slowly gaining ground.¹⁹ And a government inquiry completed in 1933 concluded optimistically that mothers from the urban and rural working classes in Latium still breastfed their infants 'as a rule', though they probably weaned infants earlier in the 1920s than their mothers had done in the pre-war period.²⁰

Despite the fact that data about breastfeeding practices were inconclusive, some members of the medical profession believed none the less that a 'biological crisis' confronted the Italian race as women in increasing numbers 'ignored the fundamental law of human evolution' by refusing to nourish their young.²¹ Held in Trieste in 1920, the 9th Congress of Italian Paediatricians called upon the government to render breastfeeding an absolute condition of assistance for unwed mothers. Delegates at the 1928 National Congress of Nepiology in Ancona declared the bond between mother and child 'sacred and indissoluble' and breastfeeding 'the supreme duty of all women'. In September 1929, paediatricians at their annual convention in Turin voted to make an 'infant's right to mother's milk' a statutory provision in a prospective fascist children's charter. The Italian Obstetrics and Gynaecology Society viewed women's primary role as the maternal one. Also in September 1929, practitioners who gathered in Rome voted to lobby the regime for a legislative enactment compelling all Italian mothers to breastfeed their infants. Though doctors depicted breastfeeding as a 'natural function of womanhood', they still wanted to supervise women in the act. Because they believed that many women nursed their babies rather badly, and others failed to observe even elementary personal hygiene and care, they proposed that medical professionals should teach women to nurse and rear their young 'more rationally and scientifically'.²²

The post-war rise of new branches of eugenic medicine which specialized in foetal, infant, and child development spurred these initiatives. Nepiology and puericulture both became established fields of medicine,

while paediatrics gained some professional standing as a discipline. Although practitioners defined nepiology as the study of the foetus, they pursued research into the larger questions of the relative effects of heredity and environment on the human being during gestation. With regard to women, the importance of the discipline can be seen in its emphasis upon the crucial role that a woman's health and well-being played during the formation and growth of the embryo. Nepiologists were amongst the most active campaigners for a programme of racial hygiene based on radical improvements in maternal health care services.²³ Growing recognition of the need to have well-nourished and healthy mothers reflected the desire to reduce infant mortality and give babies a good start in life. Gynaecologists and obstetricians shared the desire of nepiologists for a better 'prenatal prophylaxis' to monitor and influence the progress of pregnancies from beginning to end.²⁴ Puericulturists defined their science as the study of infant nutrition, but they too had wider social aims. They specialized in the detection of hereditary defects in neonates and the prevention of morbidity and mortality due to rearing mistakes. Experts in puericulture believed that by examining infants, monitoring progress, compiling anthropometrical data and drawing up daily dietary charts, they would be able to save lives.²⁵ Nepiologists, puericulturists, and paediatricians believed that eugenic science would one day be able to manipulate and control 'human evolution' in a desired way. They became proponents of a 'scientific rearing' of infants and children as a form of racial 'biotechnology'. And many of them began to put their ideas into practice, when they assumed positions of leadership at a national level within ONMI.²⁶

The prevention of infant mortality and morbidity was not the only concern of eugenic science. The new wave of child-centred medical disciplines brought the issue of the psychological development of infants and children to the fore. Recognition of the emotional needs of children gave credence to environmental, rather than hereditarian theories about the determinants of character and behaviour. Experts tended to agree that good nurturing was more important than good genes. So-called 'problem children' – the abandoned, delinquent, and deficient – and the damaging effects of institutionalization became the objects of much of this medical interest. For example, the 'illegitimate' infants who were raised in foundling homes and orphanages came to be seen as psychologically impaired because of their experience of impersonal rearing in 'unsupportive' and 'unfamiliar' institutions. In a modern, civilized, and fascist society, reformers argued, children would 'grow more numerous and more sound' for the sake of the nation.²⁷ On the one hand, the emphasis placed upon the emotional welfare of children reinforced values that were giving rise to a more compassionate approach to childrearing.²⁸ But, on the other hand, new scientific ideas sustained old ingrained prejudices about the primary

role played by mothers in the biological and psychological evolution of children.

The fascist government did not respond to all the pressures that organized medicine placed upon it for unenforceable and potentially unpopular initiatives. However, the regime did aspire to 'elevate the maternal consciousness' of women about the importance not just of breastfeeding, but also of good childrearing practice. Rather than take a hard-line approach, fascism preferred to pursue a policy of gentle persuasion. Beginning in late 1926, ONMI helped launch a nationwide appeal aimed at encouraging Italian women to 'offer their breasts to the nation' in order to make the race more robust. Spokesmen used the full panoply of scientific racism to give a new eugenic dimension to traditional arguments about how *allattamento materno* influenced the health of infants. In this publicity drive, which included the distribution of mothercraft manuals to girls in secondary schools and the intensification of pressure on employers to open nurseries in factories and on farms, 'mother's milk' was compared to the blood which nourished the foetus during gestation. This initiative also focused on the estimable honour given women to nourish and nurture the race.²⁹

Fascism's exaltation of maternity and motherhood represented an attempt by the state to regulate women socially and sexually and to subordinate their interests to those of the nation and the state. As the primary institution for the implementation of population policy, ONMI embodied these aims. But its presence was a constant reminder to Italian women that the regime had complex and contradictory beliefs: fascist pronatalism was based on social Darwinist assumptions that motherhood was the fulfilment of women's 'natural destiny' and 'feminine nature', but also that it had to be taught and learned; that women wanted to become mothers, but that they also had to be actively 'persuaded' to do so; that the state should support mothers by providing welfare services and prenatal care, but that rearing healthy children was ultimately the responsibility of women. Fascism sent conflicting messages to the 'mothers of Italy'.³⁰ But ONMI was far more than just an ideological siphon. It was also the instrument of fascism's promised 'welfare revolution' for mothers and babies. Through ONMI, fascism tried to bring women all the benefits of modern medicine, hygiene, and welfare so that they might become good mothers of the race. The organization's primary purpose, its leaders repeatedly claimed, was to transform the nation's patchy network of institutions catering to mothers and children into a comprehensive and co-ordinated national system of health care and social welfare.

Giuseppe Bottai explained the political importance of child and maternal welfare to fascism in his preface to a book by Attilio Lo Monaco-Aprile, one of the many self-styled experts on the demographic campaign. Bottai wrote that 'a state, like the fascist one, which enlarges its social base and extends

its roots deeply into the organic mass of the people must necessarily conceive of welfare as a means to preserve the race.³¹ Sileno Fabbri, one of ONMI's national leaders, wrote that 'fascism has decisively confronted the problem of the protection of the mother and the child because it did not consider this issue in isolation. Rather, the regime saw it within the larger context of social politics and defined it as a political priority, which is intimately connected to the ideals that the Fascist Revolution must translate into reality'.³² And Mussolini himself explained what he expected of ONMI when he instructed the organization's leaders to reinforce the family, decrease infant and maternal mortality, improve the health of mothers and children and operate on a mass scale.³³

The liberal roots of the fascist welfare revolution

ONMI's legislative history predated the advent of fascism. Unresponsive to calls for measures to improve the quality and increase the quantity of the population, the pre-war Giolittian regime never introduced either a family policy of any kind or a systematic programme for child and maternal welfare. But the experience of total war changed the political culture completely, as politicians who were faced with the effects of mass destruction and social upheaval on an unprecedented scale became far more amenable to the idea of state intervention to safeguard the race. On 9 June 1922, the Italian senate passed a resolution calling upon the government to prepare a comprehensive plan of action aimed at reducing infant mortality and child abandonment and increasing assistance towards pregnant women and juvenile delinquents. At the initiative of the government, a royal decree of 23 July 1922 appointed a commission, under the direction of Senator Alberto Pironi (Director-General of Civil Administration) to examine the problem of improving welfare towards children.³⁴

In the summer and autumn of 1922, the commission produced the legislative project which became the basis for the 1925 founding statutes of the *Opera Nazionale per la Protezione della Maternità e dell'Infanzia*.³⁵ The thirty-two commissioners began their work with the intention of recommending some form of state intervention in child and maternal welfare provision. Examining their options, they decided to reject the idea of adopting American-style reforms for a number of reasons. In the United States, separate legislation first in 1912 and then in 1918 established a Children's Bureau and a wartime Women's Bureau (made permanent in 1920) and put these government departments in charge of implementing all relevant social legislation. Italian reformers preferred to unify the administration of maternal and child welfare programmes. Moreover, the American model necessitated the formation of a big bureaucracy and a huge increase in federal government social spending. In England, an

impressive array of laws, including the Children's Act of 1908, the Maternity and Child Welfare Act of 1918, and the Education Act of 1921, created a fairly comprehensive system of maternal and child welfare; but English reforms also fragmented the organization of services amongst various ministries. The Spanish, Danish, and German governments also spread responsibility for social provision towards mothers and children amongst competent health and educational ministries. After examining the various foreign precedents, the Italian commissioners chose to adopt a modified version of the Belgian *Oeuvre*. Created on 19 September 1919, this agency appealed to them because it was autonomous from the state and, by co-ordinating child protection services nationwide, it fulfilled a vital public purpose at a minimal cost to government. Because of Italy's massive war debt, financial considerations decided in favour of a scheme that would emphasize the co-ordinating functions of the new agency and would permit the government to exploit private sources of funding.³⁶

On 21 December 1922, the fascist government dismantled the commission and appointed another far smaller one in its place; this team examined the first commission's legislative proposal for the 'protection and assistance of motherhood and infancy', formally approved it after two plenary sessions, and then presented it to Aldo Finzi, the Under-Secretary of State for the Interior Ministry. Although the government began to review the project in early 1923, the regime's political instability impeded immediate action. The following year, Luigi Federzoni, the interior minister, exhumed the bill from the archives and, with Mussolini's approval, gave it to the central office of the senate for review; the senate committee, under the leadership of Ernesto Marchiafava, presented the bill to the upper chamber on 8 December 1924 and suggested some minor amendments to it. The full senate approved these changes and the bill itself, after a two-day discussion on 9 and 10 June 1925. The chamber also rubber-stamped the bill, after a two-day discussion on 25 and 26 November 1925 and a rousing speech by Federzoni. According to Attilio Lo Monaco-Aprile, fascism's population policy reflected the newfound importance attached to issues concerning the health and welfare of mothers and children in the post-war period. He argued that the passage of the law of 10 December 1925 creating ONMI illustrated that 'the national government recognized that the problem of infancy, as defined by the new biological, anthropological, economic and sociological sciences, was one of the most important political, economic, eugenic and demographic priorities of Italy'.³⁷

In his presentation of Federzoni's project to the senate on 8 December 1924, Marchiafava used very similar language to describe the regenerative effects of child and maternal welfare. He argued that the proposed national institution would be a 'force for the defence, preservation, and progress of the race'. He stated that, in the previous fifty years, all advanced nations, with the noteworthy exception of Italy, had recognized the urgency of the

problem of racial degeneration and had engaged in 'intense legislative activity aimed at protecting infancy'. He reviewed the achievements of other countries and compared them to a long list of failed legislative attempts in Italy dating back to the nineteenth century. Scarce and fragmentary legislation and an intolerably high level of infant mortality were the result of endemic government indifference and inactivity under liberalism. Apart from the provision of elementary education, the state did almost nothing to protect Italian children. Most of liberal Italy's labour laws concerning women and children were never even implemented properly, because of a chronic deficiency of means, the systemic weaknesses of enforcement agencies, and the perennial indolence of local organs of government. What was needed was a central organization with a broad scope and full powers to translate the new government's pronatalist vision into reality. Through fascism, Italy would finally join the family of advanced countries, most of whom had long recognized how programmes for social hygiene could be used by governments to improve the quality of the race.³⁸

In his address to the chamber, Federzoni also emphasized that the ultimate objective of the regime's demographic policy went well beyond mere population increase. The state had to create an institution like ONMI in order to ensure that the fascist of tomorrow would be physically, morally, and socially superior to the Italian of today. The protection of children had to begin from the moment of conception and extend through infancy, childhood, and adolescence.³⁹ Some deputies, like Eugenio Morelli, questioned how the regime could possibly muster the resources to complete such a vast programme of racial regeneration touching seemingly all aspects of policy concerning the mental, physical, moral, economic and social well-being of children. But, his was a lone voice, for, in their brief discussions of the project, senators and deputies mostly expressed their support for the government's plans and their belief in fascism's ability to complete its welfare revolution.⁴⁰ Despite this optimistic appraisal, the law of 10 December 1925 did leave important questions unanswered. This was especially the case since the intention of the government was that the *opera nazionale* would not entail any major increase in state expenditure. But just how ONMI would be able to reconcile its enormous and complex brief with the regime's desire to keep welfare spending to a minimum was a bit of a mystery.

OMNI: legislative achievement

ONMI's founding statutes of 10 December 1925 contained 25 articles which defined the broad shape and scope of the new organization. The law described ONMI as a national parastate agency (*ente nazionale*) 'invested with the power of vigilance and control over all the private and public institutions for the assistance and protection of motherhood and

infancy'.⁴¹ The choice of an *ente nazionale* demonstrated once again, as in the cases of the INPS and other parastate agencies, that fascism favoured the 'entification' (*entificazione*) of public administration.⁴² The regime created numerous apparatuses which paralleled the state in order to bypass established pre-fascist ministries and bureaucracies, gain greater leverage for control, and promote its own version of efficiency and modernity. But, as well as being an *ente nazionale*, ONMI was also an '*opera nazionale*', like the *Dopolavoro* and the *Balilla* – a great philanthropic enterprise organized by the state, but undertaken by society. The nomenclature clearly delineated the state's role and defined the work of ONMI as the collective responsibility of all members of the national community. The use of the term '*opera*', given its strong association with charitable works, revealed an important feature of fascist welfarism. Because of the regime's desire to limit social spending as much as possible, one of the most essential tasks of ONMI was to increase private sources of funding for social betterment. Through ONMI, fascism expanded public power over welfare administration in order to penetrate, mobilize, and organize the private sphere. ONMI's bipolar juridical personality as both *ente* and *opera* demonstrated that fascism experimented at creating new administrative forms in order to resolve the perennial problems of the boundaries of state intervention and the public/private dichotomy to its own advantage. But the institutional model that was chosen burdened ONMI with conflicting identities as a national charity (organized and funded on a voluntary basis) and a state bureaucracy (with public employment and expenditure as its foundation). ONMI's hybrid nature restricted the agency's resources and jeopardized the fulfilment of its vast mission statement.

The organization's founding statutes gave ONMI a vast programme of action, which committed the agency to developing an array of educational, medical, social, health and welfare programmes affecting needy mothers, infants, and children. One of ONMI's primary responsibilities was defined as the 'vigilance, control, and co-ordination' of maternal and child welfare institutions. In the exercise of its supervisory function, the organization had the right to order 'the suspension or dissolution of the administration of public and private welfare institutions and the closure of these establishments'.⁴³ Fascism did not abolish Crispi's 1890 law on *opere pie*, so the governmental bodies (prefects, provinces, and congregations) which were responsible for monitoring the performance of charities retained their duty to do so during (and, indeed, after) the dictatorship.⁴⁴ However, by centralizing the control of all child and maternal welfare institutions in ONMI, and granting the agency powers which were comparable to those of the actual organs of the state, the regime hoped to expand public authority over beneficent institutions and to improve standards of service and care. ONMI's task was enormous, for, as Mussolini later noted in his Ascension

Day Speech, the most recent statistics (from 1921) showed that about 5700 public beneficent institutions in Italy provided relief for women and children; and an unknown number of purely private (and hence unregistered) charities catered to women and children. Table 5.1a indicates the number, type, and patrimony of these institutions. And Table 5.1b shows their geographic distribution throughout the kingdom:

The 1925 legislation made a point of distinguishing fascist 'social assistance' from liberal 'public beneficence' when it made relative need rather than absolute poverty the sole condition of entitlement to aid. The enactment replaced the very foundations of public beneficence – proof of poverty and domicile – by a wide definition of eligibility. And it purposefully granted married women and legitimate children social rights. According to article 4, ONMI aimed to provide protection for: 'needy or abandoned pregnant women and mothers; infants and toddlers (up to the age of five) belonging to needy families;⁴⁵ physically and psychologically abnormal children; morally and materially abandoned minors; and corrupted or delinquent children (up to the age of eighteen)'. And article 14 obliged private and public beneficent institutions under ONMI's control to

Table 5.1a: Public institutions of beneficence catering to women and children in 1921

Number	Type	<i>Patrimony (in contemporary lire)</i>
27	Maternal shelters	4 632 011
68	Agencies providing subsidies to pregnant women	2 185 916
50	Agencies providing subsidies for nursing mothers	3 603 416
119	Foundling homes	57 860 626
29	Nurseries	1 498 465
49	Homes for rachitic children	11 902 302
105	Tuberculosis colonies	8 355 328
35	Summer camps	8 161 159
3291	Playschools	143 352 405
1095	Orphanages	259 306 144
127	Institutions which provided income support to orphans	20 670 360
14	Institutions which helped adolescent foundlings	1 055 477
243	Colleges and convents	81 659 834
232	Residential institutions for 'mentally deficient' children	44 311 324
47	Children's reformatories	14 671 261
82	Homes for the deaf	16 977 207
102	Homes for the blind	29 021, 952
18	Recreational facilities	1 513 257
Total: 5733		710 738 444

Table 5.1b Geographic distribution of beneficent institutions catering to women and children in 1921

Piedmont	1665	Venetia	284	The Marches	198	The Abruzzi	85
Lombardy	1501	Campania	274	Apulia	153	Calabria	48
Emilia	428	Liguria	265	Latium	148	Sardinia	40
Sicily	322	Tuscany	210	Umbria	93	Basilicata	19

Source: A. Lo Monaco-Aprile, 'L' assistenza della maternità e della infanzia in Italia', *MI*, 1 (November, 1926), pp. 18–25, 22.

As is evident from Table 5.1a, the majority of existing institutions provided some form of assistance towards children. Because of the relative scarcity of establishments supporting women, particularly married women, an expansion in new types of women-centred services was identified as a priority. And the regime hoped that ONMI would rectify pronounced regional imbalances in social welfare provision by encouraging institutional development outside of Lombardy and Piedmont.

assist women and children 'without regard to their place of residence'.⁴⁶ The intention was that the new fascist welfare would not be like the old church charity, which succoured only those destitute and abandoned *personae miserabiles* (miserable persons) without any means of support.

The guidelines for the execution of the 1925 legislation were promulgated on 15 April 1926: the *regolamento* contained 238 articles which outlined in depth the structure and aims of ONMI; 69 of these (articles 123 to 192) described ONMI's programme.⁴⁷ The organization had responsibility for the promotion of a wide range of services and initiatives in the areas of health, education, welfare, propaganda, prison reform, social work and 'social control' (censorship of children's literature and the crack-down on under-age drinking). According to the legislation, these covered: 'obstetric assistance during pregnancy, birth, and after'; 'mother's aid, sanitary prophylaxis, and help during early infancy'; 'anti-tuberculosis prophylaxis'; 'the physical and moral protection of pre-school and school-aged children'; 'assistance towards physically and psychologically abnormal children'; 'assistance towards abandoned, corrupted, abused and delinquent children'; and 'the vigilance of at-risk children and minors under fourteen years'. In addition to creating new types of institutions, and extending welfare into rural zones, the organization was meant to run training courses in puericulture for midwives and doctors, disseminate norms on hygiene and childrearing amongst the general population, establish contacts and joint initiatives with other party and state welfare agencies, raise an army of volunteer 'agents for the protection of infancy' and collaborate with local governments.⁴⁸

The April royal decree gave ONMI a tripartite structure, comprising of a central council (*consiglio centrale*) with an executive junta (*giunta esecutiva*), provincial federations (*federazioni provinciali*), and communal committees

of patrons (*comitati di patronato*). The organization was highly hierarchical and centralized. All political appointees who were accountable to the interior minister, members of the national leadership of ONMI were responsible for policy formation and had full control over its implementation by provincial and municipal officials. The 1926 enactment, moreover, gave the executive junta the power to act as an advisory body to government by devising legislation and recommending reforms.⁴⁹

Initially, ONMI's central council had 38 members (the number was reduced to 13 by the *testo unico* of 1934). According to the royal decree law of 21 October 1926, which made some minor amendments to the 1925 law, these councillors could be chosen from officials within the ministries of education, justice, public health, the national economy and foreign affairs. Members could also be recruited from the PNF (including the *fasci femminili*) and from other *enti nazionali*, such as the *Dopolavoro* and the *Balilla*. The April 1926 regulation and the October 1926 reform both stated that a primary goal of ONMI was to create a new type of public servant – one who was not a career bureaucrat, but rather a technical specialist in the field of maternal and child welfare. To fulfil that technocratic ambition, the legislation extended membership in the central directorate to 'experts' from the Italian Paediatric Society, the Italian Obstetrics and Gynaecology Society, the Italian Eugenics Society, the Italian Association for Hygiene, the National Organization for Handicapped War Orphans and the Italian Red Cross. ONMI's leaders were to form the basis of a class of welfare professionals who would apply their expertise to the important business of social policy and planning. The regulation of 15 April 1926 made provision for women's participation in welfare administration. Article 3 stipulated that at least two women who were 'mothers dedicated to the cause of assisting children' had to be appointed to the central council of the organization: these were to be chosen from amongst activists in Catholic Action's Union of Women and the National Council of Italian Women. However, the royal decree of 24 December 1934, which contained the unified text of ONMI legislation to date, made no special provision regarding women's entry into the central council of the organization.⁵⁰

The 1926 regulation outlined plans to give ONMI a considerable presence in cities, towns, and villages throughout the nation. Federations were to be created in every province in the nation; those involved in some capacity in the work of institutions providing assistance towards mothers and children were to be appointed to these bodies. And every municipality was going to have an ONMI organizing committee whose members were to be drawn from the local middle and upper-class elite of doctors, lawyers, accountants and magistrates, as well as bishops, priests, and philanthropists. Moreover, large communes, like Milan, Rome, and Turin, were to be divided into manageable zones comprising as few as 5000 inhabitants. These administrative districts, the legislation specified, would correspond to working-class

rioni and would have their own neighbourhood committees. And ONMI's activities were to be just as intense in rural Italy as they were destined to be in metropolitan centres. The royal decree of April 1926 stated that the agency would redress the terms of social backwardness in Italy by building a network of committees and services which reached even the most outlying areas. It recognized the urgent necessity of extending welfare provision beyond the big cities, where most beneficent institutions were concentrated. The *regolamento* addressed the problem of acute regional and local differences in resources and defined these as surmountable. Organizational guidelines specified that ONMI's provincial leaders would seek to meet the particular needs of communities by setting responsive welfare targets based on local realities and allocating special emergency funds for urgent projects. A kind of promissory statement of intentions, the 1926 law laid great stress on the transformative powers of fascist welfare. From the outset, ONMI determined to encourage social development in deprived areas by building an institutional infrastructure where public provision was patchy or non-existent. The aim was to create a national health system devoted to the protection of motherhood and infancy.⁵¹

To complete its mission, ONMI would have to appeal to Catholics, whose charitable endeavours were essential to the agency. Voluntarism and enthusiasm at the local level would be the driving force behind ONMI's development and would determine the success or failure of the organization's initiatives. The regulation's provision for the entry of ecclesiasts into ONMI's communal committees made a propitious start to the campaign to win the Catholic community over with gestures of good will. This dramatic move abrogated the 1890 prohibition on clerical involvement in the public administration of *opere pie*. The fascist state's concessions to the church were based on a recognition of the predominance of pious over public institutions for maternal and child welfare and the need to appeal to the Catholic nobility, who were the backbone behind the philanthropic movement in Italy. And they paid off handsomely at a crucial time, when the delicate negotiations that led to the Lateran Treaties of 1929 secretly got under way.

Beginning in 1926, the Vatican newspaper, the *Osservatore Romano*, ran a number of articles which emphasized the church's support for ONMI and stressed that social policy under fascism was in harmony with Christian values. The Vatican could not fault a regime that enunciated such a hard-line position on abortion and contraception and seemed so dedicated to the cause of protecting mothers, children, and the family. The pontiff's press, moreover, sought to reassure Catholics that the government did not seek to supplant church charity. Rather, ONMI would strengthen and complement the work that parishes and individuals were already doing to assist the Catholic '*madri e fanciulli*' of Italy.⁵² More than any of his immediate predecessors, Pius XI believed that the charitable activities of lay persons

played a crucial part in keeping the church a living institution. In three addresses to the national assemblies of Catholic Action's *Uomini Cattolici*, *Gioventù Cattolica*, and *Unione delle Donne* in January 1927, Pius XI instructed Catholic men, women, and children to accept their 'sacred duty' and 'affirm the divinity of Catholicism' by engaging in an 'effusion of charity'. The pope drew a clear distinction between state welfare and church charity. None the less, he applauded fascism for creating 'new exigencies and new legislation' which assigned such an important role to the voluntary spirit of Catholic social action.⁵³

The papacy's mobilization of the Catholic charitable establishment would certainly prove to be very advantageous to a regime that was concerned with minimizing the costs of its welfare revolution. Promulgated on 15 May 1931, Pius XI's encyclical, *On the Reconstruction of the Social Order*, marked the fortieth anniversary of *De Rerum Novarum* with the presentation of the most complete statement of Catholic social doctrine since 1891. *Quadragesimo Anno* (the Fortieth Year) was not just an explication of how class collaboration through corporatism was the only way out of the economic crisis caused by the depression.⁵⁴ In this major encyclical, the pope also called upon his followers to be most bountiful, for Catholic beneficence and charity were the very spirit of Christianity and the soul of the church.⁵⁵

Welfare leadership and administration

Despite the importance of ONMI to the regime's *politica demografica* and *politica sociale*, the agency never developed a stable administrative structure. In order to operate effectively, the organization required officials who were equipped with precise guidelines on the exercise of responsibilities and who enjoyed some security of tenure. The conferment of bureaucratic rank and contractual regimen on office may have helped national leaders make pragmatic decisions about the future. However, appointments were honorary and temporary; and members of the central council received no salary as payment for state service.⁵⁶ As a result, many ONMI leaders, including the organization's first president, Baron Gian Alberto Blanc, mixed their casual commitments to ONMI with fixed employment elsewhere.⁵⁷ Though the regime pursued the aim of administrative efficiency in its state-building project, institutional development proceeded in a haphazard and *ad hoc* fashion.

ONMI's central administration had only the formal appearance of a government bureaucracy. Together with the lack of any internal mechanism for promotion from a provincial or municipal post to one in Rome, the absence of much continuity of leadership left institutional consolidation to chance. Not until December 1929, for example, did the organization begin

to tackle the problem of creating some bureaucratic structure at the centre. At the end of the month, the interior ministry approved plans for ONMI to hire clerical staff to work at the central headquarters. The motive behind this move was the desperate need of the agency for enough administrative staff to oversee all aspects concerning the implementation of ONMI's huge programme. After the announcement of an open competition for jobs, the agency took on 76 employees; but the number of salaried help in Rome had barely doubled by 1938. ONMI never granted its white-collar staff the status of public employees. By 1934, far less than half of the office workers in Rome had been systematized on fifteen-year civil service contracts, which qualified them for a number of benefits and perquisites. Four years later, the majority of these government workers still remained subject to the terms of labour in private industry.⁵⁸ This sort of irregularity may have kept personnel expenditure to a minimum, but it also placed constraints on institutional growth and efficiency.

On a provincial and municipal level too, ONMI relied on a volunteer leadership. National leaders experienced great difficulty creating local committees as a result. The work of organizing ONMI federations devolved upon prefects and party secretaries, who chose candidates.⁵⁹ National leaders realized early in 1927 that a majority of the 24 provincial federations which had been formed by that date were composed of officials who had no experience of welfare work. Party affiliation, rather than professional qualifications, seemed to be the deciding factor behind appointments. In January 1927, Baron Blanc issued an angry circular to prefects and party *federali* warning them to follow the instructions outlined in the 1926 regulation by appointing only qualified professionals. The purpose of the new institution, he stated, was not to serve personal or political interests but to improve the health and welfare of the race. To remedy the situation, Blanc ordered more than half of the federations to be dismantled and re-organized. Despite these directives, control over the process of administrative overhaul still belonged to the party and the prefects, with the result that ONMI's central committee had no handle on the functioning of the agency in the localities.⁶⁰

Recruitment practice as a rule narrowed ONMI's horizons. By 1936, ONMI federations functioned in all 92 of the kingdom's provinces. But Carlo Bergamaschi, the organization's president from 1937 to 1940, admitted that this figure stretched the truth by a wide margin. Over a third of these, he stated in an official publication, existed on paper only, while a large portion of the remaining federations functioned superficially by implementing only selective programmes. He singled out a few federations, like those in Milan, Bologna, and Rome, which had managed to create some form of integrated and comprehensive services; but these were the exception, he argued. Welfare organization under fascism differed widely in quality from one province to the next.⁶¹ Another organizational liability,

ONMI statutes specified that the costs of building an administrative apparatus should fall upon provincial and municipal governments. The 1925 founding statutes, the 1926 regulation, and the revision law of 24 December 1934 defined the exact terms of this obligation. Government authorities were called upon to provide ONMI's federations and committees with free buildings, furniture, equipment and staff.⁶² When it was first implemented in late 1926, this requirement caused a great deal of chaos. Many provincial and municipal governments had already begun to remove large items of social expenditure entirely from their budgets in the expectation that ONMI would now carry the full bureaucratic and financial burden of assistance towards women and children.⁶³ When OMNI leaders attempted to impose rulings on rent-free space and administrative facilities in early 1927, they met with refusal and obstruction from provincial delegations. Many provincial governments complained that they still faced a backlog of debts dating back to the war and could not set aside scarce funds for OMNI. Negotiations over this matter slowed the pace of institutional development on a provincial level. While 42 ONMI federations eventually received venues from provincial governments, most of these donations came in the middle and late 1930s. In the meantime, ONMI provincial leaders had to make do with cramped office space in foundling homes, party secretariats, hospitals or prefectures. Many of the finer *palazzi* that housed some ONMI provincial headquarters were gifts from prominent philanthropic families. And, in some cases, public appeals for funds managed to raise enough money for the construction of new buildings.⁶⁴ The national leadership faced the same problem of a makeshift and borrowed administration. After over a decade of being shunted from one unsuitable building to another (belonging to other organizations, such as the Red Cross and the INPS), ONMI leaders moved into their very own national headquarters along the Tiber in April 1938.⁶⁵

The development of the municipal committees dragged on even longer. Provincial federations worked with mayors and party officials to mobilize local elites and create *comitati*. To provide ONMI with offices, those town governments which were actually committed to welfare reform sought donations from private institutions and citizens, public bodies, employer associations and commercial banks. By 1937, however, over 4000 of the kingdom's 7350 communes still lacked an ONMI committee. And the organization's first official inspections of its local organs that year revealed that many of those which had been deemed to be 'functioning' in provincial reports to Rome were largely 'fictitious', according to Bergamaschi. Although the national leadership had no clear idea about how many municipalities had actually carried on welfare work throughout the preceding period, Bergamaschi estimated that as many as one third of the 3 000 functional committees had been mismanaged, perfunctory, and incompetent all along.⁶⁶ The 1926 legislation defined welfare as an instru-

ment of social development. But ONMI never managed to break new ground in many local communities, where its institutional presence remained scant throughout the fascist period. A lack of adequate resources to build a welfare apparatus figured as the single most important obstacle to administrative growth. And without a network of municipal agencies, ONMI stood little chance of ever implementing even a fraction of the 1926 reform programme.

Financing the welfare revolution

Those who assumed positions of leadership within ONMI repeatedly criticized liberalism for having abdicated central authority over the edifice of welfare. The dearth of social spending by the state and the discretion that local governments had over budgeting for beneficent expenditure, these arguments maintained, had obstructed the development of an integrated system of social assistance under liberalism.⁶⁷ According to the *regolamento* and subsequent legislation, ONMI would overcome these defects by channelling resources efficiently from the centre to the periphery. The 1926 act stated that relations between ONMI's central and peripheral organs would be collaborative and close in order to facilitate the process of welfare-state building at a local level; but, in reality, financing arrangements established an adversarial relationship between the central and local organs of ONMI. A centralized system of funding and control proved to be a rigid and impractical administrative model to follow in such a geographically diverse nation.

According to the scheme established by the 1925 legislation, ONMI's income derived from both private and public sources. The statute gave the central committee control of a 'special fund' from which its own expenses and its grants to provincial federations were drawn. With regard to state spending on ONMI, the regime entitled the organization to a quarter of all the revenue raised through municipal residence taxes (*tasse comunali di soggiorno*) and a variable percentage of the money collected from public pawn shops (*monti di pietà*).⁶⁸ In addition, the enactment committed the interior ministry to an annual contribution to the agency, which would vary according to budget capabilities. In 1926, this amounted to 4 million *lire*; and in subsequent years, the allowance grew slowly, but continuously. It rose from 64.99 million in 1928 to 84.49 in 1932, 100 in 1933–1935, and 108 in 1936–1940. Government expenditure on ONMI began to increase steadily again in 1941.⁶⁹ The volume of state spending on ONMI compared favourably with the derisory amount of money that the regime allocated to social insurance through one of its other *enti nazionali*, the INPS. This disproportion reflected the greater politico-ideological importance of the demographic campaign to fascism. The regime was a relatively generous investor in maternal and infant welfare; it gave ONMI an additional 8.6

million *lire* in 1926 as a one-off payment to help get it off to a good start. And it tried to bail the organization out of trouble when it went into crisis in 1927–32, due to the mounting costs of its expensive illegitimacy campaign.⁷⁰ Mussolini then decided to give the organization a small portion of the money levied by fascist trade unions and a share of the revenue drawn from the celibacy tax. The effects of this cash injection could be seen in the dramatic increase in the state's contribution from 8 million in 1927 to 64.99 million in 1928. In 1935, however, government withdrew the bachelor-tax contribution, although higher rates and harsher penalties progressively increased the size of the annual levy from 46 million *lire* in 1927 to over 150 million in 1934. Mussolini channelled this tax reserve into the imperialist war effort; because of the massive budget deficit after 1936, he did not re-issue it to ONMI.⁷¹

Notwithstanding the regime's relatively high level of financial commitment to ONMI, the reality of welfare development in fascist Italy underscored a much bigger role for private philanthropy than the 1926 regulation seemed to suggest. Italian charities did very well under fascism. National statistics lumped all of them together, including fee-charging bodies, like theological colleges and private schools; but figures do show that the kingdom's gross charitable endowment grew enormously during the fascist period, and especially in the years 1925 to 1935, when levels of the public's faith in the seriousness of fascism's social purpose were at their highest.⁷² The prestige attached to good works by the regime strengthened the sense of social responsibility that members of the Catholic nobility, in particular, already possessed. ONMI certainly benefited enormously from fascism's concerted efforts to mobilize Italian elites to give generously to the cause of Italian motherhood and infancy. In Modena, for example, the president of ONMI's provincial federation, a nobleman and a doctor, bought a villa for the organization in 1928 and used it to house a dual-purpose facility for mentally handicapped children and for unwed mothers.⁷³ In February 1928, a private individual in Venice who enthusiastically supported the work of ONMI took it upon herself to launch a concerted fund-raising drive, the proceeds of which permitted the organization to purchase an abandoned building in the countryside and convert it into a residential establishment for the care of sick children. Situated in Bribane, the Villa Patt Colony developed into one of the regime's showpiece treatment centres and farm communities for children suffering from tuberculosis. Tens years later, the Countess Anna Morosini, who also acted as a benefactor to the ONMI federation in Venice, organized a lottery whose grand prize was a clock donated by the Duce.⁷⁴ The ONMI federation of Reggio Emilia raised money by organizing various lotteries, theatrical and cinematographic performances, and lecture series on racial topics.⁷⁵

During the liberal period, initiatives of this kind were not uncommon. From the turn of the century, for example, wealthy patrons of the *Istituto*

Pro Pueritia in Turin held an annual gala event in the city's Rossini Theatre to which the cream of Turinese society were invited. Proceeds from the 'spectacle of beneficence' helped to fund the work of the institute, which was a privately endowed charity providing residential care for abandoned children.⁷⁶ An essential difference between this sort of activity and what occurred later is that, during the inter-war period, philanthropy and beneficence were being organized on a grand scale by the organs of the national state and were being used to serve fascism's agenda. ONMI leaders rewarded their most generous supporters with gold, silver, and bronze medals for *benemeranza* (good service) in official ceremonies. They also asked potential 'perpetual friends' to donate at least 50 thousand *lire* in cash to the organization; many of the nation's rich and titled gave much more than that amount. In November 1929, a single donor from Bologna left one million *lire* to ONMI in his will; that same year, the Commendatore Girolamo Carlini and his wife Lorenza gave 14 million to the agency for the foundation of a child welfare institution in memory of their deceased daughter, Giannina.⁷⁷ Not surprisingly, private donations and bequests of money to ONMI totalled over 150 million *lire* in 1930 alone, a year when the state's contribution to the agency amounted to 76.66 million.⁷⁸ And many wealthy supporters donated buildings, founded new institutions, and generously endowed them; in December 1931, the Frizzoni family of Bergamo gave ONMI a magnificent villa and estate, with immense gardens and parks, and paid for their conversion into one of the most splendid 'prophylactic colonies' that were opened in the interwar period. The aim of Guido Frizzoni was to create a 'children's paradise', a permanent mountain retreat and resort for children who were 'anaemic, undernourished, and predisposed to tuberculosis'. Run by both lay and religious personnel, the 'Frizzoni Preventorium' of Pedrengo provided children aged between three and ten with a full range of medical, educational, and recreational facilities. To serve the donor's wishes, children attended an 'open-air school', modelled along Montessori principles, and spent much of their free time in outdoor play.⁷⁹ Thanks, in no small measure, to the huge expansion under fascism of voluntary funding for state welfare, ONMI amassed an enormous patrimony, much of which was in fixed assets, by the end of the 1930s.⁸⁰

It was just as well that the Italian public was so munificent, for the financial arrangements put in place by the government meant that ONMI's provincial and communal organs had to be largely self-financing. Financial support from the centre was distributed in the form of subsidies to the agency's federations. The grants' system which the national leadership put into effect in early 1926 made the size of the award that was issued to provincial federations conditional upon the fulfilment of mandatory welfare targets. The problem with this set-up was that it deprived already disadvantaged areas of financial support from ONMI's central fund. From

1926 to 1929, for example, Baron Blanc favoured those provinces which were better equipped with services; he made the grant proportional to the number of welfare institutions and the number of women and children assisted in each ONMI provincial administration.⁸¹

As a consequence, a province like Milan, with 262 active communal committees and over 700 affiliated welfare institutions, received a far larger grant than a poorly endowed province like Mantua, which possessed 62 under-funded *comitati* and few establishments providing some form of child and maternal welfare.⁸² The president of the ONMI federation in Mantua complained to the central directorate and the government that, because of the paucity of their grant, they had been unable to distribute money to any of their communal committees between 1926 and 1928. As a result, only 48 of these actually functioned in any discernible way, while the rest 'suffered from inertia'. Mantua did not possess a foundling home, but the rate of abandonment of both infants and children was high, due partly to the extent of unemployment and poverty in the province. Mantua was very badly affected by the economic depression and the agricultural crisis; but the response of ONMI national leaders, the provincial *federale* stated bitterly, was to ignore appeals for more cash and to send regular memos about what services he should be organizing.⁸³ Milanese leaders proudly claimed that they had assisted 'in a vigilant and continuous way' over 5500 women and children between 1926 and 1928; Mantuan authorities, by contrast, admitted that they handled only 78 relief cases during the same period.⁸⁴ The inequalities that were built into the funding scheme inevitably hindered welfare development by penalizing socially deprived areas. The rationale was that the grant would function as a reward for effort; but without sufficient money and resources, ONMI leaders in the localities would not be able to initiate programmes or create institutions *ex novo*.

Blanc explained that his overall strategy was to promote the 'rationalization' and 'co-ordination' of services on a local level.⁸⁵ In practice, however, the grants' system relieved ONMI of much of the financial responsibility for the creation of services where they did not already exist. The pattern of grant disbursement varied geographically. Between 1926 and the end of the fiscal year in December 1930, national leaders distributed over 35 million *lire* nationwide in subsidies to provincial federations (4.51 million in 1927; 10.10 in 1928; 10.24 in 1929; 11.40 in 1930). Northern provinces as a whole received over twice as much money as southern provinces did. But provinces in central Italy were the main beneficiaries as they had acquired over half of all the funds.⁸⁶ Because socially underdeveloped and deprived provinces ended up being cash-starved, their communal committees were placed in the unenviable position of having to raise money locally to meet targets set in Rome, which only then qualified federations and them for substantial awards. The conditional nature of financial benefits effectively deadlocked institutional growth.

The case of the ONMI federation in Ferrara illustrates just how bureaucratic and begrudging funding procedure could be in operation. From the time that the federation became fully functioning in 1928, members of its central committee made strenuous efforts to satisfy their superiors in Rome that they were actively realizing the aims of the fascist revolution. They regularly prepared their prospective budgets well in advance of the financial year, sent them to ONMI headquarters for approval, spent their scarce funds sensibly and kept their accounts in order. They met monthly to review progress and set new goals. These volunteers were so dedicated to their mission of public service, in fact, that the prefect singled them out for praise in his routine reports to ministers about the efficiency of government administration in the province. The 'rich dames of the city and province' and the lawyers and doctors who carried out the work of ONMI, he said, had to be commended for their 'tireless dedication' to fascism and its policies.⁸⁷ ONMI leaders in Rome were also impressed with how the federation and its committees functioned; they judged the conditions and results of the *federazione* to be so good that they merited special mention. Despite all this approbation, it took almost ten years for the Ferrara federation to convince the national leadership to grant them a 'special subsidy', consisting of a measly 100 thousand *lire*, that they wanted to put towards the costs of creating a *Casa della Madre e del Fanciullo* (House for Mother and Child). According to directives from Rome, ONMI *federali* had to strive to found these centres, first in provincial capitals, and then in localities throughout every province. These institutions were conceived as the visible, architectural expression of fascism's ability to bring the achievements of its revolution to every city, town, and village in the nation. They were to be premier 'total institutions', where all aspects of welfare, including social, educational, medical and financial services, were integrated within one building; they were meant to contain specialist paediatric and maternal clinics, a social services division, a *crèche* and a mother's kitchen. By 1932, ONMI federations had established 141 *case* in mainly northern and central regions; in most cases, communes donated existing premises, or capital was raised for the construction of new buildings through donations from banks, individuals, and organizations. For example, by 1939, the provincial government of Milan had built five new *case* for ONMI at its own expense and the commune of Rome had donated three existing buildings for *case*, as well as the land for the construction of a number of others. But because officials working for the municipality of Ferrara consistently refused to donate a suitable site, the ONMI federation there had not been able to act on orders from Rome. The grant from central headquarters brought then only a little bit closer to their dream of opening a *casa* of their own.⁸⁸

Despite the shortcomings of the funding system, a better one did not seem immanent. At the end of Blanc's tenure, the government began to

put a great deal of pressure on ONMI to reduce its spending. Mussolini, his ministers, and parliament all realized by this point that although the organization had a large income, its social programme was too vast. In parliamentary discussions, the consensus was that ONMI had to focus more on the essentials and not dissipate money so much on minor initiatives. According to commentators, such as Senator Luigi Rava, the harsh reality was that the immense '*volere*' (aspiration) of fascism was simply out of all proportion to the actual '*potere*' (power) of the regime and its institutions. Fervour alone, he recognized, could not deliver social betterment to the people. Because of financial and institutional constraints, the welfare revolution was going to be a long one.⁸⁹ In response to the need to be more realistic about immediate possibilities, a revised funding scheme came into effect when Sileno Fabbri succeeded Blanc in January 1932. In an attempt to control expenditure, ONMI's new commissioner tied the amount of aid that provinces received to their total population and performance in the demographic campaign. Provinces now made requests for grants to cover a portion of outgoing expenditure on the basis of the *per capita* population within their administration. After national leaders reviewed the progress reports which *federali* prepared, they decided on the size of the grant. According to the 1926 legislation and the procedure which emerged in its aftermath, however, national leaders could suspend funding when *federali* failed to make progress in policy implementation. Perhaps the pressure to show ONMI *dirigenti* in Rome continual improvements encouraged provincial federations to exaggerate their achievements.⁹⁰

Under the new 1932 rulings, provincial federations could also claim supplemental allowances from ONMI's social fund. The central directorate distributed an additional 50 *lire* annually for each birth that was registered in a province. Ostensibly designed to meet the growing volume of demand and the rising costs of care in areas with a high birthrate and a dense population, the new scheme worked to the disadvantage of many rural provinces. Northern and central provinces, like Milan and Padua, which were experiencing dramatic population expansion due to urbanization, earned almost eight times as much money under the 1932 funding directives as did provinces with a steady or declining number of inhabitants and births and an older resident population, like Taranto, Catania, and Cosenza. With the exception of some major southern urban centres, such as Naples, Palermo, Syracuse and Sassari, where subsidies were high, the south and the islands as a whole received far less than a third of the total national grants from 1932 to 1938.⁹¹

Under Fabbri, policy goals moved more decisively towards the improvement of existing rather than the development of new services and this shift hampered institutional growth. In the south and islands, especially, ONMI's presence remained superficial in the 1930s, because of the insufficiency of local resources and state funding, as well as a lack of inter-

est on the part of elites. Prefects watched over provincial ONMI leaders, and were required by law to send regular reports to Rome which charted the progress of welfare. The prefect of Agrigento, in western Sicily, sent a memorandum in 1933 whose revelations contrasted sharply with the claims made by the office of the ONMI federation there. The provincial president of ONMI had boasted that the organization had created 24 mothers' kitchens in the capital and outlying communes. The prefect conducted an independent investigation, when rumours finally reached him that ONMI had failed to do much of anything in its seven years of existence. In the prefect's opinion, the mothers' kitchens did not exist in reality; he ended his report by saying that the programme of relief which had been implemented consisted entirely of irregular and discontinuous assistance, which took the form of occasional small subsidies to poor families.⁹²

How many other southern provinces failed to initiate welfare programmes remained unknown until 1940, when ONMI conducted its first enquiry into the progress of reforms in Sicily. The report of the ONMI inspectorate drew a sorry profile of the network of services in many provinces. The findings in Agrigento revealed that not much had been done since 1933. With a population of over 400 000, the province possessed 12 mothers' kitchens by December 1938, but none of these were administered or financed directly by ONMI. ONMI leaders had managed to establish a system of home visits, but they had been able to find only two volunteers to perform this service. And these 'social assistants' were constrained to limit their activity to the capital, because of a lack of transport. The organization had created an informal medical service by relying on the capital's seven paediatricians to share turns at a clinic which opened for four hours every week. This had been the extent of the achievement of ONMI, largely because of a lack of money and initiative, inspectors reported. They also stressed that the province's rate of infant mortality, which stood at 13.2 deaths out of every 100 first-years, had not decreased much during the fascist period. In many other southern provinces too, ONMI was found to have a 'scarce existence'. To remedy the situation, the inspectors came up with a 'technical plan for the reorganization of services in Sicily' which included a full breakdown of the cost of prospective improvements. Because of the expense involved and the disruptions caused by the war, however, no further action was taken on the matter during the fascist period.⁹³

In many respects, ONMI never really recovered momentum after 1932, when Fabbri began to suspend some social programmes.⁹⁴ Expensive forms of aid, like cash subsidies, were particularly affected, though no single aspect of reform escaped the organization's financial crisis. To regain momentum, OMNI developed a plan for a monthly national lottery of substantial cash prizes. Presented to the Council of Ministers in November 1934, the proposal estimated that profits generated through the lottery

would free ONMI from the tyranny of short-term planning. If only a small percentage of the interest payments off subscriptions were invested, the plan stated, ONMI would have the makings for lasting financial security, which was beyond the current means of government. Rejected initially, and then again in March 1935, after a revised version was re-submitted, the lottery scheme never materialized under fascism.⁹⁵

The mass organization of welfare

The aims of ONMI policy were confined to minimizing the damaging effects of poverty to the race through welfare. A wider ambition of the organization, as an official publication revealed, was 'to gain the adhesion of the masses to the regime's birthrate campaign'. This could only be done 'when the Italian people come to have faith in the ability of the state to care for families' and when 'ONMI begins to operate on a grand scale'.⁹⁶ To fulfil these goals, the organization attempted to develop new kinds of institutions for the medical, social, and economic assistance of needy mothers and children. Chief amongst these was the model *Casa della Madre e del Bambino*. The grassroots work of welfare, ONMI planners believed, also had to take place in special institutions of race hygiene, such as *preventori* ('preventoriums' or sanatoriums); designed mainly to prevent, but also to cure illness, these types of therapeutic establishments included, amongst others, agricultural, seaside, and mountain colonies for children whose constitutions needed to be strengthened. And created especially for the 'hygiene and protection of mothers', *consultori* (consulting clinics) were meant to be neighbourhood walk-in centres, where local women would find doctors, social workers, and other specialists, like puericulturists. A vital link between ONMI and the community, *consultori* were conceived as institutions providing a full range of services and a continuous form of aid for women from early pregnancy through the first years of their children's lives.⁹⁷ Through interviews, case files, and regular check-ups, medical and social staff at the clinics were to keep a close watch over the mother and her child. With regard to infants, ONMI legislation and policy defined clinics as out-patient centres, where sick babies could be brought, and as observation centres for the practice of preventive medicine. The primary goal was to assure that babies from poor families had access to weekly medical examinations in order to monitor diets and growth, to reduce levels of rickets and malnutrition, and to persuade as many mothers as possible to breastfeed. Medical experts were to instruct mothers on the proper care and feeding of infants, to insure that mothers were sufficiently well-fed to nurse, and to supervise the weaning process. Clinics were to provide economic aid in the form of hand-outs of milk, baby clothes, and other

necessities. As a special incentive for women to frequent clinics, staff were to set aside money for the regular distribution of childrearing and breast-feeding subsidies and prizes to mothers.⁹⁸

Where resources permitted, *consultori* were to be attached to 'mothers' kitchens'; they would also aim to distribute food parcels directly to clients. Officials defined kitchens as an essential service, as they benefited mothers directly. Food parcels, on the other hand, could be taken home to feed husbands, thereby undermining the main objective, which was to improve the mother's health and her ability to breastfeed.⁹⁹ According to OMNI's statutes and policy, clinics were to be directed by medical specialists in obstetrics, gynaecology, and paediatrics. Although they were not meant to be fully equipped with operating theatres, clinics, officials felt, could only run properly if medical personnel were in charge and these doctors were qualified experts. In addition, clinics were seen as the institutional base for the development of new types of professionals in social work and medical care. The organization aimed to provide general practitioners and midwives with training in puericulture to qualify them for jobs as supplementary staff in these OMNI institutions.

Approved by the central committee in June 1926, a course curriculum and trial scheme for the training of midwives and general practitioners was distributed to the leaders of the nation's institutions of higher learning for their approval. By 1928, 16 universities across the nation participated in the programme by running courses at their own expense. By the end of that year, 625 doctors and 240 midwives had received diplomas in puericulture after the successful completion of the six-week course.¹⁰⁰ However, ONMI failed to maintain the momentum of the training scheme. The following year, Blanc decided to run only one course for doctors, which was based at the university in Rome. In 1933, the national leadership organized two traineeships for *assistenti* in Rome and in Milan which certified 52 nurses to practice puericulture. Thereafter, the organization dropped the initiative entirely from its reform programme, for lack of high enrolments.¹⁰¹

Part of the problem of the unpopularity of the recruitment effort was the fact that ONMI did not develop a workable plan for the employment of medical and social staff. According to the founding statutes, all ONMI personnel who worked in the organization's own institutions were volunteers who offered their services free of charge. This policy conflicted with the aim of creating a permanent network of medico-social services throughout the nation. As relatively few Italian doctors received any specialized training in new disciplines, like paediatrics, ONMI would have to make a considerable investment of resources in education in order to realize its aim of fostering the development of a new class of experts who were qualified to advance the cause of the welfare revolution. Unless the organization could attract

recruits through financial and career incentives, any attempt at forging an institutional apparatus managed by social and medical professionals was destined to have little chance of success.

In the end, the voluntary nature of employment in ONMI was a huge obstacle to the agency's grandiose plans. The organization experienced great difficulty in enlisting the support of the medical profession. Members of the specialist societies for gynaecology, obstetrics, and paediatrics, many of whom held university chairs and posts in teaching hospitals, gave their full endorsement to the work of the ONMI out of a sense of mission. Relatively wealthy and secure, they had nothing to lose and everything to gain from assuming a vanguard position in the welfare revolution. But the Italian *Ordine dei Medici* (Order of Doctors) and the *Sindacato Nazionale dei Medici Fascisti* (National Union of Fascist Doctors) not only withheld their backing, but also lodged a formal complaint against the national leadership of ONMI with government. Brought to the attention of Mussolini in March 1928, and at least on one other occasion in March 1933, the dispute arose over the question of whether the nation's 8000 *medici condotti* were legally bound to cooperate with OMNI.¹⁰² The issue of pay figured as the most pressing matter in the controversy, but general practitioners also expressed other grievances. They resented having to work for an organization which undermined their importance to the regime's demographic campaign.

They objected, in particular, to the condescending way that medical specialists treated them. They had good reason to do so. The attitude of hospital consultants, many of whom were gung-ho eugenicists eager to take a commanding position in the new social order, came out clearly in public addresses to the medical community. At a gathering of *medici condotti* in Rome in 1930, for example, Cesare Micheli gave a lecture on the role of the 'old breed of *condotta*' in the fascist welfare revolution. A surgeon at Rome's City Hospital and the director of the San Giovanni Maternity Hospital, Micheli also held a chair in obstetrics and gynaecology at the university. A member of the national commission appointed by Mussolini in 1926 to propose legislation to stop the spread of 'Malthusianism', Micheli, along with other eugenicists, like Ernesto Pestalozza, a senator and obstetrician, had been instrumental in formulating the infamous June 1927 act, the Public Security Act of November 1927, and the act of 16 January 1929, which set more severe penalties against abortion and contraception.¹⁰³ Working in an advisory capacity for OMNI, Micheli also lobbied government to consider promulgating a law requiring all poor women who qualified for medical assistance which was organized and subsidized by municipalities to register with authorities when they became pregnant. Under the proposed guidelines for the '*denuncia di gravidanza*' (a notification of pregnancy), any such woman who failed to present herself for a medical evaluation early in her pregnancy would no longer be entitled to have a publicly-employed midwife attend to her during labour and birth.

Though the ONMI leadership rejected his recommendation, primarily because it was unenforceable, the proposal reflected the extent to which radical elements within the medical community wanted to intensify their antenatal supervision of women. Micheli argued that it was a matter of public interest to gain early access to pregnant women in order to enhance their reproductive performance and increase the chances of delivering healthy babies.¹⁰⁴ A fanatical and arrogant ONMI enthusiast who believed that he had a moral duty to bring 'Italian mothers out of their ignorance', Micheli saw *medici condotti* as underlings in this struggle. In his 1930 talk, he stated that 'the obstetrician, gynaecologist, and paediatrician rule over the domain of ONMI clinics, while general practitioners are called up by fascism to follow the lead of specialists'.¹⁰⁵ And in his paper given at the 28th Congress of the Italian Obstetrics and Gynaecology Society in 1930, Micheli bemoaned the fact that there were not enough specialists to run clinics in Italy. The nation's *condotti*, he lamented, did not know how to practise fascist and eugenic medicine at all; according to him, they were little better able to supervise the rearing of infants than were Italy's mothers.¹⁰⁶

This sort of attitude did not endear ONMI's experts to the wider medical community. Evidence of doctors' complaints of ill-treatment by the organization's consultant specialists exists. In one such case in the small suburb of Monte Mario in Rome, a local doctor working for the commune ran the *consultorio* opened there by ONMI in 1931. Assisted by a nurse who was also paid by the municipality, but received no additional salary from ONMI, he saw 50 infants and their mothers on average each of the three days a week which he devoted to volunteer ONMI work. According to the procedure adopted by Rome's *comitato*, a visiting specialist arrived once a week to hold special consultations and to review the case load. When the paediatrician from town failed to show up for two weeks' running, the doctor asked ONMI officials to explain his absence. The *condotta* had been forced to refer some children whom he suspected were showing signs of tuberculosis to the nearest hospital in a neighbouring commune; he complained of the delay which this caused in their treatment. When the paediatrician finally arrived one morning, an argument ensued because the visiting consultant refused to stay for longer than two hours, his prescribed schedule. ONMI leaders sent out an inspector to investigate the matter. In his report, the inspector stated that in normal circumstances he would advocate an official reprimand against the *condotta* for insubordination, but that in this case no action should be taken because the doctor was running the clinic in an exceptionally conscientious manner.¹⁰⁷

Doctors were not the only ones who had cause for grievance. ONMI did not offer pay to any of its clinical staff. And when these people could not at least fall back on salaries from municipal government, they found themselves in the unenviable position of doing long hours for no recompense

and little recognition. In 1939, a letter arrived at Mussolini's desk that was sent by a nurse from the commune of Aquillara Sabazia in the province of Rome. She described herself as a widow who lived off her 'miserable' pension of 3.2 lire a day, a sum which represented less than a third of what an unskilled male factory worker earned in a daily wage and less than half of what a female operative made in a day. When she retired in 1929, she began working in an ONMI clinic doing volunteer work both as 'the doctor's assistant and as the housekeeper'; but she had never received any reward for her service to the nation. Only after ten years had she unsuccessfully attempted to ask the federation for 'a little something'. In her letter, she cautiously stated that the ONMI federation in Rome had seen fit to grant the doctors sharing responsibility for the clinic a Christmas bonus every year as a gesture of their gratitude.¹⁰⁸

ONMI certainly took for granted that women would perform selfless service in aid of the fascist welfare revolution. And the regime obviously intended to save money on the cost of constructing a welfare apparatus by treating ONMI functionaries and personnel as volunteers in a quasi-public agency rather than as employees of the state. None the less, the ambiguities of ONMI's split personality as a public *ente* and a private *opera* worked at cross purposes with the broader objectives of the dictatorship. Fascism's grand project for administrative state-building and modernization was compromised because of the problem of recruitment and employment in the enterprise. In one instance, for example, ONMI's national leaders had to dismantle an entire programme because they could not find enough 'experts' to organize the undertaking. In late 1926, ONMI's executive council decided to implement a policy for *cattedre ambulanti*, or 'visiting instruction centres for the dissemination of the scientific principles of child nurture and racial hygiene'. The outreach scheme aimed to compensate for the deficiency of welfare institutions in rural regions by establishing mobile units equipped with 'medical and sanitary officers'; policy planners in Rome decided that they should initially concentrate their efforts on developing these facilities primarily in the south and islands. Each *cattedra* was meant to cover a large area in a day, set up an open clinic in a public or party building, and provide women and children with a variety of social and welfare services, ranging from basic medical aid to training in puericulture. Local ONMI leaders would negotiate the itinerary in advance with district doctors and midwives and ask them to encourage their clientele to attend. The national leadership claimed to have established 7 such travelling units in 1927, 11 more in 1928, and 33 more in 1929, most of which were located in the deep south and eastern Sicily. The *cattedra* which opened in Rome's Campagna region on reclaimed swamp land was used by ONMI and the regime as a 'model institution' to impress foreign governments and the League of Nations, who sent dignitaries to inspect 'one of the greatest victories of fascism'.¹⁰⁹

In reality, however, the policy was a complete disaster from the start, principally because ONMI authorities had difficulty enlisting the support of general practitioners and midwives. In the absence of medical professionals, local party activists with no specific training or expertise were conscripted to bring the fascist bandwagon to the peasantry.¹¹⁰ Another reason for the failure, ONMI provincial federations in rural areas with high levels of social deprivation complained that they preferred to spend scarce funds on the delivery of more substantial forms of aid to the needy. At their very best, the scientific principles of race hygiene that these units were meant to disseminate amongst those perceived as being ignorant of elementary knowledge constituted little more than advice which reflected contemporary eugenic opinion about 'good' nutritional and childrearing practice. Though there was nothing inherently wrong-headed about wanting to raise the public's awareness of health issues, particularly of those concerning what were seen as preventable causes of illness and death, these kinds of educational and 'civilizing' campaigns, embodying as they did the prejudices and values of middle-class elites about the brutish and backward masses, almost inevitably contradicted the lived experience of the poor.¹¹¹ Information about the proper diet of infants and children, for example, made no attempt to address or redress the connections between family income and nutrition. Because of this, simplistic attempts to impose higher standards of health and hygiene from above were worthless to those at the very bottom of the economic pyramid, a place where the struggle against malnutrition due to low income and high unemployment was a daily reality for many. And, in the hands of fascist fanatics on a mission, the drive to raise the consciousness of the people could easily turn into a meaningless mass propaganda initiative. Despite its shortcomings, the programme probably would have remained a priority had organizational and recruitment difficulties not undermined its success so categorically. In 1932, the national leadership officially terminated the scheme and all mention of the *cattedre ambulanti* scheme disappeared from ONMI publications.¹¹² Similarly, ONMI's plans to encourage the ruralization of welfare institutions, by means of a policy launched in 1926 that aimed at convincing the governing bodies of charities to move their premises to the countryside, was unceremoniously dropped from the agency's agenda in the early 1930s because of its minimal impact.¹¹³ Despite the contribution that their high fertility made to the demographic campaign, rural Italians did not benefit greatly from ONMI.

Welfare and propaganda

The actual success of ONMI must be assessed through consideration of the nature and substance of the assistance which women received in the organization's institutions. The aspiration for a 'universal' and open system of

access to fascist welfare that was clearly expressed in ONMI legislation and policy resolutions had to be abandoned early on because of the organizational and financial difficulties which this goal presented. ONMI worked within the existing liberal framework of norms concerning qualification for poor relief. *Consultori*, for example, imposed a restrictive policy in order to minimize running costs and target the neediest clients. Although a clear contravention of the 1926 statutes, women were required to present a *tessera di povertà* (a certificate of poverty issued by the commune) as a condition of admittance. And potential candidates had to be interviewed beforehand by ONMI communal authorities, be inscribed in the organization's registers, and be referred in writing to the clinic directors. Clinics with some form of paediatric care only accepted children under the age of six as clients. Moreover, the principal competence of clinics was to supervise childrearing rather than care for medical problems. When a woman was given a prescription at a clinic, she then had to go to the municipal poor office to have her request for free medicines and remedies validated. In rural areas, the local *medico condotto* usually ran clinics, so women did not need to undergo the inconvenience of going to different venues to sort out bureaucratic formalities. But ONMI consultants often presided over clinics in big cities, and they were not empowered to authorize free-drug claims, because they were not employees of the commune.¹¹⁴

Perhaps their greatest shortcoming, however, clinics were conceived as the institutional vehicle for the oft-mentioned 'work of persuasion' (*opera di persuasione su la massa della popolazione*), which consisted of educational activities aimed at elevating standards of childrearing in Italy.¹¹⁵ According to the instructions issued to their management and medical staff, clinics had to focus their efforts on convincing women to breastfeed their babies. And their success rate, calculated as the percentage of clients who nursed their infants, comprised the prime measure by which ONMI leaders and inspectors judged the functioning of clinics. In Rome, for example, an official ONMI inquest conducted in 1932 revealed that 96 percent of the women who frequented the 12 clinics throughout the province breastfed their babies from birth to at least six months afterwards. The organization's leaders took credit for this achievement and determined to continue in their struggle to raise standards of maternal nurturing and care.¹¹⁶ An agreement to breastfeed was sometimes made into a condition of assistance in clinics. To waive this requirement, a woman had to present a medical certificate to clinic staff confirming that she was unable to nurse her child. An attending doctor in the clinic could refer a woman to a local *dispensario antitubercolare* (dispensary) to be tested for tuberculosis and, possibly, syphilis. If she tested positive for either disease, the mother would be given the option of using the baby formula supplied free-of-charge by the clinic. These arrangements raise a number of important issues.

Firstly, the importance attached to breastfeeding illustrated the extent to which state-run welfare under fascism considered women to be primarily responsible for the health and well-being of their children. In this regard, fascism reinforced, rather than replaced, pre-existing attitudes about gender that culture and religion had deeply ingrained in identities and subjectivities.¹¹⁷ Even though ONMI officials recognized that women worked outside the home, their expectations concerning motherhood were unrealistic and contradictory. Within some working-class families, female employment precluded the fulfilment of the obligation to breastfeed offspring for as long as possible. And yet, by increasing household income, women's paid work, as some officials realized, could contribute positively to the welfare of even very young children.¹¹⁸ Meeting fascist specifications for the rearing of infants was also beyond the physical capabilities of some women. Breastfeeding could be unsuccessful, for a number of medical and personal reasons, even when it was the mother's method of choice. And secondly, the goal of the modernization of motherhood through education revealed the extent to which those in charge of fascist social policy planning and implementation distrusted the ability of women to carry out their 'natural' maternal mission unaided by 'professionals'.

The organization of mothercraft training through ONMI was part of the fascist regime's broader attempt to place control over the processes of pregnancy, childbirth, and childrearing in the hands of modern and scientific 'experts'. The campaign to endow mothers with the necessary skills to raise healthy children for the race was predicated on the belief that, because of overriding concerns of national interest, the state and its representatives had the right, and even the duty, to usurp responsibilities for the upbringing of offspring which historically resided in the family. But, it seems unlikely that fascism's drive to free Italy's mothers from ignorance and superstition posed a real challenge to tradition. Given the superficial forms of intervention that ONMI struggled to fabricate, young Italian women no doubt continued to acquire knowledge about motherhood and childrearing from other women within their own families, kinfolk, and communities. Presided over by matriarchs, midwives, and wise women (*comari*), the old reproductive and familial order did not come to an end with fascism.¹¹⁹

Furthermore, breastfeeding could never assume the compulsory character that some fanatical ONMI personnel and medical practitioners clearly intended it to have in fascist Italy. Pressure on women to conform to impossible ideals of motherhood could alienate the very people whom the regime was trying to mobilize. Evidence concerning conflicts between welfare clients and carers abound. One case chosen from a number of examples concerns a woman, living in a small commune outside Rome, who went to her local ONMI head office to complain about the *condotto* in charge of the agency's *consultorio*. An ONMI council official had to

transcribe the client's testimony because she was illiterate. In her statement, the woman accused the doctor, a fascist party secretary, of behaving as if he were 'God on earth'. According to her, she experienced difficulties in breastfeeding and then stopped lactating quite suddenly four months after the birth of her first child. She went to the clinic in a panic to ask for a supply of cereal and formula for her infant. The doctor refused to give her any on the grounds that she was young and healthy enough to nurse her infant 'naturally'. The woman claimed that she was then forced to beg for food from other mothers at the clinic. In her testimony, which passed to the provincial federation, she accused the doctor of distributing the food parcels only to local women whose husbands were members of the PNF. And she charged that the midwife who was affiliated to the clinic had actually sold some of the baby food to regular clients at a rate just below the commercial price. Despite severe poverty and unemployment in the district, she alleged, many women had been forced to pay 3 *lire* a box for food which should have been given to them free of charge.¹²⁰

Whether or not the woman embellished her story is less important than the fact that the narrative illustrates that the regime had certainly succeeded in making some people at least feel that they deserved state benefits; however, this new sense of entitlement to support could become a source of resentment, if ONMI failed to live up to rising expectations of public responsibility for welfare. Though the sources give no indication one way or the other, the allegations concerning politically and financially motivated corruption could have been true, since there certainly was scope for the rampant mismanagement and misuse of resources by ONMI officials in the localities. Very significantly too, the incident sheds some light on the subjective experience of the women whom the predominantly male policy planning and implementing establishment tried to turn into mere reproducers of the race. The woman's strong desire to assert her right to public assistance suggests that female clients were not passive recipients of fascist welfare or its ideological trappings. Like many other poor women, this client was probably a lot more selective and intelligent in her use of the services provided by the state than the regime and its reformers reckoned was possible. Her only interest in ONMI was to access food for her child which she needed, but could not afford to buy herself. On the basis of this and other qualitative evidence, it seems reasonable to suggest that what appeal fascist welfare exerted over women rested on its delivery of direct aid to the poor – in the form of food, services, benefits or subsidies – rather than its promotion of remedial training for recalcitrant mothers.

That women wanted welfare, but not propaganda, and support, but not schooling, did not preclude the possibility that they would use maternalist ideology and policy to their own advantage. An amusing 'scandal' that government officials uncovered demonstrates just how deliberate and strategic

women's responses to fascist social provision could be. In December 1933, Mussolini's personal secretary was stopped as he exited his home by what appeared to be five heavily pregnant women. They begged him to give them subsidies on the grounds that they were poor and wanted to produce healthy babies for the Duce. When Sebastiani refused, a kerfuffle ensued, which resulted in the women being carted off by the police for questioning. The police discovered that the women were not pregnant at all; they had all stuffed pillows under their skirts to feign pregnancy. Interrogations revealed that they and a number of other 'fraudsters' had apparently been running a racket for a number of years in Rome; they took poor, young women into their band and sent them on rounds to the various ministries and organizations that specialized in maternal welfare to collect cash. They shared the profits amongst themselves and their families.¹²¹ Organized welfare 'abuses' of this kind may have been unusual. None the less, the incident illustrates that efforts to 'nationalize' motherhood by laying public claim to women's bodies and influencing private behaviour could backfire in the dictatorship's face. In fascist Italy, posing as a mother of the race for pure material gain can somehow be seen as a form of women's resistance to the tyranny of maternalism.

'Official' corruption involving welfare providers was probably more common than abuses of the system by beneficiaries. For example, the *condotto* system under fascism underwent changes as party secretariats gained control of the appointment process. PNF membership, preferably dating back to the early days of the struggle for power, became a mandatory application requirement for general practitioners seeking employment with government health authorities. So too did connections to the local fascist elite. In 1935, rumblings about favouritism, which was apparently leading to declining standards of doctors' qualifications and experience, reached the national PNF secretary, Achille Starace, who then instigated an investigation into hiring procedure. The inquiry conducted in the province of Milan by the prefect's office revealed that local mayors and party officials practised a policy of '*scavalco*' by which they bypassed regulations dictating that competitions be open and appointments be made on the basis of merit; instead, fascist officialdom had resorted to placing clients and friends, who were 'unsuitable' and even 'unqualified' doctors, on the public payroll.¹²²

The politicized nature of fascist welfare also marred the work of 'reaching out to the masses'. Official reports from ONMI's Milanese *federali* to the national leadership were full of florid references to the achievements of the organization. Thanks to the generosity of government and elites, the federation had managed to complete a substantial portion of its five-year plan for the 'penetration of the people' by creating 28 mothers' kitchens and 5 clinics by 1928. Much of the success of the programme was due to the

'inspired leadership' of ONMI's *comitato* in the capital; according to the leader of the provincial federation, the members of Milan's communal committee carried on a 'tireless effort to correct the astounding ignorance and carelessness of mothers'.¹²³ However, the attempt to bring mothers within the protective arms of the state did not entirely succeed in the city of Milan, mainly because women showed hostility towards initiatives to instruct and assist them, particularly when these were political and ideological in tone. An incident that occurred at the headquarters of ONMI's communal committee in late 1931 illustrated that the delivery of overtly 'fascist' welfare to working-class people with their own political traditions and sympathies could undermine the regime's attempts to manufacture consent through social policy. Initial anger amongst ONMI clientele at a *consultorio*, which was located at the *comitato*, built up over the limited and inconvenient hours of the service provided. For two days a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays, the clinic ran a doctor's surgery which was open for two-hour morning sessions. Because the attending doctor often arrived late, women had to wait a long time. They complained to the head of the *comitato* that the physician's chronic tardiness often caused them to miss their free lunches at the mothers' kitchen, which was run on a strict schedule and was some distance away. Many also worked and could not risk losing their jobs. But, according to a subsequent investigation by the prefect, the ONMI official in charge had taken an extremely unsympathetic stance. Moreover, clients disliked her intensely because she was a zealous fascist party leader who assumed a superior attitude to the women she was supposed to be serving. Eventually, violence broke out at the clinic one day in November 1931. The prefect reported that 'shouts and screams of protest' were all targeted at the ONMI *dirigente*. Local women smashed her desk to pieces and stormed out of the office, vowing never to return again. Because of her 'condescending attitude to women of the popular classes', the prefect's report concluded, she had managed to 'distance the people' from the regime and its institutions. In order to restore confidence in the agency and fascism, the provincial federation decided to implement the prefect's recommendation that the woman be dismissed. ONMI *federali* hoped that clients would find her replacement more likeable. The old order returned to power, as Count Tullio Confalonieri, a philanthropist with years of experience in charity administration, assumed control of the *comitato*.¹²⁴

It is not difficult to imagine how keen female fascist party leaders, drawn as they were from the middle classes, and particularly from the *petite bourgeoisie*, could offend working-class women. Class and politics together could create an almost insurmountable barrier between welfare administrators and their clients. The home visits conducted by authorities in one *consultorio* uncovered the fact that those who volunteered for ONMI could look down upon the women whom they assisted. According to one official, the 'poor and ignorant women' who frequented an ONMI *consultorio*

brought up their babies in homes which were: 'unfit for human habitation; unclean and unsafe; small; without running water and electricity'. Notwithstanding 'our active hygienic propaganda', he observed, mothers exhibited a 'refractory mentality' and did not seem to understand that 'such environments endangered the health of infants'.¹²⁵

Reports of women complaining about 'not getting enough from the state' also abounded in ONMI's official correspondence with prefects.¹²⁶ Provincial ONMI budgets for the kitchens were very tight, so directors kept meal portions small and daily quotas limited. Here again, conditional eligibility requirements came into effect in order to control cost. In addition to holding a certificate of poverty, a potential client had to be examined by a doctor in one of the clinics to qualify for free food aid. Only when she could present a medical statement showing that she suffered from under-nourishment or malnutrition could a woman be allowed entry. The provision of free meals at mothers' kitchens aimed at improving women's ability to undergo pregnancy and breastfeed babies successfully. Despite these constraints, however, the free meal programme provided a vital social service for the community. By recognizing at least that poverty existed in Italy and caused significant health risks to women, the policy had the potential to be of immense material benefit to many people.

But ONMI leaders in many poor communes had trouble organizing this service. In one such case in Rome's Valle dell'Inferno (Valley of Hell), a region of high infant mortality and high female fertility, the municipal leadership made repeated requests to the federation for a special emergency grant to pay for the building and maintenance costs of a kitchen. After eight years of trying, the local patron of ONMI wrote an angry letter to *federali* explaining that in an area of chronic male unemployment where women worked the fields, and suffered high rates of miscarriage as a result, a public cafeteria for families would help to alleviate 'a great deal of misery'. But his appeal fell on deaf ears.¹²⁷ In another example, kitchen staff in a clinic bended rules in order to provide a substantive service. An inspection carried out in one kitchen which was run by nuns raised suspicions about management corruption. When brought before ONMI authorities on charges of food theft, the sisters admitted that they had been lying about the numbers of women and children who regularly attended. The nuns wanted to offer their clients enough food to last them a whole day and to give them small parcels to take home to their husbands; therefore, they fiddled the figures on attendance and supplies. The federation decided to introduce an 'assiduous and rigorous system of accounting and control' in order to prohibit this sort of 'irregularity' from happening again in the future.¹²⁸

The qualitative evidence of the bureaucratic bungling, the financial constraints, and the institutional limitations which plagued welfare under fascism is plentiful. Inspectors' reports revealed that not all kitchens lived

up to fascism's expectations for modern, hygienic, and efficient services. In one surprise visit, a refectory was found to be: 'crowded with hungry women and screaming babies, some of whom are turned away at the door for lack of space and sufficient food; filled with an incredibly horrible odour and flies everywhere, even on plates; filthy and disordered.' The simple fare, which consisted of a stew and bread, may have been without much taste, the inspector noted, but the women 'appeared grateful for what they got' none the less.¹²⁹ In another refectory, directors announced that they would no longer be giving out free food rations to cover the days when the kitchen was closed on holidays and Sundays. This economizing measure met with 'an outcry of discontent' by the 46 local women who regularly frequented the establishment. Forced to make a concession, the authorities instituted a new policy which permitted mothers and children to come to the kitchen on Sundays for their free meals. But this change caused more anger because women wanted to be with their families on the weekend. Confused about the appropriate course of action, the directors appealed to Mussolini for his help. The Duce pointed out to them that their new policy had not actually saved the organization any money because of the extra administrative and running costs for the Sunday meals. The directors dutifully reverted to their original system of providing food parcels for the entire family.¹³⁰

Of equal importance to the quality of service provided by fascist social institutions is the question of the 'mass' dimension of welfare during the dictatorship. In contrast to the *cattedre ambulanti*, the scheme which ONMI abandoned, the development of *consultori* proceeded apace. By 1929, ONMI had opened 82 mixed maternal and infant clinics, mainly in northern and central metropolitan areas, though none yet qualified to be called an integrated *Casa della Madre e del Bambino*. The number of women and children who had attended a clinic exceeded 60 000 by 1929, according to official statistics. In 1930, 120 clinics functioned, but only about 30 of these provided any form of medical care, such as testing for tuberculosis or the distribution of minor medicines. The overwhelming majority functioned as centres where women received instruction in puericulture and, if they were lucky, collected free foods, such as bread, olive oil, and baby formula.¹³¹ Agency officials claimed that, in 1935 alone, 255 000 pregnant women and mothers attended a *consultorio* for the first time and another 379 000 returned for a second or subsequent visit.¹³² These figures represented only a small percentage of the total population of potential clients (for example, 1 113 636 women gave birth in 1934), but still the organization was reaching out to the mothers of Italy. ONMI was beginning to function on a mass scale, but what kind of aid was it offering poor women?

For the most part, the establishment of educational services prevailed over the delivery of genuine welfare benefits. By 1938, ONMI had managed

to create 7900 *consultori*, but only 1 300 kitchens, and 190 complete *Casa della Madre e del Bambino*. There was something terribly vacuous and wasteful about all this frantic effort to create *consultori* whose main purpose was to educate poor, over-worked, and under-fed women about the benefits of modern, scientific mothercraft.¹³³ When they could be mobilized to assist the efforts of ONMI, representatives from fascist women's groups acted as volunteers in *consultori*. Enlisted to conduct childrearing classes, and in some cases home visits, PNF 'social assistants' were no substitute for the medical and material assistance that many *consultori* should have been, but mostly were not providing.¹³⁴ True fascist institutions they may have been; but, given the priority which they assigned to propaganda and puericulture in their activities, *consultori* do not provide a very flattering picture of the workings of the regime's welfare policy. Of far greater significance to the quality of life of working-class women was the fact that mothers' kitchens were beginning to proliferate in the nation's cities and towns. As many as 92 000 women nationwide had been fed in mothers' kitchens during the years 1927–30; the numbers rose to 61 858 in 1933, 77 011 in 1934, and 84 502 in 1935.¹³⁵ Given the numbers involved in the scheme, none the less, this more substantive form of welfare, which was directly targeted at alleviating the effects of poverty, did not have an extensive impact upon working-class women as a whole.¹³⁶

According to the population census of 1936, considered to be one of the least unreliable of fascism's social surveys, there were 8.3 million married women (and another 2 million widows) in April of that year, roughly 20 per cent of whom were in some kind of paid employment. Out of the total female population of roughly 21 million, 5.2 million were economically active, 1.6 million were wage workers in industry, and another 2.4 million were manual workers in agriculture. Long-term structural trends in the Italian economy, together with the effects of the economic crisis of 1927–c.1934 and fascist socio-economic policies, adversely affected all women workers, but especially married ones, whose presence in the 'official' female workforce diminished. By 1936, for example, the average woman industrial worker was aged between 15 and 24 years and unmarried.¹³⁷ Married women were not leaving factories for more comfortable jobs in offices, as the majority of Italy's small, but growing female white-collar labour force were young and single.¹³⁸ Nor were they entering the one branch of traditionally female-dominated industry which was expanding in the 1930s. As old-style textiles declined, the manufacture of synthetic fabrics became a boom industry from the middle of decade. However, most of the estimated 11 499 women workers in artificial textiles in 1937 were under 21 years of age.¹³⁹ The Italian countryside did not escape the trend towards the disemployment of women workers. The proportion of women within the total rural labour force fell from well over 60 per cent in

1881 to just over 35 per cent in 1938. According to official statistics, the greatest drop occurred in the period from 1921 to 1931, when the size of the female workforce in agriculture shrank by over 50 per cent.¹⁴⁰

The number of women who were officially registered as so-called 'housewives' rose from 9.3 million in 1921 to 11.3 in 1931; and the proportion of women (aged over 10 years) who were listed in censuses as being 'devoted to the care of the home' rose from 59 percent in 1921 to 67.9 in 1931.¹⁴¹ These figures reflected the growing precariousness of working-class women's economic standing. Italian fascism did not return working-class women to the safety and comforts of the home. Rather, the regime presided over the expulsion of married female wage workers from the official labour market in the 1930s. As their access to regular, fixed employment decreased, working 'mothers of the race' were ghettoized in low-paid jobs in unprotected and unregulated fields, such as domestic industries, the sweated trades, and casual by-employments.

The fascist government endorsed and encouraged this trend. Founded on 28 September 1934, the federation of *Massaie Rurali* (Rural Housewives) became recognized soon after as a section of provincial party organizations which was subordinate to the *fasci femminili*. Funded primarily by contributions from agricultural labour syndicates, and the annual dues of its own members, the association aimed to 'educate' women in the skills of garden cultivation, animal husbandry, home crafts and all those *piccole industrie casalinghe* (housewifely domestic industries) which fascist leaders defined as an important component of the rural household economy in the New Italy.¹⁴² With a membership of 571 658 in 1934, which grew to 1 242 514 by 1939, the rural housewives' federation devoted a considerable amount of its energies to channelling the labour of rural women into state-approved and party-run activities. On *Massaie Rurali* estates outside Rome, for example, women produced fruit and vegetables for ONMI's mothers' kitchens in the capital. The development of co-operative farms for underemployed rural women became a policy target because this programme served a multiple purpose. The scheme helped the government 'defend' the wages and jobs of male 'breadwinners' by promoting the expulsion of women from regular employment; and, by counteracting the damaging effects of high unemployment in the countryside and controls on rural migration, it aimed both to enlist 'surplus' women workers in the army of cheap labour that fascism created and to alleviate the increased financial pressures on working-class families under the dictatorship.¹⁴³

The regime also attempted to provide some compensatory employment relief for urban working-class 'housewives'. Beginning in 1931, ONMI took a central role in this effort. Together with the *fasci femminili*, and the *Ente Opera Assistenza*, the agency worked to create *laboratori femminili* (women's workshops) in depressed urban areas. While some women learned how to sew fabrics into the uniforms and flags that comprised such an important

component of party paraphernalia, others made garments for repatriated citizens, baby clothes for the poor, and similar specialty products in the various patriotic initiatives launched by different PNF federations. Gradually, these centres sprang up even in rural provinces where PNF *federalli* felt inclined to focus energy on this mixed form of mass organization and social welfare. Organized in informal gatherings, rural women took courses in *tessiture rustiche* which taught them how to spin and weave rough natural fibres into fabrics that the military requisitioned. By 1937, the party controlled over 200 such establishments in both rural and urban areas throughout the north and centre.¹⁴⁴

The regime provided equipment for these centres by patronizing the nation's only native sewing-machine manufacturer. President of the firm the Anonymous Society Necchi of Pavia, Vittorio Necchi began making hefty donations to the Duce's social fund for premiums to large families in 1930. In exchange, the industrialist asked the Duce to salvage his company, which chronically failed to produce goods which could compete in price or quality with superior German and American-made machines. As part of its autarkic economic policy, the government provided Necchi with protection in the form of heavy duties on imports. Eventually, the manufacturer squeezed his foreign rivals out of the Italian market; with the regime's backing, in the form of a government contract, he also managed to re-organize his plant, streamline production, and expand his workforce. By 1934, Necchi supplied his remodelled machines to most party, public, educational and charitable institutions in the country. And from 1929 onwards, he donated thousands of machines to the regime, which held competitions in every province for their distribution amongst the nation's unemployed women workers. Potential recipients were asked to write letters giving details of why they deserved a free sewing machine; the response of the public exceeded all expectations. And the letters, many of which have survived, draw a bleak picture of the workings of fascist Italy. They poignantly unmask the real face of policies which purported to have elevated women as mothers, but actually undermined them as workers. One example illustrates the point: in 1929, an unemployed mother of ten children who was married to an unemployed worker requested a machine for herself and her four unemployed daughters, so that they could earn enough doing odd jobs to support the entire family. The prefect and party officials deemed her 'miserable and worthy enough' to merit a machine. Many others in similar and worse circumstances were not so lucky.¹⁴⁵ The ghettoization of married women workers appeared to have reached completion with the creation of the party's ancillary organs for female home workers, the *Sezioni Operaie e Lavoranti a Domicilio* (Homeworkers' Sections) which were founded in March 1938.¹⁴⁶ By 1939, over 200 000 unemployed working-class women joined the army of piece-rate workers that the regime was recruiting into patriotic service in state sweatshops. One month after the declaration of

war against France in June 1940, the Ministry of War made a formal request soliciting the service of these seamstresses. At the behest of the national PNF directorate, rural and urban housewives commenced war work a few months later.¹⁴⁷

The regime's 'ideological hold' over working-class women

As ONMI's financial crisis worsened in the early 1930s, due partly to the unforeseen expense of the illegitimacy campaign,¹⁴⁸ cutbacks adversely affected forms of direct economic aid, like subsidies to mothers in need, and the development of medical and welfare services. As an interim, emergency measure to see the agency through its crisis, Sileno Fabbri shifted policy targets away from more substantive types of social assistance and directed efforts at schemes for the 'education of the masses'. Funding pressures and organizational difficulties forced ONMI leaders to resign themselves to the fact that *consultori* would never become fully-fledged medical and welfare centres. While resource and personnel constraints limited welfare expansion under fascism, ONMI, none the less, prioritized propaganda from the start. In the years 1927–30, for example, the agency spent a total of 24 244 464 *lire* on the production of educational material, including posters and pamphlets, aimed at modernizing motherhood and childrearing in Italy. During the same period, expenditure on what could arguably be defined as a greater priority, the provision of maternal welfare benefits and services (a budget category covering spending on refectories, nursing subsidies to unmarried and married mothers, aid to pregnant women and grants to welfare institutions) amounted to only 106 623 621 *lire*.¹⁴⁹

From the very beginning, clinics actively pursued a policy of 'social prophylaxis' aimed at reaching out to mothers through popular publications explaining the principles of 'child and infant hygiene'. During their home visits, consulting sessions, and mothercraft lessons, all ONMI personnel who came into contact with clients were responsible for raising the consciousness of mothers. Distributed at all its organs, including its *case* and kitchens, but especially at its *consultori*, propaganda concerning the scientific and modern methods of childcare explained in simple diagrams, drawings, and prose the regimen that a mother should follow to safeguard her infant's physical and emotional development. In addition, policy statements stressed, women should be 'gently persuaded' by all ONMI staff to appreciate the enormity of their reproductive task and the importance of their 'maternal duty' to the national community. Much of the work of ONMI, then, aimed at the modernization and regimentation of motherhood by the state.¹⁵⁰

The educational manuals that ONMI produced in the inter-war period adopted a patent moralizing tone about the requisites of good mothering.

In one such publication, entitled *The Hygienic Home*, a male physician advised women to be economical and efficient in household management. Overwhelmed at first after the birth of a baby, young mothers should learn early on to budget their time for domestic chores, baby care, and wifely duties. Asking himself whether working-class parents had the financial means to guarantee a healthy and happy home for children, the author answered that the most important thing was *una buona volontà* (good intentions). Fascist mothers, he advised, must use their good sense to organize family expenditure prudently. Every year, he remarked, Italians spent between 8 and 9 billion *lire* on wine. If those on a tight budget eliminated alcohol entirely from shopping lists, he asserted, they would have far more disposable income to spend on their children.¹⁵¹ Other publications, like *The Maternity Book*, came complete with photos of mother and baby and Madonna and child. As well as containing words of warning and advice to expectant mothers, each page had a caption with some of the more encouraging statements by the Duce, such as: 'The whims of fashion are so deleterious to the race. The craze of women to lose weight is dangerous and threatening. If only women know how men find motherhood enhances feminine beauty.'¹⁵² And others dealt with specific aspects of childrearing, like the manual on baby bath-giving which mistakenly took as an implicit assumption that all working-class households were equipped with such amenities as running water and heat.¹⁵³

Middle-class assumptions were also replete in official propaganda about the achievements of fascism. In his *A Home for the Masses and Fascist Ideology*, Antonio Lamaro claimed that the regime had elevated the labouring poor, who had been 'morally retarded by socialism', into disciplined and industrious workers. The home, he affirmed, was the prime educational tool of a dictatorship which had proved to its people that even those who earned a slim wage were entitled to 'enjoy the spiritual joys of family life, despite material dissatisfaction'. The aim of fascism was not to obliterate class distinctions, but rather to improve the moral character of the *lavoratore delle braccia* (the manual worker) so he would no longer feel socially inferior to the *lavoratore del cervello* (the intellectual or professional worker). Even for those families whose incomes were minute, the conveniences of the ideal home were indeed within reach. In the not too distant future, he promised, fascism would realize its goal of constructing abundant public housing fit with running water, electricity, and other domestic comforts.¹⁵⁴

Through publications like these, the state imposed on women a fulsome assortment of the prejudices and biases of a maternalist welfare ideology. Eugenic calls for a civic training of mothers through puericulture seem to have become a reality through ONMI. But these manuals also expose a fundamental weakness of fascist provision. Posing in a scientific guise, the literature on child nurture may have contained some commonsensical advice that middle-class women could have used, but it simply had little relevance

to most working-class women. Pamphlets extolling the redeeming mission of mothers of the race contrasted too sharply with the daily realities of working-class life for the message to have had much persuasive force.¹⁵⁵ The domestic ideals espoused in this propaganda masquerading as welfare must have given very little comfort indeed to the women who struggled for family survival.

Part III
The Problem of Child
Abandonment from Liberalism to
Fascism

Introduction: Charity, the State, and Compassion: The Modernization of Social Values

Franco Cambi and Simonetta Ulivieri's book on the history of childhood in liberal Italy begins with the confident claim that 'childhood is a modern discovery'.¹ According to Cambi and Ulivieri, modernity wrought 'profound and radical changes' in 'traditional' attitudes and behaviour towards children. The process began, they argue, in the fourteenth century, was unique to the West, and culminated in the nineteenth century, by which time children had ceased to be seen as 'little adults' and 'little devils'. In the modern age, they contend, we Europeans have given the child 'the appearance of innocence, an emotional value, and an ever elevated position within society and the family'.² This thesis is very familiar to those who have read or read about the very influential work of Philippe Ariès.³

Decades after its inception, the Ariès paradigm still possesses persuasive powers over some scholars, probably because of its endearing simplicity. Very briefly, the broad lines of his interpretation are that the idea of childhood as a separate stage in the life cycle did not exist in medieval society. Young children were thrust into a harsh world where they were expected to dress, work, and struggle for existence like adults. The affective ties that bind parents to children were especially fragile because of high mortality and high fertility. Childrearing practices, the argument goes, reflected the barren emotional landscape of family life in the proverbial 'dark ages': children simply 'did not count' back then.⁴ Because of prevailing indifference to them, children in large numbers could expect to be swaddled, beaten, abandoned and exploited by parents and strangers alike. From about the seventeenth century though, attitudes towards children softened. Firstly, a notion of childhood as distinct from adulthood arose. Secondly, a 'modern' concept of parenting emerged. Because of this modernization of sentiments, recognition of the worth of children as human beings increasingly grew, as did readiness to devote material and emotional resources to ensure their welfare and survival.

Unsurprisingly, scholars of the Middle Ages have been amongst Ariès's chief critics.⁵ They have built up a strong case to dispute the claim that

childhood as a separate stage in human development did not exist as an idea or a reality before the fourteenth century. Without engaging in this debate, some relevant points can and should be made. Firstly, Christianity had indeed long acknowledged the drama and dangers of being a child. After his conversion, Constantine made the censure and punishment of those who abandoned their babies a centrepiece of his social legislation.⁶ And in 314, Pope Sylvester, who purportedly baptized Constantine, convened the church fathers at Arles in order to define their position on children. These early Christians rejected the precept of *patria potestas* (paternal authority) contained in classical Roman law because they believed that viewing children as the property of their fathers deprived them of consequence. Legates at Arles accused their pagan persecutors of tolerating the abuse, abandonment, and murder of children. In response, they devised a new Christian morality which affirmed the dignity of childhood. The synod of Arles formally condemned the practice of *expositio* (exposition).⁷ From its earliest beginnings in late antiquity, church law defined children as a trust from God. The idea that parenthood did not confer ownership meant that church legal doctrine emphasized parents' responsibilities, rather than rights. Increasingly in the Middle Ages, ecclesiastical prescriptive codes and juridical practice held parents responsible for supporting, protecting, raising and educating the children who were entrusted to them by God.⁸

In the early Middle Ages, church authorities considered foundlings to be amongst the most worthy of all *personae miserabiles* (miserable persons) because of their total dependence on others for survival and their complete lack of culpability for their destitution. Perhaps as early as 787, Archpriest Dateo commanded ecclesiastical officials in Milan to erect Europe's first 'xenodochium' for 'derelict' infants; located at the city's Great Church, this very *pio luogo* (pious place) took its name from a Greek etymon, dating back to the time of Justinian, which signified an obligation to feed, nourish, and care for strangers.⁹ Christian piety and hospitality dictated that foundling homes be built so that unwanted infants could be protected from the threat of exposure and murder. These *brefotrofi* had a profound cultural and social significance: their mere existence affirmed that medieval Christian society believed that forsaken children had rights. The inscriptions on these buildings conveyed the message that these were holy places under the dominion of God where succour was given to the innocent victims of sin: sayings like *bimbo nutro* (I feed the baby), *Pater et mater dereliquerunt nos, Dominus autem assumpsit* (Father and mother have abandoned us, but the Lord has adopted us), and *Pro infantis et parvulis peccato natis* (For the babies and infants born in sin) appeared in stone engravings over portals. Medieval canon law, church synods, and rules for priests codified the aims and nature of charity towards foundlings and established an elaborate body of rituals, beliefs, and customs about abandonment.¹⁰

In the twelfth century, hospitals are known to have begun admitting foundlings and the first *ruote* are reputed to have been built. At the end of the century, Guy de Montpellier's monastic Order of the Holy Spirit started to dispatch missions throughout Europe whose specific task was to found institutions devoted entirely to the relief of foundlings and orphans.¹¹ The *fons et origo* of the Church's efforts to bestow mercy on abandoned infants was, however, Innocent III, the most ambitious of all the medieval popes. Determined to extend the patronage and power of papal monarchy, and to assert the church's right to intervene in secular affairs, Innocent III cultivated an image of himself as the 'infant-saving Pope'. In 1198, a year of plague, he founded the great Hospital of Santo Spirito in Saxia at Rome as a refuge for the sick, the orphaned, and the abandoned. A fresco cycle painted in the hospital's main hall in the fifteenth century, when the institution became a foundling home alone, depicts the enduring legend surrounding Innocent III's reputation as the pre-eminent child protector. One scene shows mothers committing infanticide by callously throwing their helpless babies into the Tiber; another shows fishermen netting their catch of corpses and taking them to the pope; and another still shows Innocent III in abject horror at the sight of countless dead babies. Moved so much by the spectacle of child murder, the story goes, Innocent III commissioned his hospital as proof of his compassion for the poor *gittatelli*.¹² During his reign, Innocent III encouraged the creation of special houses for the exercise of hospitality towards *esposti*. By the fifteenth century, these establishments had become magnificent objects of civic pride and spectacular symbols of the boundless munificence of church charity. Commissioned in 1419 and completed in 1445, Florence's *Ospedale degli Innocenti* is perhaps the most famous of all these foundling homes. Designed by Filippo Brunelleschi, whom contemporaries exalted as one of the most talented modernists of his age, it is often credited with being the very first example of a definably Renaissance style of architecture.¹³

Though probably added later, possibly in the fifteenth century, when many *ruote* (or *torni*) were constructed,¹⁴ a *rota* box (also called a wheel, hole, or shelf) is still set into a niche of the wall of Innocent III's Santo Spirito Hospital, just to the left of the main entrance.¹⁵ A revolving wooden turnstile with a tray attached to the bottom and an iron grille exterior, the *ruota* is large enough to hold only a newborn baby. If it were any larger, contemporaries believed, parents would have been tempted to abandon older infants and even children. Because of the expense involved in the maintenance of foundlings, the rectors of homes did not want to encourage abandonment in any way. The sound of the *ruota* turning, the cries of the child, or the ringing of a bell by the person or persons depositing the baby in the box alerted attendants that there was a new arrival. What was the motivation behind this odd device?

One of the most important functions of the *ruota* was to protect the anonymity of the person or persons who deposited the *trovatello*¹⁶ in the box. The clandestinity of the act of abandonment, the church reckoned, served as a deterrent to the far more heinous offence of infanticide. Attendants were instructed to refrain from leaving the building to ascertain the identity of the individual or individuals. And as a further precaution, the grilles or lids of turnstiles were customarily opened only at night, so that abandonment could take place in total secrecy and darkness. Only if the child's bearer or bearers lingered did the rota's keepers ask questions about the parentage and provenance of the baby. Frequently, *trovatelli* were left with notes attached to their clothing: these often contained vital information about the child's origins, about whether baptism had taken place, about the reasons for abandonment, and about the intentions of a parent or the parents to reclaim the infant at some later date.¹⁷ Whether or not authorities had any knowledge about the foundling's mother or father, the important fact remains that they did nothing to involve either or both of them in the upkeep of their offspring. The 'pious receiving society' where the infant was abandoned at the *torno* assumed all responsibility for the care of that foundling. The rationale behind these arrangements is found in religious thinking about sex, sin, and the family.

By the twelfth century, the church's view of all sex as sinful had changed somewhat, as canonists began to argue that marital sex with a procreative purpose was morally acceptable. Prohibitions concerning sexual relations outside marriage remained very strict, however.¹⁸ The church recognized that most *esposti* were abandoned precisely because they were adulterine or illegitimate offspring. It did not acknowledge, however, that its attitudes about sex and sin were partly responsible for creating a culture of abandonment.¹⁹ Indeed, the church viewed the unwed mother as an immoral woman who had fallen from grace and her child as the fruit of sin. Over a number of centuries, canonical literature devoted great attention to the perils of women's fornication and unchastity.²⁰ Like prostitutes and adulteresses, those sinful women who gave birth out of wedlock were subject to penalties which included ostracism from the company of good women. Only through a heart-felt confession, religious reclusion, and a long penance, could fallen women be rescued and saved.²¹ The involvement of the 'unredeemed' unwed mother in the upkeep of her child was unthinkable to churchmen who devised the *ruota* to prevent child murder motivated by shame and dishonour.

Profoundly symbolic of the social attitudes which shrouded unwed motherhood in secrecy and shame, the *ruota* also represented the desire of the church to save not just the bodies, but, even more importantly perhaps, the souls of the children born in sin. A prime purpose of Christian charity towards foundlings was to reclaim the infant from evil. The children of

fallen women, the church decreed, should not be punished for the sins of their mothers; rather, they should be freed from the circumstances surrounding their birth by being placed under the protection of the church. Pious institutions assumed all parental responsibilities for the care of children whose natural parents had deserted them. Acting materially and, indeed, legally as parents, foundling homes described themselves and their charges as '*tutta la famiglia*'.²² The church gave these children of 'unknown' parents (*figli d'ignoti*) a new family – the spiritual family of Christ and his followers.²³ It did so through baptism, which played an important role in the treatment of *trovatelli*; if they were well, babies were baptized within days and, if they were unwell, they were baptized immediately after being 'received' into a pious institution. Theologians considered clerics to be the spiritual fathers of all the children whom they baptized. According to religious doctrine, the children born of the evils of adulterous and illicit unions could still be saved through the purifying ritual of baptism, which conferred forgiveness and salvation. A baptized baby went straight to heaven when he or she died, while an unbaptized one waited in limbo.²⁴

The church wished to free the child both from original sin and the sin of its conception by means of baptism, which was described as the holiest of all sacraments. It also wished to integrate the child into a family setting. The bestowal of a name was a second component in the ritual of bringing the *esposto* into the family of Christ. Authorities in a single institution customarily gave the same surname to all the babies left in their care: one *brefotrofia* used 'Colombo'; another 'Innocenti'; another 'Di Pietà' or 'Di Dio'. But rather than denote 'public paternity', as some historians contend, this practice appears to have reflected the desire to privilege *esposti* with a divine paternity.²⁵ The naming ritual also marked the special status of *trovatelli* as children who were especially worthy of benevolence because of their shared misfortune of having been disowned by their natural parents. Bearing the same name signified that these were all brothers and sisters together and all God's children. Society at large may have demeaned these children with the stigma of illegitimacy, but it was not the church's intention to do so. By securing wet nurses, foster parents, apprenticeships and marriages for foundlings, medieval and early modern *brefotrofi* confirmed their intention to provide their charges with protective familial and social bonds.

Through its *brefotrofi*, the church attempted to give *esposti* the experience of belonging to families, albeit in an impersonal and institutional setting. While it may have dealt harshly with the unwed mothers and other female transgressors whom it viewed as sinners,²⁶ the church showed a compassion towards the innocent victims of sin which was often lacking in civil society. Indeed, as one distinguished jurist has demonstrated, discrimination towards these children came not from ecclesiastical rulings but from secular norms. James Brundage has argued that over the course of many centuries

the 'disadvantages visited upon illegitimate children, with respect to inheritance and other matters, originated primarily in secular, rather than ecclesiastical law'.²⁷ From an early date, children 'counted' a great deal to the church. Its laws and institutions recognized that *fanciulli* were fragile beings who needed protection to ensure their survival and development. When parents failed in their duties to care for their offspring, the church was prepared to step in to assume a parental role as guardian of the spiritual and physical welfare of children. The medieval church embarked upon a great charitable endeavour to protect society's 'surplus' infants.

The reality of the medieval church's perceived mission to safeguard outcast infants opens the enduring Ariès thesis to doubt, because this interpretation rests on the premise that compassion towards children did not exist before the seventeenth century. Though Ariès and his followers might have got the starting-point of social change wrong, the rest of their argument might still be right. Did a progressive modernization of attitudes towards childhood occur, culminating in the nineteenth century, when concern for children's wellbeing intensified, and adult behaviour changed for the better? The treatment of foundlings can shed some light on this important question.

The medieval church's *brefotrofi* and *ruote* survived well into the modern period. During the long age of mass abandonment, however, secularists began to attack these institutions. The dispensation of church charity on a huge scale resulted in spectacularly high infant mortality amongst foundlings. Though scant, some existing evidence suggests that the mortality of infants in the care of *brefotrofi* was lower in the Middle Ages than it was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²⁸ Demand far outstripped the supply of wet nurses. The difficulty of finding sufficient numbers of *balie* was compounded by the rise of rural manufacturing, which increasingly attracted village women away from wetnursing. The organization of care changed as the modern foundling home increasingly became a residential establishment. Those institutions which did not successfully introduce bottle-feeding in the nineteenth-century (most Italian ones did not) routinely saw 80 to 90 percent of their newborn admissions die in their first year of life. A medical tract published in 1860 reported that 'artificial feeding' by animals was especially prevalent in Italy's foundling homes, where it was not uncommon to see babies being placed at the teats of goats. Professor Allipandri observed that some doctors recommended that all infants be nursed in this manner since 'animals are less subject to the volatile human emotions which can sour milk'. And he stated that if an animal was going to be used, a goat was certainly preferable to a donkey or a sheep because the experience of *brefotrofi* showed that this beast 'adapted itself most easily to having a baby suckle at its breast'.²⁹

At the Holy Spirit *brefotrofo* in Rome, which prided itself on being a 'modern' foundling home, authorities began to experiment with different

kinds of 'artificial' feeds in the 1860s because of the scarcity of *balie*. They used untreated and unsterilized cow's milk, put foundlings to the breasts of goats, and even tried the new brand of 'babies' soup' from Germany, Liebig's malted milk extract, an increasingly popular product internationally which claimed to be scientifically formulated but was actually quite unsuitable for infants.³⁰ Not surprisingly really, given the poor hygiene and dangerous feeding practices associated with the new regime, officials saw the mortality rate of internally reared infants climb to levels which were higher even than they had been in the 1820s and 1830s, when the quality of care provided by foundling homes declined enormously due to rapidly rising demand. Morbidity rates amongst internally maintained infants also rose during this period of transition from 1867 to 1876; outbreaks of the much-dreaded *mughetto*, a parasitic and contagious thrush-like disease causing mouth ulcers and severe diarrhoea, became far more frequent.³¹ Because of the total failure of '*allattamento artificiale*', Pio Blasi, who directed the home, decided to annex the *brefotrofio* to the Holy Spirit charity hospital, whose maternity ward catered almost exclusively to *madri nubili*. Blasi hoped that direct access to the mothers of illegitimate infants would free the home from dependence upon 'mercenary' wet nurses and artificial feeds. He determined to enlist the support of unwed mothers in the battle against infant mortality by making these women solely responsible for feeding their own infants.³²

Professor Allipandri may have warned against maternal breastfeeding, because this practice caused prolonged infertility and was 'an obstacle to the propagation of the race',³³ but science and medicine came increasingly to the conclusion that mother's milk was the answer to the problem of illegitimacy. Enlightenment thinkers like Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi criticized the church for farming foundlings out to wet nurses and depriving them of their mothers' love. In 1770, Pestalozzi wrote that the 'maternal breast satisfies the first urgent sexual and emotional impulses of the infant'. So important to the early psychological and physical development of the child, breastfeeding bonded mother and baby. Other aspects of church charity also came under attack. The French writer, Alphonse de Lamartine (1790–1869) captured the sentiments of many critics of the rota box when he called it 'an ingenious invention of Christian charity that has hands with which to receive, but neither eyes, nor mouth with which to see and speak'.³⁴ Many felt that the church erred in its regard for the privacy of the abandoning parent. They alleged that the concealment and secrecy of the act of abandonment merely encouraged people to dispose of their offspring in the most callous way. Because dead babies were sometimes found inside *ruote*, those who wanted them to be abolished called them 'baby tombs'. They argued that the turnstile was a barbaric device for child murder rather than a deterrent to infanticide. Critics of the *ruota* also focused their attention on the archaic *brefotrofio* itself. In one of many parliamentary

discussions about abandoned infants during the liberal period, Francesco Crispi expressed a widespread feeling when he said in January 1891 that a public health warning should be placed above the portals of all foundling homes and this sign should state: 'Here children are killed at great public expense'.³⁵ Dr Decio Albini, the medical inspector of Innocent III's old Santo Spirito home in Rome, blamed the *balia* for the very poor rates of survival amongst foundlings. In 1895, he wrote: 'We send innocent infants out to wet nurses in the same way that a shepherd sends his sheep to the slaughterhouse.'³⁶

What impact did these ideas have upon the infants who were placed in society's care? Earlier in this book, we saw that the new liberal state attempted to assert its moral superiority to the church by appropriating areas of social policy which were formerly in the domain of private charity. Did nineteenth-century liberalism act as an agent of social progress and modernity by improving the life chances and opportunities of foundlings? Italian liberalism and fascism both sought to change the nature of provision towards *esposti* by transforming an institutional and cultural edifice that had been bequeathed to them by the church. But what is fascinating is that liberalism and fascism developed such different responses to the problem of abandonment. Because the 'illegitimacy question' roused such strong emotions amongst politicians and reformers during both the liberal and the fascist periods, policy towards foundlings affords the historian an opportunity to assess long-term welfare and social development and continuity and discontinuity from liberalism to fascism. This section of the book examines how Italian society from the nineteenth century to the fascist period treated its outcast infants.

6

Outcast Infants and the Liberal State

By default, liberalism engendered a process of 'reform' which had far-reaching consequences both for illegitimate infants and their mothers. Despite widespread recognition of the magnitude of the problem of abandonment, and the presentation of numerous bills calling for the state to assert and define its obligation to care for *esposti*, no Italian liberal parliament ever legislated on behalf of foundlings. Important bills, such as those by Nicotera in 1877 and Minelli in 1891 fell without being accorded the dignity of discussion. When he presented his project to the chamber, Nicotera explained that he was determined to end official indifference to this hidden social problem, the cost of which was 'an abominable level of illegitimate infant mortality in Italy – a veritable massacre which is committed in the shadow of the law and under the mantle of Christian charity'.¹ When Tullio Minelli, a socialist deputy from Rovigo, presented his project to parliament on 26 January 1891, he urged Crispi and his colleagues to support his efforts to construct a more 'illuminated' form of public beneficence.² Minelli recognized that Italy had no system of government regulation for the registration and certification of wet nurses; but when he tried to introduce French-style reforms, he encountered resistance because of the bureaucratic and financial implications of increased government involvement in the 'external' foundling home system.³ In his expanded version of Minelli's legislative proposal, Conti criticized the 'infamous business of mercenary baby-farming' for being responsible for the untold deaths of foundlings. The state should do more, he argued, to protect foundlings by providing continuous care from the moment they entered a *brefotrofio* until they reached the age of twelve. He wanted the government to establish tighter controls over *balie* by means of the competitive selection of candidates and regular visits to the homes of carers. Conti's bill, however, fell in its second reading by parliament.⁴

Liberal lawmakers had ample opportunity and cause to pass protective legislation, but they did not do so. Not until 1927 did the Italian government, under a fascist dictatorship, introduce long-awaited, landmark legislation

which gave illegitimate infants and their mothers statutory social rights. Neither the 1862 nor the 1890 laws on *opere pie* made special provision for foundlings. A few scattered dispositions in various pieces of legislation made mention of foundlings, but these did not amount to much. Criminal law gave illegitimate infants little protection. The penal codes of pre-unification states, such as Tuscany and Piedmont-Sardinia, followed Napoleonic prescripts by defining infanticide as a crime *sui generis*. Jurists believed that the crime of infanticide was caused almost exclusively by the sin of illegitimacy, so they allowed the penalties for the offence to be decreased substantially when the victim was an illegitimate baby.⁵ Positivistic jurisprudence also considered infanticide to be a very special kind of homicide because its root cause lay in the shame of sexual transgression. Positivists took a tolerant view because they assumed that rigid societal norms of respectability forced women to deny their own maternal nature and resort to desperate measures. Though they believed that the female offender should be imputable, they argued that penalties should be lenient because of the motives. In their opinion, the murderer was a victim too, first of the man who seduced her, then of the harsh code of family honour which propelled her to kill her child.⁶ A reflection of these values could be found in the 1889 unitary penal code, which permitted the motives of 'safeguarding the honour of oneself, one's wife, mother, natural or adoptive daughter, or sister' to be considered as appropriate mitigating circumstances in cases. Similarly, the code also prescribed that the length of sentences for abortion (one to four years for the woman; thirty months to five years for the abortionist) be reduced by one to two-thirds when the crime was committed for the purpose of preserving family honour. Although criminologists, including Cesare Lombroso, feared that the rate of infanticide was rising in liberal Italy, the police, magistrates, and the courts did little to increase the number of prosecutions and convictions. The high degree of tolerance which Italian society exhibited towards infanticide arose partly from the conviction that this was primarily a crime against children who should not have been born in the first place.⁷

During the liberal period, abandoned infants and children possessed no social rights whatsoever, not even to assistance by private or public institutions or to protection from neglect, mistreatment, and violence. The welfare of foundlings in care depended entirely upon the charity and goodwill of benefactors. By contrast, the fascist regime gave 'illegitimates' a '*diritto*' to state welfare first in 1925, with ONMI's founding statutes, and then in 1927, with special legislation. And in 1942, fascism codified all the legal and social rights that it had given to 'morally and materially abandoned children' in its revised civil code, which dedicated an entire chapter to the '*tutela*' (protection) of 'minors who are entrusted to public and private assistance'; this granted public and police authorities extensive powers to intervene in cases involving any kind of suspected negligence or abuse on the part of carers, parents, and guardians.⁸ Before the fascist period, no legal means existed to prevent cruelty

against abandoned children who were in the care of wet nurses, foundling homes, orphanages, poorhouses, reformatories and prisons. The dereliction of foundlings in liberal Italy was also a consequence of the inferior social and legal position of all Italian children.

Because of the political embarrassment caused by international outrage and pressure, the Italian parliament decided in 1873 to legislate against the sale of children into servitude. A measure of extreme social and economic deprivation, peasants in rural and mountainous areas throughout Italy disposed of their excess offspring by selling them to travellers, performers, merchants and even criminals. Many of these unfortunate children ended up in the sweatshops, brothels, circuses and streets of New York, Paris, and London. Although it promulgated legislation, the liberal state did little to clamp down on the traffic. Well into the twentieth century, the police at home and abroad were finding illiterate and exploited 'child slaves' and handing them over to charities to be rescued.⁹ Advocates of reform argued that social attitudes would have to change profoundly before Italian children would get justice. They focused their energies, in particular, on changing the deeply embedded cultural and legal bias against punishing the perpetrators of crimes against defenceless children.

Paediatricians tried to begin the process of shifting attitudes when they resolved to form a National Society for the Protection of Children at their second national convention in Naples in October 1892.¹⁰ They observed that the 1865 civil code permitted the courts to abrogate parental rights (*potestà paterna*) when parents were found to be unfit because of drunkenness, violence, incest, neglect or any kind of 'moral and material abdication of their responsibilities'. In its treatment of crimes against persons, the penal code (book 2, arts 390–2) also prescribed the punishment of detention for up to five years for anyone convicted of the sexual or physical abuse of a minor. At their meeting in Naples, paediatricians pointed out that, even when cases came before authorities, it was almost impossible to collect sufficient evidence because of the conspiracy of silence surrounding these types of 'hidden' crimes. Even when one of their own members was not the accused, families often refused to cooperate with investigators because of the fear of public humiliation. Witnesses also failed to come forward because of the widespread feeling that whatever happened within families was nobody else's business. Legal procedure was also to blame because children under fourteen were not allowed to testify in court, even when they wanted to do so. The paediatricians assembled in Naples argued that the entire justice system itself had to change because lawyers and magistrates had institutionalized the belief that child abuse was a private matter outside the pale of public law.¹¹

To back their case, child campaigners cited the evidence about detection and conviction rates for crimes against children. Paediatricians noted that the detection rate was increasing by fewer than 100 cases per year, though

the incidence of violence against children was probably very widespread; since the 'excessive use of discipline' was a very common form of mistreatment in reported cases, they believed that physical violence against children was rampant, especially in rural families, where even the very young were expected to work as hard as adults and childrearing practices condoned the use of force. In the years 1890–1, Italian tribunals dealt with 840 cases involving the abuse of children by family members. The violent offences ranged from rape, to torture, and assault. Only 483 (57.5 per cent) of the prosecutions for cruelty towards children in 1890–91, however, resulted in convictions.¹² When campaigners in Rome decided to form a branch of the child protection society in February 1897, they too began to focus on this important issue. They observed that the number of reported cases of child abuse was over twice the national average in Rome; in the years 1891–5, the annual average was 3.81 cases per 100 000 inhabitants in the kingdom and 8.44 in Rome. They also believed that these statistics underestimated the true extent of the problem. And they prepared documentation for the government which showed that even when convictions were obtained, magistrates still subverted the cause of justice by imposing shockingly short sentences on offenders.¹³

In one of their cases, a father was convicted of brutalizing all of his children, but especially one of his sons, an eight-year-old who was repeatedly beaten with a cane. As punishment for his reign of terror, which lasted a number of years and resulted in serious damage to his children, the man received and served a sentence of only five days' detention. Most cases that came to the attention of authorities did not make it to the courts. In another case, a boy named Enrico, aged ten, was physically abused and severely neglected not only by his mother, but also by his mother's lover. Although neighbours reported the abuse to the police, they refused to testify because of their fear of vendetta. And in another case, a girl of nine, who was found homeless on the streets, got herself in this awful predicament because she was trying to escape the horrors of sexual abuse by her mother's 'boyfriends'. The doctors who formed the Roman society felt that it was unjust that children like her could end up being placed in the 'care' of houses of correction because there was nowhere else for them to go. While those who did harm to them went free, these victims of abuse could face years within institutions which treated them no better than their parents had done. Campaigners wanted Italian society to esteem children more by investing them with fundamental civil rights according all minors dignity and personhood.¹⁴

Some child protection activists also saw a connection between the inferior legal and social position of children and that of women. They believed that a civil rights' campaign which focused on ending the servitude of both women and children would ultimately have a far-reaching impact on Italian society. On the 18 June 1867, Salvatore Morelli, one of the most

committed democrats and feminists of the *Risorgimento* generation, introduced a bill which aimed at abolishing 'domestic slavery' and granting women full civil and even political rights. Morelli strongly objected to the preservation of the 'juridical inferiority of women' in the unified civil code of 1865, which subjected women, like children, to male authority. When parliament refused to discuss his project, Morelli felt frustration at the thought that Italy was not yet ready for radical social reform. He continued to fight for the cause, however, and won a small victory on 9 December 1877, when parliament granted women the right to bear witness in public acts and documents.¹⁵ The best that egalitarians like Morelli could hope for were probably small incremental steps forward. Radical reforms of family law threatened deeply imbedded attitudes and customs concerning parent-child and gender relations; and they had little actual chance of success because parliament was a male preserve dedicated to defending men's prerogatives. Emanuele Gianturco tried repeatedly and unsuccessfully to get parliamentarians even to contemplate making the fathers of illegitimate children legally responsible for their maintenance and upbringing. A conservative 'clerical' liberal, Gianturco supported the church's efforts to care for foundlings, but he also believed strongly that the problem of child abandonment would never be solved unless Italian men were made accountable for their actions. Supporters of the notion of 'illegitimate paternity', which would have extended filial rights to paternal support to illegitimates, believed that the idea encountered such monolithic parliamentary resistance during the liberal period because politicians of all persuasions were just like average Italian males; they wanted to preserve their sexual licence and social power.¹⁶

As child protection campaigners realized, the cracks within the legal and care system were profound. Because of parliamentary inaction, the only guidelines on assistance towards illegitimates were contained in the 1865 local government act, which stipulated merely that communes and provinces had to contribute to the cost of caring for foundlings.¹⁷ Though meant to be tentative and provisory in nature, the 1865 rulings remained in force in all subsequent local government acts from 1889 to 1915 and were never replaced by apposite legislation during the liberal period. They had a number of significant negative knock-on effects. They created an anomalous situation whereby a unitary national state that was engaged in a process of centralization and unification abdicated responsibility for foundlings and left an important area of public administration to the discretion of local officials. As a direct result of the failure of the central state both to formulate a social policy on the matter and to intervene in the activities of public and private authorities in the localities, a great diversity in the nature and quality of care existed throughout the kingdom. In places where no charitable institutions for foundlings existed, for example, the law did not specify how public agencies were to be established or funded. It

allowed local governments considerable freedom in the interpretation and execution of their obligation to earmark expenditure for foundlings. And it did not empower central government or its prefects to enforce observance of its requirement that spending on *esposti* become a fixed and substantial portion of local government budgets.

Most importantly too, each successive law on local government gave communes an opt-out clause: they were exonerated in part or in whole from their obligation to contribute to the cost of care in provinces where *brefotrofi* or other *ospizi* existed. Moreover, the legislation expressly stated that whether or not these institutions had sufficient income to meet social demand was irrelevant to the determination of municipalities' share in welfare expenditure. This gave provincial governments an economic imperative to end the old regime of unrestricted access to charity.¹⁸ Because the 'illegitimacy question' was defined as a financial problem by a central state which failed to issue directives or pilot reforms, economic factors became the driving force of change in the periphery. After 1865, the overwhelming concern of over-burdened provinces and communes was to keep outlays on beneficence as minimal as possible. Many of the nation's *brefotrofi* had become impoverished as a result of the overwhelming influx of infants, both illegitimate and legitimate, which took place in the first half of the nineteenth century, when both poverty and illegitimacy increased in scale.¹⁹ They could no longer dispense boundless relief to the nation's 'surplus' children. The interests of private and public authorities, then, coalesced at mid-century.

The *ruota* and reform

The increase in the financial burdens of local governments after unification comprised the principal motive behind institutional change in the localities. Between 1865 and 1879, about 509 840 *trovatelli* were found in turnstiles. In the same period, about 2500 *esposti* were left each year in places like hospitals, city halls, churches, doorsteps and roadsides. In addition to this high number of abandoned babies, the nation's foundling homes, which were located in 27 provinces mainly in northern Italy, collected about 40 000 infants annually during those years. As public authorities grew increasingly concerned about the massive scale of abandonment and the consequent costs of social provision for foundlings, they began to put pressure on *opere pie* to close the *ruota*.²⁰ These efforts to contain the problem began to show tangible results. In 1860, the number of communes which possessed a functioning turnstile numbered 1153 (out of a nationwide total of 8258 communes); by 1879, 506 fewer *comuni* did so. Those *ruota* boxes which were still in operation in 1879 were located primarily in the *mezzogiorno*, where government encountered fierce resistance to

closures because of the strength of traditional social attitudes. A total of 586 of the 647 communes with open turnstiles in 1879 were found in the Abruzzi and Molise, Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania and Sicily alone.²¹ The attempts of provincial deputations to relieve 'public charity' of the heavy burden of providing for *esposti* paid off considerably. The number of babies who were abandoned at the *ruota* declined from an annual average of 33 989 in 1865–79 to 7311 (including 247 dead babies) in 1890–2 and 4549 (including 99 dead babies) in 1902–6.²²

However, the abandonment of babies by means of the turnstile was increasingly becoming an exclusively southern problem: 19 807 of the 21 933 babies left at the nation's *ruote* in 1890–2 were found in Sicily (8143), Apulia (4005), Campania (3907), Calabria (1938), Abruzzi (1038) and Basilicata (776). By 1906, 464 communes in the kingdom still had a functioning *ruota*, 427 of these were in the south as a whole, and 126 of these were in Sicily alone. By contrast, the *mezzogiorno* possessed few foundling homes. The age-old practice of *expositio* was also more common in those southern areas where the *ruota* and tradition survived. In 1890–2, about 6700 live babies and 364 dead ones were found on roads, at churches, and at other public sites throughout the kingdom; 6474 of these 7064 *esposti* were found in the south. And 3188 of them were found in Calabria alone, which was one of the most deprived regions in all of Italy, in terms of *per capita* income, local government resources, and the number and wealth of charitable institutions.²³

By contrast, the clampdown on anonymous abandonment proved to be far more successful in northern and central regions, where provincial governments were better able to exercise some power of control over *opere pie*. They did so in the same way that they exerted authority over civil hospitals – by appointing lay persons to preside over the governing bodies of 'public charities' and imposing changes in the statutes of private foundations which were in their interests. After 1865, provincial councils placed medical experts in charge of some of the nation's biggest *brefotrofi* in the north and centre. For example, Doctor Romolo Griffini, who was a major figure in the Milanese Medical Association, took over the running of Saint Catherine's foundling home in 1866, oversaw its transformation into the *ospizio provinciale degli esposti e delle partorienti* (provincial hospice for foundlings and unwed mothers), and issued the manifesto which announced the closure of the *ruota*.²⁴ Driven primarily by economic motives, institutional change of this sort proceeded apace. Ferrara took the lead by being the very first province in the nation officially to shut its *ruote* in 1867; Milan and then Rome followed the example by closing their wheels in 1868 and 1872 respectively.²⁵ All of the remaining *ruote* in Liguria, the Veneto, Piedmont and Lombardy were sealed by 1884. By 1893, authorities dismantled the twelve surviving wheels in Emilia; and by the turn of the century, only a handful of these archaic devices still functioned in Tuscany, the Marches, and Umbria.²⁶

As the instrument of anonymous abandonment disappeared in the decades after unification, the new secular directors of some of the nation's largest foundling homes in Rome, Milan, Turin, Como, Verona and other cities in the north and centre became self-appointed reformers in search of ways to change the terms of Christian charity completely. They were at the forefront of a broad movement of ideas and forces which sought to bring the unwed mother out from the shadows of the *ruota* and compel her to rear her own child. The reform agenda focused on the need to create a new form of public beneficence by transforming the last remnant of Catholic piety – the *brefotrofio*. Reformists believed that foundling homes had to stop admitting all infants freely, with no regard even to whether they were illegitimate or not. Institutions had to adapt to the pressures of modernity by imposing and enforcing restrictions on admissions. And, most importantly, *brefotrofi* had to end their reliance on external, paid *balie* and become residential facilities for *madri nubili* (unwed mothers) and their babies.

One of the foremost activists for foundling home reform in Italy, Doctor Decio Albini believed that the prevention of abandonment should be the aim of a new secular form of social assistance. He accused the Catholic Church of being the unwed mother's chief accomplice in a silent massacre of the innocents. Rather than protect the woman from the shame of her unwed motherhood, a more provident lay beneficence should try to care for the needs of illegitimate infants. Foundling homes encouraged immorality, he believed, by offering women the opportunity to dispose of their infants easily. They were the institutional expression of a society which did not care for its children. It was no longer morally acceptable, Albini asserted, to condemn infants to an 'almost certain death' because they were born illegitimate. He referred to *ruote* as 'little cemeteries' and looked forward to time when they would all be closed down. Commonly called '*figli della carità*' (the children of charity) or '*figli della madonna*' (the children of the madonna), foundlings were really the '*figli della malvagità umana*' (the children of humanity's iniquity): they were the 'victims of the wickedness of the mothers who abandon them, of the wet nurses who mistreat them, and of the institutions which neglect them'. Albini, who played a big part in the changes introduced at Rome's Holy Spirit home in the 1890s, argued that public welfare providers had to protect infant life by assuring that all babies had access to '*allevamento materno*' (maternal rearing).²⁷

In the summer of 1880, an International Congress on Public Beneficence took place in Milan. This conference provided a very important public forum for new ideas about how society should care for foundlings. Romolo Griffini took a leading role at the conference by explaining the kinds of reforms which he was introducing in Milan and urging his colleagues to follow his example.²⁸ He argued that unmarried mothers should no longer be able to protect their identity and offload their offspring irresponsibly.

The policy of open admissions through anonymous abandonment must be replaced by a system of direct presentation of the child and formal application for assistance. Foundling homes everywhere must restrict entry by refusing to admit legitimate babies and by making proof of the infant's civil status as an illegitimate and the mother's domicile and poverty conditions of care. Griffini wanted to subject unwed mothers to the same rules of *domicilio di soccorso* which applied to paupers, hospital patients, and vagrants.²⁹ This proposal was quite radical in intent because it sought to end definitively the secrecy of abandonment by requiring women to have appropriate documentation from police, medical, and government authorities in order to apply for aid. Griffini also proposed that midwives, who had intimate contact with the popular classes, should be forced to divulge the identity of *madri nubili*, even when these women were reluctant to come forward. Foundling homes should also conduct 'searches' to ascertain the name and whereabouts of unknown mothers. Authorities should increase access to unwed mothers by equipping *brefotrofi* with maternity wards and dormitories; this would permit officials to put pressure on women to act as 'internal feeders' of their own and as many other infants as they could possibly nurse. The ultimate objective was to persuade women legally to reclaim their children. Griffini maintained that unwed mothers should be encouraged to make 'a declaration of maternity' which would have the immediate effect of a legal reclamation. He emphasized that harsher treatment of the unwed mother would act as a moral deterrent to bastardy. While enforced feeding of infants would reduce levels of death amongst illegitimate infants, mandatory reclamation would decrease the cost of public assistance. When put to the vote, this plan for the reorganization of the foundling hospital received approval by members of the convention.³⁰

Others also believed that beneficence should become more conditional. As reformers confronted the problem of illegitimacy, they embarked on a path towards greater austerity in public provision. In 1880, distinguished members of the medical community met in Turin for the International Congress on Hygiene and Demography. These authorities also recognized the economic advantages of an enforced engagement of unwed mothers in childrearing.³¹ Antonio Agostini, who directed the foundling home in Verona, spoke about the need to restrict social assistance to the 'most wretched and poor' in order to avoid financial catastrophe. Uncaring mothers should not be allowed to impose death sentences on their own children by abandoning them. Foundling homes, he argued, should help fallen women to redeem themselves by fostering the spread of a new creed of responsible 'illegitimate motherhood'.³² Reformers in both Milan and Turin agreed to rehabilitate the *madre nubile* by forcing her to accept responsibility for the welfare of her own child. Very significantly, both the Milanese and Turinese congresses voted to support the principle of maternity searches because, as one contemporary observed, the mothers 'could

prove useful' to public providers. And both also rejected proposals to introduce paternity searches on the grounds that uncovering the identity of the illegitimate father and compelling him to be involved in the maintenance of his offspring would be an 'unnecessary inconvenience' to men.³³

From a medical point of view, the problem of *esposti* came down to one thing – how to reduce the shockingly high mortality of institutionally reared foundlings. Although no one knew for sure how many infants and children died in care, the official estimate was that the mortality of unweaned *esposti* (*lattanti*) who were confined to an institution was probably at least twice that of those illegitimates who were reared within families or directly by the mother. Enrico Raseri, who was responsible for compiling all the relevant data for the government, agreed with medical reformers who wanted to unite mother and baby.³⁴ He argued that the huge differential in the neonatal mortality rates of illegitimates and legitimates was the most compelling reason why unwed mothers should be constrained to fulfil a social obligation to breastfeed their babies. He cited his own figures to support that view: in Rome in 1877, 52 legitimate newborns and 164 illegitimates ones (out of 1000) died in their first month of life.³⁵

The solution to the problem of infant mortality which appealed most to founding home reformers was maternal breastfeeding. Medical research in foreign countries had already begun to explore the role of various environmental and hereditary factors in prenatal, neonatal, and infant mortality: in France, in particular, researchers were drawing connections between the high incidence of low birth weight, prematurity, and failure to thrive amongst *esposti* and the mental and physical condition of their mothers.³⁶ Those involved in the care of foundlings in Italy, however, preferred to focus their attention solely on securing mother's milk in order to reduce deaths. They attributed blame to the unwed mother and her chief 'accomplice', the church, which they condemned for depriving *esposti* of the nourishment needed for survival. Prevailing medical opinion on this issue reflected contemporary moral judgements about women and motherhood.

In a philosophical tract of 1899, for example, Raffaele Perrone-Capano emphasized the importance of breastfeeding to the development of bonds between mother and child. Although women had a 'sacred duty' to bear children, he argued, maternal instinct was a myth. Most women did not feel motherly love during pregnancy and birth because these experiences caused 'disagreeable' emotions, such as fear, resentment, and pain. The tactile sensation of nursing a baby, however, overwhelmed the woman to the point where she lost all sight of self and felt only utter devotion to her child. Perrone-Capano depicted maternal breastfeeding as an effective preventative against infanticide and abandonment and advised professionals working in the field to 'help' *madri nubili* embrace their 'illegitimate maternity'.³⁷

The providers of public beneficence latched on to these theories because they offered an ideologically and medically acceptable answer to a complex problem. In official statistics, most infant deaths were attributed to *vizi congeniti* (congenital defects), *atrofia infantile* (infantile atrophy), and *malattie dell'apparato digerente* (illnesses of the digestive tract).³⁸ These were all very vague terms which covered a broad range of possible causes, both natural and suspicious. Waterborne infections, such as typhoid, diarrhoea, and cholera, for example, would have been responsible for an unknown proportion of deaths due to so-called digestive disorders. Medical practitioners, however, preferred to ascribe blame almost exclusively to nutrition and to see breastfeeding as the ultimate cure-all. They wanted to make mothers solely responsible for the care and feeding of their infants.

In the aftermath of *ruota* closures, some authorities began to notice a worrying and inexplicable increase in the number of infant deaths. In the decade between 1866 and 1876, twenty-seven northern provinces closed the 'instruments of death' only to discover that reported cases of stillbirth and neonatal mortality had increased by as much as 50 per cent. Doctors saw this trend as evidence that women *en masse* were murdering their illegitimate babies.³⁹ According to them, the enforced reclusion of pregnant unmarried women provided the perfect solution to the social malady of infanticide. And breastfeeding their infants, under compulsion if need be, would make decent women and good mothers out of even the most immoral of *madri nubili*. Perrone-Capano summed up the thinking behind these ideas when he stated that 'the mother does not always feel maternal love towards her child'; sometimes 'she needs a man to correct her behaviour'.⁴⁰

Reformist ideas about infant life protection were predicated upon a disparagement of women. A public health official in Milan, for example, condemned unwed mothers of the 'double crime' of getting pregnant out of wedlock and of deserting their infants. Doctor Angelo Valdameri thought that mothers who consigned their babies to 'mercenary feeders' were more morally depraved than prostitutes. He showed no understanding of the reasons why single Italian women might not revel in their 'illegitimate maternity'. Valdameri also considered wet nurses to be guilty of the worse kind of incompetence and neglect. He believed that *balie* were 'corrupt and venal' and the *baliatico* trade was the 'most nauseating and filthy around'. He confidently asserted that foundlings suffered such high mortality not because of the intrinsic dangers of artificial feeding or even because of the total absence of any attempts by *brefotrofi* to sterilize or treat animal milk. Babies died simply because of the appalling ignorance of wet nurses who lacked 'even an elementary understanding of infant hygiene'. He expressed repulsion at the idea that women should use their bodies to earn money. And he drew a parallel between the sex trade and the foundling trade when he accused *balie* of being as promiscuous as common prostitutes; he

asserted that they made a conscious choice to have one pregnancy after another in order to keep themselves in business.⁴¹

Prostitution and illegitimacy may have been two separate social problems,⁴² but, in the minds of nineteenth-century reformers, there were striking similarities between unwed mothers, wet nurses, and prostitutes. They were all sexual and social deviants of one kind or another. In fact, in some instances, the unwed mother was seen not as the victim of seduction but rather as the equivalent of the prostitute. Discussion of the incidence of syphilis brought these ideas to the fore. In the spring of 1899, hundreds of the nation's physicians convened in Milan to discuss the system of wet nursing. At the First National Congress on the Hygiene of Mercenary Feeding, Doctor Pietro Ramazzotti spoke about the dangers which syphilis posed to infants. Authorities at the foundling home in Milan had conducted a study which seemed to indicate that in the period 1889–98 the number of babies who were infected with the disease had risen from 4.8 to 11.83 per cent of new admissions. Ramazzotti suggested that this rise was attributable to the mothers who, 'in most cases', were the source of contagion. He depicted *madri nubili* as women of ill repute who callously infected their babies and then disposed of them.⁴³ Reformers used these arguments to justify the changes which they were introducing to the foundling home system. The director of the Milan foundling home reported that the number of unwed mothers who showed any shame at having their identity become public knowledge was 'relatively small'. He stated that in 1897 the *brefotrofia* had 'assisted' 1131 women, 568 of whom had already given birth to illegitimate infants; 'only' 213 of them had expressed fear and anxiety about divulging their secret.⁴⁴

At the conference on wet nursing, a strong image of the *balia* emerged. She was either the ignorant peasant with no know-how or the evil villain with murderous intent. Whatever characteristics contributors attributed to her made no difference to the children in her custody – doctors alleged that the death of untold infants was the outcome of her trade. One foundling home director merged the two stereotypes in his depiction. He argued that wet nurses suckled their own children but gave foundlings artificial milk substitutes which were noxious. Out of ignorance or neglect, they prepared a lethal helping of *pappa*, which was a baked or boiled mixture of cow's or goat's milk and wheat flour or bread soaked in water. This served to 'procure for the poor creature a case of gastro-enteric disorder'. The mealy gruel, he stated, was too sticky and dense for delicate digestive tracts and caused constipation which could be fatal for infants. To make matters worse, the *balia* resorted to home-made laxatives to cleanse the child. The woman relied on folklore and prayer to heal the moribund infant, but called a doctor only *in extremis*. Cunning and unscrupulous, this peasant woman then went on to conceal the child's death from authorities in order to continue in their employ.⁴⁵

Other charges against *balie* included 'profiteering'. Reform advocates believed that many *balie* collected foundlings from more than one *brefotrofio* or commune and set up 'farms' where they kept children in the most squalid conditions. They argued that disreputable wet nurses were being assisted by so-called *mandarine*, women who were responsible for transporting babies in carts from *brefotrofi* to the countryside, where most *balie* were based. Foundling home administrators asserted that this 'heinous and illicit traffic in unwanted infants' was taking place on a large scale because *balie* and *mandarine* were 'merchants in human flesh' with no feelings whatsoever for the infants in their custody. Pio Blasi, who directed the foundling home in Rome, was one of the most vociferous critics of the *baliatico* and *mandarinaggio* systems, which he professed to want to see abolished completely. He contended that *mandarine* were often retired wet nurses or midwives who used their contacts in remote villages and maternity wards to keep in touch with news of recent illegitimate births. Behind the backs of authorities, they frustrated efforts to reduce abandonment by acting as baby brokers. These traffickers, he stated, approached *madri nubili*, put pressure on them to abandon their babies, and made private arrangements for the infants to be dumped at 'farms'.⁴⁶ These were serious allegations.

However, government investigations at the turn of the century revealed that the overwhelming majority of foundling homes, including that in Rome, had absolutely no system of home visiting in place to protect children from the 'unscrupulous' women who earned their living in the netherworld of baby farming. Most *brefotrofi* did not even require that wet nurses be vetted in any way *before* being entrusted with children. *Mandarine*, moreover, were paid directly by *brefotrofi* to act as their intermediaries. These 'baby merchants' were employed by *brefotrofi* to find wet nurses in the increasingly large geographic radius that comprised the 'external foundling home'. If they also 'sold' babies to *balie* for a percentage of the nursing subsidy offered by foundling homes, officialdom did nothing to stop them. Acting in *loco parentis*, *brefotrofi* certainly had more than a little accountability for the failure to safeguard the lives of babies. These institutions were so desperate to find 'feeders' that practically anyone could set themselves up in business as a *balia*. Though in theory authorities were meant to consider the age, childrearing history, character, circumstances and home environment of potential applicants, most did not bother to do so. A few local governments did try to instigate some kind of inspection system, but the burden of this fell almost entirely upon already overworked public doctors. In Naples, a single *condotto* who was in charge of supervising the wet nursing circuit was supposed to carry out monthly checks on over 15 000 infants (representing recent and past admissions) who were dispersed throughout the province.⁴⁷ The buck did not stop there, for parliament too appeared to be entirely disinterested in the serious charge that

many women were wilfully exposing children to the most horrible privations for profit and even killing large numbers of babies with total impunity. No formal inquiry into baby-farming was ever called.

The wet nursing business remained unregulated and unsupervised during the liberal period. Because of the lack of public controls, there was considerable scope within the *baliatico* system for serious abuses and atrocities to occur. In 1892, 7381 children who had been retained by wet nurses after the initial nursing period of about three years were removed from their foster homes because of mistreatment and abuse. And annually, *balie* returned thousands of infants to foundling homes because they had fallen ill in their care. In the years 1902–6, for example, 34 804 so-called *ritornelli* were returned to *brefotrofi* before the nursing contract came to an end; 12 968 of these were sent back because they were desperately ill.⁴⁸ In the course of government investigations into the nation's foundling homes, inspectors from the interior ministry discovered a number of 'irregularities' in the wet nursing system. At the turn of the century, *medici condotti* in Vicenza, who performed home visits to the homes of *balie*, discovered babies with scrofula and rickets and others mysteriously absent, though wet nurses had continued to collect subsidies. In a number of provinces, inspections revealed that infants had been given over to women with pellagra and tuberculosis. In others, inquiries revealed that certificates of good health, issued by doctors as proof that the foundling was thriving, had been written for children who had died long before. No record of the death of these children had ever been made. The apparent ease with which wet nurses could acquire false documentation and could evade legal requirements concerning the civil registration of births and deaths worried those who believed that the new state's systems of verification and control were flawless and functional. In another case, a *mandarina* who lived in Casertana and worked for the Roman *brefotrofio* was exposed as a baby-farmer. Investigations revealed that the woman, a widow and the parent of two children, took in numerous 'boarders' because she had no other source of steady income. Seven infants were found at her home, which was described as a dirty hovel with a single room and only one bed. She slept in the bed with her own children and two of the foundlings at a time, while the other infants huddled together on the floor. All of the *esposti* in her care were found to be so severely malnourished that they were at the point of starvation. Other investigators reported that children who had stayed on with wet nursing families were illiterate, battered, exploited as farm labour and generally 'treated as animals'.⁴⁹

Placing infants in the care of *balie* involved a great deal of risk for the foundling. Though originally conceived as the 'extended foundling home family', the *baliatico* system had become in the nineteenth century a significant, though under-examined, component of the peasant household economy. The ties that bound foundling to wet nurse were primarily eco-

conomic rather than affective ones. Wet nursing was a significant occupation for rural women, provided peasant families with a regular income, and, most importantly from the perspective of child welfare, involved the poorest strata of the agricultural population. In particular, smallholding peasants who lacked sufficient land to feed a family depended on a number of by-employments, such as wet nursing, to fill the gap between agricultural income and bare subsistence. The very best wet nurses could find employment in upper-class families as privileged members of the staff of domestic servants.⁵⁰ The 'commerce' in infants was also inextricably bound up with the demographic structure of rural Italy. Although *balie* could find employment with *brefotrofi* long after their milk had dried and their own children had grown, the *baliatico* was functional precisely because of the high fertility of rural women. Wet nursing may have contributed to high infant mortality in the countryside by forcing the most destitute of families to spread limited resources far too thinly. In making their accusation that wet nurses destroyed their source of income by wilfully killing off babies, reformers neglected to consider the social context within which the trade flourished. Rural Italy experienced high general infant mortality and this was tied both to the periodic cycle of food scarcity, poverty, hunger and disease which followed seasonal agricultural rhythms and the long-term crisis of agricultural society in the nineteenth century. The heavy migration of infants from towns to the country, which involved tens of thousands of children a year, almost certainly strained rural communities which were already caught in a 'Malthusian' struggle between population and subsistence.⁵¹

Reformers also failed to put into perspective how the system actually worked. Foundling homes experienced regular wet nurse shortages due to the shifting supply of labour. During times when women worked the fields, went into textile factories, or were actively involved in domestic employments, such as those surrounding silk production, authorities encountered especially intense difficulty finding places for their infants; as a result, they were forced to be much less selective than they should have been.⁵² Foundling home and municipal health authorities did not make a wet nurse's job any easier. Although they were technically public employees, *balie* were badly paid. Contracts varied enormously from one township to another, but generally authorities made no provision for any medical expenses that the *balia* might incur. Very few indeed provided any additional hardship allowance to cover any emergencies or the routine costs of childcare; few helped *balie* care for their nurslings by providing food packets or even infant necessities, like clothing and bedding. Though an essential part of the entire system of public beneficence, paid feeders had to make do with a pittance. Wages remained notoriously low given the reality of market demand.

By their own admission, foundling homes undervalued and underpaid the public service performed by wet nurses. Government enquiries dis-

closed that some authorities accumulated huge backlogs in their payments of wet nurse subsidies. Account entries in many homes, like those in Milan, Bergamo, and Turin, for example, showed wet nurses' wages regularly fell in arrears, and in some cases by as much as a full year or more. The amount of the subsidy varied greatly, but, on the whole, women in northern and central Italy enjoyed better pay than did those in the south. From a maximum of 15 *lire* a month, reported in provinces like Ravenna and Bergamo, wages descended to a minimum of 4 per month in Teramo and other southern provinces at the turn of the century.⁵³ And the duration of the contract differed. Limited to one year at Naples, Trapani, Catania, Messina, Palermo and other localities, where authorities restricted wet nurse funding, the contract exceeded the normal three year period in only a few areas. Mainly the richer northern authorities furnished some form of direct economic aid and supplementary support beyond the mere provision of a meagre subsidy: the Turin home gave out premiums to wet nurses with good records of reliable service; others, like those in Rovigo, Brescia, and Padova extended subsidies on a declining scale for up to 12 to 14 years; some, like those in Bologna, Pavia, Verona and Forlì issued educational grants to foundlings once they reached adolescence.⁵⁴

On balance, reformers were right to be concerned about the precariousness of a foundling's existence. A peasant woman who was worn out by abject poverty, hard work, and numerous pregnancies was hardly going to give a foundling the very best start in life. However, foundling homes and local authorities were also responsible for the failure of the system of public beneficence to protect children. And parliamentarians were ultimately responsible for they chose to ignore the cries of reformers about the evils of the *balatico*; not until August 1918 did health norms regulating the practice of wet nursing come into effect.⁵⁵ By then, of course, the 'business' was already in decline, so the legislation was a bit belated. It has to be said, also, that foundling homes themselves were not exactly setting the most elevated standards for the humane treatment of children either. Although reform advocates criticised wet nurses for being ignorant and negligent, they failed to offer infants a better chance of survival than *balie* did.

Foundling homes

In fact, in most instances, a foundling had a better chance of survival in the care of a *balia* than a *brefotrofo*. At the *ospizio* for abandoned infants in Viterbo in the 1890s, for example, the average annual mortality of infants reared externally by wet nurses was estimated to be 10 per cent, while that of infants reared internally was 95 per cent.⁵⁶ Located in a thirteenth-century Cistercian monastery, the home was entirely unsuited to the protection of infant life. Only in the 1870s did a refurbishment programme

begin, but even after that many of the institution's small cell-like rooms were cold, damp, and dark. Until 1872, the clergy had administered the *bre-fotrofio* directly, with the help of members of the Sisters of Mount Calvary, who cared for the infants. But when the pope ceded the province of Rome to the new Italy, all ecclesiasts, apart from the nuns, were expelled and replaced by paid public officials who were elected by provincial and communal councils to serve four-year terms on the governing body. Foundling homes remained fundamentally unaltered by superficial administrative changes brought on by their takeover by provincial deputations. Their new statutes may have claimed that they were modern institutions of public beneficence – 'expertly administered by a technical staff of doctors and accountants according to rational criteria' – but they were, above all, places where large numbers of infants died.⁵⁷

Though government under liberalism did not legislate to change this reality, it certainly grew more aware of the horrible conditions of care which the foundling home system provided. During his second stint as prime minister in the years 1896–8, Antonio di Rudinì responded to calls from the liberal left and the 'extreme left' for government action on urgent social questions in typical liberal style – he commissioned an inquest to investigate the matter. In June 1897, Rudinì instructed prefects to enlist the help of general practitioners and begin inspecting the nation's foundling homes. In case after case that came to the attention of the commissioners, prefects denounced the complete disinterest of provincial and communal authorities in administering and improving public provision for foundlings. Prefects also reported that an unforeseen consequence of this widespread abdication of public authority and responsibility was increasing levels of vagabondage amongst children who were abandoned both by their parents and by the care system that was supposed to act in *loco parentis*. Not only did the legislature have to act quickly to reform provision for *esposti*, prefects urged, but also it had to do something about juvenile delinquents. Crispi's ineffectual law of 1890 made little difference to foundlings, who were still subjected to systematic and institutionalized neglect. And article 81 of the 1889 law on public security, which authorized the compulsory 'recovery' of children in corrective institutions, needed to be overturned because abandoned and homeless *fanciulli* needed welfare, not punishment.⁵⁸

The first of its kind in unified Italy, the inquest brought to light some of the horrors of the foundling home system. In the course of investigations, a 'public scandal' taking place at the third oldest foundling home in Italy, the Saint Mary of the Annunciation in Naples, came to the attention of the commission. Only 3 of the 856 infants which the home had reared internally in 1895 survived their first year in care. Revelations about the '*novecento cadaverini*' (900 little cadavers) reached the press and provoked a public outcry.⁵⁹ Though conditions in the Neapolitan home were exceptionally grim, the

government inquest concluded that none of the nation's 121 *brefotrofi* were providing care of an acceptably decent standard. Italy's foundling homes were unclean, unsafe, ill-equipped and unfit for infant life.⁶⁰

Some lacked heating altogether, others drinking water, windows, and lighting; at Spoleto, Orvieto, and Gubbio, cribs were found to be without mattresses; at Faenza and Lucca, inspectors discovered half-naked infants crying, unattended, and covered in their own excrement. Only 13 institutions made the regular bathing of infants routine procedure. In other cities and towns, examiners found cramped living conditions as six or more babies were forced to share the same bed and bottle. In Turin and Naples, officials discovered nuns trying to feed newborns pre-masticated solid food and spotted sickly infants lying amongst those apparently still well. Inspectors reported that medical facilities, including basic provision for separate wards to isolate the ill, were virtually non-existent. And nuns were often the only people looking after even gravely ill infants. Even some of the largest homes, such as those in Rome, Como, and Ferrara, which had medical practitioners on the payroll as administrators, made no arrangements to have a physician either regularly on duty or on call in emergencies. Only one *brefotrofio* in the kingdom possessed an incubator for the care of premature infants. Inspections revealed that institutions which had declared that they made adequate provision for the preparation of animal's milk for human consumption did not in fact do so. Staff left milk standing for hours on end, did not clean bottles properly, and passed bottles from one infant to the next. Only a handful of establishments had been found to boil milk regularly before use; and only one owned a proper sterilizer for milk. The result of the lack of hygiene and care, the inquest concluded, was an incidence of tuberculosis amongst illegitimates which was 50 per cent higher than it was amongst legitimates. Only one institution, that of Milan, provided a satisfactory 'sanitary service' by sending its laundry to be washed at the local hospital; most others did not provide babies with clean clothing and bedding. Given these conditions, all sorts of infections and diseases spread rapidly through foundling homes. Consequently, mortality amongst internally reared nurslings could be as high as 100 per cent in Naples and Avellino, between 80 and 90 per cent in most southern institutions, and between 70 to 80 per cent in the rest. In defending their poor record, foundling home directors claimed that the infants who were left with them were weak, underweight, premature and malnourished. The journey from the countryside to the town where most foundling homes were located could take up to a week, they argued. Those who brought the infants exposed them to horrible privations, bad weather, and insufficient food. In Ravenna, local custom dictated that babies on their way to the *brefotrofio* were given nothing but rations of cooked honey; in Modena, authorities complained that those who transported the babies to the home gave them only crushed pieces of chestnuts during the journey. Foundlings

arrived in a state close to starvation and subsequently failed to thrive. However, the data of foundling homes concerning admissions tell a different story. A total of 2103 newborns were admitted to the Neapolitan home from October 1897 to December 1898: 4.6 per cent (96 infants) of these infants weighed 2 kilogrammes or less; 18.3 per cent (385) 2 to 2.5 kgs; 29.7 per cent (624) 2.5 to 3 kgs.; 41.1 per cent (864) 3 to 4 kgs. and 6.3 per cent (134) 4 or more kilos. And the average weight of foundlings at the Roman *brefotrofio* in 1896–7 was 3.2 kilogrammes for males and 2.9 for females.⁶¹ These were not the weights of babies who were destined to die. The reality that the directors of *brefotrofi* wished to deny was that they were offering foundlings very little hope for survival.

7

Religion, Science, and Beneficence

The 1900 inquest revealed that efforts to reorganize foundling homes proceeded very erratically after 1865 because of the lack of central government direction and coordination. While some authorities began to alter the terms of public beneficence by forcibly involving unwed mothers in the care of infants, others stuck tenaciously to the old *ruota* regime of anonymous abandonment. The south as a whole failed to capture the momentum of change, with the result that it became a region marked by chronically high levels of child abandonment and stubbornly low levels of maternal reclamation. But in those northern and central regions where the pace of reform was quicker, medical practitioners in charge of foundling homes and maternity hospitals embraced the new creed of responsible unwed motherhood wholeheartedly. The system of arrangements for foundling relief which they introduced had a dramatic effect on single mothers.

The abolition of the *ruota* gave stimulus to efforts to reorganize relief by making it more bureaucratic, selective, and coercive. In some localities in unitary Italy, the modernization of charity towards foundlings manifested itself in the transformation of the *luogo pio* into a medical and corrective institution aimed at segregating, confining, and controlling unwed mothers. Reformers initiated processes of institutional and social change which destroyed the foundations of Christian charity and resulted in the medicalization of the problem of illegitimacy and the institutionalization of *madri nubili*. *Brefotrofi* began to annex themselves to maternity hospitals and open special on-site wards and dormitories for the confinement of unwed mothers. Public authorities in charge of foundling homes also sought to restore women to their feminine nature as mothers by subjecting them to compulsory nursing contracts as a condition of care. The ostensible purpose of these changes may have been to reduce infant mortality by securing *allevamento materno*, but the net effect was the subordination of women to the male will. The expansion of the power of doctors by means of their conquest of the domain of public beneficence was facilitated by the

indifference of a central state which relinquished authority. As ecclesiasts lost control of civil hospitals and foundling homes in the nineteenth century, the medical management of abandonment replaced the moral management of it.

The North and South Divide

The process of laicizing the administration of *brefotrofi* and changing the terms of relief was completed nowhere in nineteenth-century Italy. But neither did Christian charity remain completely unaltered anywhere. Even in the south, where the *ruota* survived and where few *brefotrofi* existed, some public authorities did attempt to contain levels of abandonment by imposing strict limits on the numbers of infants whom they admitted into care. The 1900 inquest revealed, for example, that the foundling homes in Messina, Caltanissetta, Trapani, Girgenti and Siracusa all began to restrict aid to certifiably illegitimate infants in the 1890s. Many *ospizi* in the past had made provision in their governing statutes for poor people to put their legitimate children into care during times of family crisis or hardship; as local governments imposed financial constraints upon relief institutions, however, this custom gradually began to disappear throughout the nation. The council of state sanctioned restrictive practices by declaring in October 1892 that foundling homes had the right to conduct inquiries to ascertain the civil status of infants, to set their own admissions criteria, and to refuse entry to ineligible applicants. At the turn of the century, however, 43 out of a nationwide total of 121 *ospizi degli esposti* still admitted legitimate infants in extreme circumstances, which included the event of the mother's sickness, death, or imprisonment.¹

Government investigations revealed that the *mezzogiorno* as a whole was slow to introduce 'modern' institutional alternatives to the old *ruota* regime of open admissions and anonymous abandonment. Southern authorities openly acknowledged that they were falling behind their colleagues in the north and centre, many of whom were avidly implementing a range of new restrictive and coercive practices. But southerners justified their 'backwardness' by reference to cultural and social differences between north and south. In their responses to investigators, officials stated that while they recognized the importance of mother-love and maternal breastfeeding to the proper nurture of children, they had to respect local customs. In the south, they explained, attitudes about female chastity and family honour were so backward that radical changes would disrupt the social order. In Palermo and Catania, for example, authorities believed that women would murder their infants rather than risk exposure as unwed mothers. The stigma attached to unwed motherhood was still so strong, they argued, that aggressive moves to uncover the identity of *madri nubili* would cause public

order to crumble. Fathers would kill their daughters and brothers would kill their sisters' 'seducers'. In an already violent society, crimes associated with vendetta would increase, they maintained, as would abortion, suicide, and infanticide. Mainland southern authorities in Campania and Calabria shared the anxieties of their Sicilian counterparts. In Naples and Catanzaro too, officials declared that they feared women would be subjected to rituals of public humiliation, banishment, and murder if they were exposed as *madri nubi*.²

In the north and centre, some authorities also proved reluctant to introduce radical reforms. Officials in Piacenza, Genoa, Orvieto, Siena, Arezzo and Florence explained that they believed abandonment and infanticide would increase if they put pressure on women to divulge their identity and reclaim their infants. In Fano and Jesi, officials feared that suicides would rise if they attempted to trace mothers and force them to reclaim. And others felt that obligatory reclamations would disgrace families and jeopardize the marriage prospects of unwed mothers. The director of the foundling home in Parma objected on legal grounds to conducting maternity searches to determine the name, whereabouts, place of domicile and proof of poverty of unwed mothers. He pointed out rightly that while the penal code permitted *indagini sulla maternità*, the council of state seemed to call their legality into question on 4 November 1898, when it deemed that eligibility for admission to a *brefotrofio* should be decided only on the basis of the civil status and place of birth of an infant. This judgement appeared to contradict the earlier verdict of 1892, which gave foundling homes absolute discretion to set their own entrance requirements. A number of foundling home administrators complained to the inquest investigators that the absence of a coherent national strategy and central directives from Rome caused confusion in the localities. Local governments too, they argued, gave them no guidance on the important matter of policy; on the whole, provinces and municipalities confined their involvement in assistance towards foundling to haggling over money.³

Attempts to make access to assistance more conditional became increasingly widespread in the north and centre from the 1860s, despite the objections raised by some authorities. In the Veneto, the foundling home in Rovigo prided itself on being a model institution. In 1877, authorities there decided to admit unconditionally only those *esposti* who were abandoned in public places. The entry of all other infants was dependent upon their direct presentation by their mothers and proof of their eligibility as illegitimates. Furthermore, the mothers applying for assistance had to provide appropriate documentation, which included certificates of poverty, domicile and civil status, as well as a doctor's assessment of ability to breastfeed and a character reference from a priest or some other 'respectable' person. In order to qualify for aid, moreover, mothers had to agree to breastfeed their babies for a minimum of six months, after which they could abandon

their offspring if they so wished. In exchange, the *madri nobili* received domiciliary assistance in the form of a small monthly nursing subsidy. Authorities hoped that during her time as a paid '*nutrice*' the mother would have a change of heart and decide to keep her child.⁴

Although maternal reclamations did not become more frequent as a result of these changes, authorities in Rovigo declared them a success because the number of foundlings declined after 1877, as did the cost of public provision. This was a dubious achievement, however, as the evidence suggested that greater numbers of unwed mothers were making private arrangements to dispose of unwanted infants in the underground wet nursing market. In the five years from 1893 to 1897, for example, 877 infants were registered as illegitimates in the province's registry office, but only 711 of these infants ended up in care. Given that the civil registration of marriages was the norm in Rovigo, the 166 missing 'illegitimates' were not the product of unions that were celebrated only in church and were therefore not recognized as legal by the state. It was far more likely that the prospect of formal application and the system of bureaucratic controls on admissions proved off-putting enough to scare some women off subsidised childrearing. The meagreness of the subsidies may have been a factor too. As reported cases of infanticide did not increase in Rovigo, unmarried women and their families probably farmed out infants independently, with greater regularity and with unknown consequences.⁵

Foundling home authorities in Milan, Como, Verona, Viterbo, Turin and elsewhere also managed to bring expenditure down when they introduced new restrictive qualifications. The home in Viterbo decided to dispel its poor image as a place where infants in large numbers died when in 1899 authorities announced the inauguration of a new *brefotrofio*. The *statuto-regolamento* of the reformed provincial *ospizio* in Viterbo specified that unwed mothers were obliged to nurse their infants as a condition of care.⁶ By depriving legitimates (with the exception of those who were orphaned by both parents) of access to assistance, the *brefotrofio* in Milan reduced entries from 5382 in 1867 to 3981 in 1868, the year when the new regulations came into effect. Efforts to combat abandonment continued to pay dividends as annual admissions fell to 3141 in 1869, 2747 in 1870, and 2637 in 1871.⁷ The Milanese home implemented even more energetic initiatives to reduce the burden of its obligation to dispense relief. In 1887, officials there decided to require unwed mothers to care for their own babies in exchange for a nursing subsidy. The policy change produced tangible results; between 1887 and 1897 the percentage of illegitimates who were nurtured directly by their mothers increased enormously. As a consequence, the annual average rate of maternal reclamations rose from 4 per cent in 1887 to 34 per cent in 1897 and infant mortality began to decline markedly for the first time in over a century. In the kingdom as a whole, however, the mortality of infants admitted to *ospizi* did not show any

major improvement in the 1890s; the percentage of foundlings who died in their first year in care was 37.3 in 1890–2, 37.6 in 1893–6, and 36.4 in 1897.⁸ And 98 588 infants and children entered the *brefotrofi* system nationwide in the years 1902–6, while 108 935 left. A total of 19 233 (17.6 per cent) of those who left did so because they were legally reclaimed by their mothers, while 51 915 (47.6 per cent) of them were officially ‘discharged’ because they had died.⁹ In many respects, the success achieved in Milan was exceptional. Because the home catered to an urban clientele and was located in a large city with a liberating cosmopolitan culture and permissive sexual mores, attempts to increase the number of maternal reclamations met with less resistance than they would have in many small towns and villages.

Maternal confinement and compulsory motherhood

On the whole, efforts to restrict admissions by means of enforced breastfeeding and bureaucratic controls produced mixed results. Because the new restrictive regime did not beneficially affect reclamation rates nationwide, some particularly audacious authorities decided to take even more drastic action to constrain unwed mothers to fulfil their maternal obligation towards their children. Domiciliary out-relief had its drawbacks, not the least of which was that it gave officials limited opportunities to put pressure on women to reclaim their infants. Some foundling home authorities came to see the early recovery of the woman as a solution to this problem.

In 1894, the Santo Spirito foundling home in Rome officially became an ‘autonomous’ *opera pia* within the jurisdiction of provincial government; it moved from its original site to a new location in the ‘popular’ quarter of Gianicolo, where it occupied buildings which the provincial deputation rented. From 1896, it was administered by a commission of doctors and lawyers who were appointed by provincial councillors. As a result of its transformation into a private institution under public control, the home began to inaugurate major changes in its practice.¹⁰ It still permitted limited numbers of legitimates to be admitted in extreme circumstances,¹¹ but it introduced other important changes to admissions policy. The new governing board decided to require *madri nubili* to breastfeed their infants for a monthly subsidy and even opened a separate on-site facility where they could live for the duration of their four-month contract as ‘internal feeders’. Women would be exonerated from the obligation to serve as *nutrici* only if their moral or physical state precluded their involvement in childrearing or they paid an indemnity to the institution as compensation for the cost of care.

Authorities also decided to reach out directly to unwed mothers in an attempt to decrease dependence upon external wet nurses and to increase

the rate of maternal reclamations. They put pressure on local midwives to notify them of the births of illegitimate babies who were at risk of being abandoned as *ignoti*. They asked the doctors who ran hospitals and clinics that recovered lone pregnant paupers to keep them similarly informed. The foundling home employed staff to go and speak to each woman who expressed a desire to abandon her newborn. These envoys promised her room and board and no formal obligation to reclaim in exchange for her agreement to nurse her infant and as many others as she possibly could. The reclusion of the mother within the *brefotrofio* brought immense benefits to the institution. In addition to having 'internal feeders' on site, the home's authorities also had the opportunity to kindle maternal love and devotion in the *madre nubile*. They would attempt to gain the mother's consent to reclaim her child within the time allowed for birth registration. By law, registration had to take place within five days of the birth. To expedite matters, the home offered to pay for the registration and to send representatives in the mother's place to the record office. Although officials preferred to register the birth and the act of reclamation at the same time, they still had four months to persuade the woman to accept her maternal duty. The internal organization of the home promoted their efforts. The woman was completely isolated from the outside world during her time as a *nutrice*. She was not allowed to receive visitors or to leave the grounds of the institution without permission. Along with ascetic living conditions, the institutional regimen included a fixed breast-feeding schedule, sewing and cleaning duties, and religious instruction under the supervision of nuns.¹²

The *brefotrofio* of Rome was well-placed to effect an operation to reach out directly to *madri nubili*. Rome's civil hospital, the *Ospedale di S. Giovanni Laterano*, had a maternity ward which Pope Pius IX opened in 1865. Closed soon after that date because of the dearth of female patients, the *sale di maternità* there reopened in 1872 after increasing the number of its beds to eighty. It soon began to attract a sizable clientele; hospital administrators reported that 1147 illegitimate infants alone were born there in the years 1896–8. The San Giovanni *ospedale* was affiliated to the University of Rome's medical school (one of five major medical schools in the country) and was one of the few teaching hospitals in Italy.¹³ Like other big cities in the north and south, Rome had a number of hospital facilities for women; directly linked to the *brefotrofio*, the Santo Spirito hospital had a *sale di maternità* too. And between 1886 and 1890, wealthy doctors (Asdrubali, La Torre, Savetti and Panunzi) provided the funds for the foundation of four private maternity clinics which offered parturient women free room and board and medical treatment during the confinement before birth.¹⁴ Specialists in obstetrics and gynaecology financed these sorts of projects in order to get access to female patients for clinical, pedagogical, and research purposes. All of these maternity *ospizi* catered specifically to poor *madri*

nubili, who were amongst the first women to experience hospital births in unified Italy.¹⁵

Opened in 1899, Rome's *Istituto 'La Torre'*, for example, specialized in the treatment of women with 'genital diseases', but recovered all poor pregnant women. Its clientele comprised lone mothers-to-be with no financial means and family support. According to its founder, Felice La Torre, these were the ideal patients because their vulnerability and powerlessness permitted the physician to conduct those experiments in medical treatments which were absolutely essential to the advancement of the new sciences of obstetrics and gynaecology. Revised university regulations came into effect in 1903. These specified that in order to qualify for a *libera docenza*, which conferred the right to teach medicine, Italian doctors had to show evidence of their scientific contributions to a board of examiners. To obtain this equivalent of a higher degree, La Torre published an extraordinary *curriculum vitae*, which recorded his many heroic achievements over the years. As a fourth-year medical student, for example, he found himself in the midst of a terrible cholera epidemic in his native Messina. Without the slightest hesitation, he offered his services to the authorities and practically saved the day single-handedly. La Torre declared that his courage and self-abnegation deserved to be commended. He entered medical school in 1863, qualified as a doctor in 1870, and served in the army as a surgeon until 1882, when he decided to devote himself full-time to the study of the uterus. La Torre never received any formal training in obstetrics or gynaecology,¹⁶ but his work for the military gave him many opportunities to operate on the prostitutes who serviced soldiers. His mastery of new techniques and his understanding of female anatomy were so impressive, he related, that he was able to make medical breakthroughs with remarkable regularity. He was particularly proud of his work with Nino Caminiti, a fellow Sicilian who became a pioneer of the technique of 'uterine amputation' (hysterectomy) in the 1880s. Though post-operative mortality was very high for this procedure, La Torre stated, deaths were due mostly to the risk of gangrene rather than the skill of the surgeon. In his great scholarly work, a mammoth volume on *The Uterus through the Ages*, La Torre revealed that he believed that there was something essentially 'pathological' and 'deformed' about women's reproductive anatomy. He wrote that he agreed with the French anatomist, Pajot, who said that 'If God made man in his own image, he set the mould badly'. La Torre admitted that modern medicine could never be able to alter the fact that 'man is born amidst urine and excrement', but obstetric surgery could already do much to correct the mistakes of mother nature.¹⁷

La Torre expressed bitterness that he never obtained a university chair in medicine. He did, however, own his own clinic, where he enjoyed free reign to indulge his passion for scientific experimentation on female patients. In public hospitals too, self-styled specialists in obstetrics and

gynaecology were beginning to reap the rewards of their efforts to advance their disciplines. Only 55 of the nation's 1167 hospitals had a maternity ward in 1885, but the number was steadily increasing, particularly in northern regions, which had the highest concentration. While Piedmont, Liguria, Lombardy, the Veneto, Emilia and Tuscany possessed 45 of the total of 55, Apulia, Basilicata (Basilicata had no public hospital of any kind, let alone an *ospizio di maternità*) and Calabria had no maternity wards at all. And Sicily had only 2, while Sardinia had 1 such facility. The number of hospital births was 5880 in 1885; 860 (14.62 per cent) of these involved obstetric surgery, most commonly hysterectomy and/or caesarean, both of which were used in the treatment of women who experienced difficult births. Medically assisted births, moreover, resulted in a maternal mortality rate of 16 per cent, with deaths due mostly to surgical accidents and post-operative complications.¹⁸

By 1898, 137 *ospizi* and *ospedali* throughout the nation provided unwed mothers with maternity care in the form of confinement before and after birth. Because of the institutional expansion that took place, the number of hospital births rose to 16 608 in 1898.¹⁹ Much of the stimulus for the increase in hospital delivery came from medical practitioners, who opened private clinics and charity wards in public hospitals because of their quest to gain clinical experience. Their colleagues working in foundling home administration supported the trend towards the hospitalization of child-birth for different reasons. They were not interested in the unwed mother as an object of scientific study and experimentation. Rather, their primary concern was to conscript her into compulsory service as a *nutrice* and a *madre*. By the turn of the century, many of them were transforming the traditional *brefotrofio* into a residential facility where the work of persuasion could best be conducted and the goal of the union of mother and baby could best be achieved.

It is significant that those who recast the foundling home could not imagine the possibility of a less coercive style of reform. Although they stated that most unwed mothers wanted to keep their children, they still felt the need to bind women to compulsory contracts as 'feeders' and to exert maximum pressure on them to reclaim their infants. They never considered taking a more sympathetic approach to the problems that single mothers must have faced in a country where illegitimacy was still so stigmatized. What drove them was the hope and, ultimately, the realization that the isolation, surveillance, and control of unwed mothers would reap rewards for public welfare providers. Statistical data on the rate of maternal reclamation was scarce, but some authorities believed that as many as 97 per cent of those illegitimate births which took place at home resulted in the abandonment of the baby by the mother. Evidence based on a sample of clinics and hospitals gave encouragement to those who wanted mothers to take responsibility for their offspring. In 1895–7, 9637 illegiti-

mate babies were born in 23 *ospedali* and *ospizi* in the north of Italy; over half of these infants (5356) were reported as having been kept by their mothers. Not surprisingly, given these results, 24 *brefotrofi* in the north and centre, including that in Rome, had established direct links with maternity clinics and wards by 1900 in an attempt to reach out directly to the mothers. It seemed to matter little to the doctors who piloted the 'reform' of the old system of assistance towards foundlings that the same study of 23 institutions which they used to defend their actions also showed that maternal mortality in a clinical and hospital setting was four times higher than it was in home births. The fact that the birth-related mortality of infants in hospital and clinical births was more than double that in home births also attracted very little attention.²⁰ The 1900 inquest revealed that officials working in the nation's *brefotrofi* were satisfied that they were doing everything that they possibly could to shift the burden of caring for society's surplus from 'public' institutions²¹ to private individuals.

In the care of doctors

The welfare of the *madri nubili* who were experiencing institutional confinement in lying-in wards and clinics was not a major concern of doctors. Unwed mothers who were hospitalized were exposed to many risks to their health. In 1876, one of the most distinguished doctors of his day observed that the *ospizio di maternità* in Turin was just like most *ospedali* in Italy in that it was 'splendid on the outside, but wretched on the inside'. Conditions within the Turinese public maternity clinic were deplorable partly because the building dated back to the Middle Ages and was originally a Capuchin monastery. Laid out as a series of small cells off long corridors that formed a rectangle around a central courtyard, the architecture of the place was ill-suited to its function as a hospital. The facility lacked proper ventilation, lighting, and heating. The contemporary observer noted that the female patients lay in over-crowded rooms with tiny windows that were sealed and shuttered. Their beds were low to the ground, were huddled together closely, and were covered in straw mattresses that were 'soaked in miasma' and 'crawling with insects'. The toilets were horribly dirty and smelly because attendants 'regularly dumped the scoria of birth there'. The 'terrible stench and filth of puerperium' were everywhere, Scipione Giordano remarked; they overwhelmed the senses and sickened the spirit.²²

Apart from the lack of proper hygiene on the ward, unwed mothers faced dangers in hospital care that arose directly from the techniques of diagnosis, treatment, and cure which nineteenth-century doctors employed. In the hospital setting, moreover, even a healthy pregnancy and 'normal' labour could end in disaster because physicians tended to manage child-

birth in an aggressive manner. Their interventionist stance arose from the development of obstetrics from surgery.²³ The predisposition of doctors to tamper with nature exposed mothers and babies to a high risk of damage and infection. Practitioners expressed a clear preference for instrumental and manual interventions in childbirth. For example, in his introduction to Allipandri's textbook on obstetrics, which was published in 1860, Scipione Giordano defined 'vaginal exploration' during labour as a recommended procedure to monitor the course of dilatation.²⁴ He may have been very sensitive to the perceptible muck and odour of the *ospizio*, but he was oblivious to the invisible germs and parasites that abounded on his instruments and hands. In the era before asepsis, antisepsis, and antibiotics, Giordano's methods posed a major hazard to his patients.

For over forty years until his death in 1894, Giordano exerted an immense influence upon Italian medicine. After he became a professor in 1857, he founded and led the Turin School of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, which provided such an inspiring model for Ernesto Pestalozza in Rome and Emilio Alfieri in Milan to follow. He taught generations of students at the university and, from 1857, he also directed the lying-in ward of the public maternity hospice in Turin, which he used for teaching and research purposes. A special section of the *ospizio* housed the unwed women who awaited birth during their confinement. In the 1850s, Giordano increased the number of beds in the 'illegitimacy ward' from 12 to 60; he also expanded the facilities for operations and made internships there mandatory for his medical students.²⁵ He routinely practised interventionist methods in the deliveries that he managed at the *ospizio*; the use of forceps, for example, became standard procedures in long labours. To his credit, though, he criticized the craze for caesareans that had most obstetricians resorting to the knife at the slightest hint of a complication in childbirth.²⁶

Under the influence of Edoardo Porro at Pavia, obstetricians were performing caesareans with increasing frequency from the 1860s. Porro and other doctors blamed rickets for causing the pelvic deformities (*vizi di bacino*) that necessitated caesareans; childbirth emergencies occurred, they stated, which only obstetric surgery could remedy. Advocates stressed that caesareans were far more humane than the horrible craniotomies that were performed on infants when a woman could not deliver naturally. While advances in surgical practice in the twentieth century transformed the caesarean section into a relatively simple and safe option in an emergency, the operation was rarely successful in the nineteenth century. The high deathrate associated with the operation was due not just to the belated adoption in Italy of the principles of antiseptic surgery that were introduced in Germany and France in the 1870s. Though the danger of infection was very high, so too was the risk of death and damage due to surgical accidents. Because the 'art of anaesthesia' was so 'imperfect', as one nineteenth-century historian of medicine observed, many women undergoing

abdominal deliveries suffered vomiting, convulsions, and even death because of the toxicity of the anaesthetic and the difficulty of regulating doses. Doctors preferred to keep the woman partially conscious during delivery, but this could cause problems. The chloroform that was used to anaesthetize the patient could cause a 'frenzied delirium' that made surgical precision impossible; potentially fatal ruptures to uteruses and intestines were very common as a result.²⁷

What also appeared to be true to the nineteenth-century historian of medicine was that many caesareans were being done in Italian clinics and hospitals unnecessarily. How could caesareans really be the option of last resort, Alfonso Corradi asked, when they were rarely performed in home deliveries and home deliveries resulted in much lower maternal and infant mortality than did hospital ones? On the recommendation of Porro, hysterectomies and ovariectomies were performed at the same time as caesareans when a woman was deemed to be incapable of a normal labour because of the small dimensions of her pelvis.²⁸ Although Corradi acknowledged that doctors were motivated by a desire to protect the woman from the dangers posed by subsequent pregnancies, he questioned whether this drastic multiple procedure was advisable since it resulted in an estimated 89–92 per cent maternal mortality rate. The 'luckiest women' in Italy, he stated, were those who gave birth at home for even if they required a caesarean or other operation, their chances of survival were greater than were those of women who were delivered 'artificially' in hospital. He drew on data from the *clinica ostetrica* in Palermo in the years 1851–2 to illustrate his points. Infantile rickets, he explained, was a northern disease, as was the fashion for caesareans. Southern women were more robust than their northern counterparts; they started to have babies at a young age and delivered them easily, naturally, and regularly throughout their long child-bearing careers. But even in the south, where caesareans were extremely rare, they were being performed at the obstetric clinic in Palermo. What was odd, Corradi remarked, was the fact that both poor married women and poor unwed mothers constituted the entirety of the clinic's clientele, but *madri nubili* were far more likely to end up undergoing a caesarean than were married patients.²⁹

Although Corradi stopped short of accusing doctors of using unwed mothers as human specimens, he did suggest that the desire to accumulate knowledge was the driving force of medical science; obstetricians, he argued, were becoming increasingly 'confident' and 'assertive' through experimentation aimed at perfecting surgical technique.³⁰ It also seems very likely that obstetric surgeons were not inclined to leave nature well enough alone because they construed the female body as a utero-centric machine that was so flawed in its internal construction that it could not even fulfil its primary reproductive function efficiently. It seems too that in the enclosed environment of the clinic obstetricians could give free reign to

their personal and professional impulses because of the profound inequalities based on gender and power that characterized the doctor/patient relationship. The evidence provided not just by Corradi (who was, after all, a mere observer of medical practice), but also by the practitioners themselves confirms beyond any doubt that nineteenth-century obstetrics did not liberate women from pain and suffering.³¹

Moreover, although hospital births endangered the health of all female patients, including fee-paying ones, all women did not experience the *ospizio* or *ospedale* equally. Paupers received segregated and differentiated care; and marital status too determined the quality and type of treatment which a woman received. Medical science mirrored social values, so unwed mothers, along with prostitutes, were placed at the bottom of the patient hierarchy not just because of their class and gender, but also because of their 'lowly' status as lone women on the outside of respectable bourgeois society. Even within the same charity hospital or clinic, *madri nubili* were separated from married women in special wards. Medical men explained this symbolic gulf between the *nubili* and the *maritate* as a gesture of respect towards 'decent' women. From their perspective, it may have been so; but the unwed mother's isolation in *sezioni delle nubili* maximized the physician's control over the patient and subjected her to a special kind of victimization that doctors committed in the name of scientific advancement.

Nothing revealed the objectification of *madri nubili* as tools of medical science quite so vividly as puerperal fever (*febbre puerperale*), which, in the course of its emergence as a disease, came to be identified as an affliction of unwed mothers. Puerperal fever occupied a special place in the imaginative universe of nineteenth-century medicine in that its symbolic importance was, very much like syphilis, greater than its actual incidence. To medical men trying to devise strategies of 'social prophylaxis', syphilis represented the ultimate threat of sexual contagion from the female deviant, whom they conceptualized as the wet nurse-prostitute-unwed mother. Because the symptoms of puerperal fever, which could manifest itself as a form of postpartum madness,³² were so exotic, violent, and extreme, it appealed to physicians who devoted themselves to study of the abnormalities of the female mind and body. On the borderline between obstetrics and psychiatry, puerperal fever became an obsession of doctors who wanted to understand and cure it.³³

In the nineteenth century, Italian doctors started to notice an increase in isolated incidents of puerperal fever in the 1840s. But the medical literature first spoke of great 'waves' of the disease in the 1860s, when the trend towards the hospitalization of illegitimate births really gathered momentum.³⁴ At the *ospizio* in Turin, sporadic cases appeared from the 1830s onwards, but the first real 'epidemic' occurred in 1858, according to Giordano. Admissions to the *reparto* for *madri nubili* had almost doubled from 134 in 1851 to 236 in 1857, a year in which the institute obtained the

highest ever number of entries since its foundation two decades earlier. This period of expansion also coincided with the introduction of a series of important internal changes.³⁵

Most significantly, at Giordano's instigation, the presence of medical students on the ward increased at this time, as did the percentage of instrumental and surgical interventions in labour. Only 12 (4.4 per cent) of the 267 births in the ten months preceding the 1858 outbreak involved an obstetric operation, such as a caesarean or a gastrotomy (following the accidental rupture of the uterus), and these resulted in 10 maternal deaths. But the use of forceps, which Giordano described as the 'most innocent of instruments', was becoming routine, as were vaginal explorations during labour, the manual removal of the placenta, and postpartum intrauterine examinations. Clearly, these and other invasive procedures maximized the risk of birth attendants infecting the woman with some highly virulent and potentially lethal pathogen. And, while conditions in the *sezione delle maritate* improved considerably, because of refurbishments, they deteriorated markedly in the *sezione delle nubili*, because of overcrowding. Through his interest in hygiene, Giordano had gained an elementary appreciation of the importance of ventilation and cleanliness in the hospital environment. He noted, for example, that the ward for married women benefited from rudimentary sanitary improvements in the 1850s, such as the regular changing of bed linen; however, no general clean-up operation commenced in the 'second section' for single women, which became even more insalubrious as a result of the influx of patients, their increasing proximity to one another, and the consequent proliferation of filth and waste. Because of their inferior conditions, unwed mothers were more in danger of contamination from air- or dust-borne bacteria, faecal and visceral matter, and septic environments than were married women. Not surprisingly, Giordano recorded that the 1858 outbreak of puerperal fever followed a pattern reported in other clinics in that it started in the section for *nubili*.³⁶

The episode prompted Giordano to study the phenomenon. Although a few married women patients died of the disease during the 1858 epidemic, Giordano performed autopsies only on those victims who were *madri nubili*. He claimed to have made a major breakthrough when he 'discovered' that anatomical and mechanical defects within the female body were the primary causes of puerperal fever. When the womb failed to develop normally in childhood, the female reproductive apparatus seriously malfunctioned and the woman's circulatory system too went haywire. Malformation of the uterus caused disruptions to blood flow and disturbances to the entire organism. Giordano's investigations revealed to him that all of the women who had died from childbed fever suffered from blood clots and pulmonary embolisms because of the pre-existing condition of uterine malfunction. Although many apparently healthy women, he suspected, had a physiological predisposition to the illness, not all of

those who did would actually get it. The various secretions, humours, and solids of the human body were all affected by the emotions, Giordano argued, which were the secondary causative factors determining susceptibility. In order for the terrible change in the 'crasis (mixture) of the blood' to occur and the fatal process of 'self-pollution and putrefaction' to begin, he believed, a woman had to have a psychological propensity to the disorder. This tendency derived from the condition of unwed motherhood itself, he posited. It could not possibly be otherwise, Giordano stated, because *madri nubili* were the principal victims of the disease.³⁷

Giordano observed that the majority of his patients were 'for the most part miserable, abandoned, and homeless'. Because of their wretched situation, they sought 'refuge' in the clinic, where they were confined for up to two months before the birth. Even before the piercing chills, raging fevers, and frantic ranting began, these women fell victim to bouts of sadness, hopelessness, and shame, which were the first symptoms of their high susceptibility to the illness. He remarked almost casually that he had never seen an unwed mother who had been happy before the physical signs of her pathology first appeared. During their antenatal confinement, these women were 'disturbed, unquiet, anxious, imploring and insecure'. Although the doctor did his best to calm them with wine and laudanum, they often 'cried excessively or showed fear without any provocation'. The regimen and monotony of the lying-in ward contributed to the melancholia and hysteria which regularly overcame women patients, he stated. And, the religious 'instruction' given by the nuns who served as nurses on the ward, the doctor stressed, did not lend any solace. The constant haranguing of nuns, he believed, was an 'instrument of terror', which forced female patients to undergo moral anguish and ritual penitence on a daily basis. The tyranny of religion, Giordano recounted, explained the 'maniacal' and 'frenzied' manifestations of the illness in its final stages. Religious dogma exerted such an influence over many of the women afflicted with puerperal fever that, in their 'demented deliriums' before death, they would utter rapid confessions, pray incessantly, and beg for God's mercy.³⁸

Giordano recognized that religion could exercise tyranny, but he did not acknowledge that medicine could also do so. Standard treatments for puerperal fever in the second half of the nineteenth century included vaginal washes with turpentine, the ingestion of turpentine orally, warm-water enemas and radical surgery, such as hysterectomy.³⁹ Other medical observers described the sufferings of puerperal madness and mistook what was probably a drug and alcohol-enhanced 'toxic confusional state' caused by peritonitis, septicaemia, or some other infection as a symptom of women's chaotic and excitable character. Domenico Tibone, for example, corroborated Giordano's theory, as did other doctors.⁴⁰ During an epidemic in Tibone's clinic, 24 out of 394 (6 per cent morbidity) patients fell ill with puerperal fever, and 18 of them died (75 per cent mortality). Autopsies on

the victims revealed to Tibone that some physiological abnormality from infancy, compounded by the existence of a severe emotional weakness, caused the disease. Like Giordano, Tibone was absolutely convinced of the 'autonomy' of the illness and refused to contemplate that doctors and their institutions might be making women fatally ill. Tibone found proof that the female body could poison itself in the fact that some of the victims of puerperal fever had experienced 'normal' births. One such case involved a young and unmarried peasant woman of seemingly robust constitution who died suddenly after the rapid onset of postpartum fever. Tibone reported that her mental symptoms included 'stupidity' and 'unhappiness' and her physical symptoms included 'putrescence of the uterus' and 'placental remnants in the womb'. But the coagulation of blood around her heart was the tell-tale sign that she suffered from an underlying defect in her reproductive organs that had such catastrophic and unpreventable consequences.⁴¹

Because of their rigid mindset, obstetricians in Italy were slow to take effective preventative measures against puerperal fever. While French clinicians were beginning in the 1850s to make some progress towards identifying infection as the root cause of puerperal fever, the majority of Italian experts resolutely refused to accept this line of reasoning.⁴² To have done so would have opened up the possibility that they themselves were endangering the lives of their patients. By the 1880s, antisepsis had rendered puerperal fever a preventable disease, but Italian practitioners remained fixated on the notion of female culpability.⁴³

No fewer than ten major theories about puerperal fever circulated throughout the Italian medical community in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Each of them had its own idiosyncrasies, but the one element which they all shared with Giordano's interpretation was that the woman herself was to blame.⁴⁴ The long and unchallenged supremacy of the idea of self-pollution emanated from the fixation of nineteenth-century obstetrics on the uterus and the perception of male doctors that this organ alone controlled women's minds and bodies. In the 1870s, one of the most influential thinkers was Angelo Monteverdi, who devised an elaborate theory of uterine paralysis (*metro-paresis*) based on a bit of both Galen and Giordano. When the uterus was in a morbid state, Monteverdi believed, the bodily functions became suspended and the blood started to decompose. Puerperal fever developed when the malady of uterine inertia caused the putrid lochia to be reabsorbed into the system.⁴⁵ Even when, from the 1880s, some Italian doctors began to acknowledge that the disease was somehow linked to surgical operations, crowded conditions in clinics, and unhygienic hospital surroundings, they still clung tenaciously to the belief that 'auto-intoxication' was the root cause of puerperal fever. Though they would eventually begin to save lives, the antiseptic therapies that were very

gradually being adopted in Italy focused not on protecting the woman from the threat of external microbes, but rather on treating the effects of the sluggish and languorous uterus's tendency to contaminate the system.⁴⁶

Far from being a force for the 'liberation' of women, nineteenth-century obstetrics was responsible for many deaths and many suffering. While statistics from the 1860s and 1870s would be very helpful to the historian,⁴⁷ the government only began to compile national data concerning birth-related deaths by cause in the 1880s. Table 7.1 overleaf refers to all recorded fatalities from births (including all hospital and home deliveries, whether or not they were attended by a midwife, general practitioner, or specialist).

The most striking feature about the table is that it shows such pronounced regional differences. Significantly, these disparities reveal a marked inverse relationship between 'backwardness' and the risk of death in childbirth. Contemporary social commentators bemoaned the fact that improvements in the nation's health seemed to be confined to the north and centre. But, as the figures concerning infant deaths due to accident and injury illustrate, childbirth was safest for the baby where it was managed without the benefit of modern medicine and medically qualified experts. With regard to maternal mortality due to causes other than postpartum sepsis, all southern and island regions achieved levels below the national average, while only 3 (the Veneto, Tuscany, and the Marches) out of 7 northern and central regions did. The poverty, poor housing, and malnutrition which were connected to widespread economic and social deprivation in the south and islands exerted no appreciably negative influence upon levels of maternal deaths. And in terms of puerperal fever alone, the 'backwardness' that was associated with the continued predominance of home deliveries and the dearth of specialized obstetric care in the south and islands had a noticeably positive impact upon the numbers of casualties from the disease.⁴⁸ The likelihood of death from postpartum sepsis was far greater in socially and economically advanced regions largely because of their relatively high proportion of hospital deliveries, the poor standard of surgically driven obstetric care, the prevalence under medical management of unnecessary intervention in normal labours and the belated and gradual adoption of antisepsis in clinical practice.⁴⁹

In Italy, both the birthrate and deathrate began to fall in the late 1880s. Life expectancy for most age groups started to increase in the 1890s.⁵⁰ Deaths from infectious diseases, such as cholera and smallpox, began to decline by the turn of the century.⁵¹ As the lethality of diseases like tuberculosis and pneumonia also diminished after 1900, women faced a decreasing risk of dying at an early age.⁵² Despite the progressive improvements that accrued to general mortality and morbidity in the period from the end

Table 7.1 Maternal and infant mortality in birth by cause, 1881–4
(annual average per 1000 births)

<i>Regions</i>	<i>Puerperal fever*</i>	<i>Other causes**</i>	<i>Infant deaths due to accident, injury, or trauma†</i>
The north and centre			
Piedmont	3.04	5.49	3.49
Liguria	2.56	4.62	3.04
Lombardy	2.98	6.98	5.01
Veneto	1.97	3.86	5.40
Emilia-Romagna	2.24	4.44	3.55
Tuscany	2.30	3.59	3.18
Marches	1.65	3.10	2.12
Umbria	1.85	4.43	3.14
Latium	2.29	4.44	0.57
The south and islands			
Abruzzi-Molise	0.90	4.11	1.38
Campania	0.79	3.70	1.57
Apulia	1.81	3.61	0.75
Basilicata	0.65	3.04	0.43
Calabria	1.04	3.28	1.80
Sicily	1.21	2.86	0.88
Sardinia	1.60	3.53	1.21
National average††	1.92	4.22	2.79

* Puerperal fever refers only to deaths due to postpartum sepsis; fatalities due to septic abortions are excluded.

** This refers to deaths due to 'sicknesses of pregnancy' (such as ectopic pregnancies, haemorrhage, difficult labours (*distocia*), and toxæmia) and 'accidents in birth', including infected wounds and fatal injury from obstetric operations (most commonly ruptured uteruses).

†These refer only to deaths due to asphyxia, accidental damage by forceps, or destruction by craniotomy. Not included in these figures, the rate of stillbirth (*natimortalità*) in 1881–84 was estimated to be 8.37 per 100 hospital births and 3.27 per 100 home births: see Camera dei Deputati, *Movimento degli infermi negli ospedali civili del regno: Anno 1884* (Rome, 1886), cited in 'Varietà', *Annali universali di medicina e chirurgia*, vol. 280 (May, 1887), pp. 474–7.

††There were about 1 million births on average per year in 1881–1884: per 1000 births, 6 mothers and 3 babies died from the causes listed above.

Source: 'Rivista d'igiene: Risultati dell'inchiesta sulle condizioni igieniche e sanitarie nei comuni del regno', *Annali universali di medicina e chirurgia*, vol. 281 (June, 1887), pp. 284–426, 359.

of the nineteenth century to the 1930s, no great reduction in the maternal mortality rate (the MMR is defined as the number of pregnancy and child-birth-related deaths) occurred until after the Second World War. The MMR was 26 per 10 000 births in 1887–1904, 23.6 in 1910–14, and 27.1 in 1915–19. And, despite slight annual fluctuations, the MMR stabilized at around 27 fatalities per 10 000 births in the 1920s and 1930s. Only after 1914 did vital statistics begin to record birth-related deaths by civil status.

These confirmed that single, widowed, separated and divorced women had a much higher risk of death from puerperal infections (in this instance, including septic abortions) than did married women.⁵³ A small proportion of all births resulted in maternal death due to puerperal fever (defined as full-term sepsis); none the less, the salient characteristic of puerperal sepsis is that its causes were preventable, so the 7061 fatalities from postpartum infections (excluding fatalities due to septic abortions) that were recorded in 1887–89 seem all the more poignant. By 1910–14, the number of deaths due to puerperal fever had dropped to 1194 (an overall decrease of 74 per cent from 1887–1914); but the level of casualties remained stationary in the following two decades.⁵⁴ Death in pregnancy and childbirth eventually became exceedingly rare in the period after 1945. But during the decades under consideration, childbearing remained a leading cause of accident and sickness-related death amongst women of reproductive age.⁵⁵

Exposed to the rigours and risks which accompanied the redemptive medical and social strategies of liberal reformers, *madri nubili* had a far greater chance of dying in pregnancy and childbirth than did married women. Under liberalism, the unwed mother was transformed from an anonymous sinner into an object for rehabilitation, experimentation, and control. Forced out from behind the protective cover of the *ruota*, she was subjected to enforced reclusion and compulsory breastfeeding in foundling homes. As the number of maternity wards and clinics grew, *madri nubili* also became the predominant source of patients for obstetricians who were concerned to perfect their surgical techniques and consolidate their professional standing. Contemporary ideas about puerperal fever expose the extent to which the system of maternity care provided by the institutions of liberal beneficence jeopardized the welfare of unwed mothers. Modern obstetrics brought no relief from pain and suffering for the victims of puerperal fever. As long as doctors perceived the disease as a symptom of social and moral pathology and a penalty for unwed motherhood, the treatment and cure of illness remained beyond the reach of medical science.

Liberal society and the young

Scholars like Cambi and Ulivieri argue that modernizing societies undergo a process of humanization which is manifest in growing concern for the protection of infants and children. In arguments about the demise of Christian charity, however, anxiety over infant mortality took second place to the overriding economic aim of reducing public expenditure on aid towards *esposti*. In nineteenth-century Italy, the survival of the traditional demographic pattern of high fertility and high mortality may have bred an acceptance of a spectacularly large number of infant deaths. Under liberalism, the saving of infants certainly did not become a matter for national

debate or government policy, despite the fact that almost every parliament from the 1870s onwards was presented with a bill on some aspect of the problem of society's treatment of its young.⁵⁶

The transition from the old aristocratic charitable order to the new regime of bourgeois public beneficence brought few benefits to *madri nubili* and *illegittimi*. As professional middle-class men of science and medicine gained hold of some of the major beneficent institutions, and central government extended the burdens of local authorities, assistance became far more coercive in nature, but absolutely no better in quality. If the MMR and IMR are indexes of society's commitment to caring for mothers and babies, liberalism's record of achievement in this regard is very poor. And as children, illegitimates remained the victims of institutionalized and systematic neglect, discrimination, and abuse.

In the pre-First World war period, reformers began to draw connections between the widespread moral and material abandonment of children and apparently rising rates of juvenile delinquency in Italian society. Eugenically minded scientists in the overlapping fields of psychology, anthropology, and psychiatry, in particular, seized upon this issue out of a desire to improve the mental health and physical well-being of the young. One of the more interesting aspects of the campaign for better child welfare services was that participants did not hold mothers and the family solely responsible for youth delinquency. Rather, they emphasized the importance of society's wider responsibility towards children and the need for the state to play an active role in the care of the 'abnormal' child. Even those campaigners who believed in the primacy of biology and heredity as determinants of human characteristics and behaviour also argued that social solutions could help prevent the spread of defect and deviance amongst youth. For example, the eminent neuro-psychiatrist and founder of Rome's Institute of Experimental Psychology in 1906, Sante De Sanctis took an extreme hereditarian position on the causes of juvenile delinquency. He believed that Lombroso had been correct to equate the delinquent with the epileptic because both shared the traits of low intelligence, emotional volatility, and psychological instability. 'The equivalence and reversibility of criminality and epilepsy are proven facts', he declared. By being 'unstable, hyperactive, excitable, violent and incorrigible', some youngsters showed all the signs of their 'epileptoid tendencies'.⁵⁷ Despite their similarities, however, epilepsy was a physical disease caused by some 'cerebro-pathology', while delinquency was a psychological disorder to which some individuals were especially predisposed because of their 'inferior' family background and heredity. None the less, even a child who was totally 'normal' at birth could become a delinquent because poor character development in infancy resulted in aberrant behaviour and 'moral deficiency' in adolescence. Although De Sanctis attributed great importance

to inherited constitutional influences in the formation of the abnormal personality, he stressed that society's abdication of responsibility for children contributed enormously to rampant criminality amongst minors. He advocated the introduction of a national programme to combat the contagion of 'ethical atrophy' amongst the young. Most institutions which cared for homeless, abandoned, abused and criminal children were private ones, he argued. The state had to invest more generously in children both to prevent the *traviamento* (corruption) of youth and to protect society from delinquency.⁵⁸

Both Giuseppe Sergi, who was professor of anthropology and psychology at the University of Rome, and Enrico Morselli, who was professor of psychiatry at the University of Genoa, agreed that antisocial behaviours in children could be caused not just by biological factors, but also by social ones too. Character deformations in the young, they maintained, had their roots, above all, in poor parenting and deprived childhoods. At the Fifth International Congress on Psychology, held in Rome in 1905, De Sanctis, Sergi, Morselli and other prominent figures, such as Teresa Labriolo, who was a philosophy lecturer at Rome University, and Maria Montessori, who was a doctor of medicine and anthropology lecturer at Rome University, committed themselves to devising effective 'social therapies' against the corruption of young people in an uncaring society.⁵⁹ They and other campaigners argued that environment was the principal cause which led a minor to commit an offence against society. Because a child was mentally immature, morally or materially unfavourable surroundings, particularly those in which immorality, drunkenness, begging and crime were rife, exerted a powerful damaging influence on the mind. As delinquent minors were, in most cases, victims of harmful social conditions, or were acting under the influence of a morbid or retarded mental development, society should not visit them with penalties based on the idea of retribution.⁶⁰ The growing conviction that the conventional punitive approach of criminal law should not be applied to juvenile offenders gave stimulus to calls for the reform of penal policy.

In 1906, the International Congress on Criminal Anthropology in Turin addressed the problem of changing the legal system so that minors who were guilty of punishable offences would be sent to specialized reformatories and institutes with an educational purpose. Imprisonment in adult prisons demoralized children and turned them into professional criminals, but rehabilitation programmes promised to return a law-abiding and productive citizen to society. The 1889 law on prison reform and the 1899 penal code both recommended that children under eighteen who committed crimes should be subject to measures of correction rather than punishment. Instead of serving time in prison, young offenders who were not recidivists could legally be placed in the custody of private charities.

However, a lack of appropriate institutions prevented these rulings from being implemented widely. In 1902, Italy possessed only 11 state-run penitentiaries for minors (10 for boys and 1 for girls) and 33 private reform schools (11 for boys and 22 for girls). With a total population of 8840 (4915 boys and 3925 girls), these establishments were already filled beyond capacity and could not possibly meet actual demand, which amounted to requests for over 2000 places a year. Administered badly by two separate and conflicting authorities (the public security forces and the prison administration), the prison service was severely under-funded and very disorganized. Because of the chaos, children ended up being interned with hardened and dangerous criminals in both penal colonies and adult prisons. In some instances, these institutions did not provide separate facilities for minors as young as fourteen or cater their regimes of hard labour to the capabilities of children. This situation was all the more unacceptable to reformers on moral grounds because most juvenile offenders were convicted of crimes against property rather than against persons. That so many children were charged with stealing food and other necessities and were committing acts of vagrancy and begging provided ample proof that adverse social conditions contributed enormously to the spread of juvenile delinquency. Society failed children and endangered itself by denying the existence and effects of extreme poverty, violence, neglect and abuse within families.⁶¹

Delegates at the 1906 conference broadened the appeal for effective defensive action against juvenile delinquency into a generalized campaign for the protection of all of society's neglected children. Campaigners believed that the government should fund the growth of institutions catering to all children with special needs. Children who were abandoned by parents, mentally deficient, physically disabled or chronically sick had to be protected from moral and material danger. They needed the care, therapy, and education which only trained public health and medical professionals could provide. Though many of Italy's abandoned, 'corrupted', and 'defective' children were sufficiently educable to be capable of leading productive lives, they were hidden away in private institutions and forgotten by the public. Moreover, charities alone simply could not provide a sufficient number of places to fulfil demand or deliver a standard of care that met modern medico-pedagogical criteria. Because of over-crowding in institutions and insufficient government involvement in this marginal sector of assistance, orphaned, blind, handicapped, abandoned and troubled adolescents who needed help and understanding were placed in work-houses and mental hospitals for lack of an appropriate alternative.

Italy's lack of specialized child welfare agencies became a major focus of the campaign. The law of 14 February 1904 (n. 36) on lunatics and asylums had aimed to begin making this type of provision uniform throughout the nation by setting guidelines on admissions and care.⁶² However, those

working within the mental health system knew that the government had barely even begun to tackle the problem of disorganization within the sector, let alone get to grips with the issue of chronic under-funding. The majority of the kingdom's 151 institutions for the mentally deficient comprised tiny, private establishments that were under no form of public control whatsoever. In 1889, 1898, and 1908, the government attempted to compile statistics on the population that was interned in psychiatric institutions. However, the data was so incomplete and unreliable that no one knew with any certainty how many people were confined to mental institutions and how many of them were under-age children. It was estimated that about 2000 of the roughly 45 000 people who were recovered in adult psychiatric institutions in 1908 were minors; however, the government recognized that probably many more children were locked away in lunatic asylums.⁶³ Reformers believed that many tens of thousands of 'abnormal, corrupted, and abandoned' children were in some kind of residential establishment that might be damaging to their physical and mental development. They wanted to see government take a more active role in financing the creation of institutions providing appropriate medical, rehabilitative, and protective care for all categories of outcast children.

The government did not respond to calls for an extension in custodial care with a curative and remedial purpose. During his long third ministry from May 1906 to December 1909, Giolitti declared his commitment to building more prisons and asylums, but nothing much came of this promise.⁶⁴ And although he stated in parliament that society had to win the battle against juvenile delinquency, he did not make public funds available for that purpose. Moreover, the desire of reformers to institutionalize all categories of 'problem' children, such as the delinquent, the blind, the deaf, the abandoned and the abused, conflicted with Giolitti's intention to keep expenditure on such 'superfluous' areas of social provision to an absolute minimum.⁶⁵ As far as Giolitti was concerned, private philanthropy and charity were already taking responsibility for assisting these children, so there was no need for the state to increase its financial involvement.

It is noteworthy that at a time when so many other European statesmen were expressing alarm over a declining birthrate, and were thinking of ways to use child and maternal welfare benefits as positive pronatalist incentives, Giolitti did not prioritize this issue at all. This is all the more remarkable since fears about population size often had more to do with perceptions of a nation's international military and economic strength and competitiveness than they did with actual demographic realities. The fact that Italian fertility gave no cause for complaint was not a hindrance to its becoming an object of social scrutiny and policy. Absent from Giolitti's rhetoric on the welfare state was any recognition of the national and economic value of children and the importance of protecting the Italian 'race's precious *fanciulli*. Mothers and babies just did not matter that much to him. Because

of his clear political objectives, Giolitti's entire social agenda aimed at gaining the adhesion of the urban working class to the state by promoting economic prosperity and expanding contributory insurance schemes.

As in so many low-priority areas of social reform, Giolitti focused the attention of his government on 'investigating' the problem rather than solving it. With a decree of 7 November 1909, Giolitti's minister of justice, Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, established a royal commission 'to study the causes of the progressive increase in juvenile delinquency and to propose legislative remedies'. The commission examined the possibility of creating 'children's courts' that were based on American and English models. It also explored the feasibility of introducing into institutional practice a '*codice dei minorenni*' to secure the legal rights of minors. The recommendations for a more child-centred approach to juvenile crime came to nothing. By the time he had returned to power in March 1911, Giolitti had lost interest in the matter. The project fell by the wayside also because of the anticipated cost of the set of reforms. If it had been implemented, the code of practice would have set specific guidelines concerning the treatment of juvenile offenders by magistrates, the police, and auxiliary social institutions. The introduction of children's courts would have necessitated a thorough shake-up of the welfare, justice, legal and prison systems. Not until decades later did the government begin a serious attempt to implement the measures first proposed by the commission. In 1931, the fascist regime started the process of making the approach to the criminal child less punitive and more curative when it introduced legislation calling for the creation of special children's tribunals. The aim of these institutions was to shift the emphasis of the legal process from the crime to the child. It was felt that medical and educational specialists had to assess the personal and environmental circumstances which caused a child to go astray in order to devise effective individualized treatment.⁶⁶

The legacy of liberalism

In the years before the First World War, pressure on government to resolve the illegitimacy question increased. Foundling home directors and public health authorities were at the forefront of a campaign calling for the introduction of the apposite legislation on foundlings which the 1865 enactment on local government had promised would emanate shortly. In the absence of a special law on abandoned infants, the legality of many of the independent initiatives of *brefotrofi* remained in doubt. This was problematic, since legal actions against foundling homes, though very rare, had provoked much publicity and, consequently, caused deep embarrassment to authorities. In one such case, which provoked discussion in the senate in 1907, an unwed mother and her family filed a lawsuit against a *brefotrofi*

in Bologna because, before admitting her child to care, it required her to remain in the home and breastfeed on demand for three months. The issue of whether mandatory detention and breastfeeding was lawful was at stake. When the press got wind of the scandal, the foundling home agreed to pay the woman compensation in order to settle out of court. When discussing the case in parliament, Senator De Christoforis stressed the need for government action by relating to his colleagues that the incident forced the *brefotrofio* to return to the system of bottle-feeding. The result of this reversal of policy was that mortality amongst internally maintained infants went from an all-time low of between 20–25 per cent, which was achieved during the years of ‘mandatory maternal feeding’, to a high of between 90–92. In its follow-up reporting of the case, the local press castigated the woman for being selfish. The favourable publicity encouraged the home’s governing body to re-install the controversial policy. The senator ended his account by adding that, once women were again confined within the *brefotrofio*, a bewildered mortician had gone to the home to inquire about what had become of the doctor who had been killing so many babies. Even though they acknowledged that the personal liberties of women were being violated, De Christoforis and other senators, such as Manassei and Guala, unflinchingly supported the unorthodox methods of *brefotrofi*. A foundling home director himself, De Christoforis believed that even if compulsion was used to encourage women to develop maternal feelings for their infants, it was preferable to condoning the ‘barbaric’ abandonment of so many unwanted babies.⁶⁷

Foundling home directors, along with their supporters within the senate, pressed Giolitti to provide formal approbation of the changes which they had introduced to the traditional system of care. They wanted the government to abolish the nation’s surviving *ruote* (which numbered 462 in 1907) and devote more resources to this sector of assistance so that additional institutions could be created, especially in rural areas, and vital services could be improved, especially those concerned with the medical and social supervision of wet nurses. Above all, they wanted the state to sanction their policies of ‘persuading’ *madri nubili* to breastfeed and reclaim their infants; and they wanted these methods to become the norm throughout the nation. Giolitti paid lip service to these demands.

On 25 April 1907, De Christoforis asked Giolitti to address the question of when the government would enact legislation on abandoned infants. He stressed just how urgent was the need for major reform. Giolitti responded to De Christoforis’s criticism of governmental passivity in characteristic fashion by stressing that the problem of *infanzia abbandonata* was so big that no immediate solution could be found.⁶⁸ None the less, Giolitti explained that he had undertaken a review of the findings and recommendations of the 1900 commission of inquiry into the nation’s *brefotrofi* and promised to present parliament with a bill ‘in a matter of days’.⁶⁹ When he

presented his project the following month, Giolitti described it as pragmatic, but novel. The great strength of his bill, he argued, was that it broadened the definition of 'abandoned infants' to include any child who was morally and materially abandoned by parents. By depriving unfit parents of their rights over their children, he explained, many children could be protected from violence and abuse.⁷⁰

Few could find fault with the principle that the law should protect all children whose welfare or safety was at risk. The strongest objections to Giolitti's project focused, however, on its timidity. The prime minister, for example, made his position very clear on the matter of whether the government should formally abolish the remaining *ruote*. He accused his critics, including De Christoforis, of wanting to create a 'perfect system' when no such thing was possible. He argued that the 'old anonymous system of admissions' should not be abolished in 'less developed regions', where such a move could provoke an increase in infanticide because of the strength of traditional attitudes and religious sentiment. He also maintained that the 'new conditional system of entry' should not be made mandatory or uniform throughout the nation, because it would result in an unsupportable increase in public expenditure:

I hope that with the progress of civilization ... this humanitarian question will be resolved. But I will not assume responsibility for adopting this [new] system immediately in all of Italy. Moreover, has Senator De Christoforis considered whether we have the means to provide for the maintenance of mothers as well as babies? If the mother has no means of subsistence, if she cannot find work near the foundling home, if she lives and works in the countryside, and must travel in order to breast-feed her baby, who will give her the means to live? I believe, I repeat, that we will have to pay a big price if we strive to attain perfection too quickly. We should content ourselves with progressing gradually from our semi-barbarous state.

Giolitti stated firmly that Senator Cavasola should have known better than to suggest that assistance towards foundlings and their mothers should 'pass directly into the hands of the state'. 'Have Cavasola and the senate considered by what enormous percentage the number of abandoned infants would increase if the state directly provided for their maintenance?', Giolitti asked. Had they stopped to think for even a moment about whether the state had the organizational capacity and the economic resources to administer a centralized system of statutory care, he wondered out loud. He reminded his colleagues that the state was unable to fulfil the obligations it already had.⁷¹

Because of the huge 'lacunae' in the existing system of aid towards morally and materially abandoned children, this was not the time to delve

into the realm of the ridiculous. What was needed now, Giolitti asserted, was a 'first step' in the right direction. But the current government could not do more than the 'absolute minimum that is presently possible'. His intention, in fact, was to do nothing more than produce a special law based on existing provisions within the enactments on local government. Even though only 2240 of the nation's 8269 municipalities made provision for foundlings in their budgets, Giolitti believed that they should be entrusted with a duty of care towards abandoned infants.⁷²

Giolitti stated that, as a matter of principle, he found the idea that central government should be burdened by the 'minutiae and detail' of policy implementation in the localities very peculiar. And if senators had their way, he explained, the government at all levels would interfere with matters that were better left to private charities. Giolitti gave no indication that he understood that Crispi's law had purposefully changed the nomenclature in order to stress that government had a stake in beneficence. In Giolitti's mind, *opere pie* were not public institutions at all. By proposing that government regulate the *sistema baliatrico* by means of its sanitary laws and public doctors, he argued, senators were advocating the creation of an army of 'state wet nurses'. This would be impossible to achieve. And it would be undesirable too because of the harsh realities of social conditions in the country. If the choice was either to let a baby die of hunger or be farmed out to a wet nurse who might have a poor record or a social disease, there really was no choice, Giolitti emphasized.⁷³

The weaknesses and compromises in the Giolittian project on *infanzia abbandonata* resulted in parliamentary impasse. It seemed that the one issue on which broad consent could be reached was that putative fathers should not be held liable to claims for child support by unmarried mothers. Giolitti had been very insistent on this point.⁷⁴ And parliamentarians agreed that whatever happened to the system of care towards illegitimate infants, 'unwed fathers' should not be treated in the same sort of punitive and coercive ways as 'unwed mothers' were. After its failure to progress through parliament in 1907, Giolitti resubmitted an amended bill on 4 May 1909, but his departure from government that year thrust the second project into limbo. It remained there for the remainder of liberalism's tenure in power.⁷⁵ As no national legislation seemed immanent, the campaign for reform intensified its efforts.

In September 1917, directors of the nation's foundling homes assembled in Rome for a conference that was hosted by the Ministry of Health. The chronic structural deficiencies of *beneficenza pubblica* and the precipitous war-time deterioration in the quality of care towards foundlings brought them all together. Like others in Italy, the director of the home in Reggio Emilia found his attempts to deliver a decent service increasingly thwarted as the war progressed. Because of the intolerable pressure of demand, he had to relax rulings on poverty and domicile and extend the geographic

radius of his administration from 15 to 45 municipalities. As the number of admissions multiplied, the *brefotrofio* had gone into debt because provincial and municipal governments reneged on their mutual obligation to contribute to the cost of care.⁷⁶ Delegates at the congress condemned central government for its failure to ensure that local governments respected the law. Significantly, authorities did not confine their demands to an appeal for state involvement in the process of foundling home reform. Almost as a prelude to fascism's population policy, they also voted to invoke government to pass far-reaching legislation on the 'protection of infancy and childhood'. They put a whole range of child and maternal welfare issues on the agenda as part of their plans for a thorough and comprehensive review of public beneficence's poor performance. They called for central government support for the creation of milk depots, maternal kitchens, and crèches. They wanted parliament to consider placing laws on affiliation, adoption, and paternity on the books. And they proposed that the legislature immediately enact long-pending laws on all categories of morally and materially abandoned adolescents, including juvenile delinquents and mentally and physically deficient children.⁷⁷ Their demands for a final solution to the illegitimacy question remained unanswered until the advent of fascism. One of the central dilemmas of liberalism had been its inability to see beyond the perceived obstacles in the way of state action to promote social progress. But in its early years, fascism had no sense of its own limitations. The dictatorship's policy on illegitimates promised to be nothing, if not very ambitious.

8

The Illegitimacy Campaign under Fascism

Fascist policy towards foundlings and their mothers differed little from liberal policy in so far as maternal reclamation remained a primary goal of rescue efforts. Nevertheless, momentous policy departures occurred in the 1920s, as new forces and impulses came to prominence. Mussolini's regime tied the question of illegitimacy to its demographic campaign, so policy-makers now depicted attempts to save and protect the nation's 'motherless' babies as a foremost racial imperative. In contrast to their liberal forebears, fascist welfare professionals approached the 'illegitimacy question' with a profound sense of urgency and mission. They also devised some rather novel solutions to this social problem. In 1923 and 1927, the Italian government introduced important reforms which sought to transform the whole system of care towards *esposti*; and, soon after its foundation in 1925, the National Organization for the Protection of Motherhood and Infancy announced plans to commit the greater part of its resources to a trial programme aimed at extending services towards illegitimate infants and their mothers.

Appointed by Mussolini to the presidency of ONMI in 1932, Sileno Fabbri explained why the dictatorship decided to devote so much energy to this single issue. According to him, 'fascism had no choice but to confront the problem of the organization of assistance towards illegimates because the fascist state is an ethical state'. Motivated solely by 'the noblest human compassion and the highest moral purpose', the regime aspired to improve the quality and increase the quantity of the Italian race. As *esposti* suffered from especially high rates of sickness and death, Fabbri stated, improving their health and welfare had become a top priority for government. Fascism sought to do what liberalism should have done long ago, he claimed; the ultimate aim of the regime's *politica assistenziale* in this area was nothing less than the abolition of the *ruota*, the *baliatico*, and the *brefotrofio*.¹ To Fabbri and many others working within fascism's new welfare institutions, the visible expressions of church charity, the turnstile and the foundling home, symbolized the cultural and social backwardness of an Italy which

they so desperately wanted to modernize. These activists saw the campaign against illegitimacy as an opportunity to create modern, rational, and secular forms of welfare.

There was much that was progressive in new fascist laws and practice. For one thing, ONMI's centralized control of social programmes affecting what were now called '*illegittimi*' introduced an unprecedented level of state involvement in the organization of this type of assistance. For another, fascism's approach to the problem of illegitimacy exhibited some rather refreshing traits. In its early years in power, fascism seemed to possess the political will to effect radical changes in both social policy and Italian society. For this reason, the endless mention of financial constraints that make many debates and legislation from the liberal period such tedious reading no longer appeared in fascist discussions about what was to be done. For a brief interlude in the 1920s, the impossible seemed possible to those engaged in what they saw as a true social revolution.

The 'battle against illegitimacy'

On 21 June 1926, ONMI's central council approved nominations for a committee of experts to review all existing guidelines on assistance to *esposti*.² All of the members of the commission, which included the organization's vice-president, Professor Francesco Valagussa,³ the directors of some of the biggest foundlings homes in the nation, such as the old *Ospedale degli Innocenti* in Florence, and other ONMI officials, had medical backgrounds. Their training as doctors had a great impact on the final recommendations which they made to the government. Some of their strongest criticisms of the existing system focused on the persistence of ecclesiastical influence in the management of many institutions of public beneficence. One ONMI enthusiast called for a complete shake-up of the welfare establishment. Defining himself as an expert in social hygiene and medicine, Professor Giuseppe Tropeano believed that the lack of trained staff was the principal cause for the failure of Italy's welfare institutions to function efficiently: 'Look everywhere around you and it is all the same. Lawyers control the bodies overseeing hospitals, foundling homes, and charities. Priests and nuns run the institutions themselves. This is no way to build a welfare state. Fascism created ONMI in order to end this madness.'⁴

The ONMI committee investigating aid towards foundlings pointed out to the government that one of the many anomalies of the 1890 legislation was that many *enti morali* – institutions run privately by individuals, families, parishes and religious organizations – remained unregulated by government authorities, even though they were officially registered as charities and provided a public service. Although the Crispi reform theoretically gave provincial deputations and communal administrations the power to

intervene in the affairs of autonomous charities, few actually exercised their right to do so, because of the potential costs involved and the small-scale operations of many of these *enti*. The ONMI commission concluded that the state should tighten up controls in the interests of the health and welfare of the race. They argued that, as guardians of Italian *fanciulezza, bre-fotrofi* had great importance to the demographic campaign and should not be run by amateurs. Rather, they should be staffed by trained personnel specialized in '*servizi tecnico-sanitari e assistenziali*'. Public servants in fascism's welfare state should be qualified in medicine; and they should also undergo further training in one of ONMI's courses in public administration, social work, infant care or some other related field.⁵

ONMI leaders believed that their trained specialists would professionalize the administration of fascist *assistenza*, which, they asserted, should not be confused with old-fashioned *beneficenza*. Members of the commission also aimed to ensure that all foundling homes did away with bottle-feeding babies, a practice which they felt endangered the health of infants.⁶ The evidence which they had at their disposal seemed to confirm that bottle-fed babies were more prone to be weaned early onto foods that were wholly unfit for them.⁷ Doctors also directly attributed the prevalence of diarrhoea to the nutritional dangers of 'artificial methods' of feeding. In 1925, for example, the cause of death of 73.3 out of every 100 babies who died before the age of one was officially listed as diarrhoea in government sources.⁸ Statistics relating to the war years, when bottle-feeding increased for both legitimates and illegitimates, revealed too that diarrhoea was then the most frequent official cause of death for all babies under one year. As Table 8.1 shows, illegitimate and abandoned infants were more at risk from this disorder than legitimate infants were.

Table 8.1 Deaths due to diarrhoea amongst babies under one year of age

Cause	<i>The number of deaths per 1000 live births</i>					
	<i>Legitimates</i>			<i>Illegitimates*</i>		
	1916	1917	1918	1916	1917	1918
Diarrhoea**	44.6	38.9	44.9	69.8	75.0	84.5

Source: ISTAT, *Statistica delle cause delle morti per l'anno 1918* (Rome, 1924), p. xlvii.

*This figure includes *esposti*.

**This category includes gastro-enteritis.

Medical practitioners believed that all foundlings should ideally be breastfed by their own mothers. They knew that infectious illnesses of all kinds were rife in foundling homes, because of overcrowding, bottle-sharing amongst babies, and poor hygiene.⁹ They also realized that diarrhoea and gastro-enteritis were more common in the summer months

because few *brefotrofi* bothered to sterilize milk or feeding implements properly. The use of unsafe cow's milk and dirty bottles, they argued, were to blame for many of the deaths due to diarrhoea. To combat this big killer of babies, *brefotrofi* should at the very least, they argued, be compelled to employ a sufficient number of wet nurses, even if it meant paying them higher wages.¹⁰

The members of the commission knew that foundling homes had trouble finding wet nurses and monitoring the infants in their care. They also recognized that nobody really had any idea how many 'mercenary feeders' were involved in the traffic of infants from cities and towns to the countryside. Initial investigations conducted by the fascist government failed to produce enough evidence about the system of *baliatico mercenario* because many provinces failed to respond to questionnaires. The results obtained, though, did confirm the continuing importance of the trade in infants to local economies and its widespread existence in rural areas, particularly in the North and Centre, where most of the nation's *brefotrofi* were located. On the basis of these findings, ONMI urged the government to undertake more research into this occupation through the medium of ISTAT's censuses on the structure of the labour force.¹¹

The survival of wet nursing in the twentieth century seemed to be proof that parents were not taking responsibility for the care of their offspring. That so many thousands of infants were condemned to a sad existence as *figli d'ignoti* provoked anxiety amongst ONMI leaders. They could take little pleasure in the fact that the abandonment of infants remained so prevalent in Italy, despite efforts to eradicate the problem. What also worried them was that the number of illegitimates had begun to rise sharply in the 1920s: illegitimate live births totalled 48 246 in 1915; 36 884 in 1916; 32 933 in 1917; 35 930 in 1918; and 35 232 in 1919.¹² These had risen to 54 095 in 1920; 53 930 in 1921; 50 834 in 1922; 49 272 in 1923; and 53 874 in 1924.¹³ And, in the years 1922–4 alone, 36 773 (18 667 boys and 18 106 girls) illegitimate infants were deserted by their parents and placed in the care of *brefotrofi*.¹⁴ The sheer quantity of illegitimate and abandoned babies caused dismay amongst many professionals working for ONMI. They saw in these figures all the confirmation that they needed of a decay in family values in the 1920s. They also realized that such stubbornly high levels of child abandonment in Italy raised all sorts of practical problems. The 'illegitimacy question' needed to be addressed urgently, they felt, because the fascist government faced the formidable prospect of caring for a huge population of child dependents from earliest infancy to young adulthood.

Demographic statistics concerning illegitimacy provided little comfort for ONMI leaders. According to the most authoritative estimates, the illegitimacy ratio was decreasing, but it was not doing so quickly enough to satisfy the government and its policy-makers. Table 8.2 gives some sense of the erratic and gradual pace of the decline in illegitimacy.

Table 8.2 Proportion of illegitimate live births out of 100 live births

<i>Year (s)</i>	<i>Ratio</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Ratio</i>
1911–13	4.79	1920	4.67
1914	4.67	1921	4.56
1915	4.35	1922	4.51
1916	4.18	1923	4.45
1917	4.61	1924*	4.79
1918	4.85	1925**	5.00
1919	4.57	1926**	4.96

Source: G. Mortara, *La salute pubblica in Italia durante e dopo la guerra* (Bari, 1925), p. 449.

*Source: The percentage is based on absolute figures provided in ISTAT, *Annuario statistico italiano*, vol. 1 (Rome, 1927), table 4, p. 31.

**Source: 'La mortalità infantile in Italia nel 1937', *MI*, 13 (July–October, 1938), p. 315.

ONMI *dirigenti* found further cause for alarm in the diminishing rate of reclamation. Though regional variations existed, *riconoscimento* was less frequent everywhere in the kingdom in 1922–24 than it had been in 1912–13; the proportion of reclaimed to unreclaimed illegitimates was 1: 1.6 in 1912–13 and 1: 3.2 in 1922–4.¹⁵

Even more worryingly, infant mortality, though declining overall, still showed marked differentials between illegitimate and legitimate infants. On average in the period 1912–14, 25.7 out of every 100 newborns died in their first year of life; by 1922–24, this figure had dropped to 18.3.¹⁶ Available statistics, however, revealed that the life chances of legitimates and illegitimates differed enormously, as Table 8.3 demonstrates.

Table 8.3 Deaths per 100 live births

	<i>In the first month of life</i>					<i>From the age of one month to one year</i>				
	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918
Legitimate	4.4	4.5	4.2	4.7	5.3	8.2	9.8	12.0	10.4	13.1
Illegitimate*	9.6	9.3	10.0	12.7	14.7	13.1	13.8	17.0	17.7	19.7

Source: ISTAT, *Statistica delle cause delle morti per l'anno 1918* (Rome, 1924), p. xlvii.

*These figures include *esposti*.

ONMI leaders believed that some of the most significant causes of the regrettably high mortality of illegitimates were found in the limitations of existing legislation. According to the law of 20 March 1865 on local government, successive amendments to this legislation, and a recent enactment on 11 February 1923 concerning foundlings, all provinces and

communes had an obligation to assist only those illegitimates who were *esposti*. *Esposti*, moreover, were defined strictly as *fanciulli abbandonati* (abandoned babies), *figli d'ignoti* (the children of unknown persons), and *non riconosciuti* (unreclaimed foundlings).¹⁷ During and after the liberal period, local authorities retained the right to decide for themselves whether they would provide aid towards reclaimed infants and their mothers. As a result, the type and quality of care varied enormously from one municipality and province to another. What ONMI commissioners wished to do was broaden the scope of welfare by giving *riconosciuti* and their mothers a statutory entitlement to benefits. They also hoped to create a system that was uniform and comprehensive everywhere in the nation.

Only by reaching these targets, ONMI leaders argued, would fascism succeed at one of its fundamental aims, which was to reduce infant mortality in Italy. As illegitimate and abandoned babies were at greater risk of death, they maintained, the regime should prioritize this aspect of social policy. ONMI officials also tried to put pressure on government by pointing out that *illegittimi* and *esposti* also suffered alarmingly high levels of sickness. No Italian government had ever compiled data on morbidity, so the available evidence was scant. None the less, doctors claimed that illegitimates suffered more illness in early infancy than legitimates did. They based this assertion on statistics concerning mortality; these provided ample proof that illegitimates were more at risk of death due to a whole range of illnesses, including bronco-pulmonary infections, whooping-cough, and influenza. Professor Enrico Mensi, who was completing a study of the results of autopsies on neonates, believed that part of the reason why illegitimate and abandoned babies were especially vulnerable was because they were 'biologically inferior' to legitimates. He asserted that their congenital debility was directly due to the poor health and nutrition of their mothers during pregnancy. Mensi found that the frequency of prematurity at birth, for example, was higher for *illegittimi* and *esposti* than it was for legitimates. In his opinion, ONMI could increase the number of healthy pregnancies and babies each year by providing better antenatal maternity services for all unwed mothers-to-be.¹⁸

ONMI leaders agreed with Mensi. But they also anticipated that their proposals for a radical overhaul of aid towards foundlings and their mothers would provoke outrage from Catholics. To deflect criticism on moral grounds, they explained that they did not intend to offend respectable people by privileging unwed mothers. Rather, they sought to provide *madri nubili* with welfare benefits and services as an encouragement to breastfeed and reclaim their own babies. The *brefotrofio*, *baliatico*, and the *ruota* were all historical anachronisms which belonged to a bygone age, they argued. Fascism determined to abolish these because the regime was dedicated to safeguarding the interests of the child and the race. One member of ONMI's central directorate summed up the purpose of fascist reform by stating:

welfare is an ideal means of social control and change ... our experience is that in the majority of cases the fallen woman who holds her baby to her breast is redeemed through the power of maternal love and will become an honest woman once more. And in most cases maternal reclamation will lead to marriage with her seducer and the legitimization of the baby by both parents.¹⁹

ONMI officials also maintained that Italian society was ready for the unwed mother to be freed from the protective veil of Christian charity and the enforced reclusion of liberal beneficence.

The evidence which they compiled for the government seemed to support this conclusion. Based on his research at the *Istituto Provinciale degli Esposti* in Venice from 1907 to 1927, one ONMI official concluded that the majority of unwed mothers would actually prefer to keep their children. Professor Strina speculated that fear of discrimination and recrimination did figure as a factor in decisions to abandon babies. But poverty and isolation, he believed, presented far bigger obstacles to maternal reclamation. Determining a profile of the 'typical' unwed mother was difficult, the investigator revealed, because of the shifting nature of much of women's low-paid work and the 'nomadic' existence of some of these women. But, broadly, the women assisted in Venice fell predominantly into the following categories: the bulk comprised peasants who came to the city to find jobs in private homes as domestic servants or in the hotel and tourist trade as cleaners, cooks, and waitresses. A much smaller percentage of them were employed in offices; and a smaller number still worked in retail or artisanal shops, either as servants or seamstresses. Only a tiny fraction of the women were described as prostitutes. And none of them were factory workers. Those who abandoned their babies in Venice were overwhelmingly either unmarried or widowed. Although some of them were as young as thirteen, the two age groups most represented amongst Strina's cohort were 18–21 and 30–42.²⁰

The majority of the women in Strina's study do not conform to the image of the 'bastard-bearing', sexually-emancipated factory girls described by historians who posit that a modernization of sexual mores explains illegitimacy.²¹ Most of the women in Strina's investigation represented, in terms of their origins, the least 'modern' and 'permissive' of all social groups – the peasantry. These 'typical' *madri nubili* seem far more sexually vulnerable than sexually liberated. As their unplanned pregnancies confirmed, many did not have recourse to birth control. And abortion was far more frequent among urban women than among rural women.²² As *émigrées* from the countryside, they existed in a world of exploited, low-paid labour in the service sector which was often temporary or seasonal in nature.²³ Many of these women still identified themselves as peasants, even though they were engaged in urban occupations. Strina did not specify

how many of them migrated to towns precisely because they fell pregnant out-of-wedlock. We can only guess that some of them did seek the relative anonymity of urban areas, where they could more easily access foundling homes and charities providing free shelter for *madri nubili* during late pregnancy and nursing subsidies after the birth.

Other investigations gave weight to Strina's findings by suggesting that the 'illegitimacy-prone' peasant woman was also the most likely of all social groups to commit infanticide. Alfredo Spallanzani, who studied criminal records from 1891–5 and 1921–3, found that the vast majority of women who were convicted of the crime were between the ages of 21 and 30, were unmarried or widowed, and were engaged in some kind of agricultural work; domestic servants came in second; those in 'lowly' service industries came in third; and those in industrial or artisanal jobs came in last. After examining data from 1890–2 and 1928–30, Spallanzani concluded that the incidence of infanticide was far greater in rural regions like Calabria, Basilicata, and the Abruzzi than it was anywhere else in the country. He admitted, however, that the few hundred cases a year which came before the courts were a mere drop in the bucket.²⁴ Spallanzani's remarks about the difficulties of ascertaining the true prevalence of infanticide were undoubtedly correct. Police reports to the prefect of Milan from 1927 to 1935 revealed that not one single case of infanticide in the province during the whole of that period resulted in a conviction.²⁵

Child abandonment, like infanticide, were acts of desperation committed by the poorest, most vulnerable, and least educated of women. Another 'type' of the 'illegitimacy-prone' woman which Strina identified was the 'older' widow in her thirties. Earlier social investigations of this kind rarely mention widows, so it is interesting that they should now figure so prominently. Demographic data suggest that Strina's findings probably reflect a significant new phenomenon that resulted from the war. Of relevance is material relating to the incidence of illegitimacy in rural and urban settings. Although fascism depicted the city as the hotbed of moral and sexual degeneracy, illegitimacy continuously declined in urban areas in the first two decades of the century. By contrast, the countryside experienced a dramatic rise in the number of illegitimate births in the 1920s.²⁶ This was probably due to the presence of so many war widows in rural areas and the economic disincentives for them to re-marry.

Legislation dating from 1895 specified that when a war widow re-married, she lost the entirety of her husband's pension; with reform in 1916, however, she retained entitlement to the pension upon re-marriage, but could receive only a small portion of it. As part of its family policy, the fascist regime introduced new legislation on 12 July 1923 which ostensibly aimed at encouraging war widows to regularize their 'illicit unions'. This enactment, however, only gave war widows some 'compensation' for the loss of their husbands' pensions upon re-marriage. And the legislation

restricted entitlement by numerous conditions. At the very most, a war widow could get an annuity for a term of seven years after her re-marriage; but she had to be under 25 years of age at the time of her re-marriage to qualify for this. The amount of the annuity depended upon the age of the woman and other qualifications. Therefore, a war widow over 40 received the indemnity for three years, but only if she had children from her previous marriage. Whether or not she was destitute or had children, the woman over 50 who remarried received absolutely nothing at all. The reasoning behind giving younger women a larger annuity was that they were the most valuable from a racial point of view because they had many potentially reproductive years ahead of them. As she could not procreate, the older woman was inconsequential to the regime. Even though the Association of Mothers and Widows of the War Dead repeatedly pointed out to the government that this legislation was too stingy to act as any kind of demographic inducement, the regime refused to budge.²⁷

With little financial incentive to re-marry provided by the government, many widows undoubtedly chose to engage in what contemporaries regarded as 'illicit' or 'irregular' unions. These unconventional family formations were not entirely new; contemporaries realized that courtship customs in parts of rural Italy permitted premarital cohabitation. They also recognized that in some cities, like Milan, working-class men and women occasionally lived together before marriage. These arrangements were seen by contemporaries as mainly child-free transitional phases prior to marriage. What struck observers as being novel, however, was the increasing prevalence of this kind of pronounced sexual and social non-conformity. There also seemed to be a growth in the proportions of women becoming mothers while cohabitating. The first to study this trend was Giorgio Mortara, a distinguished statistician based at Messina and then Rome University from 1909 to 1938.²⁸ In 1911, Mortara published research into prenuptial pregnancies which revealed, for example, that as many as one in every six brides in Florence was pregnant at the time of her marriage. Mortara took this as evidence of the fact that Italians still felt that the 'marriage promise' was binding. Public morality was secure for the time being, he concluded, because marriage was still regarded as the norm by most Italians. But Mortara also believed that living together as a prelude to or as an alternative to marriage was on the increase. He attributed the rise of this pernicious form of 'concubinage' to the growing influence of socialist ideas about 'free love'. Greater permissiveness should be discouraged, Mortara argued, because it gave men sexual freedom with no responsibility. Men could not commit without force, so women had a duty to avoid premarital unions, because these tended to be short-lived.²⁹

The war proved to be a major catalyst of social change. By the 1920s, Mortara was beginning to feel as if public morals had irrevocably declined. During the war years, the proportion of abandoned infants, he lamented,

grew from just under 40 to well over 70 per cent of all illegitimates. An increase in casual sex amongst the unrestrained youth of Italy accounted for the rise in levels of parental desertion, Mortara believed. In the prewar period, he maintained, 'irregular unions' tended to be more stable. But the war increased opportunities for occasional sex and ephemeral relationships. The transformations accompanying mobilization – conscription, the deaths and disappearance of soldiers, rural flight to the cities – destroyed traditional values and undermined family and community. Demobilization accelerated processes of social and sexual flux and instability. In the postwar period, the rise in 'extra-legal forms of copulation', such as non-marital cohabitation and premarital sex, continued. The staggered return of troops from the front and the flooding of the countryside with veterans prolonged the sexual euphoria which gripped Italy after 1918. Mortara had become absolutely convinced that postwar Italy was a nation profoundly endangered by immorality and promiscuity.³⁰

The temporary, but pronounced increase in nuptiality – or marriage probability – in the 1920s apparently did not halt the rise in *unioni libere*.³¹ The chief culprits, according to observers like Mortara, were war widows who had no compelling reason to conform by re-marrying. Mortara and his contemporaries believed that these unions were a major source of illegitimacy because they were unstable by nature. The reasoning behind this notion was found in attitudes about masculinity. Mortara and others maintained that the legal constraint of the marriage contract helped to preserve the institution of the family; men with no compulsion, they assumed, would 'naturally' prefer to abandon partners who became pregnant out of wedlock. Government grew so worried about the apparently rising incidence of cohabitation amongst unmarried couples that it decided to investigate the problem. The 1931 census was the first to attempt to calculate the number of such unions. According to its findings, about 204 000 unmarried couples lived together and these 'irregular families' represented 2.2 per cent of all Italian families.³²

As part of their campaign against illegitimacy, ONMI leaders determined to combat the rise in extra-marital cohabitation by encouraging couples to 'regularize' their unions through marriage. Though sexual morality may have changed, they argued, attitudes towards illegitimacy remained the same. The great shame of being unmarried and pregnant still ruined the lives of many women. And, if lucky enough to reach adulthood, the poor foundling could never escape being a *figlio d'ignoto* in a society where family meant everything. Though better for the child in most cases, legitimation, they argued, should not become the sole objective of fascist welfare reforms. Whether or not they were born within or outside a registered marriage, and whether they ended up being raised within or outside a conventional family, all children had an equal right to love and care.³³

The ONMI committee responsible for investigating the problem of illegitimacy proposed some reforms, which, if implemented properly, promised to transform the entire system of social assistance towards foundlings. Very importantly, they resolved to take control of this service from local authorities and give it to ONMI officials at central headquarters and in the provincial federations. Valagussa and his colleagues based this recommendation on their recognition of what they considered to be the 'complete inability of provincial and communal governments to provide a decent standard of assistance towards illegitimates'. In their opinion, provincial and municipal authorities had failed utterly in their duty of care towards *esposti* for no other reason than the fact that 'financial criteria alone' had guided their every move and decision ever since the 1865 legislation. Because fascism had a high moral purpose, ONMI leaders argued, its social policy was motivated only by the desire to protect infants. They urged the regime to make good its promise to enact a social revolution by unleashing the full regulatory powers of its flagship welfare organization – ONMI.³⁴

They argued that only a noncorrupt, professionalized administrative agency like ONMI could possibly take on the awesome task of improving such a decrepid old charitable system as that based on the medieval *brefotrofi*. They justified this claim by showing Mussolini and other high-ranking government officials the results of foundling home inspections which they had completed within the first six months of ONMI's existence. The speed with which ONMI leaders acted on this matter reflected just how much a priority this single issue was for the organization. The 1926 inquiry uncovered just how little the nation's foundling homes had changed since the 1900 inquest. ONMI personnel inspected 96 out of a total of 121 foundling homes. Only 25 of these establishments were deemed to be providing an 'adequate' level of care; 32 were found to be subjecting the infants in their care to conditions of such poor quality that they endangered lives; 7 institutions were judged to be so badly maintained that they were forcibly closed. Inspections also revealed that the life chances of foundlings had hardly improved since the start of the century. Some of the worst institutions in the country had unacceptably high levels of mortality amongst its infants. At the one in Senigallia, for example, all of the *lattanti* under one year of age that were 'assisted' in 1924 had died before their first birthday. Even some of the better homes had deathrates of between 20 and 50 per cent for first-years in their care.³⁵

Because many foundling homes obstructed efforts to search premises and sequester records, ONMI investigators concluded that their directors had much to hide. They also suspected that farmed-out infants suffered very high mortality since so few *brefotrofi* bothered to keep checks on wet nurses through medical certification or home visits. And inspectors discovered too that many *rota boxes* still remained open in 1926, despite the *regolamento*

generale of 16 December 1923, which formally abolished the archaic device. This new regulation, ONMI officials declared, had great symbolic significance because it marked the end of an old era and the beginning of a new one. They expressed horror at the discovery that the enactment had had so little impact in some areas in the deep South.³⁶

One government inspector recorded his personal impressions of the state of the nation's foundling homes. Head of ONMI's technical services division, and professor of experimental hygiene, Guido D'Ormeo had responsibility for coordinating the inspections. He also personally inspected many of the nation's smaller *brefotrofi*, the majority of which were still run privately. It was precisely in rural areas and small towns, he argued, that ONMI faced enormous obstacles and challenges. Ever since Crispi's reform of 1890, the state had been trying unsuccessfully to laicize the administrative staff of charitable institutions. D'Ormeo was amazed to discover in the course of his travels that 'in many foundling homes we visited, no lay personnel exists at all'.³⁷

'The person in charge', D'Ormeo stated, 'is usually a mother superior of some sisterhood of nuns', and she, though probably committed to her job, 'has no specialist training or personal experience in childcare'. These 'old dears', he explained, were the first to admit that they were unqualified for the job. When asked about how she managed without any knowledge of 'puericulture, hygiene, or neonatal medicine', one such '*brave suora*' confessed to D'Ormeo that she relied on the advice of the institution's cleaner who, she said, 'knows about babies because she is a mother'. Inspectors inquired about whether any doctors ever visited. One nun at another home reported that there was a doctor who came around occasionally, but he was over 70 years old and could no longer climb the stairs easily; his visits were very irregular. The general practitioner affiliated to another institution complained to ONMI officials that he had taken a course in pediatrics and wanted to improve standards of care. However, he found the nuns unresponsive to his recommendations: 'They smile at me when I make suggestions, but nothing ever changes.' 'I'm not the director; the mother superior is.' 'So what am I supposed to do,' the doctor asked D'Ormeo.³⁸

D'Ormeo asked a lay person in charge of another *brefotrofia* how she ever managed to get appointed to the position. According to D'Ormeo, her response to the question was: 'I am a person of some importance. My father was a lawyer. Though I have no regrets about it, I never married. I never had to work because that would have been undignified for a woman like me.' Not concerned to hide his disapproval, D'Ormeo described her as a 'rumpled old witch' who showed no regard for the infants in her care. 'It is because of people like this,' D'Ormeo wrote, 'that babies die for lack of loving and effective care.' Some institutions were run properly, with the results that infant mortality for internal and external infants was low. But

these were the exceptions, as far as D'Ormeo was concerned. He deplored what he perceived to be the total amateurishness, corruption, and inefficiency of private charity.³⁹

In order to 'save the race's tender buds', fascism had to change how foundling homes functioned internally and externally, D'Ormeo argued. The ultimate aim of the regime was the abolition not just of the *ruota*, but also of the *brefotrofio*. These medieval relics did not belong to the modern age. To accomplish this revolution in welfare practice the regime had first to complete a revolution in social values. Fascism had to do nothing less than transform Italian society and culture itself by changing attitudes towards illegitimacy. Only then would the wretched *figlio d'ignoti* disappear completely. The time for 'moral absolutism' of the Christian variety had long gone, D'Ormeo declared. And liberalism's old regime of 'punishment' was over. Unwed motherhood was not sinful, but needlessly high infant mortality was. To combat some of the biggest preventable causes of infant deaths – institutionalized care, wet nursing, and 'artificial' methods of feeding – Italians just had to accept pragmatically that unwed mothers deserved help.⁴⁰

Other public welfare professionals agreed that big changes were necessary to safeguard the interests of the child. Sileno Fabbri contended that the 'social conscience of the people' had 'evolved' to such an extent that Italians now believed that the foundling home system had to be replaced by a more modern form of assistance. 'All the civilized nations of the world', he stated, 'have defined this new organization of welfare as social services.' By offering the unwed mother a comprehensive and integrated system of '*servizi sociali*', fascism could do much to reduce levels of infant abandonment and mortality. According to Fabbri, the regime was determined to encourage the acceptance of new social attitudes and practices because of the political imperative of demographic increment: to its credit, he argued, fascism recognized that the force and prosperity of the nation depended on the quantity and quality of all Italian children. But politics alone, Fabbri reckoned, did not explain why fascism chose to combat illegitimacy. In fascist Italy, social policy had become an agent of positive social change. Fabbri asked himself what was novel about fascism's response to the problem of illegitimacy. Under the old regime of private charity, he stated, the Church cruelly separated the unwed mother from her infant and eliminated every possibility of creating families. Abandonment in epic proportions was the inevitable outcome of the survival of a medieval system which shrouded 'illicit' pregnancies in shame and secrecy. Liberalism had tried to coerce *madri nubili* into breastfeeding their babies, but provided only temporary and limited financial support as an inducement. In the past, the stigma attached to *maternità illegittima* was inescapable. But in the new order, he promised, *maternità illegittima* would

be transformed into *maternità libera* as more unmarried mothers chose freely to keep their children.⁴¹

Statutory assistance at last: the 1927 legislation

Even in such a rigidly Catholic and conformist society, which placed a premium upon the 'legitimate and natural family', the unwed mother, ONMI leaders argued, should be encouraged, but not forced, to keep her baby. They reasoned that more *donne-madri* would be willing and able to rear healthy children for the race if they were given extensive state support from the beginning of their pregnancies to long after the birth of their babies. By centralizing the control of services towards foundlings, they believed, the regime would be better able to effect profoundly radical social and institutional changes. But how did the fascist dictatorship respond to the proposals drafted by the ONMI commission?

ONMI leaders expressed delight when the government introduced new legislation so quickly. On 8 May 1927, the regime promulgated a royal decree law whose preamble stated that the government, 'having recognized the absolute and urgent necessity of introducing new dispositions for the organization of services towards abandoned illegitimate babies and those illegitimate babies under risk of abandonment', has decided to create a 'more rational welfare system'.⁴² The regime's supporters in ONMI believed that the enactment was fascism's great reform act. In their opinion, fascism had succeeded in doing within only a few years of attaining power what many liberal administrations had failed to do in over half a century of governance. This law, they argued, completed a long-standing agenda for statutory aid towards illegitimates and set the guidelines for the creation of a uniform and national system of social provision.⁴³ Was the legislation really that far-reaching and progressive in design?

In many respects, the 1927 royal decree-law was a landmark piece of legislation. It took a completely innovative approach to the problem of welfare organization by introducing an unprecedentedly high degree of central state involvement in the administration of social programmes. Provincial governments would still administer aid for foundlings, by managing *brefotrofi* and *baliatico* services, but their budgets, targets, and performance would now be supervised by ONMI. The purpose of this structural change was to make governments at the provincial and communal levels totally accountable to a regulatory agency. The enactment sought to foster the coordination of policy objectives nationwide by establishing firm guidelines on the types of services that should be made available everywhere. Article 1, for example, specified that subsidies to unwed mothers who breastfed their infants should be introduced in every province in the country. Furthermore, the article stipulated that the provision of these pre-

miums should be changed from mere discretionary expenditures to fixed and large portions of provincial budgets; all nursing mothers should be paid an 'adequate' benefit, the article emphasized.⁴⁴

Promulgated on 29 December 1927, guidelines on the execution of the May royal decree-law elaborated on the importance of providing substantial cash payments to mothers. Article 3 of the December royal decree stated that administrators should consider the full cost of food, clothing, and housing for mother and baby when determining the size of the maternal subsidy.⁴⁵ The profession of poverty by provinces, and the maladministration of finances, these rulings stressed, would no longer be tolerated as acceptable excuses for the delivery of a low standard of care towards illegitimates and their mothers.⁴⁶

The law also considerably expanded the scope of welfare provision. The most progressive and original aspects of the legislation emanated from article 4, which listed the categories of illegitimate infants who now qualified for public assistance. Not surprisingly, these included *fanciulli abbandonati* and *figli di ignoti*. Most momentously, however, the law gave 'children born of an illegitimate union who are reclaimed by their mother' a statutory right to aid.⁴⁷ This single reform upturned a whole system of obligatory aid that had been devised and perpetuated through various scattered bits of legislation introduced during the liberal period. While previous regulations had restricted eligibility for public beneficence to *esposti* alone, this enactment granted *ricognosciuti* and their mothers entitlement to public welfare.

Moreover, the 1927 royal decree-law shifted the institutional focus of aid from the *brefotrofio* to ONMI. In an effort to move towards the gradual abolition of the foundling home, programmes directed at decreasing levels of infant abandonment would now be given top priority in policy directives. Reflecting the importance attached to this aspect of fascism's campaign against illegitimacy, ONMI, not local government, was held responsible for administering aid to reclaimed infants and developing appropriate social services for them and their mothers. Fascism's new and expanded welfare system called for a multifaceted approach to the problem of illegitimacy; the structure established by the 1927 reform reflected a shift in emphasis away from conventional forms of relief. Provincial governments would continue to minister to foundlings in a traditional but updated sort of way, through the *baliatico* and the *brefotrofio*, while ONMI would experiment with more modern kinds of social services aimed at *ricognosciuti* and their mothers.

According to the 1927 reform, reaching out to *madri nubili* would become a major goal for welfare administrators. Making social services more easily accessible and responsive to their clients was highlighted as the means to that end. ONMI's own founding statute of 10 December 1925 stipulated that assistance to mothers should be granted by all health and welfare agencies without regard to the place of birth, the age, or the character of

the client. Neither could the number of their preceding pregnancies or the conditions of any of their other children be taken into consideration in assessing the applicants' personal worthiness for benefits or aid of any kind.⁴⁸ The 1927 legislation maintained this commitment to abolishing some of the bureaucratic rigidities in the existing system and to liberating women from the regime of disclosure and documentation imposed by liberalism. A woman's suitability for aid, article 5 specified, should be based only on her willingness to be a mother to her child. Foundling homes, public hospitals, and any other institutions coming into contact with an unwed mother or an illegitimate child would no longer be able to refuse assistance because of insufficient proof of poverty, domicile, or civil status.⁴⁹ Significantly, this reform of procedure aimed at expanding access to welfare and facilitating its delivery to the needy.

Legislators hoped that an admissions process which required little by way of formal petitioning for help or lengthy screening of applicants would encourage maternal reclamation by keeping women in contact with authorities and their babies. Conceived along these lines, article 4 specified that, in provinces with sufficient resources, assistance should begin in early pregnancy. Preferably, this should be sometime during the second trimester.⁵⁰ Bringing women into the welfare system as soon as possible, it was felt, increased the odds that they would have healthy pregnancies and babies. Speedy and early access to aid also maximized opportunities for ONMI and other responsible agencies to undertake what they repeatedly called the 'gentle work of persuasion'; by providing positive support and encouragement, as well as individual attention, officials hoped to be able to convince *madri nubili* that their best option was to keep their babies. This process could best be accomplished through sustained and continuous contact with recipients. To create and strengthen the bonds between mother and baby, the enactment also required that institutions keep up-to-date case notes on *abbandonati*, vital information from which could be made available to their mothers, on request. Mothers who initially reclaimed and then abandoned their babies should also be given visitation rights to their children in care because they might, one day, change their minds.⁵¹

The law marked a significant turning-point in many respects. But it also contained some major weaknesses which, no doubt, would make implementation no easy task. The main shortcomings of the May 1927 enactment arose from guidelines covering financial arrangements. According to the first article of the law, the provinces and municipalities together would, as in the past, contribute to the costs of assistance towards foundlings.⁵² The 1927 law introduced only two minor amendments to the procedure which had been put into place by local government acts and article 80 of Crispi's 1890 reform. Whereas provincial governments had previously reviewed the yearly accounts of welfare institutions before reimbursing

them, they were now required to send funds in advance of each fiscal year. This change had the potential to benefit those institutions with less capital from voluntary sources. In the past, foundling homes and other establishments also had to settle accounts individually with each and every commune that they served. The 1927 legislation devolved that responsibility onto provincial governments, who themselves would now have to collect contributions from communes. These changes simplified things considerably, but they provided no guarantee that provinces and municipalities would change their old ways. Over the course of decades, many disputes had arisen between provincial and communal governments about how much they should each pay towards the provision of so-called 'obligatory' aid to *esposti*. Provinces and municipalities typically felt so overburdened with more essential claims on their monies that they spent little on this service. The chief victims of the chronic underfunding of public beneficence were the infants who were subjected to a wholly inadequate level of assistance.

For example, during the course of the 1926 inspections, ONMI officials came to the opinion that the *Brefotrofio di Roma* failed utterly in its duty of care; the foundling home's administrators were notified that the institution was to be put on ONMI's 'blacklist' because it provided a 'wholly defective and lax service towards abandoned babies'. ONMI had the power to force closure, so the governors of the foundling home set out to explain themselves and to initiate improvements. President of the governing body of that institution from 1923, Aristide Montani compiled an official report which held the system of local government funding to account for many of the home's deficiencies. In particular, he highlighted the effects of haggling and penny-pinching by municipalities and provinces. He wrote that when he assumed office in 1923 'almost all the communes in the district, and the provincial administration too, were in arrears in their payments to us'; 'as many as forty-seven communes were in debt to us, two had not paid their contributions in over seventeen years, and eleven had not done so in more than ten years'. In December 1923, the province and the communes together owed the foundling home well over 984 thousand *lire* in back payments. Montani complained that this level of indebtedness made the functioning of the institution 'almost impossible', especially because the foundling home had only one other source of income, apart from government contributions. It received an annual donation of 290 thousand *lire* from the foundation of the old *Santo Spirito* hospital, from which it had seceded. Over the years, Montani stated, this benefice, though still vital, had 'decreased in value because of the ever growing expense of social assistance'. Despite his most strenuous efforts to bring local governments to task, they still owed him a great deal of money in 1926. Collecting outstanding subsidies from the province had proven especially difficult,

Montani noted, and 'continuing defaults and delays have seriously compromised the running of this foundling home in the three years from 1923 to 1926'.⁵³

Why lawmakers in 1927 should expect local governments to improve on past performance is a bit of a mystery. Under more pressure than ever to provide modern, efficient, and comprehensive social services, local governments would undoubtedly struggle to meet fascism's exacting demands. The 1927 legislation did permit provincial administrations to request reimbursement from ONMI when they assisted reclaimed infants. According to articles in both the May law and its regulation, ONMI would issue back payments to provincial governments twice a year in December and July. But provincial governments had to submit their accounts to ONMI for review and approval. And ONMI could withhold repayments because of overspending or misallocation of resources.⁵⁴ It seems that these budgeting arrangements gave no revenue incentive to those local authorities who took a miserly approach. Nor did these measures give any guarantee to more extravagant governments that ONMI would help them in the end to discharge heavy debts. Even in a fascist dictatorship with an ambitious social agenda, fiscal constraints could quite easily continue to mar welfare development.

Notwithstanding its weaknesses, the 1927 legislation changed the terms of illegitimacy policy to the betterment of unmarried mothers. The strong position on maternity searches was especially impressive. Article 9 of the May royal decree-law did grant foundling homes and the agencies responsible for finding wet nurses the right to conduct 'reserved investigations to seek out the mother of an abandoned baby, with the purpose of procuring for the child, when possible, maternal breastfeeding and maternal reclamation'. Doctors and midwives were also legally bound to co-operate with competent authorities by divulging any information they had about a child's provenance. The article made mention of the illegality of a false registration of civil status and the harsh penalties for such crimes in article 210 of the penal code. After extracting a 'declaration of maternity' from the unwed mother, foundling homes were now legally empowered to induce her to nurse and reclaim her infant.⁵⁵ In contrast to the tacit endorsement offered by liberal governments, these provisions gave formal sanction to a practice which fascist welfare professionals preferred to call 'gentle persuasion'. However, it would be wrong to see this change as an attempt to worsen the plight of *madri nubili*; for the first time ever, this law set very strict and clear limits to the exercise of these powers by 'receiving institutions'.

The law clearly sided with the interests of the woman and child against the foundling home. It promised to punish severely those *brefotrofi* which coerced or harassed women in any way; it also specified that foundling homes should follow an 'open-door' admissions policy. No longer would they be able to deprive infants of their 'absolute' right to assistance by contesting their eligibility. Strict observance of article 376 of the civil code was

also demanded of all public and private authorities that came into contact with *madri nubili*; maternity hospitals, maternal shelters, and foundling homes now had to respect a woman's right to secrecy. The enactment conferred upon women a statutory right to privacy, consent, and confidentiality in all proceedings affecting her and her child. It also gave women the right to refuse to agree to a formal declaration of motherhood, a notarized act of reclamation, or an official legitimization decree.⁵⁶ In theory at least, these provisions afforded women a large measure of protection from undue pressure or unwanted exposure. Those responsible for interpreting and implementing the law explained why they supported the legislation's positive bias towards women and children.

The position of ONMI officials was unequivocal. In their estimation, the coercion of women and the maltreatment of infants had to end immediately because they seriously jeopardized the regime's demographic campaign. An official circular sent by ONMI's central headquarters to all ONMI provincial leaders, all directors of foundling homes, all heads of provincial governments and all prefects in the kingdom clarified the guidelines contained in the new legislation. The fascist reform of 1927, this stated, had 'finally substituted the anachronistic system of the *ruota* with a new arrangement of direct presentation of the infant by the mother'. This change, however, did not mean that women were to be forced to become mothers. 'Given the sentiments and customs still prevailing in most of the nation', secrecy had to be maintained when the mother's best interests and personal welfare were at stake. When anyone other than the mother requested public assistance for an illegitimate baby, welfare authorities could not conduct maternity searches. They could question the person presenting the baby, but these interrogations had to be conducted with the utmost 'caution' and 'delicacy'. Some foundling homes, the circular stated, did not admit a baby, even when he or she was registered as a *figlio d'ignoti*, unless the mother herself presented the child. Others still required as a condition of aid that the *madre nubile* help pay for the cost of wet nursing or agree to nurse the infant herself for a specified period. In some institutions, attempts to ascertain the identity of the mothers of the children assisted were conducted 'without any guarantee of privacy'. And in other establishments, the officials in charge treated women in an unacceptably 'brusque and uncivil manner' in order to procure *riconoscimento* or *allattamento materno*. These 'irregularities' had become so commonplace that many foundling homes actually made provision for them in their governing statutes. The 1927 reform made all these infractions illegal, the document warned, and those who violated the new rulings would be sanctioned severely.⁵⁷

ONMI leaders stressed that the regime did not want to make unwed motherhood compulsory. A coercive policy of this nature would do little to excite popular support for the government. And, as the circular stated,

coercion cost the race dearly by leaving women with few options other than 'neomalthusian, moral, and criminal offences': in order to minimize abortion, abandonment, and infanticide, women had to be encouraged and supported. Fascism had resolved to create a new social order in which *madri nubili* were to be given rights, rewards, and benefits. ONMI officials explained to all competent authorities that the 'collaboration of unwed mothers' with fascism's campaign to combat abandonment was 'absolutely indispensable' to its future success.⁵⁸

Along with the term *beneficenza*, the words *ignoto* and *esposto* disappeared from the language of welfare used by the regime and its supporters. The 1923 and 1927 reforms did not do away with the dreaded *figlio/figlia d' ignoto* (or, less frequently, *di ignoto*) *d' ignota*, or *d' ignoti* in legal documents, but by the late 1920s the regime had done much to grant equal social rights to the many thousands of infants born outside wedlock each year. The new legislation also went some way towards challenging traditional attitudes and practices which adversely affected unwed mothers. Unlike their liberal predecessors, or their Nazi counterparts in Germany,⁵⁹ welfare reformers in fascist Italy seemed determined to give unmarried pregnant women a host of positive incentives to become good mothers of the race. What might not have been so apparent to ONMI leaders in 1927, however, was that promulgating legislation was one thing, and implementing it was quite another.

9

From Public Beneficence to Public Welfare: The Roman Experiment, 1927–1938

ONMI began to implement the new legislation and policy towards illegitimates, *riconosciuti*, and their mothers in August 1927. ONMI's president, Professor Gian Alberto Blanc, and director-general, Doctor Attilio Lo Monaco, decided to launch a pilot scheme in Rome as a model for the other 91 provincial federations. With the approval of Mussolini and ONMI's national leaders, Professor Sante De Sanctis, the renowned psychiatrist who presided over the organization's provincial federation in Rome, placed the Contessa Daisy di Robilant in charge of this experimental social programme. In some ways, the countess' rise to a position of such prominence was hardly surprising. She had already gained entry into ONMI's emergent welfare bureaucracy by being appointed to the vice-presidency of the organization's newly established provincial federation in Rome in November 1926.¹ With over twenty years of concrete experience in the field of maternal and infant welfare provision, Daisy di Robilant undoubtedly possessed the right credentials for the job as overseer of this important project which, officials hoped, would successfully showcase the pioneering and progressive spirit of fascism.

The countess owed her *entrée* into public service under fascism to her aristocratic lineage, the sense of responsibility and duty that accompanied it, and the opportunities which it brought for noblewomen to engage in a peculiarly female kind of civic activism and social reformism that took the form of devotion to good works. The di Robilant family had long been engaged in the religious, social, and political leadership first of Piedmont and then of Italy.² It counted amongst its members such grandees as Count Carlo di Robilant, who had served Italy from 1849 to 1887, first as a general in the army, then as an ambassador to Vienna, and finally as a foreign minister.³ Full of strong social and moral convictions, the countess dedicated herself tirelessly to philanthropy, benefaction, and charity. Most relevant to her future work for ONMI, she had become president of Rome's newly founded Mother's Aid Society (*Opera di Assistenza alla Maternità ed all'Infanzia Illegittima o Bisognosa*) in 1918. *Assistenza Materna* provided

expectant and nursing unwed mothers who were homeless or poor with free food and lodging, as well as medical and social assistance. Under her successful guardianship, this non-profit-making organization acquired royal patronage and legal recognition as an *ente morale* in 1923. The countess very generously supported the charity with her time and her money. When fascism attained power, the society ran a shelter (*albergo materno*) in Via Vittorio Amedeo that was named after one of its founders, Olga Modigliani.⁴ The countess worked closely with the Catholic clergy who backed her project by placing nuns from the Roselia Sisterhood in charge of residents at the mother's refuge.⁵ The Mother's Aid Society also funded the Princess Maria Pia of Savoy medical centre (*consultorio*) on the same site and a refectory (*refettorio materno*) in Via Bixio. Managed by medical personnel paid by the charity, and volunteers, who were local women of mostly middle-class status, these institutions aimed at giving needy *madri nubili* meaningful and continuous forms of aid as an encouragement to maternal reclamation.⁶

When Daisy di Robilant took command of the illegitimacy programme in Rome, her brief was to expand the scope and activities of her thriving *Assistenza Materna*; the hope was that an extended network of services and facilities throughout the city and the province of Rome would become the institutional foundation for a new, publicly controlled *Centro Illegittimi* whose headquarters were to be located at the offices of ONMI's provincial federation. ONMI officials envisioned that the centre would realize the highest aims of fascist policy by providing the comprehensive and integrated types of social assistance that would eventually render the *brefotrofio* obsolete. In effect, ONMI absorbed the countess's charity and its agencies and utilized these as the basis for a revamped system of *servizi sociali* under its direction. This feat of co-optation and assimilation showed to what extent fascism was prepared to capitalize on achievements in a field of private charitable activity that was dominated by women providers with a commitment to care for mothers and children. Despite the regime's desire to reconstruct and reorganize the institutions created by women like Daisy di Robilant, organizations like her Mother's Aid Society still served as sources and models for fascist forms of public welfare.

That the fascist state went into partnership with the private sector and its personnel is significant. In reforming charitable institutions catering to mothers and children, and building new kinds of state-run social services too, fascism relied on the expertise and initiative of many women who, in fascism's otherwise male-dominated technocracy, would be considered outsiders and amateurs – outsiders because of their sex and amateurs because they were not bureaucrats or professionals. Though the Countess di Robilant and others like her were passionately committed to their charitable endeavours, they worked on a voluntary basis and had not gained experience in government work before fascism. Their lack of qualifications, if

not credentials, reflected the extreme paucity of career opportunities for women under Italian liberalism. Since gender roles in liberal Italy were so highly circumscribed,⁷ and all but a very few women were denied the chance to attain professional qualifications and fulfilment, charity work provided a vital egress from stifling domesticity and rendered female social action in the public sphere possible.⁸ Italy differed from countries like Britain and Germany, where the early growth of a state-run welfare bureaucracy between 1880 and 1920 led to a huge expansion in the so-called caring professions, such as social work, health visiting, and nursing, which were dominated by mainly middle-class women.⁹ Primary school teaching remained the major field of public service employment available to women throughout the liberal period.¹⁰ One of the ironies of such a determinedly anti-feminist force as the fascist dictatorship was that its efforts to improve maternal and infant welfare extended opportunities to women to pursue careers in public health and welfare work and administration which conferred professional status and authority.

In some respects, opportunities for women to engage in socially productive and personally rewarding public service work were beginning to open up during the fascist period, though the regime could take credit for only some of these advances. A big increase in the number of nuns occurred as women's marriage prospects shrank in the 1920s and the Catholic Church embarked upon a 'reconquest' of Italian society by encouraging charity and piety through its female and youth lay organizations.¹¹ While groups like the *Unione delle Donne Cattoliche* (the Union of Catholic Women) and *La Gioventù Femminile Cattolica* (Catholic Female Youth Organization) increased their membership in the 1920s, sisterhoods providing nurses for civil hospitals and other institutions also grew and flourished.¹² Social work arose relatively belatedly in Italy, by European standards, and fascism was largely responsible for this development. In the second half of the 1920s, the dictatorship began to pioneer efforts to professionalize social work by setting standards of practice and establishing training schemes. ONMI took a leading role in this drive. In 1933, the organization began to run courses in Rome and Milan that recruited men with a degree in law or in some other related field to be project directors; women with a nursing diploma or relevant voluntary experience, either with the Italian Red Cross or some other association, were welcome to train to be social work 'assistants'.¹³

Other significant changes in public health and welfare work occurred which affected women directly. The fascist government attempted to gain the complicity of midwives in its efforts to reduce the number of abortions and birth-related maternal and infant deaths. Appointed in April 1926, a commission under the leadership of Professor Cesare Micheli, who directed Rome's maternity hospital and served as a sub-commissar to ONMI's Roman federation, decided to increase the already considerable control of obstetricians over *levatrici* that had been established during the liberal

period. New regulations restricted the number and kinds of procedures which midwives could legally do without an attendant physician. And, just as importantly, the code told midwives that they could not terminate a pregnancy for any reason, even for the permissible one of trying to save the life of a woman; only doctors could carry out emergency, medically-assisted abortions. Furthermore, only doctors were allowed to fill in an official *denuncia di aborto* form which gave details of how and why a pregnancy ended prematurely. And it warned them that they would be suspected of performing illegal abortions if they failed to notify a doctor of any 'spontaneous miscarriage'.¹⁴ Despite the new restrictions on practice and the pressures to comply which accompanied fascist reforms,¹⁵ midwifery underwent a process of professionalization in the 1920s and 1930s which resulted in the conferment of increased prestige, pay, and status upon practitioners. Fascism dispensed these rewards because midwives played such a pivotal role in its population policy; it was felt that since midwives had privileged access to the intimate world of fertility, reproduction, and family life, they could be used to extend the reach of the watchful eye of the state. Because of its commitment to improvements in public health, and its desire to monitor and influence people's behaviour, fascism also prioritized the goal of creating a system of health visiting. In the fascist schema, the proposed army of female health visitors would permit the state to infiltrate and observe the private domain of the working-class. Mobilizing support through party and state agencies at the local level, and in particular through the *fasci femminili*, whose activities were increasingly channelled in the direction of welfare and propaganda,¹⁶ the regime tried very hard, - but only partially succeeded in its attempts to mobilize a female corps of *assistenti sociali*.¹⁷

It would be wrong to dismiss the work which women midwives, social workers, and health visitors did as mere '*assistentzialismo*'.¹⁸ This interpretation, mistakenly I believe, sees 'the social' as being separate from and, therefore, peripheral and inferior to the 'political' sphere.¹⁹ For fascism and, indeed, for all regimes which pursue welfare policies, *assistenza* was a form of *politica* which was central to its ideology and practice. Moreover, fascism's mobilization of a female army of various *assistenti sociali* was not simply the extension of the traditional female role of women as mothers onto society or the projection of womanly qualities of care into the public sphere. The women who answered fascism's call to do patriotic service for the nation's mothers and children became actively involved in the consolidation of the regime and in a process of state-building.²⁰

Throughout the nation, many women like Daisy di Robilant were also making substantial contributions to fascism's 'social revolution' by serving as leaders of ONMI's provincial *consigli direttivi* and its communal *comitati di patronato*. Male doctors, lawyers, accountants and professors dominated these boards, and routinely held the top jobs as presidents and vice-

presidents. But, by gaining entry into positions of leadership, many elite women enjoyed a unique opportunity to have power and influence over fascist social policy.²¹ Patronage of charities that could be useful to fascism gave women the most common means of access to high-ranking administrative posts within ONMI. The links between privilege and piety had long been strong, so many of those women whom fascism enlisted in its battle to protect Italian motherhood and infancy were drawn from the Catholic nobility, which had a tradition of involvement in good causes. These aristocratic Italian women who were active in the great charitable enterprise were not mere 'do-gooders', however.

Philanthropy and charity were more than just forms of religious and personal expression for upper-class women; in the modern period, they became socially acceptable outlets for serious and committed activism and reformism which sometimes, as in the case of Daisy di Robilant, took feminism (albeit a moderate variety of it) as inspiration.²² Benefaction also functioned as a meaningful vocation and a career substitute in a society which formally and informally barred even female graduates from paid employment in most professions. Fascism seemed to be fulfilling at least some of the aspirations of these women to be involved in a state-organized project aimed at creating a better society.

The Countess Bice Brusati Pedotti is a good example in this regard.²³ In 1926, Mussolini approved her appointment to ONMI's highest administrative body, the *consiglio centrale*. Donna Isabella Borghese also took up a post on this central council at the same time. Both these women had already been named 'perpetual partners' (*soci perpetui*) of ONMI because they had made huge donations to the organization in its first year. ONMI's other early *soci perpetui* included the Contessa Maria Gazzelli, the Duchess Ruffo di Guardialombarda, and the Contessa Daisy di Robilant.²⁴ The Countess Bice Brusati Pedotti's generosity towards the government's new welfare institution counted a great deal to the Duce, but so too did her reputation as one of the nation's most dedicated welfare workers in the private sector.

At the time of her appointment to ONMI's directorate, the Countess Bice Brusati Pedotti (and her colleague, the Duchess Teresa Massimo Doria) ran Rome's *Opera Pia 'Asilo Materno'*, a private charity which, according to its founding statutes of 1903, provided shelter to unmarried pregnant women who had been 'repudiated and driven out either by their parents or by their employers'; *madri nubili* were worthy of assistance, the charity's founding statutes stated, because they were 'the objects of mockery and derision by all' and 'their lives were ruined because of the crime they committed against themselves and their unborn children'. The shelter's founders proudly declared that their establishment was very different from publicly run institutions, which had strict entrance requirements. This *opera pia* admitted 'any unmarried woman at any stage during her pregnancy', undertook 'no bureaucratic formalities to determine her place of origin or settlement', and

took 'no regard of the cost of care, her nationality, or her religion'. The expressed purpose of the refuge was to provide an alternative to the *bre-fotrofio* so that women would not be forced to commit further offences, like suicide, infanticide, and abortion. In their official report on the activities of the *asilo*, its directors wrote that they had to turn away 'at least half of all those who seek help' because the residential home had only forty beds. According to them, desperate women travelled from many provinces near and far to gain entry to the *asilo* because they knew that they could find secrecy and succour there. During the First World War, the *opera* began to recover many married, pregnant women who were the wives of enlisted soldiers. In 1915 alone, it gave free room and board to 247 women, the highest number ever assisted in any one year from 1903 to 1922.²⁵

By bringing women like the Countesses di Robilant and Bice Brusati Pedotti into a new partnership with the state, fascism showed that it was willing to tolerate a degree of continuity of personnel in welfare management and a survival of 'pre-fascist' values that is striking. Even more significantly, the regime made more space for women within its public health and welfare bureaucracies and agencies than liberalism had done. And, remarkably too, the dictatorship chose to enlist the support of charity-givers who, from the turn of the century, were founding and heading new-style organizations, such as the Mother's Aid Society and the Mother's Refuge, which sought to provide clients with compassionate alternatives to the coercive institutional arrangements that liberal 'reforms' had engendered. Infuriated by official indifference to the plight of unwed mothers and their children, Daisy di Robilant and others had created organizations aimed at safeguarding the welfare of the child without sacrificing the interests of the woman. By giving women like Daisy di Robilant access to the political realm of policy formulation and implementation, the regime maximized the chances that it would fulfil its promise that unwed mothers would be supported rather than punished.

The regime did not give these women senior positions within the ONMI hierarchy out of any latent sympathy for feminist ideals. The cooperation of dedicated welfare reformers like Daisy di Robilant stood fascism in good stead. The fascist government used these hardworking and dedicated 'dames of charity' to minimize the costs of building a welfare state. But significantly, too, these women were not pawns of the dictatorship. Daisy di Robilant was a bold choice for a regime which expected women to conform to an extremely conventional and restricted vision of womanhood. In fascist circles, she was widely known to be an outspoken and active campaigner for the social, political, and economic rights of women and children.

Initially, Daisy di Robilant's response to fascism was like that of many other suffragettes. She welcomed the radical fascism of 1919 because Mussolini promised to begin the process of building a new social order by

enfranchising women. Once in power, fascism attempted to appeal to conservative interests in Italian society by backtracking on the controversial issue of the women's vote. After the passage of the disappointing Acerbo law of 1923, Daisy di Robilant took a leading role in the Pro-Suffrage Alliance, which organized an unsuccessful campaign calling for the government to give women the franchise.²⁶ She and her fellow activists lost the struggle for female suffrage, and the fascist regime moved closer to becoming a fully-fledged dictatorship by abolishing free elections in 1926.²⁷ It is important to ask how someone like Daisy di Robilant could continue to support a regime which denied women rights as full citizens, destroyed the very institutions of political democracy, and blatantly erected a system of authoritarian, male rule.

Though Daisy di Robilant parted company with fascism over the issue of female suffrage, she realized that there were still other important battles to fight. The countess reconciled herself with fascism partly because its *politica sociale* prioritized those matters relating to health and welfare which had been the focus of her life's work. Like many others whose political allegiances did not 'naturally' gravitate to the far right,²⁸ she could still collaborate with fascism because she genuinely believed in its transformative powers.²⁹ In particular, the proliferation of reforming social legislation in fascism's early years gave her good reason to believe in the possibility of a better future for women and children. It is important to realize, however, that her accommodation with the regime did not mean that she ever sacrificed her political and personal beliefs to become a '*dirigente femminile fascista*'. Some scholars think that Italian feminism of the so-called 'bourgeois' variety degenerated into an exaltation of the virtues of *femminilità* in the 1920s. The advent and accession of fascism did not cause Daisy di Robilant to undergo any such ideological conversion.³⁰

From the countess' point of view, accepting a position within ONMI was not tantamount to working with the enemy because she was in broad agreement with fascism that motherhood and infancy should be valued and protected.³¹ Her brand of feminism – a version which made issues relating to fertility and reproduction, the future of the nation and the 'race', the family, health and welfare and women and children the focus of a social politics – allowed her to find common ground with fascism.³² She also thought that by taking a government post she would be able to make fascism more responsive to the women and children whose interests she felt she had a duty to represent. After she became one of the regime's leading female functionaries, Daisy di Robilant had direct access to the Duce, and never hesitated to use that contact to try to get things done her way. Her feminism remained intact because she sought to shape fascist policy rather than implement it unquestioningly.

Daisy di Robilant happily called herself a 'pig-headed Piedmontese' (*cocciuta piemontese*) because she was proud of the fact that she never lost sight

of her objectives, even if this single-mindedness meant that she courted disfavour.³³ Her own feminist *politica sociale* was motivated by a genuine concern for the welfare of women and children, rather than a crude and panoptic pronatalism, so, on this crucial point, her views diverged from those of fascist fanatics. In her dealings with fascist officialdom and Mussolini himself, the countess could be a formidable foe and critic, though she was always careful to be deferential to the Duce. She did not want to risk ostracism, for she realized that she needed to stay at the centre of power in order to ensure that the goal of improving health and welfare remained a priority over the aim of increasing the birthrate. Unlike many others who attained high positions within the fascist state, she was never sycophantic toward her superiors. Nor did she ever try to appeal to the priapic instincts of fascist males by behaving in a docile fashion; she was no push-over. The sheer force of her personality, which was shaped by an impeccable aristocratic pedigree that bestowed immense privilege and a sense of entitlement, gave her licence to ignore many of the constraints and formalities imposed by fascism. That Mussolini and his minions tolerated her boldness showed that there was space for female autonomy and agency in this authoritarian and misogynistic order. A woman who exhibited such reluctance to be a thoroughly obedient servant and follower would never have risen to prominence and influence in the Nazi system.³⁴

In addition to revealing certain aspects of the relation between gender and fascism, the rise of women like Daisy di Robilant within ONMI's welfare bureaucracy also illuminates a key feature of fascism's *stato assistenziale*. Her career path exemplifies the entry of charitable expertise into government administration under fascism. Fascism's need to build a *stato assistenziale*, in a comparatively poor country without much of a tradition of purely state-run welfare of any kind, enabled cooperation between the public and private sectors. Just as relations between the Vatican and the Italian government grew more cordial in the 1920s, so too was a *rapprochement* between private charitable institutions and secular state authorities reached because of fascist initiatives. Far from discouraging the piety and charity of the very rich, fascism tried to promote an increase in private-sector involvement in its *assistenza sociale*. The activities of the Countess Dolores Macchi di Cellere illustrate how private benefaction could be harnessed by a regime engaged in building a public welfare system.

Dolores Macchi di Cellere purchased a magnificent medieval *palazzo* which was located near the ancient church of San Saba (or Sabina) in the Aventine area of Rome. On this site, she founded an *ente morale* for the recovery of the children of poor working mothers in 1925. Devotional in character, the charity's aims were to protect vulnerable children from the dangers of illness, immorality, and delinquency due to poverty, neglect, and deprivation. She dedicated this institute to the memory of her deceased husband, Count Vincenzo, who had served as an ambassador to

Washington. Dolores Macchi di Cellere spared no expense in the renovations which transformed the building into a well-equipped nursery serving the communities of San Saba and Testaccio. The ONMI inspector who visited the establishment in 1926 reported that he was taken aback by the grandeur and elegance of the rooms and furnishings. He also noted how clean, well-run, and well appointed the place was. In addition to spacious playrooms and classrooms, which were illuminated by electricity and heated centrally, the *asilo infantile* 'Vincenzo Macchi di Cellere' possessed a large shower room with separate compartments, a laundry room where bedding was cleaned, and a kitchen where servants prepared three balanced meals a day, six days a week for 123 children below school age. Nuns from the Salesian Sisters of Don Bosco cared for the children and gave them religious instruction. The countess employed a doctor to attend to all of their nutritional and health needs. The very generous benefactress also paid for staff to show 'educational' films for local teenagers on Sundays, when the *crèche* was closed. And at Christmas and Easter, she gave each and every child in her care a toy, as well as a more useful gift, such as an expensive item of clothing, like shoes. Satisfied that the daycare centre served the regime's higher demographic and social aims, the ONMI inspector noted that it was a 'model fascist institution' and one of the 'finest examples around of modern social assistance for the protection of infancy'.³⁵ But what exactly was so 'modern' or 'fascist' about all this?

The Countess Macchi di Cellere had used a conspicuous amount of her family's money to establish a charitable foundation and a permanent fund to finance it. The *asilo nido* which she founded as a monument to her deceased husband was completely run and supported privately. In terms of the content of the care provided by the *ente*, the divide between traditional charity and modern welfare was perhaps less sharp than the regime and its supporters seemed to think. The instruction given to the children was confessional in nature; the ritualized giving of 'alms' on religious feast days can hardly be seen as novel or secular in orientation; the benefactor's desire to elevate the poor and needy morally and materially too was, in ideological terms, both conventional and Christian in inspiration.

Yet, the presence of specialized medical personnel, including a director trained in puericulture, indicated that fascism's drive to professionalize welfare administration was having some effect. The institute's consultant physician, for example, devised diets for the children that were supposed to meet all their age-specific physiological needs. The ONMI inspector mentioned how 'scientific' and 'correct' this regime was; more importantly, he commented at length about how the nursery's staff meticulously followed the recommended medical advice when preparing meals.³⁶ The involvement of ONMI's inspectorate in the running of the institute also demonstrated that fascism was developing institutional mechanisms for a more effective state intervention in charity.³⁷ Italy had been awaiting this for

centuries. The fascist style of welfare-state building is also evidenced in the example of this *asilo nido*. The novelty of fascism was that it extended and centralized state control over private charity without antagonizing or alienating Catholics. The regime showed a great deal of finesse in its ability to fuse tradition and modernity into a new fascist synthesis that was predicated on the cooperation of private charity with the state's endeavour to build new institutions for public welfare.

But Guido D'Ormeo, who visited the premises in 1926, was right to remark that the *asilo infantile* 'Vincenzo Macchi di Cellere' was a 'model' institution. Its newness, wealth, and management made this establishment unrepresentative of many privately run charities. The regime's 'battle against illegitimacy' would test just how good fascism was at transforming much older charities and creating new-style social services. It would also challenge the fascist state to put into practice some of its most progressive social pronouncements.

Reform and resistance in the fascist new state

On the occasion of the Second International Congress for the Protection of Infancy, held in Rome in September 1937, Daisy di Robilant published at her own expense a unique record of her involvement in fascist welfare.³⁸ She dedicated this volume to Mussolini, whom she credits with having a profound understanding of the fact that 'demographic increment is not just a question of military prestige, but also a social and economic problem which highlights the importance of improving the living standards and the quality of life of the population whose future we wish to safeguard'.³⁹ More than a hint of irony is conveyed in the dedication, which is an oblique reminder to 'our Duce' of the essential purpose of his *politica sociale*. The book also reveals some of the countess' most candid thoughts about her points of agreement and disagreement with fascism.

While Daisy di Robilant opposed birth control and endorsed fascist pronatalism publicly,⁴⁰ she argued in this volume and in her private correspondence that if the regime expected Italians to reproduce prolifically, it had to provide parents with the adequate means to rear their children properly. She also commented on some of the limitations of fascist legislation. The regime, she stated, should be commended for having finally done away with that horrible appellation of '*esposto*', which condemned innocents to lives as 'social pariahs';⁴¹ but much more could and should be done to improve society's treatment of those born outside of marriage. The mere existence of separate welfare facilities, like the planned *Centro Illegittimi*, vividly illustrated for her that Italy had a very long way to go before so-called 'illegitimates' and their mothers would face no social or legal dis-

crimination of any kind. In some nations, she pointed out, social services for 'illegitimates' were fully integrated with those for 'legitimates' and all needy mothers, regardless of their civil status, possessed equal welfare entitlements. And in one of her sharpest criticisms of government policy, the countess asked why the regime placed the burden of saving the race on unwed mothers but left the fathers of illegitimate offspring out of the picture. The campaign to reduce infant mortality emphasized maternal breastfeeding as the sole solution to preventable deaths, and presupposed the woman's duty to be a good parent; Italian men who fathered illegitimate offspring were left unaccountable for their actions, despite the fact that the civil code conferred equal duties to maintain and educate children upon both parents. In Britain, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and elsewhere, the courts permitted paternity suits, so women could at least seek financial support from the imputed fathers of their children. But in Italy, where unmarried mothers were denied the right to sue for child maintenance, the state had a moral obligation to care generously for the women whom it exhorted to be responsible mothers. This was especially so, Daisy di Robilant stated, because fascism's own laws were contributing to the creation of a 'surplus' of infants. The Bolsheviks had legalized abortion in 1920 as part of their plans to reduce the numbers of unwanted children who ended up being raised at public expense. Unwilling to go down that route, the fascist dictatorship consequently had to acknowledge the extreme economic and social vulnerability of *madri nubili* in a country like Italy.⁴²

Di Robilant expressed very strong views about the direction that policy should take. She called for an end to old-style *beneficenza* which, in her estimation, was 'oppressive' to women. She argued that the only way to work towards the abolition of the foundling home system, which coerced women into becoming 'compulsory breastfeeders', was to treat each *madre nubile* as an individual. Her model of an entirely new kind of *assistenza statale* was based on the notion that aid should not take the form of the nursing subsidies meted out begrudgingly by *brefotrofi* to compliant *nutrici* for the short duration of their contracts; rather, assistance should be substantial, prolonged, varied and comprehensive in nature. And just as importantly, it should be social and legal, as well as purely economic in content. She believed that welfare providers should not focus singlemindedly on the goal of maternal reclamation since unmarried mothers could and did abandon children whom they had recognized through the legal act of *riconoscimento*. The countess tried to convince her colleagues that real savings in social spending could ultimately be had if they provided aid that was ample enough to sustain single-parent families. Wherever possible, moreover, ONMI should seek to promote the formation of stable two-parent families by helping suitable *madri nubili* 'regularize unions with the men who have made them unwed mothers'. She wanted to organize a

special matrimonial bureau (*ufficio matrimoniale*) staffed by trained personnel who would liaise with register offices, local employers, church officials and government agencies so that more parents of illegitimate children would be encouraged to marry and legitimate their offspring.⁴³

Her years of experience in this field of social work had convinced her that frustrated marriages contributed significantly to illegitimacy. A policy aimed at alleviating extreme poverty, she believed, would have a positive demographic effect by removing some of the material hindrances to marriage. Daisy di Robilant also felt strongly that *madri nubili* should not be seen as 'fallen women' or as sexual deviants; many were victims of circumstances. Upper and middle-class women who became pregnant out of wedlock were lucky enough to have the wealth that allowed them to hide their predicament. The class system afforded these women a measure of privacy and protection which was denied to those lower down the social scale. Amongst working-class women, domestic servants were particularly vulnerable to illegitimacy because of their isolation and lack of family; the grim prospect of exposure and dismissal made them inclined to seek aid as paupers and, therefore, subject themselves to the prejudice and abuse of welfare authorities. In these cases, Daisy di Robilant explained, illegitimacy was a cause of women's poverty, so, if the state expected to encourage single parenthood, it had to be willing to provide real income support to *madri nubili*. Moreover, under-age runaways, victims of rape, and homeless women who were unmarried and pregnant had to be treated differently from those who bore greater responsibility for their misfortune: the 1927 legislation never addressed the issue of children born from adulterous or incestuous unions;⁴⁴ nor did it have anything to say about the protection of young female minors who were victims of abuse or rape.⁴⁵ The social workers in the field, Daisy di Robilant felt strongly, had to make case assessments that would allow them to tailor assistance to each individual. Some women, she revealed, did openly flout convention by having extra-marital sexual relationships with men in '*more uxorio*' and bearing bastard babies, but even these 'inveterate concubines' would prefer to be wives if they could. The important thing to remember, she told her colleagues repeatedly, was that those who lived in poverty in the nation's slums did not get married unless they had some spare cash and a roof over their heads. Restricting benefits and services to keep expenditure low, she warned, would in the long term only backfire.⁴⁶

Each case had to be assessed on its own merits, the countess stressed, and benefit schemes and social services had to be flexible enough to accommodate the individual and changing needs of every client. She believed that fascism's new legislation was innovative in many respects. She also argued, however, that welfare providers should not interpret and implement it too strictly; if she and her colleagues took a rigid approach, she

maintained, they would have to treat all unwed mothers the same and see maternal reclamation as their main target. The very high levels of child abandonment of the past had proven beyond any doubt, Daisy di Robilant warned, that this short-sighted course of action was bound to end in failure. The clashes she had with ONMI officialdom and government authorities arose from her efforts to push fascist policy to the very limits of its radicalism. She wanted an immediate and substantial transformation of the system of social welfare. And she grew impatient when the regime failed to introduce reforms which she perceived to be prerequisites of the broader positive societal change it planned to effect. Prevarication and half-measures, she contended, would get neither fascism nor the women and children to whom it had made a solemn promise to help very far along the path to a better society. Because of her very strong convictions, the countess supported some controversial ideas, including those which called for the abolition of all legal distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate children.

The ex-socialist, Regina Teruzzi, who became president of the national *Massaie Rurali* federation at its foundation in 1934, organized a campaign that sought to put pressure on the government to eradicate the nomenclature '*figlio d'ignoto, d'ignota, d'ignoti*' (or '*figlio di N.N.*') from civil documents.⁴⁷ Teruzzi and her supporters bombarded PNF central headquarters, the Duce, and Donna Rachele Mussolini with letters of appeal from private citizens which revealed the private torments of adults who felt that they had been branded at birth with the stigma of being a 'child of no one'. Throughout their lives, they faced social disadvantages and prejudices because of their civil status. Activists pressed for birth certificates to show the names of fictitious parents, a device which they hoped would promote the integration of illegitimates into society. Government advisers at the Ministry of Justice saw these proposals as being far too radical to be introduced in the foreseeable future. But beginning in 1926, the regime did introduce minor but significant amendments which improved the legal position of illegitimates slightly. A reform in 1926 allowed authorities to wipe birth certificates clean of the dreaded '*ignoto*' word when a child was subsequently reclaimed or legitimated. And in 1932, two new laws came into force: one permitted persons to use extracts of their birth certificates which were free of any indication of their illegitimate origins; but another enactment made this conditional upon those persons being granted official permission from the attorney general.⁴⁸

Even otherwise staunch defenders of fascism's social agenda found fault with the regime's reluctance to bring about legal change that would improve the lives of so-called illegitimates. Both Baron Alberto Blanc, ONMI's first commissar, and Sileno Fabbri, the Milanese lawyer who succeeded him in January 1932, echoed Daisy di Robilant's criticisms when

they expressed the opinion that lawmakers had equivocated for far too long on the important matters of adoption, affiliation, fosterage and paternity.⁴⁹ Italian law and mores, they argued, did not reflect social reality. Promulgated in 1865, the first civil code of unified Italy needed revision, they believed, because of the archaic notions it embodied.

The 1865 code defined the family as a unit which was founded upon the indissoluble marriage of two persons of the opposite sex. The family was constituted, moreover, not according to any principle of a social contract of equals; rather, its organization was hierarchical, pyramidal, and patriarchal. The cornerstone of society, the family comprised parents and those children who were born in wedlock or were subsequently recognized as being the father's progeny. The code made paternal authority the bedrock of the family, defined a father's power and duties, and restricted the exercise of *patria potestà* to only 'natural' children – that is, those who were either born legitimate or later legitimated. The code deprived adulterine, incestuous and illegitimate children of filial rights.⁵⁰ According to advocates of reform, the code's fixation on whether a child was legitimate or not reflected the desire of propertied men to transmit wealth to their own offspring and prevent a stranger's child from laying claim to family patrimony. The code did permit childless persons over 40 years of age to adopt; however, as critics pointed out, the purpose of adoption, as defined in existing *corpus juris*, was not to provide caring families for parentless children but rather to find descendents for rich families with no surviving heirs. The 1865 code's detailed pronouncements against disinheritance and fideicommissum⁵¹ and its thundering silence on important issues, like the jural rights of non-legitimate children and the juridical position of stable unions of unmarried people (or what is recognized as common law marriage), further confirmed to those who wanted reform that Italian family law was overwhelmingly geared to governing and limiting rights of succession. A fascist doctrine of the family, reformers argued, had to shift the emphasis away from the issues of property transmission and paternal privileges. The law was an important springboard for a transformation of social values, they stressed, so the regime had to legislate on behalf of society's 'unknown' and forgotten children. Truly modern nations had to set new standards of decency and humanity by dignifying illegitimate infancy and granting all children, without regard to civil status or gender, fundamental rights to protection and equality.

Moves to revise the civil code also came from sources other than ONMI. Many prominent judges and jurists urged the regime to seize the opportunity for pathbreaking legal reform. In April 1923, the Minister of Justice unsuccessfully appealed to parliament to issue amendments which would have permitted authorities to uncover the identity of the putative fathers of illegitimate children and, in cases where rape or incest were not involved,

to permit paternal reclamation. Furthermore, Aldo Oviglio hoped to make these fathers legally responsible for the maintenance and welfare of their offspring by extending filial rights, as embodied in *patria potestà*, to those born outside wedlock. Illegitimate paternity, Oviglio argued, should be given the same rights and responsibilities as illegitimate maternity. He also demanded that the state act immediately to clarify and broaden the legal contours of adoption so that it might be used as a instrument in the demographic campaign. If it were legally permissible for couples with families of their own to adopt abandoned or orphaned children, Oviglio contended, then it would gradually become more socially acceptable for them to do so. The regime could go some way to changing attitudes by conferring upon the adoptive family the same legal status as the legitimate family. It was unfair that the *patria potestà* of an adoptive father had to be established in separate court proceedings and could be revoked far more easily than it could for 'natural' fathers. The procedure was also far too costly and complicated.⁵²

Other leading figures expressed similar views. Involved in the preparation of the new penal code, Silvio Longhi felt strongly that the government should approach the problem of civil law reform with the same kind of urgency that it was applying to matters relating to prisons and the police. A senator, law professor, and attorney general at the supreme court of appeals, Longhi lamented the fact that Italians had such conventional, conformist, and conservative ideas about the family. Because of this 'intransigent' opposition to change, illegitimate paternity was unrecognized and illegitimate babies were abandoned.⁵³ Longhi was one of the legal minds behind the pioneering royal decree law of 31 July 1919; this special legislation outlined norms for the adoption of children who were either orphaned or abandoned as *ignoti* during the war.⁵⁴ Though it set a precedent, by giving adoption a legal format, this reform was tentative and provisory. Under its rulings, for example, neither adoptive parents nor adopted children had the full parental and filial rights enjoyed by members of 'legitimate' families. Acutely aware of the shortcomings of the enactment, Longhi pressed the fascist government to give greater formality to adoption and to encourage its acceptance by the people. He also wanted another anomaly to be rectified by a new fascist civil code. Foster parenting, he repeatedly reminded the regime, could also be used as a measure to combat illegitimacy. Already practised by peasants who wished to increase the size of the household workforce, the system of fostering was defective because it was unregulated. Under the current *ad hoc* arrangements, children who were sent to live with foster 'families' could be abused or exploited. But if the state offered legal recognition and protection, then people's attitudes about alternative families might begin to change for the better. In whatever form the family took, bonds of affection were far more

important than blood ties. By reforming the civil code, Longhi believed, fascism would ultimately be undermining the obsolete notion that property and power provided the foundation of the family.⁵⁵

Some parliamentarians shared the opinion that the establishment of a new family and social order was a matter of some urgency. In June 1924, Fera presented a bill which was undersigned by 13 other deputies; this called for an immediate legal recognition of illegitimate paternity. The state had to ensure that the act of 'carnal paternity' be remedied by the enforcement of 'moral paternity'. In the same way that it promoted the idea of good motherhood, the fascist state should encourage the spread of a new conception of active and involved fatherhood. The signatories proposed that in cases involving partners who were cohabitating at the time of conception, and, consequently, where paternity was not imputable,⁵⁶ the laws governing illegitimate maternity be extended to men so that they would be held responsible for the care and maintenance of their offspring. Despite the fact that this change could result in substantial savings in welfare spending, parliament decided to defer judgement on Fera's draft when Mussolini appointed a commission to investigate this and all other matters relating to the civil code. Hasty action would be 'inopportune', the government had decided.⁵⁷ The huge cost involved in the rearing of illegitimate children provided ample incentive for the regime to favour legal reform. No redefinition of illegitimate paternity, however, seemed forthcoming.

In fascist Italy, the law was not the only barrier to social change. If taken to their logical conclusion, many radical reformers believed, the newfangled ideas that fascism was unfettering would inevitably pose a formidable threat to the Church and its fold. Catholics embraced their own doctrine of the 'sacred' family and had strong views about sin. Because of deeply ingrained beliefs and customs about familial normality, 'respectable' and 'fallen' women, childrearing as a woman's domain and the male prerogative to be sexually promiscuous and irresponsible, there seemed to be almost insurmountable obstacles to greater social equality, permissiveness, and diversity.

Daisy di Robilant's battle against illegitimacy

There was some consensus amongst ONMI leaders and other reform advocates that the fascist social revolution was proceeding too slowly because of nagging blindspots in law and policy. All they could do, however, was continue to put pressure on government to maintain the momentum of change. In the meantime, however, the work of building a *stato assistenziale* advanced. When she took over the illegitimacy programme in Rome, the actions of Daisy di Robilant soon made clear that the countess' contribution to fascist welfare would be very much a product of her personal vision. Although she attempted to conform to most ONMI directives, the countess

felt so strongly that maternal reclamation should not be the sole policy objective that she decided to deviate from the official line soon after she assumed control of ONMI's *Segretariato dell'Assistenza Materna per l'Infanzia Illegittima* (the Secretariat for Maternal Assistance and Illegitimate Infancy). Because this department was semi-autonomous from the organization's provincial federation in Rome, she managed to put her own principles of *politica sociale* into practice. Based on her experience at the *assistenza materna*, she devised a whole new system of benefits and services whose purpose was to provide meaningful social, medical, legal and economic assistance to unwed mothers, their children, and, when appropriate, their partners.

Without the endorsement of her colleagues and superiors, the countess began to offer unwed mothers a marriage premium in 1928. Although she followed guidelines on nursing subsidies, and dispensed these to clients as an incentive to maintain contact with their children and, ultimately, to reclaim them, she favoured the *premio matrimoniale*. The main reason that she did so was because nursing subsidies were a legacy of the old *brefotrofo* system whose utter failure to prevent abandonment was well known. Customarily dispensed monthly to unwed mothers who agreed to breastfeed their babies, these allowances of about 75 *lire* per month were far too insubstantial to act as any kind of encouragement to reclamation. The countess preferred to provide a cash payment of between 600 and 800 *lire*, depending on the woman's individual circumstances; this amount, she reasoned, was large enough to assist a newly-wed couple to set up household. Because so many unwed mothers in her care at the *assistenza materna* were actually cohabitating with partners or had stable relationships with men, this kind of aid seemed particularly appropriate as an inducement to marriage and legitimation. The scarcity of affordable housing, and the extra burden of child-care, she believed, frightened many poorer men from marriage. At the very least, the premium would cover the full cost of a deposit and one month's rent in modest accommodation in a working-class neighbourhood. The couple could use any remaining money to buy a 'marriage bed' and other furnishings; they might even have some funds left over for extra expenses on baby clothing and bedding. On top of this substantial cash payment, Daisy di Robilant devised a 'rearing premium' for especially needy women who lost their entitlement to nursing subsidies once they married. This grant helped to ease the anxiety that some of them felt about how they were going to manage without financial assistance. Di Robilant defined this provision as an occasional or one-off hardship allowance, an essential security for families for unforeseen emergencies like unemployment or sickness. But, significantly, she was prepared to be flexible in her approach; neither the marriage nor the rearing premium was a fixed award. The countess reserved the right to adjust the amount of the sums and the duration of the support to the changing needs and circumstances of her clientele.⁵⁸

Almost from the start of di Robilant's work, other ONMI officials began to complain about her unconventional approach. They argued that public money could be better spent on nursing subsidies alone. Despite the hassles that she had with her colleagues, however, the countess continued to introduce many more innovations. She reported to her fellow ONMI *federali* that the demand for marriage premiums increased in 1929, even though the onset of the depression so adversely affected the labouring poor. Her methods, she boasted, were achieving the desired results; more women were marrying and more babies were being legitimated. Spurred by her own success, the countess decided to open an official marriage bureau in 1929; operating as a division of her secretariat, this office provided free legal and social services to unwed mothers and their partners. Her small staff of volunteers did all the preparatory work of collecting documents from parish and civil record offices. Sometimes at her own personal expense, the countess covered the costs of the fees for the processing and registration of marriage and legitimation acts. She took especial care to liaise directly with parish priests and court their approval. At first she encountered resistance, which she interpreted as their outrage over what might be construed as efforts to 'subsidize' and 'condone' unwed motherhood. She soon won many local churchmen to her side, however, when she convinced them of the higher moral purpose of preventing child abandonment. She needed their cooperation to help persuade Catholic women to undergo a civil ceremony on top of a religious wedding, so that their marriages would be recognized legally.⁵⁹

Fascist planning and management had nothing to do with the success of the countess' programme. Despite the protestations of ONMI officialdom, di Robilant made flexibility and responsiveness two features of her highly personal style of welfare administration. In her reports to her peers, the countess provided tangible evidence of her achievements. Because of her marriage premiums, which took the form of a lump sum of between 600 and 800 *lire*, ONMI was making substantial savings on the long-term costs of care. The *per capita* expense of providing monthly nursing subsidies to unwed mothers amounted to about 1500 *lire* annually. As women were legally entitled to financial support for three years, the figures involved were considerable. Between 1929 and 1932, almost 25 per cent of her clients, who numbered over 2000 in total, married and legitimated their babies; this rate was well over three times the national average. Her case notes recounted the personal stories of the women whom she and her staff had assisted; her organization paid for the passage of one woman to Casablanca to join her lover; it helped many women find jobs for unemployed 'fiancés', so they would be in a position to marry; it reunited women with their estranged families when possible by liaising with priests and relatives. In short, it took a very protective attitude towards clients.⁶⁰

The positive results which she obtained, di Robilant stated, did not bring mere economic benefits.

Her real accomplishment was to reduce levels of infant and child abandonment. She attributed her success to the fact that she provided comprehensive *servizi sociali* rather than meagre hand-outs. Unlike the foundling home, which lost touch with mothers because of its superficial and impersonal approach, the countess maintained continuous and close contact with 'her mothers'. ONMI, she insisted, should never become a 'paymaster'; its clients, moreover, should never come to see themselves as being on the public payroll. In her official report to ONMI on activities in 1934, the countess prided herself on the fact that, with the aid of her dedicated volunteers, she still kept track of many of the 26 897 *madri nubili* which she had assisted in the sixteen years since she first joined the Mother's Aid Society. Her experience had taught her that welfare was not about dispensing money; rather, it was all about helping people build better lives.⁶¹

To that end, the countess ignored ONMI directives, when these conflicted with her aims. Even though she was instructed not to do so, she strictly adhered to those clauses of the 1927 law which stipulated that women did not have to be registered as paupers to receive benefits. Pregnancy caused unmarried women to join the ranks of the unofficial 'occasional poor', the countess reasoned. And because illegitimate motherhood was so stigmatized still, many women did not wish to deal with public officials of any kind. If they turned to her for help, she insisted, she would not send them away, simply because they lacked sufficient 'proof' of their need; that they were pregnant and unmarried was all the proof she required. In one of her more indignant moments, she appealed to the Duce himself to remedy the situation: she wrote to him that, in a typical day at her *asilo*, eight women had refused to reclaim their infants because they did not want to have to get documentation from their place of birth. To drive the point home, the countess sent Mussolini a letter from a young domestic servant who revealed that she desperately wanted to keep her child, but could not do so because her uncle was a municipal employee in her home town, and she feared that he might come across the paper work pertaining to her case.⁶² The dictator chose not to intervene on her behalf. Di Robilant's defiant attitude did not endear her to her colleagues and superiors. ONMI's provincial leadership remained totally unimpressed with the remarkable results of her programme. This clash of views reflected a larger problem – the rigid and short-sighted nature of ONMI's interpretation of fascist welfare policy. The countess responded to criticisms of her initiatives by complaining of the 'oppressive bureaucratization' of ONMI administration. The federation subjected Daisy di Robilant to a kind of bullying precisely because she wanted to shape policy to fit the needs of her clientele. In a moment of candour, the countess reflected about the threats of

censure and closure which her fellow *federali* periodically made. She found it very odd that they seemed to be willing to jeopardize the regime's demographic campaign for the sake of their 'tortuous byzantinism'.⁶³

Their harassment of her was all the more galling as the countess managed the running and finances of her programme exceedingly well. From its rather humble beginnings as a charity sponsoring one residential shelter, one mothers' kitchen, and one medical centre, her organization grew under her expert guidance. By 1932, the countess presided over a network of agencies which included 2 women's refuges, 3 clinics, and 28 maternal refectories in Rome, as well as 19 other refectories in different parts of the province.⁶⁴ Private philanthropic donations which she procured through repeated funding drives accounted for a considerable part of this expansion. She kept the expenses low at her offices in ONMI's headquarters by using a staff of volunteers. Her personal contacts, hard work, and business acumen allowed her to be very resourceful. For example, money covering the cost of the construction of her second mother's home came from a low-cost loan provided by the national *Cassa Maternità*; the countess secured this by calling in a favour from a prominent senator.⁶⁵ Workers' co-operatives and municipal government agencies supplied her refectories with inexpensive provisions in bulk because she successfully negotiated special concessionary rates. When plentiful, vegetables produced locally on farms run by the *Massaie Rurali* were sold to her on a discount. In times of scarcity, the countess herself paid food bills at full retail rates so that 'her mothers' would not go without nourishment;⁶⁶ she was particularly insistent that this type of 'welfare in kind' made a huge difference not only to the health of the mothers, but also to that of their babies. Legal expenses would have been much higher, had the countess not found a notary who agreed to certify documents for free. The costs of running the medical centres were also kept to a minimum because the countess arranged for doctors to donate their time; because they also functioned as dispensaries for minor medicines, food packets, and powdered milk, non-medical volunteers could do much of the work. Many of the products dispensed at the *consultori*, moreover, were acquired very cheaply from left-over stock owned by the provincial administration of public hospitals. Daisy di Robilant managed to get a hold of these surplus supplies by putting pressure on various authorities.⁶⁷

She also took great pride in the fact that she was going some way towards fulfilling fascism's aspiration that aid should begin as soon as possible after conception. Though ONMI itself did not do so, the countess prioritized the provision of food and lodging for clients because so many of them became jobless and homeless because of their pregnancies. The countess considered residential care and early recovery to be 'indispensable' to the success of her programme; she had the figures to show that they played a big part in

reducing infant and maternal mortality. When her *alberghi* were full, di Robilant and her volunteers found impromptu places for women to stay through their network of friends and acquaintances. In difficult cases involving a rape victim or a minor, these arrangements were made to give the client extra safety and security. The cost of running her homes was relatively low, compared to that of other kinds of residential care; in 1931, *per capita* expenditure in her homes, for example, came to about 12 *lire* daily, while that of her kitchens amounted to 6 *lire* per day, for three meals. This was very good value, considering that care in a maternity ward cost about 30 *lire* daily per person. Foundling home care was cheapest of all, but, as so many babies died in the *brefotrofi* system, the countess stressed, no one should even contemplate its revival.⁶⁸ On an annual average, her *alberghi* provided housing for about 150 pregnant women and 120 nursing mothers and their children for three-month stays. The small yearly award that the homes received from ONMI did not amount to much, so private donations were an absolute must. The residents contributed a little towards their maintenance, when they could, by working in the institutions' own workshops and splitting the profits made on the sale of their sewed goods with management. Added to this were occasional sums from fines that were collected for disciplinary infractions by the *ricoverate*.⁶⁹ When one of the shelters fell into financial difficulty in 1931, and was threatened with closure, di Robilant's governing board gathered together the signatures of the residents themselves and sent a petition to Mussolini requesting help. The Duce rejected their supplication for a special discretionary grant from the interior ministry's social fund, so they were forced to muddle along as best they could without much governmental support.⁷⁰

Daisy di Robilant came up with some ingenious plans to make her institutions self-funding. Located on the same site as one of the *alberghi*, one of her maternal refectories served as a profit-making workers' cafe in order to raise revenue. Women residents gathered daily in the dining hall for an early lunch before noon, when the premises opened for paying customers. Some of the cost for the provision of free meals came from OMNI's provincial federation, which made a fixed contribution. When food costs were high, the countess had to authorize regular price hikes for paying customers. She charged 'more for less' when meat or bread periodically became expensive or scarce, she reported. When she found foodstuffs in especially short supply, she complained to ONMI officials about their lack of concern. When they instructed her to control the consumption levels of the women and children who ate at her kitchens, she told them that she was not prepared to let her clients and their children go hungry.⁷¹ Her refectory was not entitled to purchase the heavily subsidized food that was distributed to the kitchens run directly by ONMI. ONMI did not help her to meet the costs of rent, personnel, heating or electricity. For general

repairs, and for cutting wood for stoves and ovens, she relied on the goodwill of the workers who patronized her establishment.⁷²

Daisy di Robilant also relied on the devotion and dedication of the volunteers who helped her to create a comprehensive system of services. Public welfare programmes, she repeatedly reminded her ONMI colleagues, had to be truly 'social' if the state were to succeed 'in gaining the adhesion of the masses'. She claimed that few women in Rome had yet heard of ONMI, much less come to see the state as a generous provider of assistance. Part of the reason for this, she explained, was that ONMI's leadership did not always recognize the importance of continuity of care, follow-up social work, and close contact with recipients to the success of their schemes.⁷³

Not all of her initiatives were popular, however. Daisy di Robilant reluctantly admitted that the home visits which her *assistenti* began in 1929 were deeply resented by her clientele. The reason for this was the fact that the system was not designed for the benefit of welfare recipients. Rather, the purpose of home visits was to find welfare frauds and identify at-risk babies. Di Robilant required those who reclaimed their children to pick up their monthly nursing subsidies in person on specified pay days; she also insisted that they bring their babies along as evidence that they were fulfilling their end of the bargain. Di Robilant and her staff scrutinized clients closely for details of dress and appearance which might show changing fortunes. They believed that some women feigned poverty and others lied about being alone when they were using state benefits to subsidize the men with whom they had sexual relationships. Domestic servants, in particular, could be 'maternally unreliable' because their employers sometimes put considerable pressure upon them to return to work and offload infants onto wet nurses, many of whom were bound to be unregistered. And a particularly prolific but 'demographically undesirable' group comprised the 'inveterate recidivists', who were older women who seemed to 'speculate in bastard babies' by having repeated non-marital pregnancies in rapid succession. With two or more farmed-out infants, they lived comfortably 'in moral decrepitude' with income support on top of earnings from working lovers. Organized by her loyal assistant, the Contessa Segreto Amidei, who donated the use of her own automobile, di Robilant's home visiting scheme was designed to uncover whether a woman was living with a man and whether she was rearing her child well. Daisy di Robilant took some satisfaction in reporting the results of unannounced visits; employing an especially effective strategy of surprise, her *visitatrici* raided homes in the small hours of the morning. Though hated by some, home visiting did provide a vital link between welfare authorities and their clients. It also functioned as a social service tool, as cases of economic hardship and domestic violence and abuse were uncovered in the thousands of visits which took place each year. The home visitors also tried to trace 'lost' women and babies and keep active case files on everyone in the system.

Because of this, they were able to assist those women who re-appeared to reclaim their children from foster care, sometimes after years had lapsed.⁷⁴

Daisy di Robilant's relations with ONMI officialdom became increasingly strained, despite the fact that the organization finally permitted the countess to establish her *Centro di Assistenza agli Illegittimi* in July 1931. When ONMI's provincial headquarters moved to a grander building at the end of 1932, the leadership left di Robilant's offices behind. She interpreted this as an affront. As the depression deepened, ONMI's dealings with founding home authorities also degenerated into open enmity. *Brefotrofi* tried to limit admissions by requiring welfare claimants to provide extensive documented proof of their eligibility. They did so because they had trouble collecting the contributions which ONMI was meant to make to help cover expenditure. From ONMI's point of view, however, *brefotrofi* did not deserve much support because they appeared to be using the 1927 reform to shirk their duty of care. ONMI officials accused the foundling homes of dumping a multitude of unwanted babies upon them. And, to make matters worse, ONMI was involved in an on-going dispute with provincial governments; they resented having to contribute to the cost of assisting *riconosciuti* and their mothers.⁷⁵

The economic crisis added to the detrimental effects of the conflicts among competing authorities. By early 1932, new financial constraints on welfare expenditure threatened to undermine the effectiveness of the countess' experimental programme. In her correspondence with Mussolini, Daisy di Robilant unsuccessfully asked for official recognition of her marriage premiums.⁷⁶ While the Duce did nothing to help her, ONMI *federali* showed their preference for nursing subsidies by reducing the amount of each *premio matrimoniale*. Marriage premiums became less substantial and, consequently, less effective as a result of this decision. However, the countess and the Signora Codurri, one of her well-connected assistants at the centre, managed to circumvent ONMI's diktat by providing far more generous 'benefits in kind' to couples who wanted to marry. She also intensified the social work aspects of her programme which aimed at sorting out the employment, housing, and other problems that poor families routinely had. Despite ONMI's lack of support, di Robilant's efforts to encourage marriage still paid demographic dividends. In 1932, her marriage rate was marginally higher than her record of 25 per cent; she proudly reported to her peers that 500 marriages had taken place that year and 723 children had been legitimated.⁷⁷

As a result of ONMI's financial difficulties, the value of monthly subsidies to both nursing mothers and wet nurses fell markedly. From the end of 1931, Daisy di Robilant begrudgingly imposed new austerity measures. In this case too, she tried to compensate for reduced subsidies by giving out larger benefits in kind, such as powdered milk, discount vouchers, and food parcels. Mothers, she claimed, sometimes sold these to neighbours to get a

bit of extra cash; this, she believed, was a symptom of hardship which the state should be working harder to remedy. As part of the new economizing trend, mothers now had to collect promissory notes in place of the cash payments which they formerly received; furthermore, these were now distributed on a weekly basis. In a bid to control spending on subsidies and increase the monitoring of welfare abuses, ONMI required women to encash these certificates at the organization's communal committees.⁷⁸ This transfer of authority from her centre to ONMI offices in the localities marked the beginning of the end for di Robilant's project.

The new payment procedure and cost-cutting measures caused consternation. Clients began to voice criticisms that they were not getting enough from the state. ONMI communal committees reported back to provincial headquarters that disturbances were breaking out with some frequency and that the organization was rapidly losing credibility.⁷⁹ Late payments caused the most upset, as single mothers and poor wetnurses with children to rear had come to rely upon the government for income support.⁸⁰ The passage of control confused matters as ONMI communal authorities required more documentation from claimants than the centre had done before. Proof of settlement and poverty, as well as authorization from the provincial federation, now came to be standard features of subsidy provision. A significant backlog of payments clogged the machinery of welfare and women now regularly faced long arrears. The countess pointed out to her colleagues that delays in payment could seriously jeopardize the lives of infants. She bitterly wrote in one of her reports: 'I have been under the mistaken impression all these years that the regime wants us to *far vivere* (to help children survive) and not just to *far nascere* (increase the birthrate).' Daisy warned that her loss of authority meant that she could no longer keep a close watch over the movement of women and children. Former regular clients, she reported, simply disappeared rather than deal with the new system.⁸¹ The Holy Spirit foundling home in Rome confirmed her suspicion that abandonment was rising. The director reported that rising numbers of women were abandoning their infants; as a consequence, the home had to seek out wet nurses farther afield than ever before. The enlarged wet nurse radius, he stated, eroded the home's fragile network of home inspections to check on the well-being of babies.⁸² The character of welfare had become increasingly impersonal and bureaucratic as the system formalized into chaos.

Significantly too, the work of the illegitimacy centre began to unravel, despite di Robilant's strenuous efforts. Financial constraints, coupled with growing social demand, conspired against her. Her *alberghi* simply could not accommodate the need for housing. Women were travelling from farther away than ever to the capital because of its reputation as a generous provider of aid. Authorities could not cope with as many as 2000 new welfare applicants a year. Founded in April 1930 in Ostia Marina, on land

that was donated by the governorate of Rome, a new *istituto materno* offered to provide refuge to some of di Robilant's more urgent referrals.⁸³ But di Robilant still struggled to provide 'her mothers' with the prenatal care which she believed was essential to the health of them and their babies. Her reports covering the early 1930s are full of desperate pleas to her colleagues to do something about the degeneration in residential services. She repeatedly told them that the average length of stay in her shelters had fallen from 100 to 10 days because of the lack of sufficient places. She called the 1927 ruling that made early recovery mandatory a 'farce' and a 'lie'. And she gave evidence that the crisis was having a deleterious effect. Inadequate assistance resulted in a sharp rise in infant and maternal mortality, and a dramatic decline in reclamations. The obstruction of other welfare institutions compounded the countess's problems. Even ONMI's own medical clinics closed their doors to her clients, because of the rigid system of segregating unwed mothers from married ones. When women fell ill during pregnancy, she could not always find them a bed in a public hospital either because authorities refused to admit patients without documentation. If they did so, they would not be entitled to reimbursement from the patient's commune of origin. Even one of the biggest maternity hospitals in Rome repeatedly refused entry to women who lacked proof of poverty and settlement.⁸⁴

A complete breakdown of services occurred in the years from 1934 to 1935 as a direct result of legislative changes in 1933. Determined to alleviate some of the financial pressures on ONMI, the government introduced a law on 13 April 1933 (n. 312) which abrogated the pioneering 1927 legislation. It would be very difficult to overestimate the importance of this enactment to the workings of welfare under fascism. The 1933 act effectively resurrected the system of local government responsibility for illegitimates which had been in place before 1927. ONMI now offloaded the burden of caring for *riconosciuti* onto local authorities. The new law introduced complicated financial arrangements; and the terms of these were particularly unfavourable for provincial governments. It declared that ONMI, the provinces, and the communes would have an equal share in the financial burden of assistance towards illegitimates; importantly though, provincial governments would have to pay the full cost and then seek reimbursement from ONMI and from communes. The law also fragmented the provision of welfare amongst different competing authorities and separated services for mothers from those for children. ONMI would still care directly for pregnant, unmarried women, though the provinces and communes together would provide for reclaimed and abandoned children. Illegitimates born before the enactment stayed with ONMI, and those born after went to local government. The chaotic organization which it created was only one of law's shortcomings. Of great significance too, the women whom fascism had promised to protect now lost the considerable gains that they had

made in May 1927. The 1933 amendment specified that welfare claimants had to present a residence certificate, a civil status certificate, and a certificate of poverty to qualify for state benefits.⁸⁵ In its design and execution, the 1933 'reform' was utterly retrograde. The 1927 law had reflected a hope in expansion, fairness, and progress; but the 1933 law was all about exclusion, limits, and regression.

Together with the new legislative arrangements, ONMI's cost-cutting regime spelled disaster for di Robilant's experimental programme. Marriage premiums, which had been as high as a thousand *lire* in the past, shrank to a mere 300 *lire* in 1934 because of pressure from the federation. Although she insisted that few couples would marry for a one-off, paltry award when they stood to gain more on the long-term from nursing subsidies, her fellow *federali* failed to listen. Further evidence of the escalating momentum of welfare decline, ONMI destroyed the mainstays of the countess' unique system of social services. In 1934, the federation made her close her marriage bureau because this type of assistance was no longer within its narrow purview. That same year, she had to let her home visitors go as ONMI frantically disengaged and dismantled. This loss hit her especially hard. By 1935, the countess had become disillusioned with fascism. As the government stepped up efforts to support baby beauty pageants and distribute good mothering medals, di Robilant remarked stonily that welfare had irretrievably degenerated into propaganda. She expressed complete contempt when, in 1935, Mussolini gave the PNF control over the marriage premium programme which she had devised. This move provided her with yet more confirmation of the 'absolute regression in services' which she was powerless to prevent; she berated the Duce for allowing his fascist party to offer 'pathetic' premiums of 25 *lire* to unwed mothers who redeemed themselves by marrying. What could the regime possibly hope to gain by such a paltry subsidy other than increased illegitimacy, she asked.⁸⁶

The state provision which Daisy di Robilant had attempted to consolidate became further attenuated as the *brefotrofi* reasserted itself as the institutional focus of welfare. With the 1933 revision act, ONMI relinquished direct control over the whole foundling home system. Though the agency continued to inspect homes, its powers of influence and intervention were much diminished after 1933. As a consequence, an increase in the number of nursing subsidies paid and a decrease in the value of these benefits occurred in subsequent years. Additionally, the percentages of non-nursing mothers rose, as did those of *non-riconosciuti* and *non-legittimati*. The outbreak of war in Ethiopia in October 1935 prompted a sudden upsurge in the marriage rate, but this did not beneficially affect levels of reclamations and legitimations.⁸⁷ Furthermore, because of the 1933 reform, responsibility for the management and monitoring of wet nurses fell back onto *brefotrofi*. Now free of direct government involvement in their affairs, foundling homes had lost all incentive to continue improving their

functioning. Because it was in their best interests to do so, moreover, the provincial deputations who were in charge of the overall funding and administering of services towards illegitimates became increasingly concerned to keep costs at an absolute minimum. As early as 1931, the countess had sensed that both ONMI and the regime were losing their dedication to the cause of a truly new *politica sociale*. The aims and impact of the 1933 enactment demonstrated beyond any doubt that fascism simply did not have the will or the means to sustain one of its most original and promising social programmes.

A brief era of social promises and progress under fascism had come to a premature and abrupt end. Because of the 1933 reform, ONMI no longer cared much about providing *madri nubili* with room and board, so this essential service fell back onto the private sector. Daisy di Robilant struggled to meet social demand at her *alberghi* and *refettori*, but without government support, she faced increasing difficulties.⁸⁸ Her former colleagues at ONMI turned against her totally and began a vicious campaign to discredit her. With increasing frequency, they sent inspectors to her refectories and her refuges and instructed them to write very unfavourable reports; they then forwarded these directly to Mussolini through his private secretary.⁸⁹ Believing that the work of di Robilant was incompatible with the aims of his government, the Duce grew distant. The final insult came in 1942, when, after years of harassment by ONMI and neglect by her leader, the countess watched in disbelief as one of her mothers' shelters was forcibly closed because of some trumped-up charge of mismanagement.⁹⁰

That times had changed found visible expression in the late 1930s, when the regime marked a new course in illegitimacy policy. An ONMI leader at Rome's communal committee of patrons, Count Alessandro Frontoni donated a huge amount of money for a new home for unwed mothers in Monterotundo. The regime rewarded Frontoni's munificence by appointing him to the presidency of ONMI in April 1940.⁹¹ Opened in 1939, this exclusive establishment catered mainly to a middle-class, fee-paying clientele, but poorer women could gain admission if they passed an intense vetting process. ONMI and the government called the institute an 'original creation' and a 'model for the future'. Its existence did, indeed, seem to signal that fascism was taking its *politica sociale* in an entirely different direction. Unlike di Robilant's refuges, this *asilo materno* bore the fascist imprint. The home refused entry to 'women infected with contagious diseases, the abnormal, and those whose conduct can be deemed immoral'. It also denied entry to foreigners and 'non-Aryan' women. Though ostensibly run by ONMI, the *asilo materno* relied on volunteers from the *fasci femminili* to provide residents with the right kind of politically motivated pastoral care. When it installed female fascist party members as its handmaids, the regime terminated the age-old custom of employing nuns as the moral guardians of *pentite*. Fascism also redefined the whole expiatory purpose of

welfare. The governing board who wrote the statutes of the home proudly declared that they offered women a new kind of 'social training'. Accountable only to their fascist confessors, 'once disgraceful creatures' would be 'purified from a sinful love and a shameful maternity'.⁹² Fascism had once challenged the church's authority and dogma in matters relating to charity. It had also aimed to free unwed mothers and their children from stigma and discrimination. Now, posing as a secular religion that possessed redemptive powers of its own and commanded devoted fidelity from followers, fascism subjected *madri nubili* to a new kind of political morality.⁹³

Dismantling services nationwide in the aftermath of reform, 1933–9

When it first came into effect, the 1927 legislation on illegitimates received widespread support. ONMI leaders were delighted when 73 out of 91 provinces initially welcomed the enactment and volunteered to implement its recommendations. According to the reform's guidelines, ONMI would reimburse provinces for the expense of caring for *ricognosciuti* and their mothers. By 1930, however, ONMI owed two years in back payments to provincial governments, so many of them refused to comply with policy any longer. Because of the huge expenditure involved, some suspended this social programme completely, while others decided to restrict services.⁹⁴ The numbers of reclaimed infants who were assisted nationwide grew annually: the totals were 4800 in 1927, 12 000 in 1928, 15 270 in 1929 and 27 580 in 1930. Consequently, the costs of the illegitimacy campaign rose from 5 million *lire* in 1927 to 10 million in 1930.⁹⁵ Because they were so heavily burdened, provincial deputations protested to the Council of State and, in January 1930, they won their appeal for immediate reimbursement from ONMI. When the organization failed to fork out the revenue, the union of provincial deputations complained again, and won a further appeal in February 1931. By then, only 15 provincial governments remained in support of the illegitimacy programme. Those who continued to comply attempted to economize by providing only the bare essentials. Even though they withdrew funding for new projects, they still had trouble financing the provision of nursing subsidies alone. Others locked horns with ONMI by contending that they had no statutory obligation whatsoever to budget for this item. They stood firm on this point because they felt overburdened. About 10 000 abandoned babies a year ended up in the foundling home system, and, by law, they were entitled to care until they reached 14 years of age. Together with *brefotrofi* and communes, provinces were obliged to provide for *ignoti*, so they had no desire to assume the primary responsibility for *ricognosciuti* too.⁹⁶

Because of the sheer costs of the illegitimacy campaign, ONMI could not meet its obligations to provincial governments. From 1928 to 1932, the organization devoted 93 million *lire* of its budget of 462 million *lire* to this one programme; this represented 20 per cent of ONMI's total expenditure in those years. The burden of caring for illegitimates seemed unsustainable and suffocating, especially as many of the other commitments outlined in ONMI's founding statutes remained unfulfilled. For example, the organization spent only 8.8 million *lire* in 1928–32 on building such important 'total' welfare institutions as the *case della madre e del bambino*.⁹⁷ While social demand increased at an alarming rate, welfare leaders grew increasingly worried that the battle against illegitimacy would consume all their revenue and resources in the future. ONMI's commissar, Baron Blanc secured an emergency government grant in 1931 by beseeching Mussolini for help. Drawn from the social fund created by the collection of the celibacy tax, this injection of cash failed to put ONMI's finances aright.⁹⁸ ONMI's enormous deficit swallowed the 65 million *lire* state subsidy which the Duce conferred upon what he called his 'most fascist of all institutions'. Spending on *riconosciuti* spiralled out of control; it rose to over 28 million *lire* in 1931 and over 33 in 1932.⁹⁹ Some confusion did arise about where all of ONMI's funds were going. In 1930 alone, for example, the organization had raised over 150 million *lire* in private donations, yet leaders still complained of acute money shortages. In one of the many parliamentary debates about ONMI's finances, a deputy raised the issue of the organization's efficiency. On the 9 April 1932, discussion in the lower house focused on whether ONMI should reduce administrative expenditure in the interests of social welfare spending. ONMI leaders bristled at the mere suggestion of corruption or mismanagement.¹⁰⁰ No sensible solution to the crisis appeared on the horizon.

The seemingly disproportionate share of ONMI's resources and energies that reclaimed infants and their unwed mothers received began to attract criticism. The church embraced ONMI and supported its efforts, but when the full implications of illegitimacy policy became clearer, some Catholics started to feel somewhat uneasy about the campaign. For example, the Catholic women's journal, *Il Solco*, began to run articles accusing the regime of privileging unwed mothers over 'respectable, married women'; while unwed mothers were being subsidized, contributors alleged, many more deserving women were left without much state support of any kind. And the conservative *Congressi per la moralità*, which applauded the government's 'moral resolve' on matters relating to paternity, abortion, and divorce, none the less attempted to incite opposition to fascism's 'soft' treatment of unwed mothers. Calling for increased convictions for the crime of child abandonment and the imposition of a tougher welfare regime, moral campaigners put pressure on fascism to be more coercive, restrictive, and

punitive in its approach. To their credit, ONMI leaders, including Alberto Blanc, Sileno Fabbri, Daisy di Robilant and others, answered these attacks by pointing out that their policy did have great 'ethical value'; as illegitimates suffered such shamefully high mortality, they deserved special treatment.¹⁰¹ Initially, the complaints of Catholics and conservatives were muted and isolated. But Pope Pius XI entered the fray with his encyclical of 15 May 1931, 'On the Reconstruction of the Social Order'. In this overt critique of fascist policy, the pontiff expressed sorrow that 'not infrequently nowadays it happens that through a certain inversion of the true order of things, ready and bountiful assistance is provided for the unmarried mother and her illegitimate offspring (who, of course, must be helped in order to avoid a greater evil) which is denied to legitimate mothers or given sparingly or almost begrudgingly.' Like Christian charity, state welfare should uphold the moral order, defend the institution of marriage, and bolster the 'legitimate' family.¹⁰²

The evidence strongly suggests that, had they not encountered such financial difficulties, ONMI and the government would have preferred to weather adverse reactions to their policy and continue along their planned course of action. Political and welfare leaders, however, had not considered fully the economic implications of illegitimacy policy. The need to decrease ONMI's stake in the relief of illegitimates was the primary motivation behind the 1933 amendment. When party and state officials received 92 ONMI delegates in the Campidoglio for the organization's first national convention on 15 June 1932, the assembled audience understood the importance of this imperative. ONMI's new royal commissioner, Sileno Fabbri addressed this problem directly in a speech which definitively signalled the end of the old era of optimism and the beginning of a new era of resignation. Fabbri spoke little of welfare revolution. Instead, he mentioned repeatedly that ONMI's seemingly insurmountable economic troubles necessitated the adoption of a more 'gradual and patient' approach to all the work ahead. All the delegates to the congress, including those from the South and the islands, affirmed their commitment to replacing the 'old, criminal, and immoral foundling home system' with a 'new rational and integrated form of assistance towards unwed motherhood, and ultimately, unwed fatherhood'. But because of the 'deficiency of means', 'practical reforms' were necessary. The 'reality of our country', Fabbri declared, was such that ONMI could never become 'a huge state-run beneficent institute or congregation of charity with unlimited funds'. Financial resources were 'finite', but the social demand for welfare was potentially 'infinite', so policy targets had to be more realistic. After less than a decade in existence, ONMI found itself spending more and more to provide masses of people with only a desultory, insufficient, and casual kind of assistance. To ameliorate the situation, Fabbri proposed major cutbacks and suspensions which would affect all social programmes to a greater or lesser extent. Although

the organization had barely got off the ground in many areas, he admitted, its economic crisis meant that provincial leaders would have to be more economical and efficient. To begin with, ONMI had no choice but to renegotiate the terms of illegitimacy policy. Delegates approved a resolution calling for a review of the 1927 legislation and made recommendations which formed the basis of the 1933 reform.¹⁰³

The 1933 legislation achieved some success at reducing ONMI's spending. ONMI's expenditure on *riconosciuti* fell from 39.5 million *lire* in 1933 to 27.4 in 1934, but it rose to 30 million in 1935, stabilized in the high 20s from 1936 to 1940 and began to rise again during the war years.¹⁰⁴ But any savings that ONMI made came at a big price for local governments who, from 1933 onwards, had to carry two-thirds of the burden of assistance and had to sup-plicate ONMI for its share in the cost. As the central state thrust many new tasks upon them, local governments saw their financial needs increase enormously during the fascist period. But many municipal and provincial authorities experienced crisis as tax collection lagged behind revenue requirements, indebtedness increased, and borrowing became more difficult.¹⁰⁵ The 1933 enactment intensified pressures on local governments to perform to fascist specifications. Pronounced disparities in resources and capabilities meant that after 1933 foundling home reform nationwide would be very patchy.

Few of Italy's provinces possessed the economic and institutional means of Milan, where ONMI and government at both provincial and municipal levels began to transform the old *brefotrofio* system in 1928. But, even here, the illegitimacy campaign had a limited impact, partly because ONMI, whose personnel in Milan comprised a high percentage of PNF activists,¹⁰⁶ prioritized outreach projects in working-class communities. Attempting to respond to the needs of poor working mothers, the organization sought to build complete health and social centres with medical facilities, a maternal refectory, and a day nursery for infants between three months and three years of age.¹⁰⁷ In 1928, ONMI *federali* and government officials announced the creation of a new *Istituto Provinciale per la Protezione ed Assistenza dell'Infanzia Illegittima* (Provincial Institute for the Protection and Assistance of Illegitimate Infants – IPAIL). In a real sense, however, the only difference this caused was a change of name to the old *brefotrofio* system. This body oversaw the care of foundlings and administered subsidies to mothers who reclaimed. The institute also provided a range of 'social services' through its one and only *albergo materno*: it ran 'training programmes' for out-of-work unwed mothers which consisted of sewing classes; it held summer camps for illegitimate children; and, by showing propaganda and popular films, it organized leisure activities for welfare recipients. But, when compared to the kind of comprehensive assistance and income support which di Robilant offered 'her mothers', the substance of these initiatives seems especially meagre. Even before ONMI's financial crash in 1932, marriage and reclama-tion premiums in Milan never amounted to much of an expense or an

incentive; and the nursing subsidies on offer were far lower than those which were available in Rome. And, in the aftermath of the 1933 legislation, ONMI distanced itself even more from the illegitimacy problem. Consequently, the value of benefits dwindled further and welfare drifted farther away from direct economic aid.¹⁰⁸ Even Sileno Fabbri, the former head of ONMI's provincial federation in Milan, admitted that reforms had not proceeded very well there. When Mussolini visited Milan in the spring of 1930, he had praised Fabbri's efforts at saving illegitimate infants. But what the Duce perhaps did not realize was that beneath the facade of a 'complete system of sanitary assistance towards illegitimates', the old foundling home regime lurked. Milan's *brefotrofio*, one of the largest in all of Italy, remained hidden under the superficially modern structure of IPAI; it not only survived the 1927 reform, but also resurged after 1933. And in that medieval institution, as many as a third of all 'assisted' babies still died before they reached their first birthday.¹⁰⁹

In some especially disadvantaged localities, the 1933 legislation did little to help hard-pressed public authorities meet local needs. For example, ONMI's federation in Mantua did not start making any contribution towards illegitimates until 1930. Because of high unemployment in the area and their own lack of resources, the organization's leaders focused their efforts on the provision of various kinds of alms to relieve hardship: the distribution of food, wood, and clothing to the poor took priority over other types of programmes. As the economic crisis worsened, however, ONMI officials in Mantua realized that they needed to do something about the rising rate of abandonment in the province. But the best that they could offer unwed mothers as an incentive to keep their babies was a mere one-off reclamation premium of 25 *lire* and monthly subsidies for three years, which were scaled down annually from 25 *lire*, to 20, and then 15. Local governments could hardly fill in the gaps in provision without a great deal of expenditure which they simply could not afford; Mantua had no foundling home, no organized wet-nursing system, no mothers' shelter and no type of out-patient prenatal care for pregnant women. In places like Mantua, the illegitimacy campaign meant very little because the institutions and infrastructure of private charity and public welfare hardly existed at all.¹¹⁰

Mantua's experience of fascist reforms was hardly exceptional. Completed in 1940, an official government inquest revealed just how little the state provided. The report concluded that the principal aim of fascist policy – the protection of illegitimate children – had not been realized, primarily because of 'the limited financial resources at the disposal of ONMI and local governments'. In addition, 'the powers of direction and control which the law attributes to ONMI have, for many reasons, never materialized, with the result that the desired coordination and uniformity of services towards illegitimates and their mothers have not been achieved.'

Prenatal care for unwed mothers was a myth outside the big cities, and even in urban centres, the quality of it differed enormously throughout the country. The statutory right of all pregnant, unmarried women to early recovery also remained a fiction. As many as 23 provinces in the nation still made no provision for reclamation premiums whatsoever and, when they were offered, these essential benefits varied enormously in size. As they were as small as 30 *lire* in some places, they could hardly be expected to function as any kind of effective deterrent against abandonment. Far less common in practice, marriage premiums were seldom as high as the 800–1000 *lire* awards which di Robilant had been distributing ten years earlier. And, as far as nursing subsidies were concerned, the typical amount of these fell well below mere subsistence, let alone a decent standard. In only 5 out of 91 provinces in the period 1938–9 did unwed mothers, who were ‘fulfilling their demographic duty by rearing their own children’, receive monthly income support which was deemed to be ‘sufficient, at least in theory, to guarantee the very minimum requirements for infant survival’. The investigation also confirmed the obvious: the *brefotrofio* had not been abolished. Italy still possessed 98 foundling homes, and 41 of these were judged to be so underfunded and badly managed that they endangered lives. The report ended with a statistical breakdown of mortality levels in Italian foundling homes which makes sad reading. While deathrates in the 91 homes for which data were available could be as low as 2 or 3 per cent in some facilities, they could also be as high as 28, 31, 38, 58 and 62 per cent in others.¹¹¹ And if what di Robilant suspected was true, and some of the worst establishments routinely fiddled the figures, then the death toll of institutional ‘care’ could be even higher still. And just as revealing, the illegitimacy campaign had no positive effect on reclamation rates nationwide. In the years 1933–7, the percentage of illegitimate babies who were legally reclaimed by at least one parent at the time of birth registration was (at 7.7 per cent) slightly lower than it had been in the years 1924–8 (when it was 7.8 per cent).¹¹² According to the government’s own inquiry, fascism had failed to fulfil its promise to protect the lives of Italy’s most vulnerable babies.

Conclusion

What does this apparently poor record of achievement tell us about the larger questions which inform this book? Throughout this work, I have used the term ‘social revolution’ in the way that contemporaries themselves used it; that is to mean, as a signifier of profound and radical changes not just to social institutions, but also to social values. This section of the book began with Cambi and Ulivieri’s reaffirmation of the Ariès thesis, which posits that a humanization of attitudes and behaviour towards children occurred in the modern period. An examination of the

illegitimacy question from liberalism to fascism brings these two themes together and reveals much about how Italian society esteemed and treated some of its most vulnerable members. So, how far did modern Italy go towards improving its treatment of illegitimates, and to what extent was fascism responsible for any advances in this area?

At a most basic level, fascism must take some of the credit for improving the life chances of foundlings. The 1940 government inquest revealed that 14.9 per cent of illegitimate infants in the foundling home system died before they reached their first birthday.¹¹³ Though the regime quite rightly questioned its record of achievement in the field of foundling home reform, this statistic, none the less, represents a significant improvement over past performance. The 1900 inquiry, for example, showed that many foundlings faced almost certain death in *brefotrofi*. While 80–100 per cent mortality was not uncommon in some of the most deplorable institutions, the national average deathrate of illegitimate infants under one who were in the care of *brefotrofi* came to 38.3 per cent in 1897.¹¹⁴ And importantly too, the huge differential between illegitimate and legitimate mortality that prevailed in the past no longer existed by the 1930s; in 1938, for example, the mortality of illegitimate infants under one was 15.2 per cent and that of legitimates was 10.4.¹¹⁵

Admittedly, the 'illegitimacy problem' which fascism inherited was a smaller one than previous liberal governments had had to face; as the number of abandoned babies each year fell from about 30 000 in c.1900 to about 10 000 in c.1940, the pressures on authorities to maintain and monitor these infants decreased too. At the very least though, fascism set new standards of institutional care, and, backed up as they were by regular governmental inspections and the increased accountability of private charities to public authorities more generally, these probably did lead to better practice.

And the fascist regime's crusade against juvenile delinquency might have had a positive impact in this regard because it highlighted the importance of good nurturing to the psychological and social development of children, underscored the wider responsibility of society towards 'deviants' and the abandoned, and emphasized the damaging effects of institutionalized rearing on the young. During the fascist period, government officials and medical specialists engaged in a lively debate about 'juvenile delinquency' which focused on liberalism's poor record of prison reform. According to one specialist, the juvenile offender came to be considered under fascism as an 'impaired and immature individual rather than a born and uneducable criminal'. As part of a plan of social prevention and defence, she maintained, corrective measures could do considerably more to 're-educate minors' than punitive ones had done in the past. Rather than impose imprisonment in adult penitentiaries, where children learned to become dangerous and incorrigible criminals, the fascist regime was attempting to

create more reformatories for the care of young derelicts to encourage their 'social adaptation'. The problem was of grave national concern, she believed, given the post-war surfeit of abandoned infants who were 'destined to fill the ranks of reckless and slothful youths dedicated to wasteful lives as vagabonds, prostitutes, beggars and thieves'.¹¹⁶

This argument advocating correction rather than punishment reflected the growing conviction that penal and social policy must be radically changed in order to deter the spread of juvenile delinquency. The belief that minors should be treated less harshly than adults under criminal law was based on recognition of social conditioning as a major cause of crime. Promulgated on 18 October 1930, Italy's new penal code incorporated some of these views into the criminal justice system. Like many criminal anthropologists and psychiatrists of the day, Alfredo Rocco believed that juvenile delinquency had begun to rise long before the war. But, according to the professor of commercial law, mobilization had aggravated the problem by causing the break-up of families. Military service had imposed a kind of institutionalized abandonment on young recruits. Orphaned and stray children also figured prominently amongst the social casualties of war. In parliament, the nationalist stated on a number of occasions that the nature of juvenile crime had changed in the post-war period. Youngsters, he stressed, committed serious offences endangering persons, property, and even the state. Appointed minister of justice in 1925, Rocco determined to defend society from the growing threat of the 'alarming criminality of Italian youth'. He believed that 'purely penal measures' had 'proven insufficient to combat the grave and worrying upsurge of habitual delinquency, juvenile delinquency, and mental infirmity'. Child offenders should be placed in institutions for their re-education and rehabilitation.¹¹⁷

A new regulation governing penal institutions came into effect on 18 June 1931. This law, together with a further enactment on 20 July 1934, redefined the nature of punishment of child offenders. These acts enhanced the 'corrective' and 'educational' aspect of retribution at the expense of so-called 'pure' punishment. They made provision for the psychological evaluation of individuals and for their medico-pedagogical rehabilitation. ONMI did participate in this 'therapeutic' movement. With the involvement of local police and private charities, some ONMI federations in mainly northern provinces created child detention and observation centres. By 1935, local money and private venues had been found for 24 such specialized institutions, which housed 'delinquent, degenerate, and disturbed' children awaiting trial or sentencing. Together with a magistrate and a representative from ONMI, medical staff included a specialist in criminal anthropology and one expert in psychiatry. The purpose of these centres was to diagnose the causes of delinquency by examining each individual for symptoms of abnormality. Intelligence tests were given to children who appeared mentally deficient; skull measurements were taken of

physically handicapped offenders; psychiatric investigations were made of children deprived of 'material and moral' family support who then turned to crime.¹¹⁸

Between 1931 and 1934, 1404 male and 60 female children mostly between the ages of 12 and 18 were examined in those institutions under ONMI supervision alone. Biological and psychiatric testing found that the vast majority of delinquents suffered from some form of hereditary predisposition due to immoral, alcoholic, and psychopathological family traits. Out of one sample of 189 minors with especially pronounced personality disorders, a proportion were judged 'sick and dangerous' but worthy of social re-education in a reformatory; these comprised 41 children who were found to have low intelligence and 19 to have severe emotional problems. In Rome, during a six-month period beginning in November 1934, authorities admitted 119 young convicts (of whom 36 were suspected 'habitual delinquents') to a neuro-psychiatric clinic for testing. None of the children had committed serious offences. Many were without family contact; and most had been unemployed and homeless at the time of arrest.¹¹⁹

That child poverty could contribute significantly to juvenile crime was clear from police reports. Public security measures permitted the police to question and detain youths without bringing official charges. Especially in places like Milan, which had a notorious reputation as one of the nation's most 'delinquent' cities, dragnet operations were a common occurrence. By the 1930s, the police claimed that they were stopping about 27 000 children annually in the streets of major metropolitan centres; and of those subsequently arrested, the overwhelming majority were charged with crimes of vagrancy, begging, and prostitution.¹²⁰ ONMI alone reported that it had helped to recover 18 068 homeless children nationwide between 1926 and 1931. Foster parents were very difficult to find, especially in southern and northern regions, so institutional confinement was often the only option available. A proportion of these children were found to be 'corrupted', often meaning sexually or physically abused; over 1270 were placed in private mental institutions; care orders were given to over 4750 for recovery in public psychiatric hospitals; and 1750 were put into custody within houses of correction.

This level of child abandonment clearly reflected profound disruptions to family life wrought by severe economic hardship. Although child labour rose during the depression due to the preference of employers to keep wages down, children younger than 15 who would normally contribute to the household were now finding it harder to find stable work. In some provinces which were especially hard hit by mass unemployment, the party actually evaded restrictions to combat the illegal employment of children. As part of an informal policy to help impoverished families, PNF officials ordered prefects to issue temporary work permits dismissing children from

school and allowing them to do banned jobs, such as night-time shifts in factories.¹²¹ The abandonment of minors was undoubtedly a huge problem in fascist Italy. Annually about 8000 adolescents who had been reclaimed as illegitimate infants found themselves destitute and alone. Despite the severity of sentences for parental abandonment, and the increasing publicity given such cases in the press, the regime failed to put a stop to the spread of this 'moral contagion'.¹²² The evidence suggests that financial pressures on poor families and single-parent households put children in a very precarious position.

Minors still existed in the shadows of the system of protective statutory provision provided by ONMI and the law. Despite attempts to foster the development of rehabilitative facilities, children were still being incarcerated in fascist Italy. By the end of the 1930s, the total population of children in psychiatric and penal institutions had risen considerably over the course of the previous two decades. Out of a total prison population of 327 036, 14 144 mostly male children were interned in 1938, and over 4000 more boys were detained in reform schools. When fascism came to power in 1922, Italy's penal and correctional establishments had held 3643 minors, over 5000 fewer than had been incarcerated at the turn of the century. And up markedly from the preceding period, the number of 'deficient and degenerate' children confined in institutions for both the 'educable' and the 'incurable' averaged about 2000 a year during the fascist period, and numbered well over 50 000 according to the most conservative estimates.¹²³

By bringing these issues of child welfare to the forefront of public consciousness and debate, fascism may have contributed to changing attitudes in a way which ultimately benefited children. The forces of social change, of course, had begun to gain some momentum long before fascism arrived on the scene; but successive liberal governments stymied these and perpetuated a culture of neglect whose casualties included many thousands of foundlings. None the less, the fascist regime proved unable to solve all the problems affecting children on the margins of Italian society.

As far as illegitimacy policy went, it remains true that another regime might have implemented the reforms which fascism introduced in its early years in power; but no other had done so before. And, for all its faults, the 1927 legislation on illegitimates was profoundly radical and path-breaking. But fascism did not finish the social revolution it began. Though internally and externally reshaped by the new supervisory *istituti provinciali di protezione all'infanzia illegittima*, which surfaced in Milan and elsewhere, especially after the 1933 enactment came into force, the archaic system of the *brefotrofia* and the *balia* survived the fascist period. And the pace of institutional transformation slowed down considerably in the second half of the 1930s as ONMI and the regime ran out of steam.

It is, of course, far more difficult to assess fascism's impact upon social values. Fascist illegitimacy policy aimed at elevating the status of 'unwed mothers' in Italian society and, for this reason, it contrasted favourably with that of its predecessors in liberal Italy and its peers in Nazi Germany.¹²⁴ Out of a desire to decrease the number of publicly maintained children (rather than any feminist impulse), Italian fascism determined to give *madri nubili* the economic independence and social support which they needed to rear their offspring. But whether the changes which the regime wrought had any lasting effect is open to question. At the very least, the dictatorship succeeded in bringing the question of illegitimacy out into the open. By turning the problem of abandonment into a political priority and a matter of government policy, fascism probably began to lay the foundations for the creation of a more plural, tolerant, and permissive society in the post-1945 period. It also predicated its welfare programme on the assertion that single women had a right to be mothers. This may have had a positive impact on women by freeing them of the compulsion to conform to conventional moral and social precepts about the unity of marriage and motherhood. However, at the end of the fascist period illegitimacy still roused shame and stigma, particularly in the south. But the new perceptions of women and the family which the regime actively encouraged had begun to chip away at the mass of tradition, religion, and culture which obstructed female emancipation.

Only very late in the day did fascism begin to recast the family by revising civil law and promulgating the so-called Mussolini Code from July 1939 to March 1942. Despite its rather dramatic title, and all the hype it received, the new codification fell far short of being the fundamental *riordinamento della famiglia* which the regime had promised it would be. Reflecting party and political interests, the code defined the family as an institution under paternal authority which none the less had responsibilities towards society and the state.¹²⁵ Though the code identified the family as the nucleus of national society, and thereby politicized its function, it also recognized the religious act of marriage as the foundation of the familial order.¹²⁶ As its supporters stated enthusiastically, the new code did indeed aim at 'privileging and protecting the legitimate family'.¹²⁷ However, it also prepared the groundwork for the major changes to the legal position of illegitimates which emerged very gradually in the post-war period.

Most importantly, new rulings in 1939 extended the rights of abandoned children by legalizing and formalizing affiliation. According to the guidelines, anyone, regardless of sex or civil status, could affiliate one or more abandoned children. Conceived as a legal remedy to abandonment, and as a means to reduce public expenditure on foundlings, affiliation had a number of advantages over adoption. For one, it required only that the affiliating person or persons be of majority age; and, secondly, even those with legitimate or illegitimate offspring could affiliate non-biological chil-

dren. But, in other respects, affiliation was a timid compromise because the jurists who created it were very keen to maintain very rigid distinctions between the 'legitimate family' and other lesser varieties of 'quasi' or 'surrogate' families. Although the affiliated child took the name of the affiliating person (and in the case of a couple, the husband's name), he or she had no rights of succession. Moreover, full parental powers and responsibilities were not conferred upon the affiliating party.¹²⁸ There were limits to the new types of family formation which the state was prepared to tolerate.

Moreover, although fascist legal minds defined adoption as a 'precious institution' because it 'imitated the family', they did nothing to reform it. The 'legitimate' family maintained its social primacy because of the strength of resistance to alternative forms of family formation. Though the regime encouraged adoption in the 1930s, no more than a few hundred cases ever came before the courts in any one year in that decade. Decades after the fall of fascism, Italy still had one of the lowest adoption rates in all of Europe. When legislators finally reformed adoption law in 1967, new simplified and democratic procedures seem to have brought few benefits to the many thousands of children who remained without families.¹²⁹

During its last years in power, fascism finally started to conceive of the possibility that the fathers of illegitimates should have responsibility for the maintenance of their children. The new civil code permitted the courts to recognize 'natural filiation' (*filiazione naturale*) and paternity in cases involving cohabitating partners, and even in those involving incestuous children. When paternity was not imputable, therefore, fathers could be held responsible for child maintenance. Though innovative, these rulings were also tentative. In cases involving adulterine children from a relationship between a married person and an unmarried one, for example, paternity could be established only when the spouse of the married party was deceased; moreover, if the married party had any legitimate or legitimated children, the council of state had to consider their views before declaring paternity. The paramount concern of the code was still to preserve and defend the legitimate family.¹³⁰ Though fascism began an important process of legal reform, social attitudes about men and masculinity remained resistant to change. Even after the 1948 Constitution of the Italian Republic legalized paternity searches, welfare authorities still complained in the 1950s and 1960s that paternal reclamation of illegitimates remained an extreme rarity and, in the overwhelming majority of their cases, fathers abandoned the women with whom they had conceived a child and shirked their responsibility towards their children; society's burden of care, they lamented, fell almost entirely upon single mothers.¹³¹ These post-war social workers should have studied the fascist experiment more closely, for had they done so, they might have learned a valuable lesson – that government could not simply reinvent the social order through legal action and welfare policy. Processes of social change often

remain beyond the control of even those states which seek actively to alter society according to their own specifications.

In Italy, the great transformation of social values concerning gender and the family proved to be particularly slow in the coming. Rising levels of female employment in the post-war period, together with increasing use of contraception and abortion, may have brought Italy's illegitimacy ratio to an all-time European low by the 1970s and 1980s, but some of the old attitudes about men, women, and children survived these dramatic changes. The fascist social revolution made some headway in the right direction, but the process of social liberalization and reformation is still under way today.¹³²

10

An Italian Social Revolution?

One of the great *idées-lumineuses* to emerge from that period known to us as the Enlightenment was the separation of the spiritual from the temporal. An absolute divorcement between church and state seemed to many to be the best guarantee of ecclesiastical autonomy and civil authority. Radical and moderate secularists alike believed that the state could be much more of a guardian of morality and virtue and a protector of the people's welfare than the church had ever been. The construction of a civil society, founded upon personal liberties and communal values, and a good government, committed to material betterment and social progress, did not seem beyond reach.¹ The world of the *ancien régime* bequeathed to the nascent modern era a belief that state power and secular values could be the agents of profound and positive social change. The progressive utopia that was *Risorgimento* liberalism inherited this dream of *buon governo* and *civiltà moderna* and set itself a task of immense importance. It aimed to challenge the church's primacy over the social realm, transform the institutions of private charity, and, ultimately, place responsibility for the dispensation of relief in the public domain. What the nineteenth-century papacy called the 'perfidious liberal revolution' may have been anticlerical, but it was not faithless, for secularism was a sacred tenet of liberalism's modernizing creed.²

This book has attempted to show how the struggle for control over the institutions which ministered to the needs of the people formed an integral feature of liberalism's search for social modernity and experiment at state-building. The social mission of nineteenth-century liberal statecraft was to laicize the archaic institutions and structures of private charity and create altogether new forms of public welfare which befitted a modern society. But the great liberal project failed. Earlier revolutions provided no easy blueprint for the liberals as they embarked on a programme to alter fundamentally both government and society.

The Napoleonic interlude had not destroyed the old order of Christian piety and charity in Italy. Indeed, if anything, their French rulers had set a bad precedent for Italian state-builders and modernizers as the Napoleonic

administrative model of 'legal charity' superficially extended lay control over beneficence without effectively challenging the church's claims to a monopoly over matters relating to the provision of welfare. Heir of the great eighteenth-century ideas of liberty, the rule of law, and the Rights of Man, Cavour seemed particularly sensitive to the need for a new Italy to remedy the terrible deprivation afflicting the popular classes. He believed that the poverty and ignorance of the underprivileged could be combated by undermining the influence of the clergy in Italian society and building a constitutional monarchy devoted to the political education and social elevation of the people. But, seeking always to find a *via media* between the white reaction of absolute kingship and the red republic of popular democracy, Cavour never began, let alone completed, a real social revolution.

The generation of statesmen which succeeded him lost sight of some of the more high-minded ideals of Cavour's social vision. Rather than create a new framework to promote national unity and social integration, they simply extended existing Piedmontese laws, policies, and administration upon the rest of the kingdom. Subjecting *opere pie* to almost no interference by government, other than the requirement that they submit their accounts for audit by public officials, Piedmont's system of *carità legale* was not a secure foundation upon which to build a decent system of social provision. None the less, it became the basis for unified Italy's peculiar form of *beneficenza pubblica*, with the result that the need of the working classes for comprehensive and statutory assistance by the state went unmet. Cavour's successors also imposed a style of governance, by a very narrow ruling elite of northerners, which was totally indifferent to the plight of the people. The civil war in the south in the 1860s cost many more lives than were lost in all the wars of national liberation. The uprising of Sicilian peasants that provoked the armed struggle with troops sent by the House of Savoy belied the myth that the *Risorgimento* was the product of the popular will.

Government under the centre-left during the Depretis years was founded upon many social promises, but few actual achievements. After 1876, the parliamentary system became increasingly dysfunctional, as liberal politics depended upon changeable, disparate, and fragile coalitions. *Trasformismo* was symptomatic of the defective nature of rule by a liberal oligarchy which did not have to struggle with other groups for power or popularity. The absence of pluralism and competition in political life accentuated the insularity of liberals and marred the performance of government. *Trasformismo* also precluded the development of decisive and long-term social policies that served the whole nation's interests. And, resting as it did upon the ability of prefects to manufacture electoral majorities in the localities, the liberal regime used a vital organ of the administrative machinery of the central state – the prefectures – to further crass political ends rather than to discharge vital administrative duties.

The structure of the Italian state began to change at the end of the nineteenth century, as Crispi successfully pushed for an expansion and centralization of governmental functions. The terrible cholera epidemic of 1865, followed by seven other less severe outbreaks in the years before 1887, provoked dozens of parliamentary debates about the necessity of government action to improve public health and hygiene. Crispi managed to convince a reluctant senate to accept a modified version of his bill which, when converted into law in late 1888, reorganized the kingdom's sanitary services, which had hitherto been in the hands of the communes. At the centre, the reform created a *Consiglio Superiore di Sanità* (Superior Health Council) under the interior ministry and, in every province, subaltern branches located in the prefectures. By establishing directive organs at the national and provincial levels and transferring responsibilities for the task of supervision from the local political appointees of mayors to qualified experts approved centrally, these new institutions aimed at imposing controls over how municipalities performed their duty to protect the public's health.³ Though significant in its intent to extend the purview of the national state, the legislation had a limited effect in many localities throughout the peninsula and islands. While it sought to break with the tradition of state non-interventionism and passivity that emerged as a distinct feature of liberal social politics in the post-unitary period, the Crispian revolution of the years 1887 to 1896 ultimately failed, too, either to secure social progress or to guarantee public order. Crispi's overhauled state still proved unable to erect the proper legal and institutional edifice for a re-founded system of legal charity which was capable of supervising private charitable institutions watchfully, developing satisfactorily regulatory policies for public welfare, and meeting sufficiently demands for social rights emanating from below. Once peasants and workers ceased to be inert, liberals eventually paid a big price for having left unresolved Italy's 'social question' for far too long. The pent-up resentments of the masses that exploded in a torrent of strikes and riots in the 1890s underscored the political seclusion of the governing class and the structural weaknesses of the liberal order.

Under the long ascendancy of new liberalism in the years before the First World War, the country experienced a period of dramatic democratic reconstruction after the wreckage of the 1890s. Giolitti launched an inclusive programme that sought to broaden the social bases of liberal rule and consolidate bourgeois, capitalist society. For about a decade, he succeeded at giving the middle classes relative economic prosperity and social peace. He temporarily stabilized the liberal order also by granting the urban working class some basic rights to political participation and social protection. But, in some very important respects, only very superficially did Giolitti redefine the style of governance of his orthodox liberal forebears. If anything, venality in politics grew more rampant in the hands of the masterful '*ministro della malavita*' (minister of gangsterism).⁴ As their critics have long recognized, Giolitti and his *fidati*

'managed' elections in 1904, 1909, 1911 (in a by-election) and 1913 by bribery and thuggery. They also excelled at the corruption of high office. Under Giolitti, ministries freely distributed government contracts for public works projects as favours to cronies in southern constituencies, which comprised the backbone of Giolitti's bloc of support. Whenever Giolitti grew tired of parliamentary shenanigans, he backed an unpopular measure, such as tax reform, in a bid to propel a rival to the premiership and withdraw from active politics. Since no one else could work the system which he created, the boss felt safe in the knowledge that, in a matter of months, he would be asked to make a triumphant return to power. Democracy was the means, rather than the end of Giolitti's pre-war regime. Giolitti behaved more in the manner of a true opportunist than a principled politician. He sought to construct a lasting liberal-labour alliance. But he also tried to appease the nationalist appetites of segments of the middle classes by embarking upon a colonial campaign in 1912. In other countries, such as Britain during the Boer Wars, imperialism repaired the breaches in political systems.⁵ But the Libyan War provoked the dissolution of the pre-war regime precisely because Giolittianism had not succeeded at manufacturing the consent of the masses.

The Giolittian experiment confirms that governments can be undone by the real 'bread and butter' social issues of health, education, and welfare. Though of immense significance to male workers, electoral reform alone could not save Giolitti's regime, because it was not accompanied by sufficient social progress. Giolitti had no social vision. He used social policies quite flagrantly to serve his overriding political agenda of preserving liberal power. And, very significantly, he promised the masses far more than he actually delivered. He extended social entitlements to some strata of the urban proletariat, but workers' welfare 'gains' were extremely limited in scope and impact during this period. Dependent upon placement and status within the labour market, the social insurance system under Giolitti was highly clientelistic, restrictive, and selective. Far from being 'a modern' when it came to embracing new collectivist notions of the role of the state in society, moreover, Giolitti espoused some very traditional, nineteenth-century ideas about the absolute bounds of public responsibility for the people's welfare. Voluntarism continued to be the organizing principle of social insurance reforms. Adherence to the outmoded doctrine of self-help might have been abandoned, had there been greater commitment to distributing the rewards of increased affluence more equitably. As the 'Red Week' in June 1914 demonstrated only too clearly, the Giolittian social state was never really capable of integrating or domesticating the masses. Many of its most important policies and provisions were never implemented effectively. It excluded the majority of the working population, the peasantry, from any of the benefits of 'social citizenship'. And it granted the urban labouring poor only the slightest means of protection from the ever present danger of destitution, due to illness, disability, childbirth,

unemployment and old age. Significantly too, Giolitti's policy on *opere pie* bore many of the hallmarks of pre-Crispian old liberalism. The improvement of public beneficence through purposeful state intervention never became a priority because of Giolitti's fixation on political expedients. In accounting for his inaction, Giolitti resorted to the familiar excuse that one of the oldest and most pressing social questions confronting Italian statesmen – what was to be done with the charitable establishment – could not be resolved resolutely because it was just too complicated a problem. Prolonged neglect of *beneficenza pubblica* eventually brought the system and its institutions to the point of total collapse during the war. And, almost ironically, a lack of political principles and social priorities eventually cost Giolitti his hold on power.

The history of Italian liberalism in power is the story of its political isolation and terminal decline. The failure to enact a social revolution, herein defined not in rigid Marxist terms – as a re-structuring of class relations and the means of production – but in the broader sense that the Enlightenment and its followers conceived it – as a transformation of social institutions and values bringing positive benefits to the people – can help us to understand why that was so.⁶ The inability of liberals to devise and implement effective policies, constituting a social politics aimed at bettering the conditions of the mass of the population, deprived them of extensive institutional means to extend their presence in society, establish instrumental linkages with local elites, govern more effectively, gain popular support and exercise genuine legitimacy.⁷ Why were liberals unable to complete their mission?

There are a number of possible explanations. The timing may have been wrong. The goal of national unification undoubtedly took priority over social reform during the *Risorgimento*. But the coincidence of the social and national revolutions did not really impede an advancement of the liberal project. After all, what is seen as the belated achievement of nationhood in Germany (when compared to Britain or France) did not pose as an obstacle to the introduction of pioneering social insurance programmes in the 1880s. However, the delivery of 'modern' welfare is, ultimately, dependent upon the rise of bureaucratic management under the nation-state. In Germany, the relative strengths of pre-unification states and their bureaucracies, and the pre-existence of a tradition of what historians once called 'benevolent patriarchy' in Prussia, made a policy of social reform on a broad national scale and in a sweeping manner possible.⁸ The administrative structures and policies necessary for a revolutionary transformation of the old charitable order were absent in pre-unitary Piedmont, whose model of limited government activity in the realm of social welfare became the blueprint for the new Italy.

So too did religion play a part in the development of the functions and powers of government in the modern period. After the break with Rome, Reformation Prussia and England replaced the medieval institutions of Catholic piety with increasingly bureaucratized forms of public relief. There

was no Italian equivalent to the English Poor Law of 1601 or the Prussian Common Law of 1794, which established a rudimentary framework for the organization of charity by the state. In post-unitary Italy, attempts at state formation and administrative bureaucratization coincided with efforts to laicize and re-organize charities. This was unfortunate. It meant that, well into the twentieth century, the instrument of good government – the fabric of civil administration from centre to periphery – was still too weak to ensure the effective implementation and enforcement of social legislation and directives from Rome.

Economic factors can also account for the rather low level of increase in public welfare activity and the piecemeal pace of social reform in liberal Italy. 'Fiscal constraints on the growth of the welfare state' did seem to be more pronounced in Italy than they were in much wealthier countries, such as Germany and Britain. And these economic impediments appeared to have had a lasting impact. In the course of roughly a century, government social expenditure on health, assistance, and insurance (but not housing and education) rose dramatically in Western Europe from 1 or 2 per cent of GNP (Gross National Product) at most in the 1870s to 22.8 per cent in France, 16.6 in Germany, 13.5 in Italy and 10.8 in Britain in 1965. How nations reached the levels attained in 1965 differed enormously. For in the nineteenth century, the rate of growth in social spending was far lower in France (under 1.5 per cent per year) and Italy (under 1 per cent) than it was in Britain and Germany (about 2 per cent). The 'welfare gap' between Germany and other nations grew even larger when German social spending increased massively in the first three decades of the twentieth century. By allocating welfare so few of its societal resources, Italy lagged far behind all the rest. But in the 1930s, it began the process of catching up with and, in the case of Britain, even surpassing its competitors by the 1950s. It was under fascism rather than liberalism that Italian welfare-state building, measured in social expenditure, began to experience 'take-off' to new levels of acceleration.⁹

Initially, the difficulty and expense of nation-building severely limited the ability of the unifying state to increase social expenditure substantially enough for it to secure Italy's passage from being a society dominated by 'traditional' charity to a nation that delivered 'modern' welfare. And because industrialization started relatively late, and progressed so slowly from the 1860s to the 1890s, the kingdom of Italy did not possess the accumulated economic surplus that was necessary to generate continuous welfare development. The possibilities were further restricted by the coincidence at the end of the century of what some historians describe as the early stages of welfare state-building with a prolonged world depression that hit Italy very badly. Scholars see industrialization as a prerequisite for major breakthroughs in welfare provision; it seems to generate pressure for welfare development by exposing increasing numbers of people to ever

greater varieties of risk and misfortune, such as mass unemployment and industrial accident. And, by increasing living standards, broadly defined, it prolongs human life, expands the pool of elderly persons, and creates potential demand for old-age pensions.¹⁰ But in Italy the 'need' (if we can speak in such crude terms) for new types of social protection was appreciably less intense than it was in some other nations. Adult mortality, for example, was declining only very slowly. And the economy provided little opportunity or incentive for investment in welfare. Had Italy been as highly industrialized as Germany, which became Europe's powerhouse and a world leader by the end of the nineteenth century, the argument goes, its governing class might have collectivized arrangements for social insurance too. Economic and social modernity, however, do not always coincide quite as closely as some would like to think.

In fixating on the absence or presence of apparent pre-conditions to welfare-state building, structural and economic interpretations can be very mechanistic and deterministic. These approaches need to be complemented by an appreciation of ideological and political factors in policy formation too. Was not liberalism itself to blame, at least in part, for its own failures? This is certainly a charge that is levied at the proponents of the great liberal idea in the United States.¹¹ In Italy, liberalism's political success in achieving unity and power was blighted by its ideological failings. Political choices and priorities determine whether nations promote welfare development. After unification, Italian liberal statesmen complained bitterly about the nation's economic impoverishment; but they launched repeated wars for imperial conquest none the less. Predicated upon the desire for prestige, status, and stability, Italian imperialism from the 1880s brought few economic gains. And it was a poor substitute for the material betterment and social protection that the working classes had long awaited. There were also real possibilities for reforms that might have saved the Italian liberal order from disintegration. After unification, the era before the ascendancy of socialism and clericalism was a particularly propitious time for the launch of a strategy based on the search for social inclusion through reform. And the first decade of the twentieth century was a missed opportunity for real consensus-building initiatives. But liberalism never acquired a popular mandate because it never truly grasped the importance of 'the social' to the polity. Hence, the liberal governing class claimed the right of public ownership of charities without assuming any responsibility for improving the system of beneficence. And even as the working-class challenge to the liberal order gained momentum, liberalism stuck tenaciously to outmoded social responses to large-scale deprivation and discontent. The outcome of this blinkered vision was acute class conflict that tore liberalism and its state asunder.

Liberal Italy's break with the past came not in 1890 or even between 1900 and 1914. Despite what historians have identified as an 'increasingly

interventionist position of the state in civil society' from the turn of the twentieth century, liberalism did not become an agent of positive social change until it was too late.¹² As Adrian Lyttelton has asserted in another context, the convulsive and transformative experience of the war was the real watershed in the history of modern Italy's social policy and development.¹³ Just as Mussolini would later do, during the fateful days of the sham Republic of Salò, when Italian fascism, as Hitler observed, was evaporating in the midday sun, liberalism of the final hour before the 'seizure of power' sought frantically to stop its disintegration by rekindling a sense of its own historic mission and embarking upon a social revolution. Resurgent ambition and idealism in the conduct of government came too late to save liberalism from fascism. None the less, the definitive end to the tired politics of compromise came with a bang rather than a flutter as the profound post-war crisis provoked the speedy introduction in 1919 of truly far-reaching and pioneering social legislation in Italy, which, had it not been for its parenthetical nature, might have provided the foundation for a democratic welfare state which was very different from the one which fascism eventually constructed.

Mussolini's assumption to the premiership in 1922 was a reflection not of the strength of fascism, but of the weakness of liberalism.¹⁴ The bankruptcy of the liberal idea in power had made democratic institutions unworkable and the nation ungovernable. Motivated by a desire to define a genuinely 'fascist' style of welfare, but hindered in this endeavour by the unclarity of its social aims, fascism initially devised responses to the deep crisis in Italian society with difficulty rather than determination. The institutionalization of fascism in the years from 1922 to 1927 proceeded very haphazardly. By the early 1930s, however, fascism had completed its overhaul of the post-war liberal social insurance system, destroyed its most progressive features, and built new institutions premised upon the ideology and practice of fascist dictatorship rather than social democracy.

What was the nature and impact of the fascist welfare state? It was amorphous and labyrinthine in structure. Under fascism, local party organs and the central state possessed overall control over all welfare activities in the nation. But neither party nor state possessed the organizational capacity to co-ordinate multiple welfare initiatives nationally or deliver decent social provision locally. On the ground, PNF officialdom often replicated rather than strengthened the work which was already being carried out by the private sector. For example, the campaign against tuberculosis might have been more effective had the party been mobilized to support organizations that were already committed to combating the disease, such as the Red Cross. Instead, the regime insisted on fulfilling its 'totalitarian' objectives by creating entirely new 'fascist' institutions. Motivated by a desire to control all spheres of potential social power, fascism unwittingly undermined its own aspiration because many of its own party-run social institu-

tions were amateurish and ineffective. The creation of competing and overlapping areas of responsibility dissipated energies. Consequently, many fascist social programmes remained inchoate. Fascism's obsessive need to be 'totalizing' made welfare policy in the inter-war period overly ambitious and deeply unfocused. The dictatorship depleted the nation's relatively scarce resources in numerous minor initiatives that served a political agenda and limited the impact of reforms that might have made a real difference to the lives of working-class people. Moreover, fascism preferred bureaucratic solutions to the problem of how modern society should organize and distribute its resources. The numerous parastate institutions that were founded in the inter-war period appeared to be a rational and efficient way to maximize private sources of social expenditure. Indeed, one of the great achievements of fascism in the social arena was that it succeeded so well at blurring the distinctions between public welfare and private charity. But the proliferation of *enti* and *opere* also caused administrative chaos and disorganization.

In terms of its class-based policies, the fascist welfare state was very different from its democratic variants. Under fascism, social policies affecting the working class were predicated upon the destruction of the labour movement and the disempowerment of workers by a repressive and authoritarian dictatorship. They were also accompanied by economic policies which adversely affected working-class incomes and consumption. Corporatism as a theory espoused some very progressive notions of the ethical state standing above class conflict, of social justice as a collective ideal, and of insurance protection as a right of labour. Fascism appropriated the language of progressivism and collectivism to justify its incursions in the long-awaited post-war liberal system of comprehensive and compulsory social insurance. The regime's promises and pronouncements about a New Deal were a purely instrumental cover for the expropriation of workers by the state. Mussolini's regime showed a remarkable propensity to use social insurance institutions and resources to further the aims of its state-building project, its economic agenda, and its expansionist programme. The dictatorship did transform and modernize the structure of social insurance which it inherited from liberalism, but it did not do so in order to protect the millions of members who paid premiums to state-run schemes which gave them little by way of compensation for their deteriorating living standards. The delivery of cash benefits to the deserving insured and the guarantee of a modicum of social security to the masses came very low down the list of priorities of the dictatorship.

If the historian restricted her or his gaze to social politics directed at workers alone, as many scholars still do, the only reasonable conclusion that could be drawn was that the fascist welfare state was a monstrous myth.¹⁵ But, in terms of how government chose to mobilize and distribute the nation's resources, Italian fascism gave greater priority to gender-based

welfare programmes than it did to those social insurance schemes catering specifically to the working class. None the less, ONMI never completed its welfare revolution, primarily because of its organizational difficulties, the shortcomings of its purpose and design, and its overblown ambition. As a function of the campaign to increase births, the endeavour to encourage the development and improvement of welfare institutions catering to the needs of women was marred by strict adherence to demographic and maternalist dogma. Ideological imperatives severely circumscribed the character and limited the impact of many potentially substantive initiatives. As a result, the Italian welfare system serving mothers and children did not become more uniform, national, and comprehensive under fascism. But, if laws and policies are a reflection of social values, and I believe that they are, then fascism did make a serious attempt to promote a new understanding of the place of so-called 'illegitimacy' in Italian society. During the fascist period, the state advanced notions about 'unwed mothers' and 'illegitimate infants' which approximate some of our own more permissive attitudes about single parents and their children. And, if only because it wanted to decrease infant mortality, the regime sought to implement measures based on the radical premise that *madri nubili* should be supported rather than punished. Fascism may not have succeeded at revolutionizing the care or treatment of those who lived outside the conventional two-parent family, but, compared to liberalism, it adopted a more compassionate stance towards women and children at the margins of Italian society.

When the 'fecund decade' came to a less than spectacular close, the fascist welfare state began to move in new directions. In response to the disappointing results of the demographic campaign, the fascist government made a formal declaration to its people that it was revising its social policies in a series of articles in the national press. On 15 February 1937, for example, Giuseppe Bottai, who was a member of the Grand Council and the Minister of National Education, published an article in *Critica Fascista* on the population problem. Bottai revealed that the government intended to implement a 'new plan of action' as the course of fascism's *politica demografica assistenziale* entered a 'second phase', characterized by the introduction of punitive and selective measures. Welfare state-building would continue, but the means would have to change since positive encouragements had not altered the procreative habits of the Italian people. Two days later, a piece which appeared in *Il Popolo d'Italia* stated that the birthrate had continued to decline in cities and the countryside, notwithstanding concerted attempts to promote fertility through social provision targeted at all Italians. On 25 February, the senate discussed at length the possibility that social policy might become more radical and draconian. And in a number of sessions in early March 1937, the Grand Council actually met at Palazzo Venezia to discuss the future of fascist welfare and population policies. During the meeting on 3 March, Giuseppe

Bottai spoke about the underlying causes of the failure of the battle for births. The 'low quality of life in Italy', the 'slow progress towards social development' and the 'considerable privations suffered by the people', he believed, exerted a 'constant anti-demographic pressure' which welfare alone had been unable to dispel. Bottai argued that

The demographic programme has failed completely. And it has failed because of fascism's idealism. The regime has neglected to take into consideration the fact that when misery and destitution knock at your door, you have no patience for big words and grand appeals to collective solidarity. You become egotistical. The idea of the defence of the race has not sunk into the heads of most Italians. The need to continue to reproduce in order to preserve the race for future generations is meaningless to those who face a far more personal and daily struggle to ensure the survival of themselves and their families.

The regime should continue to provide social assistance, but aid should be confined to only the most prolific members of society. Italians, Bottai stated, were guilty of 'conscious and premeditated sterility'. When a 'tree does not bear fruit', he stated, 'you must cut it down'. The regime, he urged, should 'root up the infecund weeds and let the fertile plants grow'.¹⁶

Bottai proposed a number of remedies for Mussolini to consider, which together comprised a mixed programme calling for positive and negative measures for population increase. He wanted the regime to 'abolish all residual indulgences' towards single citizens over thirty years of age, childless couples, and couples with fewer than four children. His plan called for new legislation to prohibit the employment of 'infecund' people in the private and public sectors. Prolific people should be given enough material rewards to make them into a new economic elite, he stated. Already extended to all workers, family allowances should be raised to an amount which truly reflected the real cost of childcare and would provide a substantial income support to big families. The state should also consider implementing an annual tax against 'sterile' couples. In addition to these measures, a law prohibiting childless people from drawing up wills and unmarried people of both sexes from inheriting wealth was another avenue that the regime should explore. He stated: 'we should take away the automobiles too and any other assets which those citizens who practise voluntary sterility possess'.¹⁷

Alberto De Stefani, who was Minister of State, proposed that Italians should be made to realize that reproduction was compulsory. Like Bottai, he believed that the state should stop being so tolerant towards those who did not perform their duties satisfactorily. Welfare, he stated, had caused Italians to become selfish and dependent. He pointed out that despite the introduction of progressively harsher penalties against celibacy, which had

trebled the amount of the annual tax between 1927 to 1936, many single men preferred to pay the price of bachelorhood than embark upon marriage and fatherhood. If celibacy really was a crime against the state and against the race, as official ideology upheld, then the regime should increase the severity of the punishments against infecundity. He considered the possibility of expanding the powers of the state over the private lives of Italians. A feasible course of action for a new demographic campaign, De Stefani suggested, would involve enacting legislation to criminalize celibacy and to force people to marry before their thirtieth birthday. Another possibility was to give the courts the authority to annul marriages which remained childless after five years.¹⁸

When details of the deliberations of the Grand Council leaked out to the press, national party headquarters were inundated with calls from citizens who feared imminent state expropriations. Telephone tapings by the government also revealed that some Italians were trying desperately to offload assets by signing property over to particularly prolific relatives. Foreign newspapers picked up on the fact that these proposed measures coincided with the Grand Council's resolution in March 1937 to launch a fifteen-year rearmament programme based on the Nazi precedent. The militant and punitive drift in pronatalist policy, German journalists reported, reflected worry about how fascism was going to pay the costs of armaments and autarky without levying heavy taxes. Italian lawmakers received plans for the implementation of a radical population policy with considerable misgivings. At least one prominent senator, Alfredo Felici, voiced concern that the regime was being incautious. Before putting any new provisions on the books, he argued, the government needed to consider the legal implications very carefully. Legislators would also need to discuss the juridical framework of harsh penalties before contemplating passing laws abrogating the rights of citizens over marriage and property.¹⁹

The regime did seem to be groping for some new vision for the future. Though Mussolini decided to defer judgement about some of the more punitive recommendations of his advisers, he did approve turning fascist population and welfare policy more explicitly into a family policy favouring those with many children. On 3 June 1937, the regime promulgated a law which created the *Unione Fascista fra le Famiglie Numerose* (The Fascist Union of Big Families). Based on French models, the national family association was designed to be an interest group which would take over many of the party's responsibilities for mass demonstrations, educational propaganda, and national celebrations around demographic and racial themes. With the establishment of provincial and local organs, the union would serve to put moral and economic pressure on Italians to reproduce by implementing measures designed to reward the most deserving with special bonuses and privileges.²⁰ As Mussolini came increasingly under the influence of Hitler, Italian policy changed in other significant ways too.

Although it never became a fully-fledged 'racial state' along Nazi lines, the Italian dictatorship began to formulate social policies which followed the dictates of hardcore racism.

One of the most far-reaching moves by the regime in this regard involved the creation on 7 June 1937 of an *Ufficio Centrale Demografico* (Central Demographic Office), which was placed under the interior ministry. According to its founding statutes, the competence of the department was to review laws on citizenship and rights and to promote the development of 'demographic and racist' legislation. At the top of the agenda stood plans to formulate new laws and policies to prevent the 'bastardization' of the Italian race, such as the enactment of 19 April 1937 against racial intermingling between Italians and Africans in the colonies. Those who defended racist measures from criticism stated that the regime was fulfilling its mission and following the logic of its own doctrine. For example, Ferdinando Loffredo argued along these lines:

If you implement a positive policy to promote the health and fertility of the race, it is only logical that you should also try to preserve the race by other means. Fascism has not deviated from its original plan for racial defence, but it has merely developed the racist programme in the direction towards which it was destined to proceed.²¹

Mussolini also attempted to silence attacks from within his own party. On 30 July 1937, the Duce answered critics who charged that the new militancy was an attempt to implant German racism on Italian soil. At an address to PNF secretaries in Forlì, he stated: 'To say that fascism has imitated anyone or anything is absolutely absurd'. In the following September, he spoke at a rally in Trieste where he argued:

The racial problem [of crossbreeding] has not suddenly emerged as some seem to believe. It has been on the horizon ever since the foundation of empire; because history has taught that empires are made with arms, but are maintained when those who have conquered have a strong racial consciousness, not only of their unique qualities, but also of their overwhelming superiority over the vanquished.²²

If 1937 marked the beginning of a new phase in the demographic campaign, with the adoption of a selective family policy, then 1938 marked the definitive end to the pre-eminent place which welfare held in the regime's programme for racial defence.

On 26 July 1938, Achille Starace received a delegation of university professors, which included Nicola Pende, Franco Savorgnan, and other prominent eugenicists. The scientists came armed with what the Manifesto of the

Italian Race, a document which, when promulgated by the government on 6 October 1938, proclaimed that the preservation of the purity, morality, and genius of the Italian race would be the new doctrinal basis of fascism.²³ The regime accelerated moves which made the dictatorship into what some government spokesmen did, indeed, call a '*stato razzista*' (racial state). On 7 September 1938, the government revoked the citizenship rights of recent immigrants whose parents belonged to the 'Jewish race'. That same month, the *Ufficio Centrale Demografica* was transformed into the Superior Council Of Race and Demography, a government department which was placed on a par with other ministries. And on 22 May 1939, new ONMI legislation tightened the grip which the government had over the agency in an attempt to make its policies conform more closely with the new racist agenda.²⁴ In those last years before Italy's entry into the Second World War, the regime seemed to have embarked upon a sharp downward spiral. The momentum of reform had been irretrievably lost and all the old promises had worn thin. The regime had never really been able to balance the conflicting imperatives of welfare and warfare. In the end, of course, fascism delivered neither guns nor butter very successfully. For a time during the early years, a fascist social revolution had seemed possible to many true believers. But, the fundamental antinomies of fascism got in the way of the realization of some of the more worthy aims of the regime. A force that was repressive and progressive, revolutionary and reactionary, regressive and modernizing all at once implemented policies that were contradictory, changeable, and, ultimately, self-defeating.

Notes

I Introduction: The Old Charitable Order and the Promise of Good Government

1. L. A. Muratori, *Trattato della carità cristiana e altri scritti sulla carità*, P. G. Nonis, ed. (Rome, 1961), p. 687.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 19–20, 690.
3. *Ibid.*, intro. pp. 61–2. See also B. Geremek, *La pietà a la forza: Storia della miseria e della carità in Europa* (Bari, 1986), intro.
4. On the failure of Victor Amadeus II's attempts in 1716 and 1717 to reform poor relief through state intervention, see S. Cavallo, *Charity and Power in Early Modern Italy: Benefactors and their Motives in Turin, 1541–1789* (Cambridge, 1995), ch.5, esp. pp. 182–96. Cavallo seeks to debunk the myth of this Savoyard king as Italy's Louis XIV.
5. See D. Carpanetto and G. Ricuperati, *L'Italia del settecento: Crisi, trasformazioni, lumi* (Rome and Bari, 1986), intro.
6. J. P. Trevelyan, *A Short History of the Italian People: From the Barbarian Invasions to the Present Day* (4th edn, London, 1956), p. 291; S. Woolf, *A History of Italy, 1700–1860: The Social Constraints of Political Change* (1979; reprinted London and New York, 1991), pp. 130–5 on Leopold and 125–30 on Joseph II of Lombardy; D. Carpanetto and G. Ricuperati, *L'Italia del settecento*, ch. 15.
7. F. Venturi, *Italy and the Enlightenment: Studies in a Cosmopolitan Century*, ed. S. Woolf, trans. S. Corsi (London, 1972), p. 20 *et passim*.
8. F. Nitti, *L'assistenza pubblica in Italia: L'azione della chiesa a l'azione dello stato* (Trani, 1892), p. 10.
9. On medieval ideas about charity and their revival in Catholic Counter-Reformation culture, see B. Pullan, 'Catholics and the Poor in Early Modern Europe', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. 26 (London, 1976), pp. 15–34, 27–31.
10. S. Woolf, *The Poor in Western Europe in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London and New York, 1986), intro, esp. pp. 26–7.
11. F. Nitti, *L'assistenza pubblica in Italia*, p. 13.
12. L. Ricci, *Riforma degl'istituti pii della città di Modena* (Modena, 1787), cited in S. Woolf, *The Poor in Western Europe in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ch. 3, p. 77.
13. S. Cavallo, *Charity and Power in Early Modern Italy*, ch. 6; and, by the same author, see 'Conceptions of Poverty and Poor Relief in Turin in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century', in *Domestic Strategies: Work and Family in France and Italy, 1600–1800*, ed. S. J. Woolf (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 148–99. On the opening c.1759 of Milan's workhouse, see also, G. Ferri Piccaluga, 'La riforma della pubblica assistenza sotto il governo di Maria Teresa: l'architetto Francesco Croce e la costruzione dell'Albergo dei Poveri nella città di Milano', in *Timore e carità: I poveri nell'Italia moderna, Atti del convegno 'Pauperismo e assistenza negli antichi stati italiani'* (Cremona, 28–30 marzo 1980), ed. G. Politi, M. Rosa and F. Della Peruta (Cremona, 1982), pp. 225–35.

14. See C. Jones, *Charity and Bienfaisance: The Treatment of the Poor in the Montpellier Region, 1740–1815* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 161 for a discussion of similar ideas and developments in France.
15. The literature on just how discriminating and selective medieval and early modern Church charity in Italy actually could be is vast. For references, see B. Pullan, *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice: The Social Institutions of a Catholic State, to 1620* (Oxford, 1971).
16. A. Cherubini, *Storia della previdenza sociale in Italia, 1860–1960* (Rome, 1977), pp. 11–13.
17. Of course, if you were to take a very long-term view of welfare state-building, then you could plausibly argue that this process began in the sixteenth century, when Italian municipal governments attempted to gain control of Church charitable institutions for poor relief. See S. Cavallo, *Charity and Power*, ch. 1, esp. p. 15, for a discussion of debates about the late medieval period. Though used indiscriminately by some, the term ‘welfare state’, however, can only meaningfully be applied to the later modern period because it presupposes the existence of a whole complex set of institutions, policies, and laws, under a guiding central administrative state, which simply did not exist in earlier societies.
18. For a discussion of this concept in a different context, see O. Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1990).
19. The quote is from J. A. Davis, *Conflict and Control: Law and Order in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Basingstoke and London, 1988), p. 19; ch. 1 analyses autocratic reformism; D. Carpanetto and G. Ricuperati, *L'Italia nel settecento*, ch. 21 on the crisis of the old regime.
20. Considerably more is known about the repression of pauperism than about forms of relief targeted at the deserving poor (infants, the aged, the infirm): see, for example, E. Bressan, *Povertà e assistenza in Lombardia nell'età napoleonica* (Milan, Rome, and Bari, 1985), ch. 1; and S. Woolf, ‘Charité, pauvreté et structure des ménages a Florence au début du xix^e siècle’, *Annales économies sociétés civilisations*, 39:1 (Jan–Feb, 1984), pp. 355–82, which provides a very detailed picture of poverty and its relief from 1808 to 1814.
21. On the ‘administrative revolution’ enacted by Napoleonic prefects in Bologna, see S. C. Hughes, *Crime, Disorder and the Risorgimento: The Politics of Policing in Bologna* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 19; and see J. A. Davis, *Conflict and Control*, pp. 22–3 on the ‘profound and irreversible’ impact of Napoleonic administrative reforms on Italy.
22. D. Maldini, ‘Il Dépôt de Mendicité del Dipartimento del Po: Analisi di una struttura assistenziale nel Piemonte napoleonico’ *Timore e carità*, pp. 331–45.
23. S. C. Hughes, *Crime, Disorder and the Risorgimento*, intro. and ch. 1.
24. Literally translated as ‘pious works’, *opere pie* were all those institutions of ‘piety, religion, and public utility’ which had been founded through Christian charity and private benefaction. Over the course of centuries, thousands of these charities arose.
25. G. Farrell-Vinay, *Povertà e politica nell'ottocento: Le opere pie nello stato liberale* (Turin, 1997), pp. 96–7.
26. M. Piccialuti Caprioli, ‘Il “sistema della beneficenza pubblica” nel Piemonte pre-unitario’, in *Timore e carità*, pp. 477–87, 477.
27. See S. Wolf, ‘Problems in the history of pauperism in Italy, 1800–15’ in *Timore e carità*, pp. 317–29 and in *The Poor in Western Europe in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, pp. 128–45, esp. 134–36; see also ‘The Treatment of the Poor in Napoleonic Tuscany, 1808–14’ in *ibid.*, pp. 76–117.

28. G. Da Molin, 'Les enfants abandonnés dans les villes italiennes aux xviii^e et xix^e siècles', *Annales de démographie historique* (Paris, 1983), pp. 103–23, 103.
29. V. Hunecke, *I trovatelli di Milano: Bambini esposti e famiglie espositrici dal xvii al xix secolo* (Bologna, 1989), pp. 36, 38.
30. G. Da Molin, 'Les enfants abandonnés', p. 114; and see her *L'Infanzia abbandonata in Italia in età moderna: Aspetti demografici di un problema sociale* (Bari, 1981), pp. 115–218.
31. L. Dodi Osnaghi, 'Ruote e infanzia abbandonata a Milano nella prima metà dell'ottocento', in *Timore e carità*, pp. 426–35, 429.
32. M. Livi Bacci and M. Breschi, 'Italian Fertility: An Historical Account', *Journal of Family History*, 15:4 (1990), pp. 385–408, 394; see also, M. Aymard and G. Delille, 'La démographie historique en Italie: Une discipline en mutation', *Annales de démographie historique* (Paris, 1977), pp. 447–61, esp. 458–61.
33. L. Dodi Osnaghi, 'Ruote e infanzia abbandonata', p. 429.
34. M. Barbagli, 'Marriage and the Family in the Early Nineteenth Century', in *Society and Politics in the Age of the Risorgimento: Essays in Honour of Denis Mack Smith*, ed. J. A. Davis and P. Ginsborg (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 92–127, 123.
35. M. Piccialuti Caprioli, 'Il "sistema della beneficenza pubblica"', p. 482.
36. D. Laven, 'Austria's Italian Policy Reconsidered: Revolution and Reform in Restoration Italy', *Modern Italy*, 1:3 (Autumn, 1997), pp. 3–33, 18. At the time of writing, *Napoleon's Legacy: Problems of Government in Restoration Europe*, ed. L. Riall and D. Laven has not yet been published.
37. G. Farrell-Vinay, *Povertà e politica nell'ottocento*, pp. 98–100.
38. F. Della Peruta, 'Per la storia della società lombarda nell'età della restaurazione', *Studi storici*, 2 (1975), pp. 305–39, 337–8; S. J. Woolf, *The Italian Risorgimento* (London, 1969), pp. 29–30.
39. S. Woolf, 'The Poor and How to Relieve Them: The Restoration Debate on Poverty in Italy and Europe', *Society and Politics in the Age of the Risorgimento*, pp. 49–91, 65.
40. M. Piccialuti Caprioli, 'Il "sistema della beneficenza pubblica"', pp. 483–4.
41. P. Ungari, *Storia del diritto di famiglia in Italia* (Bologna, 1974), p. 136.
42. G. Farrell-Vinay, *Povertà e politica nell'ottocento*, pp. 37–8.
43. M. Piccialuti Caprioli, 478–9.
44. J. P. Trevelyan, *A Short History of the Italian People*, pp. 334–5.
45. From an article in *Nuova antologia* that appeared in January 1890; cited in F. Della Peruta, 'Le opere pie dall'unità alla legge Crispi', *Il Risorgimento*, 2–3 (1991), pp. 173–213, 183.
46. In his *L'assistenza pubblica* (p. 14), Nitti used the term 'shadowy forest that no one wants to enter'; see also F. S. Nitti, 'Poor Relief in Italy', *Economic Review*, 2:1 (January, 1892), pp. 1–24.

1 Reform and the *Risorgimento*

1. The details are from W. R. Thayer, *The Life and Times of Cavour*, vol. II (Boston and New York, 1911), pp. 487–91; quotes on pp. 487 and 491.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 492–3.
3. For a discussion of this 'statist' liberalism, see M. John, *Politics and the Law in Late Nineteenth-Century Germany: The Origins of the Civil Code* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 2–4 and G. De Ruggiero, *The History of European Liberalism* (Boston, 1959), pp. 262ff, 300–12.

4. For details of his *Etat de la mendicité et des pauvres dans les états sardes*, see G. Farrell-Vinay, *Povertà e politica*, pp. 34–5; A. Fossati, *Il pensiero e la politica sociale di Camillo Cavour* (Turin, 1932), p. 95.
5. E. Martinengo-Cesaresco, *Cavour* (1898; reprinted Port Washington, New York and London, 1970), p. 80.
6. For details of Cavour's *Extrait du rapport des Commissaires de S. M. Britannique qui ont exécuté une enquête générale sur l'administration des fonds provenant de la taxe des pauvres en Angleterre*, which was published in 1835 in Turin, see A. Fossati, *Il pensiero e la politica sociale di Camillo Cavour*, pp. 95–7.
7. F. M. L. Naville, *De la charité légale, de ses effets, de ses causes, et spécialement des maisons du travail et de la proscription de la mendicité*, 2 vols (Paris, 1836).
8. As a result of a favourable review of Naville's work in the *Bibliothèque universelle* in 1836, Cavour withdrew his offer to contribute a piece on pauperism to the journal. For details, see D. Berti, *Il Conte di Cavour avanti il 1848* (Rome, 1886), pp. 227, 270.
9. R. Romeo, *Cavour e il suo tempo*, vol. 1: 1810–1842 (Bari, 1969), pp. 420ff., 544ff., et passim.
10. 'Considérations sur l'état actuel de l'irlande et sur son avenir', in *Gli scritti del Conte di Cavour: nuovamente raccolti e pubblicati*, ed. D. Zanichelli, vol. 2 (Bologna, 1892), pp. 221–349, 282.
11. See M. S. Quine, *Population Politics in the Twentieth Century: Fascist Dictatorships and Liberal Democracies* (London, 1996), intro.
12. 'Considérations sur l'état actuel de l'irlande et sur son avenir', *Gli scritti del Conte di Cavour*, ed. D. Zanichelli, vol. 2, pp. 282–3.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 290–91.
14. On the foundation of this journal, see D. Mack Smith, *Cavour* (London, 1985), pp. 31–3.
15. 'Influenza delle riforme sulle condizioni economiche dell'Italia', in *Gli scritti del Conte di Cavour*, vol. 2, pp. 67–74, 67.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 72–4.
17. H. Header, *Italy in the Age of the Risorgimento, 1790–1870* (1983; 6th ed, London and New York, 1992), pp. 182–92; G. Salvemini, *Mazzini*, trans. I. M. Ranson (London, 1956).
18. C. L. Lovett, *The Democratic Movement in Italy, 1830–1876* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1982), pp. 35, 49.
19. S. W. Halperin, *The Separation of Church and State in Italian Thought from Cavour to Mussolini* (Chicago, 1937), p. 7.
20. 'La libertà di culto e di coscienza', first published in *Risorgimento* on 18 May 1848, in *Gli scritti del Conte di Cavour: nuovamente raccolti e pubblicati*, ed. D. Zanichelli, vol. 1 (Bologna, 1892), pp. 85–8.
21. S. Tessitore, *Il Conte di Cavour e le corporazioni religiose* (Turin, 1911), p. 36.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 37–8.
23. 'Sullo insegnamento della teologia nei seminari', *Il Conte di Cavour in parlamento*, ed. I. Artom and A. Blanc (Florence, 1868), pp. 174–84. For a discussion of an unsuccessful bill calling for the introduction of civil marriage, which Cavour did not sign, even though he supported it, see D. Mack Smith, *Cavour*, pp. 67–8.
24. See C. L. Lovett, *The Democratic Movement*, pp. 199–203.
25. See S. Tessitore, *Il Conte di Cavour*, pp. 54–7 for details about Cavour's role in the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1848.
26. 'Intorno alla soppressione di alcune corporazioni religiose', *Il Conte di Cavour in parlamento*, pp. 276–316, 276.

27. Camera dei deputati, *Discorsi parlamentari del Conte Camillo di Cavour*, vol. 1 (Turin, 1863), pp. 395–409, 405.
28. S. Tessitore, *Il Conte di Cavour*, p. 129.
29. From Cavour's speeches of 17 and 23 February 1855, in *Il Conte di Cavour in parlamento*, pp. 281–5 and 308–13.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 283.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 316 on the seduta del senato of 25 April 1855. And see G. D'Amelio, *Stato e chiesa: La legislazione ecclesiastica fino al 1867* (Milan, 1967), pp. 57–9 for details of the legislation.
32. On this issue, see D. Mack Smith, *Italy: A Modern History* (London, 1959), pp. 87–8 and 90–1.
33. 'Intorno all soppressione di alcune corporazioni religiose', in *Discorsi parlamentari scelti con commenti ed introduzione di G. Scipione Scipioni*, ed. G. S. Scipioni, (Rome, Ascoli, and Piceno, 1911), pp. 135–56, 142.
34. S. W. Halperin, *Italy and the Vatican at War: A Study of Their Relations from the Outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War to the Death of Pius IX* (Chicago, 1939), pp. 282–9.
35. R. Corrigan, *The Church and the Nineteenth Century* (Milwaukee, 1938), pp. 289–95.
36. On the reaction of liberals to the papacy's threat of the use of force to defend its prerogatives, see R. D'Azeglio, *The Court of Rome and the Gospel*, trans. A. H. Layard (London, 1859), esp. p. 4.
37. E. Eyck, *Bismarck and the German Empire* (London, 1950), pp. 202–11.
38. 'Sulla costituzione data dal Re di Napoli', in *Gli scritti del Conte di Cavour*, vol. 1, pp. 9–16, 9–10.
39. 'La legge elettorale', first published in *Risorgimento* on 19 February 1848, in *ibid.*, pp. 47–56, 48 and 51.
40. See his speech to the new parliament, 'Discorso d'apertura della prima sessione del parlamento subalpino', in *ibid.*, pp. 137–41.
41. C. M. Lovett, *The Democratic Movement in Italy*, ch. 2, esp. pp. 32–3.
42. 'La legge elettorale', first published in *Risorgimento* on 21 March 1848, in *Gli scritti del Conte di Cavour*, vol. 1, pp. 71–80, 71.
43. 'La rivoluzione del 1848 in Francia', published on 17 March 1848, in *ibid.*, pp. 371–80, 378.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 379.
45. E. Martinengo-Cesaresco, *Cavour*, p. 13 on Cavour's early intellectual development.
46. 'La rivoluzione del 1848 in Francia', published on 11 March 1848, in *Gli scritti del Conte di Cavour*, vol. 1, pp. 362–71, 367.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 364 and 365.
48. Camera dei Deputati, *Discorsi parlamentari del Conte Camillo di Cavour*, vol. 1, discorso intorno ad alcune leggi di finanza, 28 October 1848, pp. 66–80, 68.
49. 'Intorno all soppressione di alcune corporazioni religiose', a speech to the Senate of 25 April 1855, in *Discorsi parlamentari scelti con commenti ed introduzione di G. Scipione Scipioni*, pp. 135–56, 141–2.
50. Camera dei Deputati, *Discorsi parlamentari del Conte Camillo di Cavour*, vol. 1, p. 68.
51. *Ibid.*, pp. 73 and 78.
52. D. Berti, *Il Conte di Cavour avanti il 1848*, pp. 284–5.
53. See ch. 3 on commercial reforms in *Il Conte di Cavour in parlamento*, p. 36.
54. E. Martinengo-Cesaresco, *Cavour*, p. 80; D. Mack Smith, *Cavour*, pp. 72–3.
55. Camera dei Deputati, *Discorsi parlamentari del Conte Camillo di Cavour*, vol. 6 (Florence, 1867), first speech to the chamber of deputies on 14 January 1853, pp. 315–16.

56. A. Cherubini, *Storia della previdenza sociale in Italia, 1860–1960*, pp. 46–58.
57. F. Della Peruta, *Democrazia e socialismo nel Risorgimento* (2nd edn, Rome, 1977), intro. *et passim*.
58. In 1852, Emperor Louis Napoleon decreed that the presidents of workers' mutual aid societies should be appointed by government. Control was thereby given to local notables in a bold attempt to turn workers' organizations into 'agencies of bourgeois paternalism', according to D. M. Gordon in *Merchants and Capitalists: Industrialization and Provincial Politics in Mid-Nineteenth-Century France* (University, Alabama, 1985), p. 92.
59. Camera dei Deputati, *Discorsi parlamentari del Conte Camillo di Cavour*, vol. 6, second speech to the chamber of deputies on 14 January 1853, pp. 322–4, 323.
60. *The Making of Italy, 1796–1866*, ed. D. Mack Smith, (1968; rev. edn. Basingstoke and London, 1988), pp. 93–100, 98–9; S. Woolf, *A History of Italy*, pp. 331–8, 336.
61. See B. S. Pullan, *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice*, pp. 579–625; and see S. Woolf, *The Poor in Western Europe*, ch. 3, pp. 82–6.
62. A. Fossati, *Il pensiero e la politica sociale di Camillo Cavour*, p. 107.
63. Camera dei Deputati, *Discorsi parlamentari del Conte Camillo di Cavour*, vol. 5 (Florence, 1866), speech to the chamber on 15 March 1852, pp. 17–20, 20.
64. *Ibid.*, speech of 16 March 1852, pp. 23–4.
65. *Ibid.*, discussions of 22 March 1852, pp. 35–9 and 40–1.
66. *Ibid.*, speech of 20 March 1852, pp. 33–5, 35.
67. *Il Conte di Cavour in parlamento: Discorsi raccolti e pubblicati*, ed. I. Artom and A. Blanc (Florence, 1868), pp. 174–84, 184.
68. C. M. Lovett, *The Democratic Movement in Italy*, pp. 35, 54–5.
69. E. Martinengo-Cesaresco, *Cavour*, p. 34.
70. Camera dei Deputati, *Discorsi parlamentari del Conte Camillo di Cavour*, vol. 1, third speech of 20 February 1850, pp. 340–1.
71. *Ibid.*, first speech of 20 February 1850, pp. 336–8.
72. G. Farrell-Vinay, *Povertà e politica*, pp. 38–9.
73. The law defined *opere pie* as 'institutions of charity and beneficence and any non-profit agency (*ente morale*) which have in whole or in part the aim of succouring the least well-off classes, both in sickness and in health, and in providing assistance, education, or instruction in any profession, art, or craft'; S. D'Amelio, *La beneficenza nel diritto italiano* (Milan, 1930), pp. 32–3.
74. G. Farrell-Vinay, *Povertà e politica*, pp. 40, 159, and 161–2.
75. A. Cherubini, *Storia della previdenza sociale*, p. 38.
76. F. Nitti, *L'assistenza pubblica in Italia*, p. 14.
77. A. Cherubini, *Storia della previdenza sociale*, pp. 74–6.
78. E. Martinengo-Cesaresco, *Cavour*, p. 63.
79. A. Fossati, *Il pensiero e la politica sociale di Camillo Cavour*, p. 108.

2 State and Society in Liberal Italy, 1862–1890

1. Adapting the social indicators used by Morris, which focus on literacy, infant mortality, and life expectancy, Giovanni Federico and Gianni Toniolo estimate that in 1870 Italy was a socially 'backward' country and in 1910 it still 'lagged more than a generation behind the most advanced European countries in terms of standard of living'. In their league table of European countries, Italy was one of the 'worst' performers. See their chapter on Italy in *Patterns of European Industrialization: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. R. Sylla and G. Toniolo (London

- and New York, 1991), pp. 197–217, 200–1; and D. M. Morris, *Measuring the Conditions of the World's Poor: The Physical Quality of Life* (New York, 1979).
2. ISTAT, *Cento anni di sviluppo economico e sociale dell'Italia, 1861–1961* (Rome, 1961), tables on pp. 58–9; S. Somogyi, *La mortalità infantile nei primi cinque anni di età in Italia, 1863–1962* (Palermo, 1967), table on p. 42; J. Vallin, 'Mortality in Europe from 1720 to 1914: Long-term Trends and Changes in Patterns by Age and Sex', in *The Decline of Mortality in Europe*, ed. R. Schofield, D. Reher, and A. Bideau (Oxford, 1991), pp. 38–67.
 3. R. Finzi, 'Quando e perché fu sconfitta la pellagra in Italia', in *Salute e classi lavoratrici in Italia dall'unità al fascismo*, ed. M. L. Betri and A. Gigli Marchetti (Milan, 1982), pp. 391–429, 392.
 4. F. Della Peruta, 'Le opere pie dall'unità alla legge Crispi', *Il Risorgimento*, nos 2–3 (1991), pp. 173–213, 173.
 5. C. Borro Saporiti, 'La tubercolosi polmonare a Milano nella seconda metà dell'ottocento: Un tentativo d'interpretazione', in *Salute e classi lavoratrici in Italia*, pp. 431–62.
 6. L. Del Panta, 'Italy', *European Demography and Economic Growth*, ed. W. R. Lee (London, 1979), pp. 196–219, 205.
 7. MAIC, DGS, *Notizie sulle condizioni demografiche, edilizie ed amministrative di alcune grandi città italiane ed estere nel 1891* (Rome, 1893), pp. x–xxiv for data on the incidence of the major diseases; L. Del Panta, *Le epidemie nella storia demografica italiana* (Turin, 1980); P. E. Ogden, 'Changes in Population and Society, 1500 to the Present', *An Historical Geography of Europe*, ed. R. A. Butlin and R. A. Dodgshon, (Oxford, 1998), pp. 181–206, esp. 186–7.
 8. ApC, Sessione del 1876–7, Discussioni, Tornata del 28 Novembre 1877, pp. 4601–0; see Pessina's speech, 4618–22.
 9. On Bismarck's campaign against the Roman Catholic Church and the Catholic Centre Party from 1871 to 1887, see E. Eyck, *Bismarck and the German Empire*, esp. pp. 202–10.
 10. S. W. Halperin, *Italy and the Vatican at War*, pp. 468–71.
 11. In *Citizenship and Social Class* (Cambridge, 1950), pp. 9–14, T. H. Marshall argued that in the course of development since the eighteenth century citizenship came to include social as well as civil and political rights. According to him, elites and governments extended rights to social security and welfare by means of the nationalization and collectivization of arrangements. Though still highly criticized, Marshall's approach is commendable, not the least because it identifies a distinctly social politics which accorded people the right to 'live the life of a civilized being' (p. 10) and defines this as an important part of the European state-building experience.
 12. See R. Scalfaferrì, 'L'origine dello "stato sociale" in Italia, 1876–1900', *Il pensiero politico*, XIX (1986), pp. 223–40.
 13. See C. Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism: 1870–1925* (London, 1967), p. 12 (n. 2) on the difficulties of applying the terms 'moderate/conservative' to the Right and 'democratic/progressive' to the Left.
 14. A. W. Salomone, *Italy in the Giolittian Era: Italian Democracy in the Making, 1900–1914*, intro G. Salvemini (Philadelphia, 1960), p. 14.
 15. See G. Policastro, *Crispi e Mussolini* (Mantua, 1928), pp. 26–7.
 16. J. J. Sheehan, *German Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago and London, 1978), pp. 35ff., 123–39; T. S. Hamerow, *The Social Foundations of German Unification, 1858–1871* (Princeton, NJ, 1969), chs 4–5.

17. G. V. Rimlinger, *Welfare Policy and Industrialization in Europe, America, and Russia* (New York, 1971), p. 91.
18. E. J. Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State: Early Industrial Britain, 1783–1870* (London and New York, 1983), p. 345.
19. C. Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism*, pp. 45, 65.
20. L. Izzo, *La finanza pubblica nel primo decennio dell'unità italiana* (Milan, 1962), pp. 106–7.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 108–9.
22. V. Zamagni, *The Economic History of Italy, 1860–1990* (Oxford, 1993), p. 37.
23. See Marcello De Cecco and Antonio Pedone's discussion of the 'debtor state' in *Storia dello stato italiano dall'unità a oggi*, ed. R. Romanelli, (Rome, 1995), pp. 270–3; see also, V. Zamagni, *Il debito pubblico in Italia dal 1861 al 1987* (Rome, 1988). For estimates of the total level of public indebtedness for the whole of the period, see F. A. Répaci, *La finanza pubblica italiana nel secolo 1861–1960* (Bologna, 1962), table 32, p. 113.
24. R. Romanelli, *Il commando impossibile: Stato e società nell'Italia liberale* (Bologna, 1988), pp. 56ff.
25. L. Izzo, *La finanza pubblica*, pp. 23–32, on the unification of financial administration by Pietro Bastogi.
26. Répaci has 'corrected' the official figures, which show a surplus in 11 of the 37 ^{1/2} budgets between 1861 and 1898; F. A. Répaci, *La finanza pubblica*, pp. 15, 27, and table 2 on 28–9.
27. G. Toniolo, *An Economic History of Liberal Italy, 1850–1918*, trans. M. Rees (London and New York, 1990), pp. 61–3.
28. F. A. Répaci, *La finanza pubblica*, table on p. 30; L. Izzo, *La finanza pubblica*, pp. 23–45 on the disastrous policies of Quintino Sella and Marco Minghetti.
29. L. Valiani, *L'Italia dal 1876 al 1915: La lotta sociale e l'avvento della democrazia* (Turin, 1960), pp. 403–4 and 419–33; F. A. Répaci, *La finanza pubblica*, table on p. 30; and see R. Romanelli, *L'Italia Liberale, 1861–1900* (Bologna, 1979), table on pp. 448–9, based on P. Ercolani's calculations in *Lo sviluppo economico in Italia: Storia dell'economia italiana negli ultimi cento anni*, vol. 3, *Studi di settore e documentazione di base*, ed. G. Fuà (Milan, 1969).
30. L. Izzo, *La finanza pubblica*, pp. 43–5, 71–7, quotes on 43, 71; on the tax on the grinding of wheat and corn, see D. Mack Smith, *Italy: A Modern History* (Ann Arbor, Michigan and London, 1959), pp. 86–7.
31. Italy was a nation of high indirect taxation, with taxes falling disproportionately on consumption rather than on income or property. According to D. Mack Smith, Italians could expect to pay over 30 per cent of their individual incomes in taxation, a percentage which was 'probably a higher proportion than anywhere else in the world'. Naturally, taxes on foodstuffs affected the poor most severely. D. Mack Smith, *Italy: A Modern History*, pp. 86–7, 105.
32. L. Izzo *La finanza pubblica*, p. 161.
33. For a breakdown of the budget, see MAIC, DGS, *Risultati dell'inchiesta sulle condizioni igieniche e sanitarie nei comuni del regno: Relazione generale* (Rome, 1886), p. cclxii.
34. F. Della Peruta, 'Le opere pie dall'unità alla legge Crispi', p. 189.
35. R. M. Russo, *La politica dell'assistenza: Storia dello sviluppo capitalistico e del sottosviluppo assistenziale in Italia dal 1860 ai giorni nostri* (Rimini and Florence, 1974), p. 26.
36. F. Nitti, *L'assistenza pubblica in Italia*, p. 27.

37. *State, Economy, and Society in Western Europe, 1815–1975: A Data Handbook in Two Volumes*, vol. 1: *The Growth of Mass Democracies and Welfare States*, ed. P. Flora et al. (Frankfurt, London, and Chicago, 1983), p. 127.
38. Quoted in A. Lyttelton, 'Shifting Identities: Nation, Region and City', *Italian Regionalism: History, Identity and Politics*, ed. C. Levy (Oxford and Washington, DC, 1996), pp. 33–52, 39.
39. S. D'Amelio, *La beneficenza nel diritto italiano*, pp. 118–20.
40. S. Sepe, 'Stato e opere pie: La beneficenza pubblica da Minghetti a Depretis, 1873–1878', *Quaderni sardi di storia*, n. 4 (July 1983–June 1984), pp. 179–205; M. Piccialuti Caprioli, 'Opere pie e beneficenza pubblica: Aspetti della legislazione piemontese da Carlo Alberto all'unificazione amministrativa', in *Rivista trimestrale di diritto pubblico*, 3 (1980), pp. 963–1040; G. Farrel-Vinay, *Povertà e politica*, ch. 5.
41. G. Farrel-Vinay, pp. 171, 172–3.
42. On 20 March 1865, the legislature introduced six laws on administrative unification as 'enclosures' within one overarching law. 'Allegato A' contained the new law on the functions of provincial and municipal governments. The *testo unico* was the fundamental law, consisting of a unified collection of all the relevant norms contained in previous legislation.
43. The text appears in Min. Interno, CR, Commissione Reale d'Inchiesta sui Brefotrofi (CRIB), *Inchiesta sui brefotrofi e studi di legislazione comparata sui provvedimenti per l'assistenza della infanzia abbandonata* (Rome, 1900), p. 88; this inquest is discussed in Part III of this book.
44. This number includes those within the Veneto, which were added in 1867. On the 1861 inquest, which published its results in 15 volumes, from 1868 to 1873, see P. Castiglioni, *Le opere pie del Regno d'Italia secondo la statistica del 1861* (Rome, 1873), pp. 10–17; M. Piccialuti Caprioli, 'Il patrimonio del povero: L'inchiesta sulle opere pie del 1861', *Quaderni storici*, 45 (December, 1980), pp. 918–41.
45. F. Della Peruta, 'Le opere pie dall'unità alla legge Crispi', p. 194.
46. ACS, *L'inchiesta sulle condizioni sociali ed economiche della Sicilia, 1875–1876*, in 2 volumes, ed. S. Carbone and R. Crispi, vol. 2 (Rome, 1963), p. 1112.
47. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 562–75.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 1045. See also D. Mack Smith, *Modern Sicily after 1713* (New York, 1968), pp. 456–8 for details of the sale of church *latifondi*, which Mack Smith estimates to have amounted to about half a million acres; and L. Riall, *Sicily and the Unification of Italy: Liberal Policy and Local Power, 1859–1866* (Oxford, 1998), ch. 4 on the brokerage of power by local mayors and municipal councils.
49. *L'inchiesta*, vol. 1, containing interviews, esp. pp. 381–7.
50. It is important to note the gendered nature of orphan relief: while institutions gave girls training in mothercraft skills, morality and religion, and in the 'more feminine' tasks of sewing, weaving, and silk-making, they offered boys the opportunity to acquire a humanistic education and some competence in a trade or craft. The *Relazione sullo stato morale dell'Orfanotrofio Maschile di Milano* (Milan, 1884) shows that authorities wished to educate their 'sons' in the virtues of manliness and work. Founded in 1530 by a local philanthropist, the orphanage was located in a monastery near the church of the San Sepolchro. Though boys had to wear uniforms, and were subjected to a harsh discipline involving public humiliation and solitary confinement as standard punishments for bad behaviour, they also received instruction in design, music, and the arts (p. 63). In addition, they learned and practised a trade in the

orphanage's *bottega*. Upon their release at the age of 18, alumni received a quarter of all their accumulated earnings, a complete set of new clothes, and a bit of money to give them a good start in life on the outside (p. 75).

51. See P. Gavitt, *Charity and Children in Renaissance Florence: The Ospedale degli Innocenti, 1410–1536* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1990), pp. 256–9 for a discussion of the origins and practice of the *sposalizio*. The author also refers to the visual representation of this act in the famous fifteenth-century Pellegrinaio frescoes at the Ospedale della Scala in Siena. See also, A. Groppi, *I conservatori della virtù: Donne recluse nella Roma dei papi* (Rome and Bari, 1994), pt 2, ch. 4. First created in the seventeenth century, the *conservatorio* was so-called because its social function was to conserve the honour of women. Under very rigid ecclesiastical control, these establishments gave refuge to lone women, who were all seen as potential prostitutes, in an attempt to eliminate promiscuity and prostitution. Widows, 'repentent' ex-prostitutes, and abandoned and abused girls with 'sordid' family backgrounds were given shelter in these institutions which isolated them from the outside world and subjected them to a strict religious 'education' and work discipline.
52. *L'inchiesta*, vol. 2, p. 1112. Other prefects also reported that the perceived need to rescue orphaned women from vice meant that many institutions in Sicily arranged marriages between 'young girls of 18 and old men of 80'; see *ibid.*, p. 1113. In so doing, these charities felt that they were providing an important service to the community by satisfying accepted social custom and serving their ancient traditions. The figure of the lone woman was a very threatening one in patriarchal Sicily in the nineteenth century.
53. In his *L'ostetricia, la ginecologia e la chirurgia in Piemonte dalle origini ai giorni nostri* (Saluzzo, 1973), T. M. Caffaratto refers to a dispute that began in 1876 between one *opera pia*, the Regia Opera di Maternità in Turin, and government officials. After public authorities initiated a modernization drive within the maternity hospital, which was still run along 'medieval' lines, they encountered great resistance. The case went from the prefect to the *deputazione provinciale*, then to the *consiglio comunale*, then to the interior ministry and, finally, to the *consiglio di stato*. After many deliberations, the case then went back to the province's commission of special affairs, who sent it back to the interior ministry. After ten years of review, the interior ministry finally made a judgement that the treatment of patients within the institution did not meet modern medical standards, so the hospital needed to be reorganized. Even after arbitration, however, efforts at reform still dragged on slowly (pp. 119–120).
54. G. Farrel-Vinay, *Povertà e politica*, p. 163; see also, F. Della Peruta, 'Le opere pie', pp. 198–9.
55. L. Valiani, *L'Italia dal 1876 al 1915: La lotta sociale e l'avvento della democrazia* (Turin, 1960), pp. 403–4, 419–33.
56. C. Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism*, p. 46.
57. G. Carocci, *Agostino Depretis e la politica interna italiana dal 1876 al 1887* (Turin, 1956), pp. 64–6, 69–71.
58. See ApC, Documenti, Legislatura XIII, Sessione 1876–77, pp. 21–9, for Nicotera's presentation and his bill (n. 152) on the reform of the law on beneficent institutions; see also, G. Farrel-Vinay, pp. 226–31.
59. F. Della Peruta, 'Le opere pie', p. 207.
60. See above, note 43.
61. Min. Interno, CR, Atti della Commissione Reale per l'Inchiesta sulle Opere Pie (hereafter ACRIOP), *Statistica delle opere pie e delle spese di beneficenza sostenute*

- dai comuni e dalle provincie, vol. 1: Piemonte (Rome, 1886), pp. 1–5 for details of the establishment of the commission by Depretis.
62. A. Cherubini, *Storia della previdenza sociale*, p. 40.
 63. Min. Interno, CR, ACRIOP, *Relazione A.S.E. il presidente del consiglio, ministro dell'interno, sui lavori della commissione* (Rome, 1884), contains the full history of the inquest's investigations and details of the difficulties of research, esp. pp. 6–12.
 64. S. Sepe, *Amministrazione e storia: Problemi della evoluzione degli apparati statali dall'unità ai giorni nostri* (Rimini, 1995), p. 308; see also S. Lepre, 'Opere pie anni '80: L'inchiesta conoscitiva economico-morale-amministrativa presieduta da Cesare Correnti', *Istituzioni e borghesie locali nell'Italia liberale*, M. Bigaron, ed. (Milan, 1986), pp. 146–75.
 65. Min. Interno, CR, ACRIOP, *Abruzzi e Molise, Puglie, Basilicata, Calabrie e riassunto generale per il regno* (Rome, 1897).
 66. Farrell-Vinay, ch. 7, esp. 237–41; 276–8.
 67. The commissioners were well aware of the lack of comparability between the 1861 and 1881 statistics. For example, because of changes in the definition of *opere pie*, they dissuade readers from assuming that there had been a massive increase in the number of institutions since 1861: see the last volume, ACRIOP, *Abruzzi e Molise, Puglie, Basilicata, Calabrie e riassunto generale per il regno*, p. 41.
 68. A. Cherubini, *Beneficenza e solidarietà: Assistenza pubblica e mutualismo operaio, 1860–1900* (Milan, 1991), p. 37 and table 1 on p. 38.
 69. Répaci, *La finanza pubblica*, table 11, p. 52.
 70. Farrell-Vinay, p. 253.
 71. A. Cherubini, *Beneficenza e solidarietà*, p. 48.
 72. Ibid., table 6.2 on pp. 45–6, 48; Farrell-Vinay, table 7.3.1, p. 256.
 73. Min. Interno, CR, ACRIOP, *Lombardia: Statistica delle opere pie al 31 dicembre 1880* (Rome, 1887), pp. 5, 8.
 74. Min. Interno, CR, ACRIOP, *Sicilia e Sardegna* (Rome, 1889), pp. 1, ii, iv.
 75. Min. Interno, CR, ACRIOP, *Veneto* (Rome, 1887), p. 2; *Toscana* (Rome, 1888), p. vi; *Campania* (Rome, 1891), p. vi; *Abruzzi e Molise, Puglie, Basilicata, Calabrie*, p. 6; and see ACRIOP's *Relazione del Direttore Generale della Statistica* (Rome, 1889), pp. 7–8.
 76. A. C. Jemolo, *Church and State in Italy, 1850–1950*, trans. D. Moore (Oxford, 1960), pp. 48–51.
 77. Anon., 'Il congresso di beneficenza', *Civiltà cattolica*, iv: series 11 (Florence, 1880), pp. 5–17, 15.
 78. These figures include the administrative and personnel costs for the treasury. S. Sepe, *Amministrazione e storia*, p. 58.
 79. The search for salvation was the *raison d'être* of these voluntary associations, which concentrated their activities on the celebration of masses and the commemoration of the dead. The primary function of these devotions was to intercede on behalf of brothers and sisters and secure their easy passage into paradise.
 80. Camera dei deputati, *Discorsi parlamentari di Francesco Crispi*, vol. 3 (Rome, 1915), pp. 388–437, esp. 388–408.
 81. Ibid., pp. 388–408.
 82. Istituto per la Scienza dell'Amministrazione Pubblica (ISAP), *Le riforme crispine*, vol. 4: *Amministrazione sociale* (Milan, 1990), ch. 2 by R. Scalfafferri, pp. 24–5.
 83. ISAP, *Le riforme crispine*, vol. 4, *Amministrazione sociale*, pp. 23, 29; ch. 5 by E. Bresson, 230–1; see also, S. Restelli, 'Chiesa e mondo cattolico italiano di fronte

- alla legge Crispi del 1890 sulla riforma della beneficenza', *Bollettino dell'archivio per la storia del movimento sociale cattolico in Italia*, XIII (1978), pp. 100–42.
84. Camera dei deputati, *Discorsi parlamentari di Francesco Crispi*, vol. 3, p. 409.
 85. ISAP, *Le riforme crispine*, vol. 4, ch. 2, pp. 30–1; A. Cherubini, *Beneficenza e solidarietà*, pp. 112–13.
 86. ISAP, *Le riforme crispine*, vol. 4, p. 33.
 87. *Ibid.*, pp. 35–7.
 88. *Ibid.*, ch. 4 by S. Sepe, pp. 157–8.
 89. F. Della Peruta, 'Le opere pie dall'unità alla legge Crispi', pp. 209, 213.
 90. R. Romanelli, *L'Italia liberale, 1861–1900*, pp. 349–50; these views are echoed in *Il commando impossibile*. See also G. Farrell-Vinay, *Povertà e politica*, pp. 320–4 for an overview of other positive appraisals of the 1890 law.
 91. On the *regolamento* of 5 February 1891, see S. D'Amelio, *La beneficenza nel diritto italiano*, vol. 1 (Naples, 1909), pp. 197–290.
 92. On the general issue of continuity in Italian history from liberalism to fascism, see John Davis' introduction to *Gramsci and Italy's Passive Revolution*, ed. J. A. Davis (London and New York, 1979), pp. 11–30.
 93. ISAP, vol. 4, *Amministrazione sociale*, ch. 4, p. 180.
 94. See Camera dei Deputati, *Discorsi parlamentari di Giovanni Giolitti*, vol. 2 (Rome, 1953), pp. 568–74, 571 for details of the new era of fiscal conservatism after 1889. This resulted neither in a balanced budget nor in reductions in public expenditure; Répaci, table 3, p. 30. However, efforts to keep social spending to a bare minimum were far more successful.
 95. ISAP, vol. 4, *Amministrazione sociale*, ch. 4, pp. 149–50, 180.
 96. *Ibid.*, n. 86, p. 219.
 97. S. D'Amelio, *La beneficenza nel diritto italiano*, pp. 197–290; A. Cherubini, *Beneficenza e solidarietà*, pp. 108–9; F. S. Nitti, *L'assistenza pubblica in Italia*, pp. 20–2.
 98. ISAP, vol. 4, *Amministrazione sociale*, ch. 4, pp. 168, 192.
 99. In 1887, Crispi launched the first national statistical investigation into the kingdom's *confraternite*, but the data compiled by MAIC were highly inaccurate, primarily because the Holy See issued instructions to the confraternities to falsify information in order to hide their wealth and activities from the prying eyes of secular officialdom. MAIC, DGS, *Statistica delle confraternite*, 2 vols (Rome, 1892 and 1898), discussed in G. Farrell-Vinay, *Povertà e politica*, pp. 291–5.
 100. ASA, P, serie iii, cat. 5, opere pie-varie, 1923–1950, b. 83, f. 1, sf. 9, letter from the congregation to the prefect, 30 June 1920; letter from the congregation to the interior ministry, 24 July 1920.
 101. ISAP, vol. 4, *Amministrazione sociale*, ch. 4, pp. 191–3.
 102. R. Laschi, 'Le congregazioni di carità nel presente e nell'avvenire', *Rivista della beneficenza pubblica e degli istituti di previdenza*, xxvii (1899), pp. 334–49.
 103. ACS, Min. Interno, DGAC, Divisione III, Opere Pie, Anni 1916–1918, b. 15, f. 25283.12c, sf. 33, relazione commissione provinciale di beneficenza di Milano, 1915–1917, on beneficent services in the province.
 104. *Amministrazione sociale*, ch. 4, pp. 172, 182.
 105. *Discorsi parlamentari di Giovanni Giolitti*, vol. 2, pp. 684–5.
 106. A. Cherubini, *Beneficenza e solidarietà*, p. 37; C. M. Lovett, *The Democratic Movement*, pp. 130–2.
 107. S. Sepe, 'Amministrazione statale e assistenza: Il controllo sulle "opere pie" nel periodo giolittiano', *Rivista trimestrale di scienza dell'amministrazione*, n. 1 (1984), pp. 8–20.

108. S. Sepe, *Amministrazione e storia*, ch. 3, pp. 193, 200.
109. Camera dei Deputati, *L'Attività parlamentare dei socialisti italiani*, vol. 2: 1900–1904 (Rome, 1970), pp. 446–8.
110. ACS, Min. Interno, DGAC, Divisione III, Opere Pie, anni 1916–1918, b. 13. f. 25283.9, istituti e posti di ricovero nelle provincie, containing prefect reports, including letters of 24 January 1917 from Campobasso and of 30 January 1917 from Alessandria.
111. Camera dei Deputati, *Discorsi parlamentari di Giovanni Giolitti*, vol. 4 (Rome, 1956), pp. 1814–17, on the senate's discussion of beneficent institutions.
112. S. Saladino, 'Italy', *The European Right: A Historical Profile*, ed. H. Rogger and E. Weber (London, 1965), pp. 208–61, 212–13.
113. The tendency amongst revisionist historians has been to avoid describing the process of nation-state-building in either Liberal Italy or Imperial Germany as a failure. In this regard, see D. Blackbourn and G. Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford, 1984), chs 6 and 7; and J. A. Davis, 'Remapping Italy's Path to the Twentieth Century', *Journal of Modern History*, 66 (June, 1994), pp. 291–320, for a review of recent reappraisals. Revisionists posit that the historian should avoid judgement because every nation's route to modernity is unique. Despite the strengths of this argument, it would be disingenuous to think that scholars can simply ignore the overwhelming reality of the collapse of parliamentary democracy and the rise of fascism in both countries. The word 'failure' may be flawed in some respects, but it may also be appropriate, so long as the historian seeks to explain, rather than to blame.

3 The Rise of Giolitti's 'Insurer State'

1. S. Talamo, 'La questione sociale e i cattolici', *I cattolici e la questione sociale in Italia, 1894–1904*, ed. G. Are (Milan, 1963), pp. 148–74; the article, which first appeared in 1896, highlights the importance of the social question to Catholics.
2. On the crisis of 1893–9 as a symptom of the weakness of the liberal state, see G. Candeloro, *Storia dell'Italia moderna*, vol. vii: *La crisi di fine secolo e l'età giolittiana* (Milan, 1974); U. Levra, *Il colpo di stato della borghesia: La crisi di fine secolo in Italia, 1896–1900* (Milan, 1975); J. A. Davis, *Conflict and Control*; R. Bach Jensen, 'Police Reform and Social Reform: Italy from the Crisis of the 1890s to the Giolittian Era', *Criminal Justice History*, 10 (1989), pp. 179–200.
3. G. Giolitti, *Memoirs of My Life* (London and Sydney, 1923), pp. 48–69 on the nature of his dissidence and his vision. At the time of writing, Alexander De Grand's *The Hunchback's Tailor: Giovanni Giolitti and Liberal Italy from the Challenge of Mass Politics to the Rise of Fascism, 1882–1922* (Westport, Conn., 2000) has not yet been published.
4. A. Aquarone, *L'Italia giolittiana, 1896–1915*, vol. 1: *Le premesse politiche ed economiche* (Bologna, 1981), pp. 184ff. and 285ff. on Giolitti's resolution of the political crisis.
5. The speech appears in *L'età giolittiana: Documenti della storia*, ed. M. L. Salvadori (Turin, 1980), pp. 60–3, 63.
6. On the importance of the search for consensus and legitimacy in welfare-state development in Europe after 1885, see J. Alber, 'Le origini del welfare state: Teorie, ipotesi ed analisi empirica', *Rivista italiana di scienza politica*, 12:3 (December, 1982), pp. 361–421, esp. 405.
7. From the earliest days after her arrival in Italy in 1884, Kuliscioff supported the idea of social reform because of her feminism. Involved from the beginning in

the formation of the socialist party in the 1890s, she pushed for socialists to distance themselves from anarchists and adopt a pragmatic programme. Both she and Turati were imprisoned in 1898 for 'inciting violence'; the experience of persecution during the anti-socialist campaign of 1894–99 convinced Turati of the need to exploit the new liberal regime in order to obtain social rewards that might win socialism adherents. See the collection of Kuliscioff's works and reminiscences of friends that was published to mark her death: *Anna Kuliscioff in Memoria* (Milan, 1926), intro. esp. pp. 33–8; and on Turati's reformist convictions, S. Discala, *Dilemmas of Italian Socialism: The Politics of Filippo Turati* (Amherst, Mass., 1980), pp. 5–21.

8. N. Valeri, *Turati e La Kuliscioff* (Florence, 1974), pp. 62–3; P. Favilli, *Storia del marxismo italiano: Dalle origini alla grande guerra* (Milan, 1996), pp. 328, 339.
9. E. Gentile, *L'Italia giolittiana, 1899–1914* (1977; rev. ed. Bologna, 1990), pp. 79–80.
10. On the rise of anti-reformist revolutionary syndicalism within the PSI in 1900–07, see the classic account by R. Michels, *Storia critica del movimento socialista italiano dagli inizi fino al 1911* (Florence, 1921). And see the controversial work on 'Sorelianism', Z. Sternhall, with M. Sznajder and M. Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, trans. D. Maisel (Princeton, 1994), ch. 3.
11. G. Giolitti, 'Per un programma liberale di governo', in *Discorsi extraparlamentari di Giovanni Giolitti*, ed. N. Valeri (Turin, 1952), pp. 237–46.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 238, 241, and 245.
13. See for example, A. W. Salomone, *Italy in the Giolittian Era: Italian Democracy in the Making, 1900–1914* (1945; 2nd edn. Philadelphia, 1960); G. Natale, *Giolitti e gli italiani* (Milan, 1949); G. Ansaldo, *Il minisero della buona vita: Giolitti e i suoi tempi* (Milan, 1949); F. Gaeta, *La crisi di fine secolo e l'età giolittiana* (Turin, 1982).
14. In the prewar period, Giolitti served as prime minister November 1903–March 1905, May 1906–December 1909, and March 1911–March 1914. In addition, he did five stints as president of the council of state and as interior minister: Seton-Watson, pp. 728–30. Over the course of his long career, he also served as a deputy uninterruptedly for 46 years from 1882 to 1928, as Crispi's treasury minister from March 1889 to November 1890, as prime minister from May 1892 to November 1893, and as Zanardelli's interior minister from February 1901 to October 1903. See the biographical essay in Camera dei Deputati, *Discorsi parlamentari di Giovanni Giolitti*, vol. 1 (Rome, 1953), intro., esp. pp. xiii–xiv.
15. G. Toniolo, *An Economic History of Liberal Italy, 1850–1918*, trans. M. Rees (London and New York, 1990), ch. 10; G. Federico and G. Toniolo, 'Italy', *Patterns of European Industrialization: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. R. Sylla and G. Toniolo (London and New York, 1991), pp. 197–217, 202.
16. Revisionist scholars are finally starting to challenge traditional depictions of Imperial Germany's welfare policies as crude attempts at social control. They are also moving away from the fixation on the 'feudal-dynastic' aspects of Bismarckian reforms from above. These new interpretations allow us to see welfare as a means to command and construct modernity. G. Steinmetz, *Regulating the Social: The Welfare State and Local Politics in Imperial Germany* (Princeton, NJ, 1993), for example, explores how social insurance reforms became an imperative for bourgeois society.
17. G. V. Rimlinger, *Welfare Policy and Industrialization in Europe, America, and Russia* (New York, 1971), pp. 114, 116.
18. P. Paur, 'The Corporatist Character of Bismarck's Social Policy', *European Studies Review*, 11:4 (October, 1981), pp. 427–60, 445.

19. G. Procacci, *La lotta di classe in Italia agli inizi del xx secolo* (Rome, 1970).
20. See, for example, D. F. Crew, *Town in the Ruhr: A Social History of Bochum, 1860–1914* (New York, 1979); R. J. Lustig, *Corporate Liberalism: The Origins of Modern Political Theory, 1890–1920* (Berkeley, California, 1982).
21. G. C. Marino, *La formazione dello spirito borghese in Italia* (Florence, 1974); F. Bonelli, 'Il capitalismo italiano: Linee generali d'interpretazione', *Storia d'Italia*, I: *Dal feudalesimo al capitalismo* (Turin, 1978), pp. 1195–255.
22. A. Lonni, 'Fatalità o responsabilità? Le "jatture" degli infortuni sul lavoro: La legge del 1898', *Salute e classi lavoratrici in Italia dall'unità al fascismo*, pp. 737–62, 738–9.
23. A. Cherubini, *Storia della previdenza*, p. 81.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 62–5, 81, 86–9; and on classic liberal theory of the open and competitive society, see D. Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State* (1973; reprinted. Basingstoke and London, 1990), ch. 5, esp. 104.
25. P. Thane, *The Foundations of the Welfare State: Social Policy in Modern Britain* (1982: 6th edn New York, 1989), p. 41–2.
26. P. Flora, vol. 1, p. 599.
27. M. V. Ballestrero and R. Levrero, *Genocidio perfetto: Industrializzazione e forza lavoro nel lecchese, 1840–1870* (Milan, 1979), pp. 30ff; M. V. Ballestrero, *Dalla tutela alla parità: La legislazione italiana sul lavoro delle donne* (Bologna, 1979), pp. 11–13.
28. S. Ortaggi Cammarosana, 'Labouring Women in Northern and Central Italy in the Nineteenth Century', *Society and Politics in the Age of the Risorgimento*, pp. 152–83, 153.
29. G. Tagliacarne, 'L'occupazione delle donne nelle fabbriche e negli uffici durante gli ultimi cinquant'anni e la diminuzione delle nascite', *Giornale degli economisti*, 49:12 (December, 1934), pp. 927–40, 932.
30. Ortaggi Cammarosano, p. 180; on the vagaries of Italian official statistics on women workers, see A. Pescarola, 'I mestieri femminili: Continuità e spostamenti di confini nel corso dell'industrializzazione', *Memoria*, 3:30 (1990), pp. 55–68.
31. Supported by the socialist party, the *camere di lavoro* were organized on a territorial basis; they helped workers find jobs and organize disputes. Many also managed their own mutual funds. At the turn of the century, they had more members than did craft or industry-based federations of workers. P. Spriano, *Socialismo e classe operaia a Torino dal 1892 al 1913* (Turin, 1958), ch. 1; D. Marucco, *Mutualismo e sistema politico: Il caso italiano, 1862–1904* (Milan, 1981), pp. 127–33. On the voluntary insurance movement in Britain, see B. Abel-Smith, 'The History of Medical Care' in *Comparative Development in Social Welfare*, ed. E. W. Martin (London, 1972), pp. 219–40.
32. P. Frascani, 'La disciplina delle industrie insalubri nella legislazione sanitaria italiana, 1865–1910', *Salute e classi lavoratrici*, pp. 713–35.
33. Cherubini (1977), pp. 114–17, 121; Lonni, pp. 745–50.
34. In 1904, mutual aid societies voted at their third national congress to lobby for the introduction of compulsory contributory pensions: Cherubini (1977), p. 133. Not until 1911 did trade unions give their support to the concept of *obbligatorietà*; and in 1914, the reformist socialist party officially endorsed a platform calling for state-run compulsory insurance. See S. Merli, *Proletariato di fabbrica e capitalismo industriale: Il caso italiano, 1880–1900*, vol. 1 (Florence, 1972), pp. 223–5.
35. ApC, Legislatura XXI, Sessione I, Discussioni, Vol. IV, Tornata del 13 maggio 1901, interpellanze sulla cassa nazionale di previdenza, pp. 3757–61, 3759.
36. INPS, *Seventy Years of the National Social Insurance Institute, Fifty Years of General Compulsory Insurance for Disability and Old-Age* (Rome, 1970), pp. 228–32; Cherubini (1977), p. 149.

37. A. Wood, *Nineteenth-Century Britain, 1815–1914* (1960; 2nd edn Harlow, 1982), quotes on pp. 398, 402.
38. A. I. Ogus, 'Britain', in *The Evolution of Social Insurance, 1881–1981: Studies of Germany, France, Great Britain, Austria and Switzerland*, ed. P. A. Kohler and H. F. Zacher, with M. Partington (London and New York, 1982), pp. 150–264, quote on p. 183.
39. D. Fraser, ch. 7; quotes on p. 157; P. Thane (1982/1989), pp. 74–84; G. C. Peden, *British Economic and Social Policy: Lloyd George to Margaret Thatcher* (1985; reprinted. Oxford, 1988), ch. 2.
40. See B. B. Gilbert, *The Evolution of National Insurance in Great Britain* (London, 1966) on the legislative process.
41. Some commentators depict the British case as an example of a 'patriarchal welfare state' which viewed women as mothers and men as breadwinners: C. Pateman, 'The Patriarchal Welfare State', *Democracy and the Welfare State*, ed. A. Gutmann (Princeton, New Jersey, 1988), pp. 231–60. On Britain specifically, see J. Lewis, *The Politics of Motherhood: Child and Maternal Welfare in England, 1900–1939* (London and Montreal, 1980), intro.; and, by the same author, 'Gender and the Development of Welfare Regimes', *Journal of European Social Policy*, 2 (1992), pp. 159–73. For a discussion of these issues, see S. Pedersen, *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State: Britain and France, 1914–1945* (1993; pb ed Cambridge and New York, 1995), intro. and ch. 1. Others argue that the act entrenched the insurance principle in British welfare policy and committed it to the maintenance of a system, based as it was on flat-rate contributions compulsorily drawn from all wage-earners, which functioned as a form of regressive taxation; see Fraser, pp. 166–7.
42. Gilbert, quote on p. 53; and Thane (1982/1989), pp. 94–6 and Pedersen, p. 50.
43. The term is from S. Romano, *Giolitti: Lo stile del potere* (Milan, 1989).
44. ApC, Legislatura XXI, Sessione 1900–01, Vol. VI, Discussioni, Tornata di sabato 29 giugno 1901, aggiunte e modificazioni alla legge del 17 luglio 1898, pp. 6081–5; and A. Cherubini, 'La previdenza sociale nell'epoca giolittiana', *Salute e classi lavoratrici in Italia*, pp. 562–81, 570–1.
45. F. Bettio, *The Sexual Division of Labour: The Italian Case* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 104–5; see also S. Musso, *Gli operai di Torino, 1900–1920* (Milan, 1980), *passim*.
46. See P. Flora, vol. 1, p. 460 and vol. 2, p. 554; A. Cherubini (1977), pp. 154–5; and L. Preti, *Giolitti, i riformisti e gli altri, 1900–1911* (Milan, 1985), pp. 243–4.
47. G. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency, 1899–1914* (Oxford, 1971).
48. *Seventy Years of the National Social Insurance System*, p. 234.
49. After textiles, the *manifatture dei tabacchi* employed the most numerous category of female factory workers in Italy. F. Pieroni Bortolotti, *Socialismo e questione femminile in Italia, 1892–1922* (Milan, 1974), p. 193–4; see also, P. Nava, *La fabbrica dell'emancipazione: Operaie della manifattura tabacchi di Modena* (Rome, 1986).
50. A. Aquarone, *L'Italia giolittiana, 1896–1915*, vol. 1 (Bologna, 1891), pp. 67–71.
51. L. Preti, *Giolitti*, p. 249; Cherubini, pp. 172–3.
52. P. Favilli, *Storia del marxismo*, chs 5–6; E. Gentile, *L'Italia Giolittiana*, ch. 4; N. Valeri, *Turati e Kuliscioff*, pp. 74–7.
53. A. Cherubini, 'La previdenza sociale', p. 566; L. Preti (1985), pp. 145–6.
54. J. H. Quataert, 'Social Insurance and the Family Work of Oberlausitz Home Weavers in the Late Nineteenth Century', *German Women in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. J. C. Fout (New York and London, 1984), pp. 270–94.
55. See M. L. Stewart, *Women, Work and the French State: Labour Protection and Social Patriarchy, 1879–1919* (London, 1989); J. Jenson, 'Gender and Reproduction: Or

- Babies and the State', *Studies in Political Economy*, 20 (1989), pp. 9–46 and, by the same author, 'Representations of Gender: Policies to 'Protect' Women Workers and Infants in France and the United States before 1914', in *Women, the State, and Welfare*, ed. L. Gordon (Madison, Wisconsin, 1990), pp. 152–77; and L. Lee Downs, 'Between Taylorism and Denatalite: Women Welfare Supervisors and the Boundaries of Difference in French Metalworking Factories, 1917–1930', *Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women's History* D. O. Relly and S. M. Reverby (Ithaca, New York, 1992), pp. 289–302.
56. Since 1898, for instance, the Italian federation of metalworkers supported the idea of equality in jobs and pay between the sexes. A notable, but unrepresentative exception involved the print workers' union, which discriminated against women: Bettio, p. 147.
 57. Kuliscioff pointedly reminded her male colleagues that not until 1910 did any socialist party congress make 'the question of the female proletariat' the 'order of the day'. She believed that the problem of the economic emancipation of women was marginalized in party doctrine and practice: see her 'Proletariato femminile e partito socialista: Relazione al congresso nazionale socialista 1910', *Anna Kuliscioff in memoria*, pp. 299–312, 299. The PSI never really addressed the specific problems of women in employment. To have done so would have demanded a critical examination of gender relations, which could act independently of class relations. Instead, male socialists who ran the parliamentary party focused on single-issues, such as maternity benefit or working hours, but only as a secondary aspect of their programme.
 58. Legislators angered many women's representatives, including Anna Mozzoni, because they 'infantilized' women by defining their minority age as 15 to 21, while that of men was 12 to 15. L. Valiani, *L'Italia dal 1876 al 1915*, pp. 435–6.
 59. C. Ficola, 'Legislazione sociale e tutela della maternità nell'età giolittiana', *Salute e classi lavoratrici in Italia*, pp. 698–735, 708; see also Bortolotti, *Socialismo e questione femminile*, ch. 3; and see Kuliscioff's proposals in *Congresso nazionale del partito socialista italiano, Roma, 8–10 settembre 1900: Organizzazione economica per una legge sul lavoro delle donne e dei fanciulli* (Milan, 1900), pp. 5–8.
 60. Cherubini (1977), pp. 166–9.
 61. Ballestrero, *Dalla tutela alla parità*, pp. 20–1.
 62. *Ibid.*, pp. 26–32.
 63. See Bettio, p. 134; and S. Puccini, 'Condizioni della donna e questione femminile, 1892–1922', *La questione femminile in Italia dal 900 ad oggi*, ed. G. Ascoli, N. Fusini, *et al.* (Milan, 1979), pp. 9–75, esp. 12–26.
 64. C. Ficola, 'Legislazione sociale e tutela della maternità', p. 701; Bettio, pp. 43–4. So deeply imbedded was the sexual division of labour that even during the war the use of female labour in war industries was not as extensive in Italy as it was in other countries. The owners of big firms, like Fiat, for example, were decidedly against employing women, even though mechanization, which de-skilled many tasks, made employing women more possible. See A. Camarda and S. Peli, *L'Altro esercito: Le classi operaie durante la prima guerra mondiale* (Milan, 1980), pp. 22–6 and pp. 34–5, on resistance to the entry of women in traditionally 'male jobs'.
 65. Cherubini (1977), pp. 171–2.
 66. A. Buttafuoco, 'Motherhood as a Political Strategy: The Role of the Italian Women's Movement in the Creation of the Cassa Nazionale di Maternità', in *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States, 1880s–1950s*, ed. G. Bock and P. Thane (London, 1991), pp. 178–195, 191; Ficola, 'Legislazione sociale', p. 710.

67. Buttafuoco, p. 191.
68. Cherubini (1977), pp. 126, 131, 133; and see MAIC, Ufficio del Lavoro, *La donna nell'industria italiana* (Rome, 1905) and *Operai ed orari negli opifici soggetti alla legge sul lavoro delle donne e dei fanciulli, anno 1907* (Rome, 1908), cited in Ficola, p. 701.
69. 'L'impresa libica e i problemi della vita nazionale', speech presented in Turin on 7 October 1911, *Discorsi extraparlamentari*, 259–72, 261, 264.
70. Based on literacy, the law gave the vote to all literate men at the age of 21; illiterate men who had completed military service or were over thirty could also vote. As a result of the reform, the electorate increased from 3.3 to 8.6 million, representing a growth in the citizenry from 9.5 to 24 per cent of the total population: E. Gentile (1977/1990), p. 205.
71. See *L'età giolittiana*, ed. M. L. Salvadori, pp. 267–76, for Salandra's speech.
72. 'Il monopolio delle assicurazioni', session 8 July, Camera dei Deputati, *Discorsi parlamentari di Giovanni Giolitti*, vol. 3 (Rome, 1954), pp. 1426–35, esp. 1428–29.
73. A. Scialoja, 'L'istituto nazionale delle assicurazioni e il progetto giolittiano di un monopolio di stato delle assicurazioni sulla vita', *Quaderni storici*, 6 (1971), pp. 971–1027.
74. G. Carocci, *Giolitti e l'età giolittiana* (1961; 8th edn Turin, 1971), ch. 13; E. Gentile (1977/1990), p. 204; D. J. Forsyth, *The Crisis of Liberal Italy: Monetary and Financial Policy, 1914–1922* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 33–4.
75. Carocci, pp. 59–60; Forsyth, p. 29.
76. Répaci, p. 27.
77. A. Caracciolo, 'Il processo d'industrializzazione', *Lo sviluppo economico in Italia: Storia dell'economia italiana negli ultimi cento anni*, vol. 3: *Studi di settore e documentazione di base*, ed. G. Fuà (Milan, 1969), pp. 98–182, 98–120.
78. S. Sepe (1995), p. 194.
79. Throughout the Giolittian period, the kingdom devoted barely 1 per cent of GNP to social spending: J. Hage and R. A. Hanneman, 'The Growth of the Welfare State in Britain, France, Germany, and Italy: A Comparison of Three Paradigms', *Comparative Social Research*, 3 (1980), pp. 45–70, 57.
80. Répaci, pp. 37, 168–9. See also R. M. Russo, *La politica dell'assistenza: Storia dello sviluppo capitalistico e del sottosviluppo assistenziale in Italia dal 1860 ai giorni nostri* (Rimini and Florence, 1974), n. 10, p. 31 for the following figures on the state's social expenditure (in contemporary lire): 1905–07 6,473,395; 1909–10 9,308,185; 1912–13 8,945,375; 1913–14 8,946,612; 1914–15 19,473,224 1922–23 60,500,000; 1923–24 63,027,000; 1924–25 108,530,000.
81. The term is used by Vera Zamagni in 'La dinamica dei salari nel settore industriale, 1921–1939', *Quaderni storici*, 10: pts. 2–3 (1975), pp. 530–49, 548; also see her 'Sui salari industriali nell'età giolittiana', *Rivista di storia economica*, 1 (1984), pp. 183–221.
82. M. Langan and I. Ostner, 'Gender and Welfare: Towards a Comparative Framework', *Towards a European Welfare State?* ed. G. Room (Bristol, 1991), pp. 127–50, 136–7.
83. Flora, vol. 1, pp. 460–1.
84. Eventually France found its own way, by reforming its German-style social insurance system in 1930 (and allowing workers to choose their own insurer) and, more importantly, by exploiting the best of its own native traditions of family-based welfare. Introduced in 1932, compulsory family allowances and the many other pronatalist and familist initiatives that followed became cornerstones of a peculiarly French welfare state: Y. Saint-Jours, 'France', *The Evolution of Social Insurance*, pp. 93–149, 117; Quine, *Population Politics*, ch. 2.

85. A. De Swaan, *In Care of the State: Health Care, Education and Welfare in Europe in the Modern Era* (Oxford, 1988), intro. pp. 1–12.
86. P. Baldwin, *The Politics of Social Solidarity: Class Bases of the European Welfare State, 1875–1975* (Cambridge and New York, 1990), pp. 1–3.
87. M. Paci, 'Il sistema di welfare italiano tra tradizione clientelare e prospettive di riforma', *Welfare state all'italiana*, pp. 297–326, 307–8.
88. Cited by N. Valeri, in his introduction to *Discorsi extraparlamentari*, p. 68.
89. Salomone, pt. 2, ch. 3.
90. P. Togliatti, *Discorso su Giolitti* (Rome, 1950), pp. 15, 28, 42. Though he was no apologist for *giolittismo*, Togliatti praised its creator for conceding 'an almost universal suffrage' (if you ignore women, of course) at a time when not all 'democrats' were even convinced of the benefits of democracy (p. 32).
91. Salomone, p. 42.
92. Romano, *Lo stile del potere*, p. 5; and see pp. 329 ff. for details about Giolitti's role in the rise of fascism.

4 Fascism's New Deal: Social Insurance under a Totalitarian State

1. A. James Gregor defines Mussolini's conception of the state as 'Hegelian or neo-Hegelian', and with regard to fascism's deification and mythologization of the state he is correct. But fascism added its own totalitarian theory to philosophical notions of the transcendent state, thereby transforming and modernizing the idea of the supra-state. See A. J. Gregor, *The Ideology of Fascism: The Rationale of Totalitarianism* (New York, 1969), p. 154.
2. From a lecture delivered in Florence on 8 March 1925, reprinted in *Fascism*, ed. R. Griffin (Oxford, 1995), p. 54; Gentile actually 'borrowed' the concept of an 'ethical state' from the liberal Right.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 54; and G. Gentile, *Che cosa è il fascismo: Discorsi e polemiche* (Florence, 1925), pp. 17, 35–6 and his *Origini e dottrine del fascismo* (1929; 3rd ed. Rome, 1934).
4. On Gentile's theories of the fascist state, see H. Sifton Harris, *The Social Philosophy of Giovanni Gentile* (Urbana, Illinois, 1960), *passim*; Gregor (1969), ch. 5; E. Gentile, *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista, 1918–1925* (Rome and Bari, 1975), pp. 358–69.
5. Mussolini's contribution to the encyclopaedia article was published in English: B. Mussolini, *The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism*, trans. J. Soames (London, 1933), pp. 14–16, 24.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
7. From the text of a speech given by Mussolini on 6 October 1934 to the workers of Milan, reprinted in B. Mussolini, *Speeches on the Corporate State* (Florence, 1936), pp. 39–40.
8. B. Mussolini, *My Autobiography* (1928; rev. ed. London, 1939), ch. 10; and see A. Cherubini, 'Introduzione storica alle assicurazioni sociali in Italia: Il ventennio fascista', in *Rivista degli infortuni e delle malattie professionali*, n. 5 (1969), 731–59, 736.
9. The terms 'corporative' and 'corporate', 'corporativism' and 'corporatism' are used virtually interchangeably in the literature, although only corporate and corporatism are technically correct.
10. See, for example, G. Bortolotto, *Lo stato e la dottrina corporativo* (Bologna, 1931), pp. 6–11 and B. Biagi, *Lo stato corporativo* (Rome, 1934), pp. 24–36.
11. Scholars, by contrast, have long recognized that the corporative state never gave any autonomy or power to workers. Determined to prevent any repeat of

the 1920 occupation of the factories, the fascist regime sought to deprive the working class of the weapons of class war. The Palazzo Chigi Pact of 21 December 1923 called for employers and workers to establish 'cordial relations' so that the nation's productive capacities could be increased. Work stoppages due to strike activity harmed the whole national community by interrupting the rhythm of industrial development. On 2 October 1925, the Palazzo Vidoni Pact gave fascist syndicates the exclusive right to represent organized labour in its dealings with the bosses of big business. Rival socialist and Catholic trade unions ceased to exist. And a decree-law banning strikes and lock-outs was promulgated on 3 April 1926. Though the Corporative State was founded in 1927, the actual corporations were not created until 1934; but even after that the rhetoric surrounding it never matched the reality. Early critical appraisals include G. Salvemini, *Under the Axe of Fascism* (London, 1936), *passim*; W. Ebenstein, *Fascist Italy* (New York, 1939), esp. ch. 6 and 7; C. T. Schmidt, *The Corporate State in Action* (New York, 1939), *passim*; and J. Meenan, *The Italian Corporative System* (Cork, 1944), esp. ch. 7. See also A. Aquarone, *L'Organizzazione dello stato totalitario* (Turin, 1965), pp. 435–6, 439; and C. F. Delzell, *Mediterranean Fascism, 1919–1945* (New York, 1970), pp. 108–20.

12. C. Alessandrini, 'La carta del lavoro e la tutela dell'infanzia e della maternità', *MI* 2:1 (January, 1927), pp. 22–5.
13. See R. De Felice, *Mussolini il fascista*, vol. 2: *L'organizzazione dello stato fascista, 1925–1929*, (Turin, 1968), pp. 222–96 and appendix pp. 542–7.
14. Quoted in Cherubini (1977), pp. 283–4.
15. G. Landi, *Assistenza e previdenza nell'ordinamento corporativo fascista* (Ferrara, 1932), 56–9.
16. A. Lo Monaco Aprile, *La politica assistenziale dell'Italia fascista* (Rome, 1931), p. 269.
17. A. Cioffi, *Istituzioni di diritto corporativo* (Milan, 1933), pp. 407–8.
18. *My Autobiography*, p. 281.
19. See R. Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London, 1991), p. 26 for a definition of fascism as 'palingenetic' nationalism.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
21. E. Gentile, 'From the Cultural Revolt of the Giolittian Era to the Ideology of Fascism', *Studies in Modern Italian History: From the Risorgimento to the Republic*, ed. F. J. Coppa (New York, Berne, Frankfurt, 1986), pp. 103–17, 116.
22. D. Schoenbaum, *Hitler's Social Revolution: Class and Status in Nazi Germany, 1933–1939* (1966; pb. edn. New York, 1967), pp. 254–6, 286; Schoenbaum's classic account examines Hitler's 'New Deal' for Germany from the perspective of changes in social status and mobility, rather than social welfare.
23. From a speech before the assembly of the national council of corporations, 13 November 1933, B. Mussolini, *Speeches on the Corporate State*, pp. 9–25, 20. In his *Lectures on Fascism* (New York, 1976), pp. 46, 48, 73, 144, Palmiro Togliatti alluded to the 'ideological hold' which fascism gained over the working class by means of its social policies: first published as *Lezioni sul fascismo* (Rome, 1970). And in her *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, 1981), p. viii, Victoria De Grazia made reference to the 'stabilizing' effects of welfare.
24. E. Gentile, *Il mito dello stato nuovo dall'antigiolittismo al fascismo* (Rome and Bari, 1982), pp. 30–76.
25. R. De Felice, 'Ordine pubblico e orientamenti delle masse popolari italiane nella prima metà del 1917', *Rivista storica del socialismo*, 7 (1963), pp. 467–504, 468.

26. G. Procacci, 'Popular Protest and Labour Conflict in Italy, 1915–1918', *Social History* 14:1 (January, 1989), pp. 31–58.
27. G. Fiume, 'La donna e la famiglia', in *Il fascismo: Politica e vita sociale*, ed. S. Fedele and G. Restifo (Milan, 1980), pp. 162–74, 168.
28. A. Camarda and S. Peli, *L'altro esercito*, pp. 29, 60, 84–7 *et passim*.
29. A. Cento Bull and P. Corner, *From Peasant to Entrepreneur: The Survival of the Family Economy in Italy* (Oxford, 1993), p. 60; and G. Toniolo (1990), p. 126.
30. Toniolo (1990), p. 62.
31. A. Serpieri, *La guerra e le classi rurali italiane* (Bari, 1930), pp. 71–2; League of Nations, *Agricultural Production in Continental Europe during the 1914–1918 War and the Reconstruction period* (Geneva, 1943), pp. 35–6, 50–1.
32. See, for example, the essays by C. Osborne and P. Weindling in R. Wall and J. Winter, eds, *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in Europe, 1914–1918* (Cambridge and New York, 1988), pp. 389–404 and 417–38; Quine, *Population Politics*, chs 2 and 3.
33. Cherubini (1977), pp. 199–206. The expansion in coverage was dramatic: the percentage of the Italian workforce which was covered by accident insurance rose from about 10 per cent in 1915 to about 50 per cent in 1920. About 80 per cent of British workers and 70 per cent of German workers were covered by similar schemes in 1920: Flora, vol. 1, p. 461.
34. Toniolo (1990), pp. 129–30.
35. A. Tasca, *The Rise of Italian Fascism, 1918–1922* (New York, 1966), pp. 19ff. R. Vivarelli, 'Revolution and Reaction in Italy, 1918–1922', *Journal of Italian History*, 1:2 (1979), pp. 235–63; D. H. Bell, 'Working-Class Culture and Fascism in an Industrial Town, 1918–22', *Social History*, 9:1 (1982), pp. 1–24, esp. 7–8.
36. The term derives from C. Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe: Stabilization in France, Germany, and Italy in the Decade after World War I* (Princeton, 1975), though it is used differently by the author, who examines the development of corporatist economic policies in the 1920s.
37. Article 25 of the 'Norme per l'assicurazione obbligatoria contro la disoccupazione involontaria', *Lex: Provvedimenti legislativi e disposizioni ufficiali*, Anno V–1919 (Turin, 1919), pp. 1646–65, 1658.
38. *Ibid.*, art. 23, p. 1655.
39. *Ibid.*, art. 31, p. 1658; and art. 2 of 'Norme per il versamento dei contributi per l'assicurazione obbligatoria contro la disoccupazione, decreto del ministro per l'industria, 29 dicembre 1919', *Lex: Legislazione italiana*, Anno VI–1920, Gennaio-Giugno, (Rome, 1920), pp. 12–18, 12.
40. 'Norme per l'assicurazione obbligatoria', *Lex* (1919), arts 35, 38 on pp. 1659, 1660. Despite these limitations, the national unemployment office operated on a mass scale. From 1 July 1921 to 30 June 1922, for example, it collected 85.97 million *lire* in contributions and distributed 84.56 million in benefits: *Seventy Years of the National Social Insurance Institute*, pp. 299, 300.
41. The royal decree of 27 October 1922 gave insured people (both men and women), who had accumulated at least 240 fortnightly contributions, the right to take early retirement at the age of 60; fascism never converted this measure into law.
42. The target represented about 40 per cent of the entire population above 15 years of age: INPS, *Per una storia della previdenza sociale in Italia: Studi e documenti*, (Rome, 1962), pp. 136–61.
43. A royal decree of 27 July 1919 stipulated that the council of the administration be composed of both employers' and workers' representatives; this ruling was

- put into practice: *Seventy Years of the National Social Insurance Institute*, pp. 238–9, 321–8.
44. Ministero per l'industria, il commercio, ed il lavoro, Direzione generale del lavoro e della previdenza sociale, *L'assicurazione obbligatoria contro le malattie. Parte I: Studi preparatori, relazioni, schemi di progetti di legge* (Rome, 1920) and *Parte II: Verbali delle adunanze della commissione della sottocommissione* (Rome, 1921), cited in D. Preti, 'Per una storia sociale dell'Italia fascista: La tutela della salute nell'organizzazione dello stato corporativo (1922–1940)', in *Salute e classi lavoratrici*, pp. 797–834, 813.
 45. Flora, vol. 1, p. 460. In 1921, the national board collected contributions totalling 278 million *lire*; and it distributed 12 million *lire* in pension benefits to some 49 000 people: *Seventy Years*, pp. 515, 521.
 46. For a contrasting view, see Z. Sternhall, with M. Sznajder and M. Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, trans. D. Maisel (Princeton, 1994), p. 229 *et passim*.
 47. Seton-Watson, p. 702; De Felice, *Mussolini il fascista*, vol. 2, pp. 4–9, 114ff.; A. Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power: Fascism in Italy, 1919–1929* (London, 1973), chs 6–8.
 48. See the next chapter; and see M. S. Quine, 'From Malthus to Mussolini: The Italian Eugenics Movement and Fascist Population Policy, 1890–1938', (PhD thesis, University of London, 1990), chs 4–6.
 49. On the issue of continuity and discontinuity from liberalism to fascism, see S. Cassese, 'Le istituzioni del fascismo', *Quaderni storici*, 12 (1969), pp. 424–37; G. Sabbatucci, 'Fascist Institutions: Recent Problems and Interpretations', *Journal of Italian History*, 1 (Spring, 1979), pp. 75–92.
 50. In his 'Social Policy under German Fascism', *Stagnation and Renewal in Social Policy: The Rise and Fall of Policy Regimes*, ed. M. Rein, G. Esping-Andersen, and L. Rainwater, (Armonk, NY and London, 1987), pp. 59–77, G. V. Rimlinger discusses the difficulties of defining a 'fascist social policy'.
 51. A. Cherubini (1977), pp. 262, 264–5.
 52. Delzell, pp. 120–6; Mussolini, *The Corporate State*, pp. 65–74.
 53. W. C. Welk, *Fascist Economic Policy: An Analysis of Italy's Economic Experiment* (Cambridge, Mass., 1938), pp. 90–102; R. Sarti, *Fascism and the Industrial Leadership in Italy, 1919–1940: A Study in the Expansion of Private Power under Fascism* (Berkeley, 1971), intro. and pp. 134–7; P. Melograni, *Gli industriali e Mussolini: Rapporti tra confindustria e fascismo dal 1919 al 1929* (Milan, 1980), pp. 240–3 *et passim*.
 54. 'Assicurazione obbligatoria contro la disoccupazione involontaria', *Gazzetta ufficiale del regno d'Italia: Gennaio-febbraio*, 1924, no. 34 (Rome, 1924), p. 623.
 55. In fact, the regime did not introduce any changes to the 1919 levels of unemployment benefit (set at 1.25 *lire* for workers earning 4 *lire* or less per day; 2.50 for those earning 4–8 per day; and 3.75 for those earning 8 or more per day) until February 1937, when unemployed fathers (but not mothers) were given a very modest 'family supplement' of .60 *lire* for every child dependent under 15 years of age.
 56. 'Testo del regolamento (R. D. 7 dicembre 1924, n. 2270) per l'esecuzione del regio decreto 30 dicembre, n. 3158, concernente provvedimenti per l'assicurazione obbligatoria contro la disoccupazione involontaria', *Lex: Legislazione italiana*, Anno XI, 1925 (Turin, 1925), pp. 119–35, arts 45–7, 66–8, pp. 127–8, 131–2.
 57. Salvemini, pp. 277–79; *Seventy Years*, p. 243–4, 297–9; G. Bronzini, 'Legislazione sociale ed istituzioni corporative', *Le classi operaie durante il fascismo: Annali Feltrinelli 1979/1980*, vol. 20 (Milan, 1981), pp. 315–27, 322.

58. *Seventy Years*, pp. 295, 331; Salvemini, p. 323; P. Corner, 'L'Economia italiana fra le due guerre', *Storia d'Italia Laterza*, vol. iv: *Guerre e fascismo*, ed. G. Sabbatucci and V. Vidotto, (Rome and Bari, 1996), pp. 305–78, 311–19.
59. D. Preti, 'Per una storia sociale dell'Italia fascista: La tutela della salute nell'organizzazione dello stato corporativo, 1922–1940', *Salute e classi lavoratrici*, pp. 797–834, 800–4; and, by the same author, *Economia e istituzioni nello stato fascista* (Rome, 1980), ch. 5, esp. 215–19 and *La modernizzazione corporativa, 1922–1940: Economia, salute pubblica, istituzioni e professioni sanitarie* (Milan, 1987), pp. 116–23, 199–204.
60. *Seventy Years*, pp. 244–9; Camera dei deputati, Legislatura XXVII, *La legislazione fascista, 1922–1928*, vol. 1 (Rome, 1929), pp. 624–30.
61. The dictatorship's official secrecy about the compilation and publication of sensitive data has made the work of scholars investigating living standards very difficult. See two of the most authoritative accounts: B. Buoizzi, 'Le condizioni della classe lavoratrice in Italia, 1922–1943', *Annali dell'Istituto Giangiacomo Feltrinelli*, ed. A. Andreasi, vol. 14 (Milan, 1972), pp. 423–76; V. Zamagni, 'La dinamica dei salari nel settore industriale', pp. 530–49.
62. Unemployment remained well above 1 million during the years from 1932 to 1936; in 1936, the government imposed censorship on the publication of unemployment statistics. Despite the ban, the Confederation of Industry and the National Social Security Institute continued to compile data. See Buoizzi, p. 434, n. 40; and ISTAT, *Compendio statistico italiano, 1936*, vol. 10 (Rome, 1936), p. 148.
63. C. Saracena, 'Percorsi di vita femminile nella classe operaia: Tra famiglia e lavoro durante il fascismo', *Memoria*, no. 2 (October, 1981), pp. 64–75, 71.
64. Zamagni (1990), p. 311 cites the work of Piva and Toniolo.
65. H. S. Miller, *Price Control in Fascist Italy* (New York, 1938), pp. 15–18; Zamagni (1975), p. 539; A. Mortara, 'Osservazioni sulla politica dei "tagli salariali" nel decennio 1927–1936', *Industria e banca nella grande crisi, 1929–1934*, G. Toniolo, ed. (Milan, 1978), pp. 65–72, 67.
66. A. Lo Monaco Aprile, *La politica assistenziale dell'Italia fascista*, p. 306. Gaetano Salvemini, however, cited the example of another fascist 'expert', who advised the rural unemployed to do without bread and meat and return to a pellagra-inducing, maize-based diet in order to withstand the crisis. The cabinet minister, Giacomo Acerbo, endorsed these views when, in 1932, he recommended increased production of corn because 'it serves to feed not only human beings, but also cattle, and especially pigs'; see Salvemini's 'The Economics of Fascism', in *Neither Liberty nor Bread: The Meaning and Tragedy of Fascism*, ed. F. Keane (New York and London, 1940), pp. 211–17, 217.
67. *Seventy Years*, pp. 298–9; W. Ebenstein, *Fascist Italy* (New York, 1939), pp. 173–4;
68. Cherubini (1977), p. 223.
69. Buoizzi, p. 457.
70. A. Lo Monaco Aprile (1931), p. 308.
71. The INPS was also called the *Istituto Nazionale Fascista della Previdenza Sociale* (INFPS - National Fascist Institute of Social Insurance).
72. Article 1 of R. D. L. 4 ottobre 1935–XIII, n. 1827, 'Perfezionamento e coordinamento legislativo della previdenza sociale', *Lex: Legislazione italiana*, Anno XXI–1935, (Turin 1935), pp. 1333–69, 1333.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 1341; and art. 11, p. 1335.
74. On the failure of fascism's settlement scheme, see H. M. Larebo, *The Building of an Empire: Italian Land Policy and Practice in Ethiopia, 1935–1941* (Oxford, 1994), esp. ch. 5.

75. L. Conti, *L'assistenza e la previdenza sociale: Storia e problemi* (Milan, 1958), pp. 79–84; and see, Cherubini (1979), p. 278 and Zamagni (1990), ch. 9.
76. ASN, P, I Serie, Categoria 7, b. 19, f. 5, INFPS, contains numerous testimonies; see the deposition of Albertina D., 17 January 1937.
77. ASN, P, I Serie, Categoria 7, b. 19, f. 5, testimony of Maria M., 17 September 1937.
78. ASN, P, I Serie, Categoria 7, b. 19, f. 5., sf. sussidio di disoccupazione, letter of Maria B. to the mayor, passed on to the prefect for his attention, 27 April 1938. The prefect approved the decision.
79. P. Morgan, 'Italian Fascist Social Welfare Policy, 1927–37', *Tuttitalia*, 4 (1991), pp. 2–8.
80. P. Togliatti (1976), pp. 46–8, 73, 144.
81. ISTAT, *Annuario statistico italiano, 1938–XVI*, vol. 4 (Rome, 1938), p. 260–1.
82. ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–1943, b. 41, f. 1.81421, famiglie bisognose, letter of prefect to the SPD, dated 11 December 1933, and elenco dei sussidi.
83. ACS, PCM, G, 'Beneficenza, 1933–1939', b. 1, spese casuali – elenco dei sussidi, which covers 1934; there are a total of 12 boxes in all.
84. ACS, PNF, DN, Servizi Amministrativi, b. 146, giustificazioni di casa, 20/5–5/6 1939, a group of papers, see especially letter of Bozzi, the federal secretary, to Marinelli, the administrative secretary, 22 May 1939.
85. H. S. Miller, pp. 18–20.
86. ASV, GP, Serie I, m. 79 (86), f. 363, situazione politica, letter of the police chief to the prefect, dated 31 January 1931, which reports that 'the working-class masses do not have incomes which are high enough to support the cost of living' because of this practice of over-charging, something that 'almost all the merchants and shopkeepers' were doing.
87. At the same time that workers were losing access to affordable food, the state was extending benefits to its public employees which aimed at 'combating the cost of living'. A new law of 21 March 1926 founded the 'Provvida', a co-operative, under the ministry of communications, which sold publicly subsidized food to all grades of state employees: See ACS, PCM, 1927, f. 3 sf. 16, Protocollo 337, titolo dell'affare–estensione dei benefici della 'Provvida', Ciano's *appunto* for Mussolini, 17 April 1927.
88. *Atti del Consiglio Superiore dell'Economia Nazionale: Sessione V-Riunione del 23 novembre 1926* (Rome, 1927), pp. 130–77.
89. G. F. Venè, *Mille lire al mese: La vita quotidiana della famiglia nell'Italia fascista* (Milan, 1988), pp. 104–22, esp. 112 and 118; Buozi, pp. 429–30.
90. D. Preti, 'La politica agraria del fascismo: Note introduttive', *Studi storici*, 14:4 (1973), pp. 802–69, 844–5.
91. AST, GP, m. 322, f. urbanesimo – affari vari, contains the circular sent to prefects and the police by the Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione Generale della Pubblica Sicurezza, on 8 December 1928.
92. AST, GP, m. 322, f. Città di Torino, Divisione XII – servizi demografici, 1929–1937, elenco nominativo delle persone rimpatriate, 2 August 1933.
93. AST, GP, m. 322, f. Città di Torino, Divisione XII – servizi demografici, 1929–1937, relazione mensile sul movimento migratorio, prefect to the Gabinetto of the Ministero dell'Interno, July 1933; and see the report of May 1933, which reveals that the majority of the repatriated were unemployed *braccianti*. Compare the monthly reports in this holding to the findings of A. Treves, *Le migrazioni interne nell'Italia fascista* (Turin, 1974 or 1976), pp. 91ff. and 110–33. According to Treves, the laws against urbanism were not implemented fully because industrialists opposed them for fear of their impact on

- the labour market and the costs of labour. The author argues that this policy mainly served a rhetorical and ideological function within the dictatorship.
94. AST, GP, m. 322, f. migrazioni interne, contains a circular sent by the Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, Commissariato per le Migrazioni e la Colonizzazione to all prefects in the kingdom, 4 December 1937. D. V. Glass estimated that 62 of the nation's 92 prefectures made use of banishment orders to restrict internal migration: *Population Policies and Movements in Europe* (1940; reprinted New York, 1968), p. 230.
 95. AST, GP, m. 322, f. migrazioni interne, Mussolini's letter of 1 April 1933 outlined that rural migrants who 'don't have work, nor any prospect of finding it' should be paid about 200 *lire* to 'remove themselves' from Turin. He promised a fund of 200 million *lire*, and sent 2 million as an advance to help cover the costs of the programme.
 96. D. V. Glass, pp. 222–4.
 97. G. Salvemini, *Under the Axe of Fascism*, pp. 299–302.
 98. G. C. Baravelli, *The Policy of Public Works under the Fascist Regime* (Rome, 1935), p. 55.
 99. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
 100. M. Casciato, 'L'abitazione e spazi domestici', *La famiglia italiana dall'ottocento a oggi*, pp. 526–87, 533.
 101. *Ibid.*, pp. 552 and 555.
 102. ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–1943, b. 225, f. 528, Istituto Romano di Beni Stabili, report of Eugenio Tarsia di Belmonte, accompanied by 120 signatures from tenants, to the party secretariat, 4 March 1931, and the uninterested response of Alessandro Chiavolini of 14 March 1931.
 103. For economic reasons, the superior council of the national economy decided in 1929 to defer introducing compulsory general health insurance and to encourage the growth of privately funded occupational schemes. A universal system would have required an expensive overhaul of the nation's hospitals. Only in 1943 did the regime introduce a national contributory system of health insurance (open to waged workers and salaried employees) with the foundation of INAM or INFAM (Istituto Nazionale (Fascista) per l'Assistenza di Malattia ai Lavoratori – The National (Fascist) Institute for Workers' Health Assistance): 'Recensioni', *Difesa sociale*, 13:1 (January 1935), pp. 41–43; Cherubini (1977), pp. 339–49; 737–8; A. Piperno, 'La politica sanitaria', *Welfare state all'italiana*, pp. 153–84, 165–8.
 104. The term belongs to N. Tranfaglia, 'La modernizzazione contraddittoria negli anni della stabilizzazione del regime, 1926–36', *Il regime fascista*, ed. A. Del Boca, M. Legnani and M. G. Rossi, (Rome and Bari, 1995), pp. 127–38.
 105. *Seventy Years*, p. 520–2; ISTAT, *Sommario di statistiche storiche dell'Italia, 1861–1965*, table 26, p. 38.
 106. B. Bianchi, 'I tessili: Lavoro, salute, conflitti', *Annali Feltrinelli, 1979–1980*, pp. 973–1071, 1030–8 on labour conditions in the wool industry.
 107. See the correspondence of the fascist syndicate (unione industriale fascista di Biella) with the prefect and with employers in ASV, GP, Serie I, confederazione nazionale dei sindacati fascisti dell'industria, m. 70, f. 328, especially letter of I. Stagno to the prefect of Vercelli, dated 25 February 1932, concerning conditions within the woollen industry.
 108. B. Biagi (president of the INPS), 'Family Allowances in Italy', *International Labour Review*, 35:4 (April, 1937), pp. 457–87, 466.
 109. D. V. Glass, p. 258.

110. Biagi, 'Family Allowances', pp. 484–5.
111. Cherubini (1969), p. 743.
112. *Seventy Years*, p. 304.
113. Zamagni (1975), p. 541.
114. R. D. L. 4 ottobre 1935 – Perfezionamento e coordinamento legislativo della previdenza sociale', *Lex* (1935), p. 1349; Buozzi (1972), p. 457; C. Vannutelli, 'The Living Standards of Italian Workers, 1929–1939', in *The Ax Within: Italian Fascism in Action*, ed. R. Sarti (New York, 1974), pp. 139–85, 155; V. Zamagni, 'Distribuzione del reddito e classi sociali nell'Italia fra le due guerre', *Annali Feltrinelli*, 1979–1980, pp. 17–50, 31.

5 Racial Regeneration through Welfare

1. R. De Felice, *Mussolini il fascista*, vol. 2, pp. 264–5, 397.
2. The speech to the chamber of deputies appears in *Opera omnia di Benito Mussolini*, ed. E. and D. Susmel (Florence, 1957), vol. xxii, pp. 360–90.
3. 'Atto di nascita del fascismo', speech pronounced in Milan on 23 March 1919, *Opera omnia*, vol. xii (Florence, 1953), pp. 321–7, 323.
4. Glass (1940/1968), p. 218; S. Lanaro, *Nazione e lavoro: Saggio sulla cultura borghese in Italia, 1870–1925* (Venice, 1979), pp. 55–7.
5. Although the definite article, 'the', should precede the acronym, ONMI, I have chosen to forgo using it for stylistic reasons. See Quine (1990 and 1996) and C. Ibsen, *Dictating Demography: The Problem of Population in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 147–60.
6. *Opera omnia*, vol. xxii, pp. 361–7, 390.
7. 'Il numero come forza', in *Opera omnia* (Rome, 1957), vol. xxiii, pp. 209–16; and preface to Richard Korherr's *Regresso delle nascite: Morte dei popoli* (Rome, 1928), pp. 7–15.
8. For a discussion of the nature and impact of Arthur de Gobineau's mammoth *The Inequality of Races* (1853–4), see M. D. Biddiss, *Father of Racist Ideology: The Social and Political Thought of Count Gobineau* (London, 1970), esp. introduction.
9. R. Korherr, *Regresso delle nascite*, pp. 28–9, 146–7.
10. 'La razza bianca muore?', an article based on a section of his 'Numbers as Force' essay and first published in *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 4 September 1934, in *Scritti e discorsi di Benito Mussolini*, vol. ix (Milan, 1935), pp. 117–22.
11. *Opera omnia*, xxii, p. 365 and xxiii, pp. 215–16.
12. In practice, each commune followed government directives concerning concessions to the fathers of 'big families' according to its own financial capabilities. In the province of Milan, for example, municipalities interpreted and implemented this policy in a number of different ways. One commune exempted large families from the payment of local government taxes; another granted discounts on medical bills and hospital treatments; another gave the children of large families free school books and notebooks; and another gave a subsidy of 100 *lire* to mark the birth of an eighth child, one of 150 *lire* for a ninth child, and one of 200 *lire* for a tenth. In some instances, private individuals and organizations, including banks, offered to fund this 'patriotic' campaign. For details, see ASM, GP, Categoria 24, Demografia, b. 498, famiglie numerose, prefect's questionnaire to mayors, dated 2 May 1928, and various responses from communes. Party and government officials compiled dossiers on potential recipients of awards: ASM, GP, Categoria 24, Demografia, b. 499, sussidi a famiglie numerose, 1927–9, contains individual files on couples who were given subsidies of between 50 and, in exceptional circumstances, 400 *lire* as a reward for

their procreative output. One such family comprised a male 'head of household', aged 58, his 'wife-housewife', aged 53, and their nine children, aged between 13 and 31. This family was deemed deserving because it exemplified the fascist values of rurality and fecundity, exhibited 'good moral and political conduct', and struggled to survive.

13. Glass (1940/1968), pp. 255–6.
14. See G. Chiarelli, 'La religione e la natalità' and N. Castellino, 'Le malattie sociali e la natalità' in *Popolazione e fascismo*, L. Lojacano, ed. (Turin, 1933), pp. 102–5 and 129–32.
15. *Opera omnia*, vol. xxiii, p. 215.
16. See ACS, Fondo SPD–CO–466 for Fausto Carbone's report about the activities of ONMI's provincial federation in Alessandria, *Relazione sull'attività svolta nell'anno 1929*, p. 10.
17. L. Baci, *Donna, fecondità, e figli*, p. 318, on contemporary attempts to correlate infant mortality with breastfeeding.
18. G. Sanpaolosi, 'Osservazioni sui lattanti e sulle madri assistite al Consultorio Pediatrico Maria Callacchioni di Firenze', *MI*, 2 (April, 1935), pp. 453–67.
19. S. Platania, 'Le mortalità infantile a Catania nel ventennio, 1906–1925', *MI*, 4 (September, 1929), pp. 748–61. ONMI did recognize that one of the reasons why working mothers might not breastfeed was the chronic resistance of some employers (particularly those running small firms and farms) to respect the law on maternity leave, breastfeeding breaks, and factory and office nurseries. Only one of many pieces on this theme in the organization's journal is 'Protezione delle donne e dei fanciulli impiegati nel lavoro', in *Documenti ufficiali*, *MI*, 2 (February, 1927), pp. 4–5.
20. ISTAT, *Indagine sulla mortalità infantile nel governatorato di Roma* (Rome, 1933), p. 57.
21. N. Pende, 'Salvare i figli del popolo', in *Gazzetta del Popolo*, 9 April 1933; and *Movimento scientifico*, 'Il diritto del bambino al latte materno', *MI*, 13 (July–October, 1938), pp. 392–3.
22. F. Valagussa, 'Ciò che L'ONMI ha fatto per la nipiologia', *MI*, 5 (July, 1930), pp. 688–701; M. Faberi, 'L'assistenza pediatrica alla maternità dell'Ospedale di S. Giovanni in Roma', *MI*, 6 (April, 1931), pp. 419–36.
23. Società Italiana di Pediatria, *Atti del XVI Congresso Italiano di Pediatria, 15–18 settembre 1938* (Varallo Sesia, 1938), pp. 89–92. Valagussa, 'Cio che ONMI ha fatto per la nipiologia', pp. 688–701.
24. ACS, PCM, 1928–30, f. 1, sf. 6–2, P. 5221, 'Relazione su alcuni problemi sociali, specialmente dal late ostetrico, riguardante ONMI (1928)', pp. 9–15. The file contains the results of research conducted by Dr Antonio Bonora in Emilia, at the behest of ONMI. His study directly correlated the 'over-work and under-nourishment of mothers' with high infant mortality and morbidity. The doctor concluded that levels of stillbirth and miscarriage, as well as prematurity and underweight in newborns, differed dramatically by social class. He found that cases of miscarriage, prematurity, and stillbirths were on average 30 per cent higher for working-class mothers (and especially those engaged in factory labour) than they were for middle-class 'housewives'. And when the women was exposed to the risks of industrial accidents and toxic poisoning in textile, chemical, and tobacco industries, they were 50 per cent higher. He also determined that weight-at-birth progressively increased the higher up the social ladder the mother was situated. He singled out poverty and bad conditions at work and home for pregnant and nursing women as important factors in the lower life chances of working-class infants.

25. E. Soncino, 'Puericoltura pratica a Mantova, 1905-1926', *MI*, 2 (February, 1927), pp. 74-84; C. Micheli, 'La società italiana di ostetricia e ginecologia e l'ONMI nel campo dell'assistenza materna', *MI*, 5 (January, 1930), pp. 59-76.
26. F. Valagussa, 'Relazione al xiv congresso di pediatria tenutoso in Firenze nel settembre 1931', *MI*, 6 (October, 1931), pp. 1040-61. Valagussa saw nutrition as a means to improve the biological constituents of racial and individual constitutions.
27. Movimento scientifico, 'L'assistenza da punto di vista del bambino collocato in famiglia e in istituti', *MI*, 1 (November, 1926), pp. 63-4; G. D'Ormeo, *I brottopoli: Relazione al primo congresso nazionale di nipiologia* (Rome, 1928), p. 4.
28. On a 'softening' of women's attitudes to childrearing in the interwar period, see C. Saraceno, 'Percorsi di vita femminile', pp. 70-1.
29. F. Valagussa, 'La necessaria disciplina alimentare infantile', *MI*, 2 (November, 1926), pp. 26-9; and in the same issue under Movimento scientifico, 'La mortalità nelle prime settimane di vita e i provvedimenti per combatterla', pp. 61-2, which correlated data on feeding practice with infant mortality. The breastfeeding campaign was also targeted specifically at unwed mothers: see F. Coletti, 'I figli senza madri', in *Corriere della Sera*, 9 July 1927.
30. L. Caldwell, 'Madri d'Italia: Film and Fascist Concern with Motherhood', *Women and Italy: Essays on Gender, Culture, and History*, ed. Z. G. Baranski and S. W. Vinall (Houndsmill and London, 1991), pp. 43-63, 61; and see, S. Mongioj and M. Rimola, 'Per una definizione del rapporto donne/istituzioni: Il caso ONMI dalla sua fondazione al 1935' (Tesi di Laurea, Università degli Studi di Trento, 1977/1978), pp. 101-25; and E. Mondello, *La nuova italiana: La donna nella stampa e nella cultura del ventennio* (Rome, 1987), pp. 122-3.
31. A. Lo Monaco-Aprile, *La legislazione assistenziale nel diritto fascista* (Rome, 1928), pp. 6-7 and his *La protezione sociale della madre e del fanciullo in Italia e all'estero* (Bologna, 1923), pp. 30-7. Lo Monaco-Aprile was a leading figure at the *Istituto Italiano d'igiene, Previdenza, e Assistenza Sociale* (Italian Institute of Hygiene, Insurance, and Social Assistance), one of the premier eugenic organizations in Italy. And he was director of ONMI's monthly bulletin, *Maternità ed Infanzia*: ACS, SPD, CO, 1922-43, b. 1994, f. 533601, Attilio Lo Monaco-Aprile, contains biographical information.
32. ACS, Fondo SPD-CO-V.F. 148, S. Fabbri, *L'ONMI* (Milan, 1933) p. 68. A self-confirmed fascist of the purest faith, Fabbri eventually fell out with Mussolini in 1943 because of a rather trivial personal matter. His son, Vittorio Emanuele, worked for the journal, *Libro e Moschetto*, which transferred its headquarters from Milan to Rome. When the young Fabbri refused to relocate to the capital, he found himself out of a job. The elder Fabbri grew furious, when Mussolini failed to make any attempt to stop the move. His anger revealed the extent to which high-ranking fascist officials expected favours from the Duce in return for their loyalty: see Sileno Fabbri's letter to Mussolini, dated 8 March 1943 in ACS, SPD, CO, 1922-43, b. 2439, f. 552801, Sileno Fabbri.
33. See Mussolini's personal circular to ONMI leaders, dated 24 April 1933 in ACS, SPD, CO, ONMI, b. 1261, f. 509817, sf. 3. For details of Mussolini's other instructions to ONMI officials, see also 'Documenti ufficiali', *MI*, 1 (November, 1926), pp. 87-8; F. Valagussa, 'Benito Mussolini fra i bimbi', *MI*, 1 (December, 1926), pp. 3-7; G. Giannini, 'Il convegno nazionale dei delegati provinciali dell'ONMI', *MI*, 7 (July, 1932), pp. 629-51, 646.
34. See A. Lo Monaco-Aprile, 'Lo spirito e il contenuto della legge fascista sulla protezione della maternità e dell'infanzia', *MI*, 3 (February, 1929), pp. 155-66, 158.

35. See Quine (1990 and 1996) and C. Ibsen, *Dictating Demography: The Problem of Population in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 147–60.
36. Min. Interno, Commissione Reale per lo studio dei provvedimenti legislativi a favore dell'infanzia, *Relazione del direttore dell'amministrazione civile sulla protezione e l'assistenza dell'infanzia nelle legislazioni moderne* (Rome, 1922), pp. 6–74 on the history and findings of the commission.
37. A. Lo Monaco-Aprile, 'La genesi della legge per la protezione della maternità e dell'infanzia', *MI*, 2 (February, 1927), pp. 19–28, 26.
38. ApS, Legislatura XXVI, Sessione 1924–29, Vol. 128, Disegni di legge, Disegno di legge per protezione e assistenza della maternità e dell'infanzia presentato dal ministero dell'interno, Federzoni, di concerto col ministero delle finanze, De Stefani, col ministero della giustizia e degli affari di culto, Oviglio, e col ministero dell'economia nazionale, Nava, tornata di 8 dicembre 1924, pp. 632–44.
39. L. Federzoni, *Protezione e assistenza della maternità e dell'infanzia: Discorso alla camera dei deputati, 26 novembre 1926* (Rome, 1925), 4–6 *et passim*.
40. *La legislazione fascista*, vol. 1, pp. 630–5, 633.
41. Article 5 of the law of 10 December 1925, no. 2277, on the 'Protezione e assistenza della maternità e dell'infanzia', in ONMI, *Raccolta delle leggi sull'ONMI* (Rome, 1967), pp. 5–13, 7.
42. The term belongs to G. Melis, *Due modelli di amministrazione tra liberalismo e fascismo: Burocrazie tradizionali e nuovi apparati* (Rome, 1988), p. 263, cited in M. Salvati, 'Modernizzazione e impiego pubblico tra unità e fascismo', *Rivista di storia contemporanea*, 19:1 (1990), pp. 162–79, 178.
43. Art. 5 of the law of 10 December 1925, *Raccolta*, p. 7.
44. Congregations of charity, however, were 'reformed' in 1937, when *enti comunali di assistenza* (ECAs) were created: A. Preti and C. Venturoli, 'Fascismo e stato sociale', in the *atti* of the Bologna convention of 27–8 May 1999, *Forme di povertà e innovazioni istituzionali in Italia dal medioevo ad oggi*, vol. 2 (Bologna, 1999), pp. 1–24, 20.
45. This was changed to children of any age by article 122 of the 1926 regulation, discussed below.
46. *Raccolta*., pp. 7, 10.
47. Royal Decree of 15 April, no. 718, 'Il regolamento di esecuzione della legge 10 dicembre 1925, no. 2277', in *Raccolta*, pp. 14–85.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 51–72.
49. R. D. 15 April 1926, titles 1–3, in *ibid.*, pp. 15–50, esp. art. 14 on p. 19.
50. R. D. 15 April 1926, art. 2; arts 1–3 of regio decreto legge of 21 October 1926, no. 1904, 'Modifiche alla legge 10 dicembre 1925'; and art. 2 of regio decreto of 24 December 1934, no. 2316, 'testo unico delle leggi sulla protezione ed assistenza della maternità e dell'infanzia', in *Raccolta*, pp. 68–70, 86–91, 94–105. The Consiglio Nazionale delle Donne Italiane gave its full support to the regime's demographic campaign: see ACS, PCM, 1926, f. 3, sf. 12, P. 1087, richiesta di provvedimenti per repressione propaganda per limitazione dell nascite.
51. Articles 42, 79, 103 and 105 of the April 1926 royal decree in *Raccolta*, pp. 27–8, 39, 45–6.
52. See 'Fanciulli cattolici d'Italia', *L'Osservatore Romano*, 26 March 1926; and 'Per la protezione ed assistenza della maternità e dell'infanzia: Opportuna circolare del Ministero Federzoni', *L'Osservatore Romano*, 9 June 1926.
53. 'Per l'applicazione della legge sulla maternità ed infanzia', *L'Osservatore Romano*, 7 and 8 January 1927; and 'L'Azione Cattolica è carità', *L'Osservatore Romano*, 12 January 1927.

54. M. Conway, *Catholic Politics in Europe, 1918–1945* (London, 1997), pp. 62–3.
55. C. Carlen Ihm, *The Papal Encyclicals: 1903–1939* (Raleigh, NC, 1981), pp. 415–43.
56. Art. 10 of R. D. L. 21 October 1926, in *Raccolta*, p. 90. During the fascist period, ONMI's presidents (re-named as commissioners in 1926) included: the professor of physics, Baron Gian Alberto Blanc, May 1926–January 1932; the lawyer, Sileno Fabbri, January 1932–July 1937; the lawyer, Carlo Bergamaschi, July 1937–April 1940; Count Alessandro Frontoni, April 1940–May 1943; the lawyer, Sergio Nannini, May 1943–July 1943; the professor of medicine, Francesco Adami, September 1943–April 1944 (during his presidency, ONMI's central headquarters moved from Rome to Pedrengo, in the province of Bergamo); the prefect of Pedrengo, Dino Cagetti, May 1944–April 1945; the accountant, Silvio Radaelli, May 1945–June 1945 (during this period, central headquarters moved to Milan); Capelli Vegni, July 1945–December 1945. See ONMI, *L'Opera nazionale per la protezione della maternità e dell'infanzia dalla sua fondazione* (Rome, 1962), pp. 222–3.
57. See ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–45, Gian Alberto Blanc, b. 691, f. 209. 168, sfs. 1 and 2, for a number of documents about Blanc's personal history and business activities; and ACS, SPD, CR, 1922–45, Gian Alberto Blanc, b. 81, f. W. R. , sf. 1; letter to the Duce from the journalist, Rinaldo Raggi, dated 27 February 1930, accusing Blanc of favouritism by successfully encouraging Mussolini to appoint his son-in-law, Francesco Valagussa, to the vice-presidency of ONMI. Valagussa also served on the public health council's national directorate; see ACS, Min. Interno, DGSP, AG, 1931–32, b. 61bis., Consiglio Superiore di Sanità, report of the meeting of 18 June 1931. A Neapolitan by birth, Blanc came from an illustrious noble family with royal connections and inherited a huge personal fortune. He mixed his commitments to ONMI with membership in the Superior Council of the National Economy, the national PNF directorate, and the Grand Council. Blanc spent much of his tenure as ONMI's president in Naples, where he organized shady business ventures aimed at ousting the huge Mellon conglomerate, the Aluminum Company of America, from Italian soil and opening his own chemical works to extract the metal from leucite. In 1927, Bonaldo Stringher asked Blanc to become a governor of the Bank of Italy; the baron refused on the grounds that he had a conflict of interest because of his involvement in the PNF directorate.
58. *ONMI dalla sua fondazione*, pp. 52–4, 56–7.
59. Arts 9 and 10 of law of 10 December 1925, *Raccolta*, p. 9.
60. G. A. Blanc and B. Graziani, *Report on the Development of the Work of the National Institution for the Protection of Maternity and Childhood, 1926–1930* (Rome, 1932), p. 16; and see Blanc's, 'Messaggio della presidenza dell'Opera Nazionale ai presidenti delle federazioni', *MI*, 1 (December, 1926) p. 62.
61. C. Bergamaschi, *L'ONMI: Motivi e proposte di riforma* (Rome, 1937), p. 12; for personal information about Bergamaschi, see PNF, SA, SCN, fascicoli personali, b. 3. f. 35, Carlo Bergamaschi, Consigliere Nazionale, which contains copies of telegrams and letters covering the years from 1924, when Bergamaschi joined the PNF, to 1938, when he became OMNI's royal commissioner. As a deputy, Bergamaschi played a crucial role in the formation of the EOAs (*Enti Opere Assistenziali*) in 1932 and the ECAs (*Enti Comunali di Assistenza*) in 1937. In large cities, such as Milan, Turin, Rome and Naples, where party federations were fully operative, these ECAs were designed to oversee and co-ordinate the various welfare activities organized by the PNF. The gossip about Bergamaschi that his critics circulated was that he rose to the top not because of his abilities, but rather because of his connections. His brother, Bernardo, was a close friend

- of Ciano. Disgruntled rivals also accused him of expelling opponents from the party in his native Pontecorvo because they threatened to expose his cousin, who was allegedly involved in a local banking scandal that resulted in the loss of savings of many people.
62. *Raccolta*, pp. 8–10, 42, 99, 102.
 63. *Report on the Development*, pp. 17–24.
 64. Bergamaschi, *L'ONMI*, p. 12.
 65. *L'ONMI dalla sua fondazione*, p. 51.
 66. Bergamaschi, *L'ONMI*, p. 12.
 67. See, for example, G. A. Blanc, *L'ONMI* (Milan, 1928), pp. 3–8, a copy of an article which originally appeared in *Gerarchia*; S. Fabbri, 'La politica demografica del regime', *Giornale d'Italia*, 21 August 1932; and A. Carelli, 'Un popolo all'avanguardia', *MI*, 7 (October, 1932), pp. 987–91.
 68. Art. 7 of law of 10 December 1925, *Raccolta*, p. 8.
 69. *ONMI dalla sua fondazione*, p. 218.
 70. See Part III, below.
 71. On the bachelor tax, see Glass (1940/68), pp. 236–7; and A. Boidi, *I provvedimenti tributari demografici* (Turin, 1931), pp. 33–7.
 72. Russo, *La politica dell'assistenza*, pp. 44–5.
 73. *Report on the Development*, p. 20; see also *ONMI dalla sua fondazione*, p. 64, for a list of other generous gifts.
 74. ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–43, b. 3, f. A. 44, Venezia-Federazione Provinciale dell'ONMI, letters of 22 February 1928 and 6 May 1938 to Chiavolini.
 75. *Report on the Development*, p. 22.
 76. AST, GP, associazioni assistenziali, 1927–45, m. 216, f. 101, Istituto Pro Pueritia, which contains a number of documents, dating back to 1903 (when the institution was founded) and concerning the institution's charity appeals.
 77. A commendatore is a knight commander of a chivalric order. See *Report on the Development*, pp. 11–12; and see also, ACS, Fondo SPD–CO–4056, C. Micheli, *L'attività dell'ONMI nel campo della protezione della maternità, 1926–1930* (Milan, 1931), pp. 5–6 for other examples of this kind.
 78. The figure concerning ONMI's charitable endowment was provided by Leandro Arpinati, under-secretary of state for the interior ministry, in his address to the chamber on the budget and its implications for social spending, 'Stato di previsione della spesa del ministero per l'esercizio finanziario dal 1 luglio 1931 al 30 giugno 1932', ApC, Legislatura XXXVIII, Sessione 1929–31, Vol. 4, Discussioni, 30 May 1931, p. 4029.
 79. ONMI, *Istituti e preventori* (Rome, 1950), pp. 38–42.
 80. When fascism came to power, Italy possessed approximately 5700 child and maternal welfare institutions; at the start of the Second World War, ONMI oversaw the work of 9956 institutions. This number represented a sizable increase of 44.75 per cent in the nation's institutional endowment. Unfortunately, however, 3266 of these establishments were destroyed during the war, so fascism left a legacy of only 6713 maternal and child welfare institutions when it fell in 1945. *ONMI dalla sua fondazione*, pp. 144, 220–1.
 81. *Report on the Development*, p. 28.
 82. ACS, PCM, 1928–30, f. 1, sf. 6.2, P. 6968, Milano-Federazione provinciale dell'ONMI, Bianca Fabbri's *L'Opera svolta dal comitato di patronato di Milano nel 1930 (viii)* (Milan, 1931), p. 6.
 83. ACS, PCM, 1928–30, f. 1, sf. 6.2, P. 6134, Mantova-Federazione provinciale dell'ONMI, Doctor F. Maccabruni's *Atti della federazione nel biennio 1927–1928*

- (Mantua, 1929), esp. pp. 24–7; the report contains copies of the correspondence with ONMI central headquarters.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 57; and ACS, Fondo SPD–CO–2023, S. Fabbri, *L'attività della federazione provinciale Milanese dell'ONMI durante il 1928* (Milan, 1929), pp. 28–32.
 85. 'Seduta', *MI*, 1 (May, 1926), p. 89; copy of the minutes of the meeting of the executive council.
 86. *Report on the Development*, p. 28.
 87. ACS, PCM, 1931–33, f. 1, sf. 6.2, P. 8143, Ferrara–ONMI, prefect's reports of 4 January 1933 and 27 February 1933.
 88. The provincial archive in Ferrara holds an exceptionally large ONMI archive, which spans the years from 1928 to 1975. ASF, ONMI, atti-contabili, consuntivi, 1928–44, b. 1, minutes of the adunanza del consiglio direttivo della federazione provinciale di Ferrara dell'ONMI il giorno 19 novembre 1937 alle ore 10, with documents from central headquarters attached.
 89. *L'Opera ... dalla sua fondazione*, p. 60; 'L'ONMI nella discussione alla camera', *MI*, 7 (April, 1932), pp. 459–62.
 90. S. Fabbri, 'Il programma del regio commissario dell'ONMI', *MI*, 7 (March, 1932), pp. 202–27.
 91. Bergamaschi, *L'ONMI*, pp. 12–13.
 92. ACS, PCM, 1931–33, f. 1, sf. 6.2, P. 8230, ONMI–Agrigento, prefect's report of 4 February 1933.
 93. ACS, Min. Interno, GB, 1940–41, b. 1, f. 97, relazione sul riordinamento della Sicilia, piano tecnico-finanziario e situazione attuale nella provincia di Agrigento; the description of welfare activities and the plans and costs of reforms are given for each province.
 94. S. Fabbri, *Direttive e chiarimenti intorno allo spirito informatore della legislazione riguardante l'ONMI e alle sue pratiche applicazioni* (Rome, 1934), p. 44.
 95. ACS, PCM, 1934–36, f. 9, sf. 5, P. 2807, ONMI, Lotteria Nazionale, proposals of 28 November 1934 and 23 March 1935.
 96. ONMI, *Istruzioni per il funzionamento dei consultori materni e pediatrici* (Rome, 1941) p. 8.
 97. The idea for *consultori* came directly from Ernesto Pestalozza, who was responsible for drafting large sections of the 1926 regulation and served on ONMI's first executive council. Pestalozza based his vision of the *consultorio* as a premier institution on his mothers' help centres (the *aiuti materni* or *consultori per lattanti*). While he served as director of the obstetric and gynaecological clinic for the poor in Florence, Pestalozza opened the nation's first *aiuto materno* in 1900; by 1922, five such centres existed in Florence. Catering to married women, these institutions were designed to 'correct' problems in pregnancy, childbirth, and childrearing and help women perform their reproductive and maternal duties well: see D. Moggi, 'Gli aiuti materni (consultori per lattanti) di Firenze negli anni 1900–28', *MI*, 1 (June, 1926), pp. 651–7.
 98. Royal decree of 15 April 1926, *Raccolta*, arts 132–3, pp. 54–5; ONMI, *Istituti e preventori*, pp. 25–33; ONMI, *Il programma di sviluppo dei servizi sanitari e sociali dell'ONMI* (Rome, 1968), p. 39.
 99. A. Signa, *Il funzionamento del consultorio pediatrico dell'ONMI* (Rome, 1941), pp. 11–12.
 100. *ONMI dalla sua fondazione*, pp. 67–72; Documenti ufficiali, 'Preparazione del personale specializzato di puericulture', *MI*, 1 (December, 1926), p. 58; P. Brusa, 'Lo sviluppo dell'attività dell'ONMI nel 1928', *MI*, 4 (May, 1929), pp. 491–530.
 101. S. Fabbri, *Direttive e chiarimenti*, p. 20–2.

102. Bergamaschi, *L'ONMI*, p. 10; and ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–1943, ONMI, b. 1261, f. 509817, letter from Blanc to Mussolini, 15 March 1928.
103. See Micheli's personal file in ACS, PNF, SCN, b. 19, f. 332, which gives these career details; on Pestalozza, see the obituary in *Lucina: Organo del Sindacato Nazionale Fascista delle Ostetriche*, 2:1 (January, 1935), pp. 8–9. On the legislation against doctors who disseminated 'Malthusian propaganda', see F. P. Bortolotti, *Femminismo e partiti politici in Italia*, p. 358; and on the law of 16 January 1929, which permitted doctors to perform legal abortions on the medical grounds that a continuation posed a possible threat to the woman's life, see C. Rubbiani, 'La rubbrica della madre e del fanciullo', *MI*, 4 (January, 1929), p. 67. In an interview which I conducted in Rome, a former ONMI official told me that in 1938 Micheli's enemies threatened to expose him as an abortionist. He had apparently been performing illegal terminations for some time. His clients were wealthy women from the highest social circles; the doctor had royal and aristocratic connections through his marriage and intimate access to fascist officialdom through his government work. Because a trial of such a high-profile, pro-fascist public figure would have been very damaging to the regime, Mussolini allegedly intervened personally to hush the rumours and prevent public scandal. Much as I would have liked to have done so, I was unable to substantiate this allegation.
104. C. Micheli, *La denuncia della gravidanza* (Rome, 1929), pp. 12–14. Micheli also took part in the commission to reform the practice of midwifery, out of which emerged new regulations severely limiting the right of midwives to intervene in birth. See ONMI, *Esercizio ostetrico delle levatrici: Regolamento, istruzione tecniche, relazione illustrativo*, 17 Maggio 1930 (Rome, 1930), pp. 24–36.
105. C. Micheli, *I medici condotti e la protezione della madre nell'ONMI* (Rome, 1930), pp. 7–9.
106. C. Micheli, 'XXVIII Congresso della Società Italiana di Ostetricia e Ginecologia', *MI*, 5 (January, 1930), pp. 59–76.
107. ACR, ASS, ispettorato dell'ONMI, f. 71114, sf. 1, report of the inspector, Mario Acqua, dated 12 March 1938, accompanied by the letter of the consultant, Giovanni Carratelli.
108. IPAIL, lettere riservate, f. comune di Aquillara Sabazia, letter dated 12 January 1939, addressed to Mussolini, referred back to the federation. I was not allowed to record any of the names on these letters. Refer to the bibliography for an explanation of these sources.
109. A. Carelli, 'Sei anni di attività dell'Opera Nazionale Maternità e Infanzia', *MI*, 7 (October, 1932), pp. 972–91.
110. Notiziario dell'attività assistenziale, 'La cattedra ambulante di puericultura di Ceccano', *MI*, 2 (June, 1927), pp. 12–16; Notiziario dell'attività assistenziale, 'Le cattedre ambulanze di puericultura', *MI*, 2 (February, 1927), p. 15.
111. For a comparison with similar initiatives in inter-war Britain, see G. Jones, *Social Hygiene in Twentieth-Century Britain* (London and Sydney, Australia, 1986), ch. 6.
112. Bergamaschi, *L'ONMI*, p. 7; *Report on the Development*, pp. 29, 47.
113. ISTAT, *Annali di Statistica*, serie vi, vol. 32, *L'Azione promossa dal governo nazionale a favore dell'incremento demografico e contro l'urbanesimo* (Rome, 1934), pp. 58–60, provides details of some of the thirty-odd charities which moved to the countryside; mainly these were institutions which recovered adolescent children (the so-called 'delinquent, corrupted, and abandoned'), the reasoning being that they would benefit from fresh air, rural life, and agricultural work.
114. Signa, *Il funzionamento del consultorio pediatrico*, p. 20.

115. F. Valagussa, 'Relazione al XIV Congresso di pediatria tenutosi in Firenze nel Settembre 1931', *MI*, 6 (October, 1931), pp. 1040–61, 1041.
116. Signa, *Il funzionamento*, p. 10; it is impossible to determine the quality of the data used in the study. The suspicion is that some welfare clients who were 'savvy' enough to 'play' a system steeped in maternalist ideology lied to authorities about their feeding practice in order to get benefits.
117. See V. A. Goddard, *Gender, Family and Work in Naples* (Oxford and Washington, DC, 1996), chs. 7–9, for a discussion of this theme, in the context of Southern Italy after 1945.
118. Fascist authorities recognized that the survival of poor labouring families could depend upon women's paid employment: in this regard, see 'Notiziario del lavoro e della previdenza', *Difesa sociale*, 12:7 (July, 1934), pp. 401–2. Women's waged work, some fascist activists argued, was an 'incontrovertible fact of modern life' which 'contributed enormously to the nation's prosperity'. Women did not seek employment outside the home in order to shirk their domestic and maternal duties; rather, millions of good Italian daughters, mothers, and wives made the 'supreme sacrifice' of leaving the home because they had to help feed their families: see R. Riva Sanseverino, 'L'organizzazione del lavoro femminile nei sindacati', *Il giornale della donna*, 7:9 (June, 1927), pp. 39–47 for a clear exposition of this view.
119. The documents in ASM, GP, Categoria 42, Sanità, b. 1035, f. consiglio sanitario, suggest that the new fashion for seeing gynaecological and obstetric specialists on a routine basis was gaining hold amongst middle-class women; fascism's obsessive interest in the reproductive functions of women's bodies, no doubt, was partly responsible for this trend. A letter from police headquarters to the prefect, dated 5 February 1930, and a copy of an undated report from the medical council, confirmed allegations concerning two doctors, who opened a 'modern, elegant, and complete' obstetric and gynaecological clinic in an attempt to attract business amongst wealthy women. When a private patient was misdiagnosed with syphilis and subsequently lodged a formal complaint with the Order of Doctors, investigations revealed that the physicians had no training in obstetrics or gynaecology whatsoever. One was struck off the list of doctors when the Ordine dei Medici found him to be 'an unqualified opportunist' who was 'driven by greed'. Despite the boom in obstetrics and gynaecology which the regime encouraged, the vast majority of births (around 90 per cent in the 1920s) still took place at home and continued to do so, long after the fall of fascism: see ISTAT, *Statistica degli ospedali e degli altri istituti pubblici e privati di assistenza sanitaria* (Rome, 1932), pp. 9–18, for details. By contrast, the hospitalization of births was far more advanced in Britain, where the proportion of hospital deliveries reached 54 per cent by 1946. A. S. Williams, *Women and Childbirth in the Twentieth Century: A History of the National Birthday Trust Fund, 1928–93* (Phoenix Mill, 1997), p. 191.
120. IPAIL, lettere riservate, f. San Gregorio, letter dated 6 September 1935, written by an ONMI worker, who transcribed the testimony.
121. ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–43, b. 41, f. L. 78.785, 1933–sussidio, including the report from the *questura*.
122. ASM, GP, Categoria 42, Sanità, b. 1035, one file on *levatrici*, and another on *medici condotti*, letter of Starace to prefect, 15 February 1935; and letter of PNF federale to the prefect, 21 November 1936.
123. S. Fabbri, *L'attività della federazione provinciale Milanese dell'ONMI durante il 1928*, pp. 40–2.

124. ASM, GP, cat. 12, ONMI, b. 378, prefect's report about the incident, 17 November 1931 and letter from ONMI federation to the prefect, 24 August 1932. For details concerning a similar situation, ACR, ASS, ispettorato dell'ONMI, f. 744, sf. 1, from *comitato* in Centocelle to Rome's *patronato*, 20 November 1935, a complaint about a doctor who never arrived before 11 in the morning, when the surgery opened at 8.30; and in the same holding, f. 724, sf. 1, a letter dated 21 March 1936 from zona Appio Latino-Metronio about an outburst at one clinic which erupted when women were turned away at the door, after having waited several hours, because the doctor failed to arrive.
125. ACR, ASS, ispettorato dell'ONMI, f. 7181, Quadraro, segreteria-complessivo, breve relazione sull'attività del consultorio pediatrico, 10 February 1939.
126. ACR, ASS, ispettorato dell'ONMI, f. 7181, Quadraro, segreteria-complessivo, see the relazione annuale, 1938.
127. IPAIL, lettere riservate, f. Valle dell'Inferno, letter from the local *presidente delegato* of 27 January 1935 to the provincial federation.
128. IPAIL, lettere riservate, f. commune di Ascoli, report of the incident by *comitato di patronato*, 31 July 1938.
129. ACR, ASS, ispettorato dell'ONMI, f. 755, sf. 1, zona Esquilino-Celio, report of 6 March 1936.
130. ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–43, b. 493, f. 189. 751, Roma-Comitato di Patronato dell'ONMI, report of the chiusure festive dei refettori materni, 1938.
131. C. Micheli, 'XXVIII Congresso', p. 63; Dati statistici, 'Consultori materni', *Difesa Sociale*, 16:2 (February, 1937), p. v, contains data on the functioning of clinics in the major cities in 1936 which reveal that only in a tiny minority of cases was medical care of any kind provided directly or were women and children referred elsewhere for treatment.
132. ISTAT, *Compendio statistico italiano nel 1936*, vol. 10, table 2, p. 199. However impressive they may seem, the available 'crude' data do not reveal whether women received sporadic, minimal, and discontinuous contact with fascist welfare or whether the regime actually 'penetrated' the daily life of its people. Drawn from the evidence, my strong impression is that women were selective and strategic in their use of fascist welfare and that the regime delivered no more than a fascist form of old-style charity (hand-outs accompanied by propaganda) rather than what we would identify as 'modern' social welfare (based on clear statutory entitlements and comprehensive social services).
133. This was equally true of ONMI's *Case della Madre e del Bambino*, which were defined as 'modern and efficient centres, completely equipped with all the essential technical organs, covering moral, material, sanitary, hygienic, social and welfare services'. In June 1937, ONMI constructed a huge pavilion (at a cost of over 700 thousand *lire*), with displays documenting the work of its *case*, at the Exhibition of Summer Camps in the Circolo Massimo in Rome. The exhibit had photographs of some of the most sumptuous and grand of the newly constructed buildings that housed *case*. What was not revealed, however, was that attendance at these costly sites could be very low: one of ONMI's showpiece *case* in Rome, for example, 'assisted' only 12 mothers and 27 children in the whole of 1936–37. *L'Opera ... dalla sua fondazione*, p. 124.
134. In the province of Alessandria, ONMI worked closely with fascist women's groups and the police force. Because of the unstable political situation in the entire northwest region, due to the high levels of unemployment and anti-fascist activity, diverse welfare initiatives became a top priority for the government. Indeed, the political function of welfare as an instrument by which to

- build consent was so explicit that the prefect filed reports concerning social assistance under the title, 'periodic relations concerning the political situation'. Here, ONMI enlisted the help of 'fascist home visitors' and gave them clear instructions concerning their brief: in an attempt to alleviate the effects of the economic crisis, they were to use home visits as a means to determine whether poor families deserved cash subsidies; they were to endeavour to uncover 'subversive elements in the working class'; and they were to make regular home visits, so that women would not be compelled to go to PNF or ONMI offices seeking aid, thereby increasing the general population's awareness of poverty and increasing the possibility that assembled crowds of the poor would create public disturbances. ASA, GP, Cartelle speciali (not yet inventoried), b. 27, Relazioni periodiche sulla situazione politica, 1929-31, report from the provincial delegation of the fascio femminile to the prefect, 29 December 1931.
135. Carelli, 'Sei anni di attività', figures on pp. 978-80; ONMI, *Istituti e preventori*, pp. 12-16; *ONMI dalla sua fondazione*, p. 142; and *Notiziario dell'attività assistenziale*, 'I refettori materni', *MI*, 10 (May, 1935), pp. 5-8.
 136. In 1931, 22 per cent of all Italian families, representing a combined total of over 2 million people, had a 'head of household' who was listed in the census of that year as a 'manual worker'. When the numbers of all categories, including women workers, their children, and working-class 'housewives', are considered, ONMI's potential client base went well into the millions, so the task of reaching out to the people had barely begun by the time that fascism fell. ISTAT, *VIII Censimento generale della popolazione, 21 aprile 1936*, vol. iii, *Popolazione: Parte prima* (Rome, 1938), p. 90; vol. iv, *Professioni: parte prima* (Rome, 1939), p. 27; vol. iv, *Professioni: Parte seconda* (Rome, 1939), p. 217. And see *Compendio statistico italiano*, 1938, vol. xii, p. 42; G. Tagliacarne, 'L'Occupazione delle donne nelle fabbriche e negli uffici durante gli ultimi cinquant'anni e la diminuzione delle nascite', *Giornale degli economisti e rivista di statistica*, 49/12 (December, 1934), pp. 927-40, 931; and C. Saraceno, 'La famiglia operaia sotto il fascismo', *Annali Feltrinelli*, 1979/80, vol. 20, pp. 189-231, 198.
 137. B. Bianchi, 'I tessili: Lavoro, salute, conflitti', *Le classe operaia durante il fascismo: Annali Feltrinelli*, 1979/1980, vol. 20, pp. 973-1071, 1064.
 138. The regime, moreover, attempted to halt the expansion in female white-collar employment by legislation in September 1938, which imposed a 10 per cent quota on the employment of women in salaried jobs in the public and private sectors and a total ban on the hiring of women in offices or firms with fewer than ten employees: E. P. Noether, 'Italian Women and Fascism: A Revaluation', *Italian Quarterly*, 90 (1982), pp. 69-80, 73.
 139. Historians have noted that employers in artificial textiles were trend-setters with regard to company welfare schemes: see V. De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge and London, 1981), pp. 67, 84-7. When the Baron Alberto Fassini Camossi opened the nursery at his rayon works in 1927, ONMI lavished praise on this industrialist, who seemed to be adopting a very protective attitude towards his workers. Employing more than 2000 women at his Prenestina plant in Rome, the baron also provided worker housing in the form of dormitories on the large industrial estate. Over 85 per cent of his female labour force were under the age of 18: see, G. D'Ormeo, 'Il nido della Società Generale Italiana della Viscosa', *MI*, 2 (February, 1927), pp. 40-7.
 140. ISTAT, *La struttura della popolazione rurale italiana e le nuove figure agricole rilevante nell'VIII censimento* (Rome, 1937), p. 16; ISTAT, *Compendio statistico ital-*

- iano, 1938, vol. xii (Rome, 1938), table on p. 42; 'Notiziario del lavoro e della previdenza', *Difesa sociale*, 12 (July, 1938), pp. 401–2.
141. O. Vitali, 'Popolazione attiva in agricoltura attraverso i censimenti in Italia: Nuove valutazioni', *Quaderni storici*, 14 (1970), pp. 541–75, table on 562.
 142. ACS, PNF, DN, PG, SA, b. 314, f. 64E, Sezioni Massaie Rurali, 1934 *regolamento* of the federation.
 143. ACR, ASS, ispettorato dell'ONMI, f. 7113, sf. 1, zona Acilia, verdura per refettorio gestito dell'ONMI, report of 23 April 1942.
 144. ACS, PNF, DN, PG, SA, b. 314, f. 64F, Sezioni Operaie e Lavoranti a Domicilio, Pro Memoria of 21 March 1938 on women's exodus from the female *fascio* into the new section.
 145. ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–1945, b. 263, f. 11451, Victorio Necchi-Azienda Macchine da Cucire, Pavia: see especially, sf. 1, Mussolini's note to all prefects, 22 February 1930; sf. 3, letter of Ministero delle Corporazioni, 28 March 1934, on import duties and law suits against Necchi's chief rivals, Singer and Pfaff; sf. 5, Pro Memoria riguardante attività della ditta Necchi, 8 February 1928; and the offerte di macchine per cucire in various other sub-folders, including the letter cited, in sf. 11451–32, 23 September 1929.
 146. ACS, PNF, D. PG, SA, b. 314, sf. 64B, schedari per organizzazioni femminili, 27 April 1939; sf. 64E, laboratori femminili, letters from the *federali* to PNF secretariat, 1930–1937, in response to circulars about their functioning.
 147. *Ibid.*, letter from the office of Ministero della Guerra, 4 July 1940, outlining provision for war work.
 148. See below, ch. 9.
 149. *Report on the Development*, p. 74.
 150. ONMI, *Istruzioni per il funzionamento dei consultori*, pp. 5–6; royal decree of 15 April 1926, arts 134–36, *Raccolta*, pp. 55–6.
 151. O. Palesa, *La casa igienica* (Rome, 1930), pp. 1–5.
 152. P. Gaifami, *Il libro della maternità* (Rome, 1930), p. 7.
 153. ONMI, *Istruzioni popolari alle madri sul modo di fare il bagno al bambino* (Rome, 1930), 3–6, *et passim*.
 154. A. Lamaro, *La casa per le masse e l'ideologia fascista* (Milan, 1941), pp. 11, 14, and 18–23 on the 'rationalization of housework' by means of the modernization of working-class living spaces and the mass production of domestic appliances; see also M. Hildegard, 'Per la razionalizzazione dell'economia domestica', *L'Organizzazione scientifica del lavoro*, 2 (October, 1927), pp. 411–16. The regime never seriously aspired to mimic social trends in Britain and Germany by revolutionizing housework and building modern homes for the masses. Italian fascism's public housing project provided only the most basic accommodation for a limited number of poor families.
 155. See L. Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class*, trans. R. Lumley and J. Bloomfield (Cambridge and London, 1987), ch. 4 on women's resistance to demographic policy.

III Introduction: Charity, the State, and Compassion: The Modernization of Social Values

1. F. Cambi and S. Ulivieri, *Storia dell'infanzia nell'Italia liberale* (1988; 2nd ed, Florence, 1994), p. 11.
2. The authors maintain that 'archaic Christian tradition' depicted children as evil in nature, but provide no evidence to support that view: *ibid.*, p. 11.

3. Ph. Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime* (Paris, 1960); and its translation by R. Baldick, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York, 1965). Cambi and Olivieri cite the Italian edition, *Padri e figli nell'Europa medievale e moderna* (Rome and Bari, 1968).
4. See, for example, Ph. Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, pp. 70–1, 326–9, 411–12.
5. See S. Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (1990; pb edn, London and New York, 1992) intro., esp. p. 4.
6. See C. W. Previté-Orton, *The Shorter Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 1: *The Later Roman Empire to the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, 1952), p. 30.
7. Benedictine Monks of St Augustine's Abbey (Ramsgate), *The Book of Saints: A Biographical Dictionary* (London, 1939), p. 244; D. H. Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford, 1978), p. 366.
8. S. Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, p. 13.
9. Dateo's original guest house for abandoned babies was transferred to larger premises in 1780. By order of Maria Theresa, the convent of Saint Catherine, which was affiliated to the Great Hospital, became the new site. G. E. Chareun, 'L'assistenza all'infanzia in Milano attraverso i secoli', *MI* (September, 1931), pp. 924–31, 926–7.
10. The church viewed the act of abandonment by a parent as a very grave offence and decreed that it should be punishable by excommunication. See S. Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, p. 122; and also, J. Larner, *Italy in the Age of Dante and Petrarch, 1216–60* (1980; 3rd edn, London and New York, 1988), pp. 79–80.
11. S. Shahar, p. 123.
12. One of the terms used to describe unwanted infants, *gittatello* had a double meaning: it referred to the fact that these infants were figuratively 'thrown' from the family by parents who abandoned them. Its literal meaning reflected the reality that a common form of disposing of unwanted infants was to throw them into rivers and waterways. See E. D. Howe, *The Hospital of Santo Spirito and Pope Sixtus IV* (Baltimore, 1978), pp. 336–41.
13. F. and J. Gies, *Marriage and the Family in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1989), p. 288; and see also, C. Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago, 1985), p. 111 *et passim*; and P. Gavitt, *Charity and Children in Renaissance Florence*, ch. 4.
14. The wheels were not a Napoleonic 'innovation' as D. I. Kertzer maintains in 'Gender Ideology and Infant Abandonment in Nineteenth-Century Italy', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 22:1 (Summer, 1991), pp. 1–25, 17. However, a Napoleonic decree of 19 January 1811, which probably did not have much impact, ordered that *brefotrofi* equipped with *ruote* be built. In France, the experience of reform was vastly different than it was in Italy because authorities there began to close the turnstiles during the Napoleonic period. V. Hunecke, *I trovatelli di Milano*, p. 20 and C. Frua, *Sulla questione del torno: Relazione fatta all'onerevole consiglio degli istituti ospitalieri di Milano* (Milan, 1866), pp. 3–10.
15. See F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (London, 1974), pp. 703–4; and see B. M. Bolton, "'Received in His Name': Rome's Busy Baby Box", *Studies in Church History*, 31 (1994), pp. 153–67, esp. 160, which questions the link between Innocent III and the first *ruota*.
16. Because the baby was literally 'found' (*trovato*), the term 'foundling' (*trovatello*) came into usage. The term *esposto* originally derived from the practice of exposure, which involved depriving the child of shelter and protection by leaving him or her in a public place, such as a road or a building. Still used widely in the

- nineteenth century, both terms had broadened out in meaning and were used to signify abandoned babies (*abbandonati*).
17. For about a millennium, stretching from the early medieval to the modern period, people abandoning babies traditionally left salt as a sign that the baby needed to be baptized. They also left personal belongings, drawings, or notes to identify the baby, most commonly for the purpose of later reclamation. See P. Gavitt, *Charity and Children*, p. 188; see also J. E. Boswell, 'Expositio and Oblatio: The Abandonment of Children and the Ancient and Medieval Family', *American Historical Review*, lxxxix (1984), pp. 10–33 and F. Doriguzzi, 'I messaggi dell'abbandono: Bambini esposti a Torino nel '700', *Quaderni storici*, 53 (1983), pp. 445–68. Authorities considered only those babies who were left without any personal effects to be illegitimates. See V. Hunecke, *I trovatelli di Milano*, p. 140.
 18. J. A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago and London, 1987), pp. 152–64, 205, 364.
 19. See J. Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York, 1988), for an analysis of the motivations behind abandonment. Boswell and others have shown that the motives which drove parents to abandon their children ranged from compassion to cruelty. This interpretation is in stark contrast to the Ariès thesis and to the line taken by Edward Shorter, who has argued that 'in traditional society, mothers viewed the development and happiness of infants younger than two with indifference'. For Shorter, good parenting is an 'invention of modernization': see his *The Making of the Modern Family* (New York, 1975), p. 168.
 20. See J. A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, *passim*, which charts developments from the ancient world to the sixteenth century, and even discusses the survival of religious moral prescriptions in twentieth-century law.
 21. See *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook*, E. Amt, ed. (New York and London, 1993), pp. 68 and 79–83.
 22. P. Gavitt, *Charity and Children*, p. 243.
 23. Church teachings placed greater emphasis on the spiritual family than on the natural family. This probably reflected the church's ambivalence about marriage and its reluctance to exert control over it. Not until the sixteenth century, for example, did marriage in church become a necessity for Catholics. See C. N. L. Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 126–7 and 139.
 24. B. Hamilton, *Religion in the Medieval West* (1986; reprinted. London and New York, 1989), p. 112.
 25. M. Gorni, 'Il problema degli "esposti" in Italia dal 1861 al 1900' in M. Gorni and L. Pellegrini, *Un problema di storia sociale: L'infanzia abbandonata in Italia nel secolo xix* (Florence, 1974), pp. 1–107, 96.
 26. It should be said, however, that the church held that fallen women could be saved from eternal damnation by penance. And it even condoned a return to the company of good women by marriage. See G. Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (Oxford, 1985) *passim*.
 27. J. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, p. 606.
 28. P. Gavitt, *Charity and Children*, pp. 222–3; Hunecke, pp. 149–52.
 29. Prof. Allipandri, *Trattato elementare di ostetricia*, preface by S. Giordano (Turin, 1860), pp. 245–6; interestingly, he made no mention of cow's milk.
 30. On Justus Liebig and his baby formula, see P. Weindling, *Health, Race, and German Politics*, pp. 33, 94, 197.

31. The mortality rates were 72 per cent in 1829–33, 65 per cent in 1850–59, 67 per cent in 1860–66 and 75 per cent in 1867–76: P. Blasi, *Brefotrofio romano: Primo saggio di statistica medica, 1867–68* (Rome, 1868), pp. 2–6 and his *Relazione del brefotrofio di Roma, 1897–98* (Rome, 1898), pp. 3–12, both found at ACSR.
32. F. Romita, *Evoluzione storica dell'assistenza all'infanzia abbandonata* (Rome, 1965), pp. 68–72.
33. Allipandri, *Trattato elementare di ostetricia*, p. 245.
34. Quotes from Pestalozzi and Lamartine are found in *I cosiddetti illegittimi: Atti del convegno nazionale sui nuovi orientamenti dell'assistenza ai cosiddetti 'illegittimi'*, Bologna, 25–7 Ottobre 1963 (Rome, 1963), p. 153.
35. Quoted in D. Albinì, *La questione degli esposti ed il brefotrofio di Roma* (Rome, 1897), p. 7; Crispi actually borrowed the phrase from Deléssert.
36. D. Albinì, *La questione degli esposti in Basilicata* (Rome, 1895), pp. 14–15.

6 Outcast Infants and the Liberal State

1. E. Raseri, 'I fanciulli illegittimi e gli esposti in Italia', *Archivio di statistica*, anno vi: fascicolo 11 (Rome, 1881), pp. 5–24, 10–12.
2. For details of his project, see D. Albinì, *La questione degli esposti ed il brefotrofio di Roma*, pp. 7ff.
3. Before the introduction of the Roussel law of 1874, wet nursing in France was subject only to municipal controls. Because of the increasing use of wet nurses by married women workers in the nineteenth century, greater organization of the business through national legislation was seen to be necessary. G. D. Sussman, *Selling Mothers' Milk: The Wetnursing Business in France, 1715–1914* (Urbana, IL, 1982), pp. 8, 6, 102.
4. The 1859, 1865, and 1889 laws of public security treated children's homelessness and begging as public order offences and prescribed corrective detention as the remedy. They permitted the police to detain minors under 16 years of age in poorhouses and penal institutions. Local governments were under no obligation to care for children older than twelve and many foundling homes placed maximum age limits on assistance. In Rome, for example, the *brefotrofio* paid subsidies to wet nurses until the foundling reached ten years of age. In other provinces, the period of assistance could be as low as four or five years. Clearly, this put children at risk of homelessness or exploitation as labourers. ApC, Legislatura XVIII, I Sessione 1892–93, Documenti, Tornata of 31 January 1893, proposta di legge (n. 127) sulla protezione dei bambini lattanti e della infanzia abbandonata, pp. 963–8; ApC, Legislatura XVIII, I Sessione 1892–3, Documenti, Seduta of 7 July 1893, relazione della commissione composta dei deputati sulla proposta di legge n. 127, pp. 1321–36.
5. A. Stoppato, *Infanticidio e procurato aborto: Studio di dottrina, legislazione, e giurisprudenza penale* (Verona and Padua, 1887), pp. 86–7.
6. A. Stoppato, *Diritto penale* (Milan, 1887), pp. 150–1.
7. For the text of the 1889 code, see CRIB, *Inchiesta sui brefotrofi e studi di legislazione comparata sui provvedimenti per l'assistenza della infanzia abbandonata*, pp. 90–2; and see D. Vincenzi Amato, 'La famiglia e il diritto', *La famiglia italiana dall'ottocento a oggi*, ed. P. Melograni (Rome and Bari, 1988), pp. 629–99, 652, and C. Lombroso, *Sull'incremento del delitto in Italia* (Turin, 1879).
8. D. Vincenzi Amato, 'La famiglia e il diritto', pp. 664–5.
9. M. E. Ferrari, 'I mercanti di fanciulli nelle campagne e la tratta dei minori: Una realtà sociale dell'Italia fra '800 e '900', *Movimento operaio e socialista*, 1 (1983), pp. 87–108, esp. 95.

10. The proceedings are held at IPAI: P. Blasi, *Sull'istituzione di una società nazionale di protezione dell'infanzia* (Rome, 1892).
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.
13. IPAI, P. Blasi, *Per l'inaugurazione del comitato romano della società nazionale 'pro infanzia'* (Rome, 1897), p. 8.
14. IPAI, Società Nazionale 'Pro Infanzia', Comitato Romano, *Relazione morale della società, bilancio di previsione per il 1899 e conto consuntivo dell'anno 1898: Relazione dei revisori dei conti* (Rome, 1899), pp. 20ff. for case details.
15. Not until 17 July 1919 was the law on the juridical capacity of women promulgated; this gave women legal personhood by abolishing marital authorization in most matters relating to employment, commerce, and inheritance. However, parliament did not formally abolish the patriarchal and archaic foundation of the family, the *consiglio di famiglia*, until 1946. The family council comprised the grandfather, father/husband, and uncles, who were legally empowered to make all decisions affecting female and child members of the family. M. Bellomo, *La condizione giuridica della donna in Italia: Vicende antiche e moderne* (Turin, 1970), pp. 129–33, 136–8.
16. D. Albini, *La questione degli esposti in Basilicata*, pp. 28–31.
17. See above, pp. 44–5, on local government acts. With an enactment on 30 April 1810, the Bourbons also made the provision of aid towards foundlings the responsibility of communes and provinces. This system too had failed to have a positive effect on the quality of care: P. Castiglioni, *Sul ordinamento del servizio sanitaria comunale nel regno d'Italia* (Milan, 1861), pp. 72–6.
18. A good example of this dynamic in operation was the attempt by a number of provincial councils in the immediate aftermath of the 1865 law to evade their obligation to care for *esposti*. Authorities in Belluno, Rovigo, and elsewhere decided to interpret the letter of the law in a very restrictive way when they limited aid to only those *esposti* who had been abandoned in a public place. Despite the decision of the council of state in April 1879 to uphold a broader definition of *esposti* (to include all those infants who were not legally reclaimed by parents), conflicts and contestations of this kind continued throughout the liberal period; see *Inchiesta sui brefotrofi*, p. 88.
19. M. Livi Bacci, *Donne, fecondità e figli: Due secoli di storia demografica italiana* (Bologna, 1977), pp. 78 and 98 on the illegitimacy ratio; and see G. Da Moulin, 'Les enfants abandonnés dans les villes Italiennes', p. 103.
20. About 3.4 per cent of all newborns were abandoned nationwide in the decades from the 1860s to the 1880s; by 1902–5, this rate had declined to 2.3 per cent. But regional differences remained very pronounced. Whereas the levels in 1902–5 were 1.8 per cent in Lombardy and 1.9 in Piedmont, they were 3.9 in Calabria and 3.2 in Sicily. See MAIC, DGS, *Risultati dell'inchiesta sulle condizioni igieniche e sanitarie nei comuni*, p. ccxxvi; MAIC, DGS, *Statistica della assistenza dell'infanzia abbandonata: Anni 1890, 1891, 1892* (Rome, 1894), p. 6.
21. MAIC, DGS, *Statistica delle cause di morte nell'anno 1905, Appendice: Statistica dell'assistenza agli esposti nel quinquennio 1902–1906* (Rome, 1907), p. 3 for the following data: in the years 1890–2, 462 communes still had open *ruote*; 377 did so in 1894–6, but 464 did so in 1902–6 because some southern municipalities had reopened them.
22. *Ibid.* p. 2. It should be pointed out that the official figures are probably underestimates. In 1888, the direzione generale della statistica began to compile 'moral statistics' on foundlings by means of questionnaires sent from prefects to mayors and

- directors of *brefotrofi*. The government itself realized that its data were subject to a large margin of error primarily because not all authorities responded to requests and others did so in a slapdash manner. On 'moral statistics', see S. Patriarca, *Numbers and Nationhood: Writing Statistics in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 155–8.
23. The number of provinces in each region which had a *brefotrofi* in 1893–6 was as follows: Tuscany 23; Piedmont 18; Emilia 15; Umbria 15; Lombardy 14; Sicily 7; Liguria 6; Veneto 6; Marches 6; Calabria 5 (the *brefotrofi* of Reggio di Calabria, which serviced 5 provinces, only opened in 1895); Campania 2 (the *brefotrofi* of Avellino, which serviced 2 provinces, only opened in 1895); Latium 2; Abruzzi 1; Sardinia 0; Apulia 0; Basilicata 0. *Statistica della assistenza dell'infanzia abbandonata: Anni 1890, 1891, 1892*, pp. 4, 6.
 24. V. Hunecke, *I trovatelli di Milan*, pp. 264–7.
 25. There is some disagreement about when the first closure actually took place. Authorities at the Santo Spirito home in Rome claim that their *ruota* was closed before 1865 in an attempt to reduce abandonment: *Brefotrofi di Roma, Cenni statistici sul Pio Istituto di S. Spirito in Sassia in Roma* (Rome, 1880), pp. 78–79. This seems odd, however, since the pope did not give his approval to closures until 1865.
 26. CRIB, *Inchiesta sui brefotrofi*, p. 62.
 27. *La questione degli esposti in Basilicata*, 16–17.
 28. As early as 1874, Griffini went public with the changes which he had been introducing in the Milanese *brefotrofi* since 1868. See his report to a national medical convention: *Comitato milanese dell'associazione medica italiana, Relazione sul sesto congresso medico italiano, tenutosi a Bologna nel sett. 1874* (Milan, 1874), pp. 14 ff.
 29. According to the laws on local government, where a person had resided for the previous five years determined which authority was responsible for paying for assistance. This measure had been introduced to serve two purposes: to block the migration of the poor to the big cities and to distribute the financial burden of relief more evenly. However, it caused conflict between *opere pie*, provinces, and communes. It was also impossible to implement uniformly, because many communes lacked registry offices. Despite the many problems which the norm caused, central government did not issue any directives: ISAP, vol 4, ch. 4, pp. 205–6.
 30. Griffini's report of the proceedings is published in the *Atti del congresso internazionale di beneficenza di Milano: Relazione sul tema beneficenza avente carattere e rapporti d'ordine pubblico* (Milano, 1880) *passim*. See also E. Raseri, 'I fanciulli illegittimi', pp. 12–15; Cherubini, *Beneficenza e solidarietà*, p. 59.
 31. For a contrasting view of the motives of founding home directors, see G. Pomata, 'Madri illegittimi tra ottocento e novecento: Storie cliniche e storia di vita', *Quaderni storici*, 44 (1980), pp. 497–543; Pomata argues that public administrators were motivated primarily by a clinical interest in syphilis.
 32. A. Agostini, 'Dal governo degli esposti', *Giornale della società italiana d'igiene*, 6 (1880), 23–47.
 33. Quotes from Raseri, 'I fanciulli illegittimi', pp. 14–15.
 34. He worked for the direzione generale della statistica from 1879 until his death in 1911 and was responsible for all publications concerning population, health, and assistance. A medical doctor by training, Raseri had studied with Lombroso: see ISTAT, *Decennale, 1926–36* (Rome, 1936), pp. 113–15 for an overview of his career.
 35. The mortality for first-years was estimated to be 174 for legitimates and 329 for illegitimates: 'I fanciulli illegittimi', p. 20; see also his 'De la protection de l'enfance et plus spécialement de l'assistance aux enfant-trouvés en Italie et dans

- quelques autres états' in *Memoria della sessione di Berna dell'istituto internazionale di statistica* (Rome, 1895), esp. pp. 6–12.
36. A. Morricone, 'Cenni storici sulla evoluzione dell'assistenza al bambino prematuro', *Pagine di storia della medicina*, 5:2 (March–April, 1961), pp. 37–44. According to Livi Bacci, the first Italian work which correlated women's work, living conditions, feeding practice and infant mortality was a study done in Milan by a socialist doctor: A. Schiavi, *La mortalità infantile* (Milan, 1908), cited in *Donne, fecondità e figli*, p. 317.
 37. R. Perrone-Capano, *L'infanticidio e l'esposizione d'infante nel loro significato ontogenetico* (Naples, 1899), esp. pp. 34–6.
 38. MAIC, DGS, *Statistica delle cause di morte: Anno 1881* (Rome, 1882), p. 35; and in the same series, *Anno 1882* (Rome, 1883), p. 41; *Anno 1883* (Rome, 1884), p. 39; *Anno 1884* (Rome, 1885), p. 9; *Anno 1886* (Rome, 1888), p. 41; *Anno 1902* (Rome, 1905), p. 45; *Anno 1908* (Rome, 1911), p. xlviii; *Anno 1909* (Rome, 1912), p. xiv.
 39. 'I fanciulli illegittimi', p. 17.
 40. *L'infanticidio e l'esposizione d'infante*, p. 19.
 41. IPAIL, A. Valdameri, 'L'allattamento artificiale ed il latte sterilizzato — considerazioni', *Bollettino dell'associazione sanitaria milanese, Comunicazione fatta all'associazione sanitaria milanese nella seduta del 31 maggio 1899* (Milan, 1899), pp. 157–160.
 42. In *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (Cambridge, 1890), p. 194, J. Walkowitz argues that these two social problems inhabited quite distinct historical terrain. However, infant life protectors tended to blur the boundaries between illegitimacy, prostitution, and juvenile delinquency.
 43. IPAIL, P. Ramazzotti, *Profilassi della sifilide da allattamento, Relazione al primo congresso nazionale per l'igiene dell'allattamento mercenario* (Milan, 1899), pp. 4–5, 7–8; he also did not accept the premise that infected babies posed a health risk to the *balie* in whose custody they were placed.
 44. *Inchiesta sui brefotrofi*, p. 53.
 45. IPAIL, 'Verbali del primo congresso nazionale per l'igiene dell'allattamento mercenario', *Pro infanzia: Bollettino ufficiale della pia istituzione provvidenza baliatica*, no.1 (November 1898), pp. 9–10 and no. 2 (December, 1898), pp. 13–15.
 46. IPAIL, P. Blasi, *Relazione sul funzionamento del brefotrofio di Roma al deputato amministrativo* (Rome, 1900), pp. 3–7; According to Blasi, homes had long relied on *pie ricevitrici* to transport babies to their wet nurses in the countryside. They were called the *longa manus* of the *brefotrofio*. The commercial system of *mandarinaggio* arose because of the scarcity of wet nurses.
 47. *Inchiesta sui brefotrofi*, pp. 40–41, 44; on the plight of the nation's 8920 (in 1882) general practitioners after Crispi's health reform of 1888, which introduced medical services for the poor, see A. Lyttelton, 'The Middle Classes of Liberal Italy', *Society and Politics in the Age of the Risorgimento*, pp. 217–50 and A. Forti Messina, 'I medici condotti all'indomani dell'unità', *Salute e classi lavoratrici*, 663–97.
 48. *Statistica dell'assistenza agli esposti nel quinquennio 1902–1906*, p. 4.
 49. *Inchiesta sui brefotrofi*, pp. 44–45.
 50. Relatively little work has been done on domestic servants in Italy: see A. Arru, 'The Distinguishing Features of Domestic Service in Italy', *Journal of Family History*, 15:4 (1990), pp. 547–66, which, however, does not mention *balie*.
 51. For a comparison, see J. R. Lehning, 'Family Life and Wet nursing in a French Village', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 12:4 (Spring, 1982), pp. 645–56, 655; and see R. M. Bell, *Fate and Honor, Family and Village: Demographic and Cultural Change in Rural Italy Since 1800* (Chicago, 1979), pp. 40ff. on the seasonality of infant mortality.

52. Women's work was extensive and varied, but largely discontinuous and seasonal. Most work done at home by women, such as spinning and wet nursing, escaped the notice of statisticians who compiled data on the structure of the labour force. See S. Ortaggi, 'Labouring Women in Northern and Central Italy in the Nineteenth Century', *Society and Politics in the Age of the Risorgimento*, pp. 152–83.
53. *Statistica della assistenza dell'infanzia abbandonata: Anni 1890, 1891, 1892*, p. 12.
54. *Statistica delle cause di morte: Anno 1886*, appendix, pp. 81–9.
55. For details about the impact of the *decreto luogotenenziale* of 4 August 1918 and its *ordinamento* of 6 June 1919 on the regulation of wet nursing by the Ministry of Health, see 'Documenti ufficiali', *MI* (June, 1931), pp. 567–8.
56. *Le riforme crispine*, vol. 4, ch. 4, p. 188.
57. C. Pinzi, *L'Ospizio degli esposti in Viterbo dalla sua fondazione sino all'anno 1890*, pp. 99, 186–7.
58. A royal decree of 1 July 1897 established a commission under Raffaele Perla whose function was to examine the reports of prefects: another commission was established on 3 April 1898 whose purpose was to begin studying the problem with a view towards devising legislative proposals. Finally, on 24 November 1898, these two commissions were merged. Placed under the presidency of Corrado Crudeli, the refashioned commission was divested of its legislative task. *Inchiesta sui brefotrofi*, pp. 1–7. Enrico Raseri wrote the inquest's *relazione*.
59. ACS, Min. Interno, Serie Diverse, R. Commissione d'Inchiesta per Napoli, 1899–1902, opere pie, p. 22, f. 5, contains a copy of a newspaper report concerning the foundling home: 'Una visita al Brefotrofio dell'Annunziata', *La Colonna*, 13 March 1898. The article blamed the local mayor's office for the appalling conditions within the home. Because of the failure of city government to contribute to the cost of foundling home provision, the quality of care declined from the 1870s to the 1890s. For months at a time, wet nurses did not receive payment. And internally reared infants were crowded together in cribs and left unattended for hours at a time.
60. *Inchiesta sui brefotrofi*, pp. 1–7, 51.
61. *Ibid.*, pp. 19–22, 25, 34–5, 39; as newborns can lose a kilogramme or more in their first few days of life, these weights are lower than birth weights would be.

7 Religion, Science, and Beneficence

1. *Inchiesta sui brefotrofi*, pp. 10, 42.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 12–14.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 51, 80.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.
6. C. Pinzi, *La questione degli esposti: Discorso letto nella inaugurazione del nuovo brefotrofio di Viterbo* (Viterbo, 1899), pp. 1–28.
7. R. Griffini, *Relazione del 1871 intorno all'ospizio provinciale degli esposti e delle partorienti di Milano* (Milan, 1882), p. 9. These figures compared very favourably with those from the first half of the nineteenth century: Hunecke, tables on pp. 293–4, 316.
8. *Inchiesta*, p. 14; see also, F. Landucci, *Cenni storici e statistici sulla maternità e brefotrofio di Bergamo* (Bergamo, 1900), pp. 26–7 esp., which provides details concerning the reform of the home in the years 1869–96. During this period, the *brefotrofio* in Bergamo established links with the Ospedale Maggiore of the city, which had a maternity ward, and began to require women to breastfeed infants.

9. *Statistica dell'assistenza agli esposti nel quinquennio 1902–1906*, p. 4.
10. ASCR, P. Blasi, *Brefotrofio di Roma: Relazione 1897–1898* (Rome, 1898), pp. 18–20.
11. ASCR, O. Parisotti, *Brefotrofio di Roma: La sezione legittimi* (Rome, 1915), p. 3.
12. IPAIL, M. Mauri, *Relazione del Brefotrofio di Roma per il biennio 1904–1905* (Rome, 1905), 2–9; ASCR, O. Parisotti, *Brefotrofio di Roma: Relazione generale, 1917–1918* (Rome, 1918), 4–11.
13. G. E. Curàtulo, *L'Arte di Juno Lucina in Roma: Storia dell'ostetricia* (Rome, 1901), pp. 244–5; Curàtulo was a professor of obstetrics at the hospital.
14. O. Viana and F. Voza, *L'Ostetricia e la ginecologia in Italia*, intro. E. Alfieri (Emilio Alfieri was one of the founders of both the Italian Obstetrics and Gynaecology Society and the Italian Eugenics Society) (1902; 3rd ed, Milan, 1933), pp. 440, 783ff, 793–6 for details of these institutions. In 1906, Ernesto Pestalozza (1860–1935), professor of obstetrics and gynaecology from 1891 and an avid prewar eugenicist, opened Rome University's own obstetric and gynaecology clinic. By the 1920s, this clinic was treating annually about 3500 obstetric patients, 1000 gynaecology patients, and 4000 day patients. Pestalozza entered the senate in 1923 as a fascist and was a keen supporter of the regime's demographic and welfare policy.
15. P. Frascani, *Ospedale e società in età liberale* (Bologna, 1986), p. 77.
16. In Italy, medical training was not as specialized or advanced as it was in France, Germany, and Britain; see *ibid.*, p. 53.
17. F. La Torre, *Curriculum vitae* (Rome, 1903), cited in his *L'Utero attraverso i secoli: Storia, iconografia* (Città di Castello, 1917), p. x; and see pp. 607–13; A liberal nationalist, La Torre also became a eugenicist: see his *I fondamenti dell'eugenica* (Rome, 1915).
18. *Risultati dell'inchiesta sulle condizioni igieniche e sanitarie nei comuni del regno*, p. ccxliii; there were 7 168 924 women between 15 and 50 in 1881. See also, Camera dei deputati, *Movimento degli infermi negli ospedali civili del regno: Anno 1884* (Rome, 1886), which states that the number of maternity wards was 44 in 1884 (p. 9).
19. *Inchiesta sui brefotrofi*, p. 41–2.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 41–2.
21. It is important to recognize that even those institutions whose administration was laicized still retained a considerable amount of autonomy and continued to draw revenue from private sources. And many smaller *brefotrofi* remained independent charities that were not in receipt of public funds.
22. T. M. Caffaratto, *L'Ostetricia, la ginecologia e la chirurgia in Piemonte dalle origini ai giorni nostri* (Saluzzo, 1973), p. 41.
23. V. Busacchi and E. Greco, 'Clinici medici, chirurghi, ed ostetrici nella età del risorgimento', *Pagine di storia della medicina*, 5:3 (May–June, 1961), pp. 3–15.
24. *Trattato di ostetricia*, p. 33.
25. O. Viana and F. Voza, *L'Ostetricia e la ginecologia in Italia*, p. 505.
26. Istituto ostetrico-ginecologico di Torino, *Prelezioni e scritti medici di Scipione Giordano* (Turin, 1880), preface et *passim*; Caffaratto, *L'Ostetricia*, p. 346.
27. A. Corradi, *Dell'Ostetricia in Italia dell metà dello scorso secolo fino al presente*, vol. iii (Bologna, 1877), pp. 1881; and on the use of chloroform, ether, and opiates, see vol. ii of Corradi's work (Bologna, 1875), pp. 1192–7.
28. See also, Viana and Voza, *L'Ostetricia e la ginecologia*, pp. 1086–9 for a discussion of these 'radical therapies' for 'viziatura pelvica'.
29. A. Corradi, vol. iii, pp. 1857, 1865–71, 2332.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 1864.

31. Bizarrely, E. Shorter credited nineteenth-century obstetrics not only with securing women's health, but also with causing the rise of feminism; *A History of Women's Bodies* (1982; pb edn, Harmondsworth, 1984), esp. p. 296.
32. I. Loudon, 'Puerperal insanity in the 19th century', *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 81 (February, 1988), pp. 76–9; Loudon argues that puerperal insanity should be treated as a separate entity from puerperal fever, but Italian medical science did not make any distinction between the two disorders until the rise of psychiatry in the twentieth century.
33. Puerperal fever was an infection of the uterus which spread into the peritoneal cavity (causing peritonitis) and the bloodstream (causing septicaemia). It was caused by the Group A *Streptococcus* microorganism, which is also responsible for scarlet fever. The disease progressed rapidly and almost always ended in fatality. Not until the introduction of the sulphonamides in the 1930s was there an effective treatment. See the most complete account of its history, I. Loudon, *The Tragedy of Childbed Fever* (Oxford, 2000), *passim*.
34. Caffaratto, pp. 190–91.
35. S. Giordano, 'Statistica della sezione seconda dell'ospizio di maternità di Torino, 1851 al 1857', *Giornale delle scienze mediche della reale accademia medico-chirurgia di Torino*, xxix: 12 (June, 1857), pp. 193–210, 195.
36. S. Giordano, *Della febbre puerperale osservata nella clinica ostetrica, dell'eclampsia, e dell'edema acuto* (Turin, 1859), pp. 77–80, 89.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 81ff.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 20–1.
39. F. La Torre, *Intorno all'indicazione dell'isterectomia nelle infezioni puerperali e alla cura di esse* (Rome, 1901), *passim*.
40. F. La Torre, *Osservazioni e note cliniche sulle infezioni puerperali* (Milan, 1890), *passim*.
41. D. Tibone, 'Rendiconto statistico della febbre puerperale osservata nella clinica ostetrica', *Giornale delle scienze mediche della reale accademia medico-chirurgia di Torino*, xxix: 12 (June, 1857), pp. 108–55, esp. 124–9.
42. Corradi, vol. ii, p. 2332; and vol. iii, pp. 1865–71, on the rejection of the ideas of Stéphane Tarnier, who believed that puerperal fever was 'contagious' even before the responsible microorganism was discovered. In the mid-1850s, Tarnier began to argue against the use of forceps and the frequency of medical intervention in labour. Even though a woman who had delivered normally could still get puerperal fever, Tarnier believed that natural childbirth was the most reliable form of prevention. Similarly, the pioneering work of J. F. Semmelweis on the importance of disinfectants in the prevention of disease was ignored long after it was first published in 1847. Working in a Viennese hospital, Semmelweis observed the connection between outbreaks of puerperal fever and the presence of medical students on the maternity ward. These students would do rounds in sick wards or practicals in the morgue and then infect their female patients.
43. See M. G. Nardi, *Il pensiero ostetrico-ginecologico nei secoli* (Milan, 1944), p. 364 on the continued resistance by Italian obstetricians to the late nineteenth-century bacteriological theories of the causes of the disease which were gaining currency in France and Germany.
44. One of the oddest sources from nineteenth-century obstetrics is Scipione Giordano's book of light-hearted rhyming verses describing women dying horrific deaths in childbirth: *Rime di più che mezzo secolo* (Turin, 1883); some particularly tasteless, misogynistic, and awful 'poems' appear on pp. 55–64. Despite the fact that Giordano was a second-rate poet and doctor, he was revered during

- and after his own lifetime: see the gushing account of his life in G. Faldella, *Galleria Piemontese: Libro I, Un mistero ed uno scettico (Tancredi Canonico e Scipione Giordano): Vite parallele* (Rome, 1928), pp. 100–54. Giordano's own artistic and professional limitations did not prevent him from developing an enormous ego; the epitaph which he wrote for himself claims that he dedicated his life to saving others (p. 144).
45. Corradi, vol. iii, pp. 2025–82, esp. 2076–7; and on the influence of Galenic ideas on modern medicine, see T. Laqueur, 'Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology', *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. C. Gallagher and T. Laqueur, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1987), pp. 1–41.
 46. The director of the public maternity clinic in Vercelli urged his colleagues to adopt antiseptic practices in the battle against puerperal fever. In 1887, Professor Giuseppe Chiarleoni began to use intrauterine antiseptic gauzes, soaked in a mixture of iodine and formol on patients. He reported that this procedure helped reduce mortality from the disease; see his 'Zaffo endouterino con garza iodoformica nella endometrite puerperali', *Annali universali di medicina e chirurgia: Anno lxxiv*, vol. 283: 1st semester (Milan, 1888), pp. 127–33. But in his 'Ginecologia ed ostetricia', Rusconi (no first name given) disputed the claim that manual and surgical interventions in birth endangered the mother and argued that 'there is no proof that septicaemia and puerperal fever are caused by a lack of antisepsis'. He also argued that doctors had to remove the placenta by hand before the uterus closes and advocated laparotomies in cases in which placental presentation was incomplete: *Annuario delle scienze mediche: Riassunto delle più importanti pubblicazioni*, anno xix (Milan, 1889), pp. 443–81, 444.
 47. This is especially so since the evidence strongly suggests that the conditions of obstetric care were far worse in those decades than they were in subsequent ones.
 48. See C. Pancino, *Il bambino e l'acqua sporca: Storia dell'assistenza al parto dalle mammane alle ostetriche (secoli xvi–xix)* (Milan, 1984), ch. 6 on increasing conflicts between midwives and obstetricians in the nineteenth century and ch. 7 on the survival of the 'traditional' birth experience outside the big cities.
 49. On the final point, I disagree most strongly with Edward Shorter: it seems to me that what is striking is not the rapidity of the 'great decline in death' from hospital infection from the 1840s to the 1930s, but rather that it took so long for medical professionals both to introduce proven preventative measures and to develop effective treatments. See *A History of Women's Bodies*, ch. 6, esp. p. 130.
 50. See the graph on Italy's 'demographic transition' in *State, Economy, and Society in Western Europe*, vol. 2, p. 28; and the table on expectation of life, p. 103.
 51. See the table on mortality by cause in ISTAT, *Cento anni di sviluppo economico e sociale dell'Italia*, pp. 60–1.
 52. On the specificities of female mortality, see M. Ventisette, 'Alcune caratteristiche della mortalità femminile italiana per generazioni, 1866–1961', *Genus*, 29: 3–4 (1973), pp. 65–103; the increase in survival has meant that greater numbers of women reached and completed their reproductive years.
 53. ISTAT, *Statistica delle cause di morte nell'anno 1935* (Rome, 1937), pp. 5, 30; 'La mortalità materna in Italia', *MI*, 13 (July–October, 1938), pp. 385–6. It should be pointed out, however, that Italy's MMR was very low compared to other more advanced nations, such as Britain and America: See I. Loudon, 'Maternal Mortality: 1880–1950. Some Regional and International Comparisons', *Social History of Medicine*, 1:2 (August, 1988), pp. 183–228. In America, for example, the MMR was 77.6 in 1900–04.

54. MAIC, DGS, *Statistica delle cause di morte nell'anno 1909* (Rome, 1912), p. xx, which provides data concerning puerperal fever alone; *Statistica delle cause di morte nell'anno 1935*, p. 31, which shows that the number of deaths attributable to puerperal fever hovered at around 1100 per year in the 1920s and 1930s. And ISTAT, *Sommario di statistica storiche dell'Italia, 1861–1965* (Rome, 1968), table 22, p. 33 provides the following estimates of the number of reported cases of puerperal infections (including septic abortions) per 100 000 births: 1881–90 – 657.3; 1891–1900 – 274.0; 1901–10 – 231.2; 1911–20 – 139.0; 1921–30 – 165.6; 1931–40 – 166.0; 1941–50 – 44.2.
55. In the pre-First World War years, the predominant causes of death (defined as those responsible for at least 40 deaths per thousand) for women included smallpox, typhoid fever, tuberculosis and *malattie di gravidanza, parto e puerperio* (including *febbre puerperale*). For women between the ages of 20 and 39 who died in 1914, sicknesses of pregnancy, birth, and the puerperium and puerperal fever accounted for 71 out of 1 000 deaths: Ministero per l'Industria, il Commercio, e il Lavoro, Ufficio Centrale di Statistica, *Statistica delle cause di morte nell'anno 1914* (Rome, 1917), p. 43. In 1918, (an unusual year because the pandemic of influenza caused so many deaths), pregnancy and birth accounted for 15 per 1 000 deaths amongst women, while the war wounds suffered by soldiers accounted for 17 per 1 000 deaths amongst men. ISTAT, *Statistica delle cause delle morti nell'anno 1918* (Rome, 1924), p. xl.
56. Cambi and Olivieri probably mistake an assumed humanization of social values for the effects of birthrate decline. Infants and children increased in value and estimation only when they became a scarce national resource. Not until the advent of fascism, when the fall in fertility became more marked, did any modern Italian government make the depletion of population through emigration and death a policy issue.
57. S. De Sanctis, 'Su alcuni tipi di mentalità inferiore', *Archivio di psichiatria e scienze penali*, 27 (1906), pp. 193–6; *Patologia e profilassi mentale* (Milan, 1912), ch. 4; De Sanctis was a founding member of the Italian Eugenics Society, which grew out of Giuseppe Sergi's Anthropological Society of Rome; see my *Race and Nation in Italian Science and Culture, c.1890–c.1945* (forthcoming).
58. S. De Sanctis, *Educazione dei deficienti* (Milan, 1915), pp. 127–30, 135–7; see also G. Montesano, *Assistenza dei deficienti anormali e minorenni delinquenti* (Milan, 1913) on the necessity of institutionalization and education for successful social prevention and mental hygiene.
59. *Atti del V congresso internazionale di psicologia tenuto in Roma dal 26 al 30 Aprile 1905 sotto la presidenza di Giuseppe Sergi* (Rome, 1905), esp. 667–73.
60. F. Dalmazzo, *La tutela sociale dei fanciulli abbandonati e travati* (Turin, 1910), pp. 23–35.
61. 'Statistica delle carceri', *Rivista penale*, lxxv (1907), pp. 247–48; for a useful comparison, see M. Perrot, 'Delinquency and the Penitentiary System', in *Deviants and the Abandoned in French Society: Selections from the Annales*, vol. iv, ed. R. Forster and O. Ranum, (Baltimore, 1978), pp. 213–45.
62. M. U. Masini and G. Vidoni, *L'Assistenza e la terapia degli ammalati di mente* (Milan, 1914), pp. 193–233 contains the full text of the law.
63. ISTAT, Ufficio statistico per le malattie mentali presso il manicomio provinciale di Ancona, *Le malattie in Italia: Relazione statistico-sanitaria sugli alienati presenti nei luoghi di cura al 1 gennaio 1926, con riassunto di Gustavo Modena* (Rome, 1928), pp. 25–8 for data from 1899 to 1926.

64. *Discorsi parlamentari di Giovanni Giolitti*, vol. 2, senato del regno, tornata del 2 maggio 1907, disegno di legge sul 'costruzione di fabbricati carcerari', p. 923.
65. S. Sepe, *Amministrazione e storia*, p. 73.
66. F. Dalmazzo, 'Il problema del traviamiento precoce', *MI* (February, 1927), pp. 35–9.
67. ApS, Legislatura xxii, Sessione 1904–7, Discussioni, discussioni del disegno di legge sull'assistenza agli esposti ed all'infanzia abbandonata, tornata del 9 Dicembre 1907, pp. 1034–46.
68. Giolitti first professed his commitment to 'completing' the Crispian project in 1893. During an important and definitive speech in Dronero, he stated that special laws on abandoned infants, the unable-to-work, mental asylums and *monte di pietà* had to be introduced immediately: G. Giolitti, *Discorsi extraparlamentari*, Dronero speech of 18 October 1893, pp. 138–59, 157.
69. *Discorsi parlamentari di Giovanni Giolitti*, vol. 2, tornata del 25 aprile 1907, pp. 918–19.
70. ApS, Legislatura xxii, Sessione 1904–7, Documenti-Disegni di Legge e Relazioni, disegno di legge sull'assistenza agli esposti ed all'infanzia abbandonata, tornata del 4 maggio 1907, pp. 1658–72.
71. *Discorsi parlamentari di Giovanni Giolitti*, vol. 2, infanzia abbandonata, tornata del 9, 10 ed 11 dicembre 1907, senato del regno, pp. 993–1000, quotes on pp. 993–4.
72. *Ibid.*, pp. 995, 1000.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 999.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 996.
75. ACS, Min Interno, DGAC, Divisione III, Opere Pie, Anni 1916–8, b. 19, f. 25283.13, minorenni-assistenza e tutela: see esp. the relazione on infanzia abbandonata, the appunto per il gabinetto di s. E., il sottosegretario di stato of 5 March 1914; in another (unnumbered) file, see the disegni di legge on abandoned infants; and in f. 21272.s, the relazione on Giolitti's project.
76. ACS, Min. Interno, DGAC, Divisione III, Opere Pie, 1916–8, b. 15, f. 25283.12.c, relazione sul servizio della beneficenza, Reggio-Emilia; and see f. 25283.12.a, Alberto Pironi's *relazione* for the interior minister on assistance towards foundlings, 1916–8.
77. ACS, Min. Interno, DGSP, AG, Anni 1910–1920, Atti amministrativi, b. 599, f. 20900–7, congresso nazionale dei direttori ed amministratori dei brefotrofi ed istituzioni congeneri, Roma 19–20 sett. 1917, relazione.

8 The Illegitimacy Campaign under Fascism

1. ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–43, Sileno Fabbri, b. 1261, f. 509817, sf. 3, Fabbri's Prospettive assistenziali della prima infanzia, October 1932, p. 13. A lawyer by training, Fabbri had previously served as *delegato straordinario* for ONMI's provincial federation in Milan. He remained in office as president of ONMI until 1937. ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–43, Sileno Fabbri, b. 2439, f. 552801 contains documents about Fabbri and his family, close members of which avidly served fascism in various capacities: see sf. 1 for material about his meteoric rise through the ranks of fascism's welfare bureaucracy; sf. 2 contains a letter from Fabbri to Mussolini dated 3 March 1943 which outlines his disillusionment with a regime that was no longer in a position to dispense favours and privileges to the chosen few.
2. 'I primi sei mesi di vita dell'Opera Nazionale per la Protezione della Maternità e dell'Infanzia: Relazione presentata dalla presidenza al consiglio centrale nella seduta del 10 dicembre 1926', *MI*, 1 (December, 1926), pp. 55–64, 58.

3. Valagussa was also a senator; see ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–43, b. 478, f. 184.555 for the PNF's file on him.
4. G. Tropeano, 'I concetti informativi dell'assistenza al fanciullo nell'asilo Tropeano a Napoli', *MI*, 2 (June, 1927), pp. 52–5, 52–3.
5. By February 1927, 365 doctors nationwide had gained certificates in one of ONMI's three-month training programmes: see 'Notiziario dell'attività assistenziale', *MI*, 2 (February, 1927), pp. 12–15, 14.
6. One of the reasons why doctors believed that breast was best can be found in the chronic scarcity and inferiority of substitutes. Branded baby foods were too expensive for the working class and the peasantry. Most foundling homes did not use them either, because of their cost and their unsuitability for small infants. In 1940, when the government became concerned about the effects of rationing on the nation's health, investigations revealed that only about twenty firms nationwide manufactured malted, farinose, milk and egg-based products for a small and mainly middle-class market. See ACS, Min. Interno, GB, b. 1, f. 97, 'alimentazione materna e infantile (1940–1941)', in Buffarini's appunti per il duce.
7. ONMI conducted its own researches into infant feeding practices in the early 1930s and discovered that one of the most common 'artificial' methods was to give cow's milk diluted with rice water and sugar to even very small babies. Because of the difficulties and expense of getting fresh cow's milk, premature weaning (before the age of six months) onto foods which were inappropriate for young infants was very widespread amongst the poor. See G. Sanpaulesi, 'Osservazioni sui lattanti e sulle madri assistite al Consultorio Pediatrico "Maria Collacchioni" di Firenze', *Genus*, 1:3–4 (April, 1935), pp. 453–67, 456. Goat's milk was still given to babies in the south of Italy; doctors considered this practice to be a principal cause of life-threatening 'digestive disorders'. See S. Platania, 'La mortalità infantile a Catania nel ventennio 1906–1925', *MI*, 4 (September, 1929), pp. 748–61, 753.
8. ISTAT, *Annuario statistico*, vol. 1 (Rome, 1927), p. 48.
9. E. Mensa, 'La questione dell'elevata mortalità degli illegittimi e sua pratica soluzione', *MI*, 2 (June, 1927), pp. 69–73; and F. Romita, *Evoluzione storica dell'assistenza*, p. 86.
10. 'I primi sei mesi di vita dell'Opera Nazionale per la Protezione della Maternità e dell'Infanzia: Relazione presentata dalla presidenza al consiglio centrale nella seduta del 10 dicembre 1926', *MI*, 1 (December, 1926), pp. 55–64, 60–61.
11. See G. A. Alessandri, 'Il baliatico mercenario nelle campagne', *MI*, 5 (November, 1930), pp. 1136–8.
12. See G. Mortara, *La salute pubblica in Italia durante e dopo la guerra* (Bari, 1925), p. 450–51.
13. The 158 859 illegitimate live births in 1920–2 compared well to the 236 845 *nati illegittimi* (out of a total of 3 325 747 live births) in 1890–2; because 139 101 of those illegitimate babies born in 1890–2 were reclaimed at the time of birth registration, many were declared illegitimate because they were the offspring of people married in church only. But 97 744 of those illegitimate infants ended up being abandoned as *esposti*. See *Statistica della assistenza dell'infanzia abbandonata: Anni 1890, 1891, 1892*, p. 9.
14. See 'I figli di madri nubili', *MI*, 2 (February, 1927), pp. 29–34, 30. ISTAT figures differ slightly from these: according to the *Annuario Statistico*, vol. 1, table 4, p.31, the total number of *figli d'ignoti* in 1922–4 was 36 974.

15. Ibid., p. 31. Only Lombardy and Piedmont showed a marked increase in reclamation rates during the first two decades of the century: the south, as a whole, still proved resistant to change. See A. Piccioni, *La fanciullezza abbandonata e seviziata* (Milan, 1922), pp. 22–23 for regional breakdowns.
16. 'Le cause di morte nell'infanzia', *MI*, 5 (July, 1927), pp. 39–47, 47. During the fifty years from the 1870s to the 1920s, 1919–21 evidenced the highest mortality for infants under one year of age. Infant mortality for under-ones continued to decline in the years 1925–1927, but regional variations remained very pronounced: the Abruzzi and Molise, Campania, Basilicata and Calabria still had very high levels of deaths amongst first-years. See ISTAT, *Annuario statistico italiano*, vol. 3 (Rome, 1927), p. 60 for regional breakdowns.
17. On the decree law of 16 December 1923, which approved the *regolamento generale* of 11 January 1923 on assistance towards *esposti*, see *LEX: Legislazione italiana: Raccolta cronologica (gennaio-giugno)*, vol. 9 (Turin, 1923), pp. 480–9 and *La legislazione fascista, 1922–1928*, vol. 1, p. 635.
18. E. Mensi, 'La questione dell'elevata mortalità degli illegittimi e sua pratica soluzione', *MI*, 2 (June, 1927), pp. 69–73, 69.
19. A. Lo Monaco-Aprile, 'Il valore etico dell'assistenza alle madri illegittime', *MI*, 5 (November, 1930), pp. 1111–18, 1117.
20. F. Strina, 'In tema di assistenza agli illegittimi', *MI*, 3 (August, 1928), pp. 646–55, 650.
21. See E. Shorter, 'Illegitimacy, Sexual Revolution, and Social Change in Modern Europe', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, II (Autumn, 1971), pp. 237–72. Shorter maintains that between 1750 and 1790 illegitimate fertility rates began to rise in Europe due to the start of a 'sexual revolution' in women's attitudes (pp. 260–71). And some of the contributors to *Bastardy and Its Comparative History*, ed. P. Laslett, K. Oosterveen and R. M. Smith, (London, 1980) support this view and define the 'illegitimacy-prone' woman as a factory worker. To describe rising illegitimacy as a symptom of a 'sexual revolution' is problematical as the term can only appropriately be used to describe a process whereby women gained increased control over their lives, bodies, and fertility.
22. See L. Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory*, pp. 174–9, for a discussion of the incidence of abortion and 'miscarriages' amongst urban working-class women.
23. For a comparison, see J. R. Gillis, 'Servants, Sexual Relations and the Risks of Illegitimacy in London, 1801–1900', *Feminist Studies*, V (1979), pp. 142–73. See also, R. G. Fuchs and L. P. Moch, 'Pregnant, Single, and Far from Home: Migrant Women in Nineteenth-Century Paris', *American Historical Review*, 95:4 (October, 1990), pp. 1007–31; these authors explore the connections between illegitimacy and 'women's poverty, geographic mobility, occupational instability, and absence of social protection' (p. 1009).
24. A. Spallanzani, 'I reati di infanticidio e di procurato aborto secondo le statistiche giudiziarie italiane', in Comitato Italiano per lo Studio dei Problemi della Popolazione, *Atti del Congresso Internazionale della Popolazione, Roma, 7–10 Settembre 1931*, ed. C. Gini, vol. 7 (Rome, 1934), pp. 161–81, 177–8.
25. ASM, GP, Q, categoria 5, moralità, b. 224, aborti e infanticidi, 1927–35: one example of the many is a letter from the capo della polizia to questore, 12 December 1927 involving investigations surrounding the discovery of a dead newborn floating in a river; the remains of aborted fetuses were also found in rivers and waterways – in these cases, however, the police had slightly more

- success in finding the culprits, because easily identifiable midwives were always the prime suspects.
26. G. Mortara, *La salute pubblica in Italia*, p. 460.
 27. E. Menna, *Le provvidenze del regime fascista per la battaglia demografica in Italia* (Como, 1936), pp. 28–9.
 28. On Mortara's career, see L. Lenti, 'La vita e le opere di Giorgio Mortara', *Giornale degli economisti*, vol. xxvi (1967), pp. 199–218; Mortara was forced to flee Italy in 1938 because of the regime's anti-semitic policy.
 29. G. Mortara, 'I concepimenti antenuziali', *Giornale degli economisti e rivista di statistica*, 43:11 (August, 1911), pp. 107–209, 158, 202–3.
 30. G. Mortara, *La salute pubblica in Italia durante e dopo la guerra*, pp. 458–60, 462.
 31. A. Golini, 'Profilo demografico della famiglia italiana', *La famiglia italiana dall'ottocento a oggi*, pp. 327–81, 350. This work considers unmarried cohabitation from a demographic point of view. There is surprisingly little research on the subject by social or family historians. This type of family formation hardly receives mention in C. Saraceno, 'Trent'anni di storia della famiglia', *Studi storici*, 4 (1979), pp. 833–56, *La famiglia italiana dall'ottocento a oggi*, or *The Family in Italy from Antiquity to the Present*.
 32. Golini, p. 357; interestingly, this percentage was higher in 1931 than it was in 1983, when ISTAT estimated that the number of 'irregular families' totalled 1.3 per cent of all families.
 33. See G. A. Blanc's *ONMI* (Milan, 1928), p. 7; this booklet also appeared as an extended article in *Gerarchia*.
 34. 'I primi sei mesi di vita dell'Opera Nazionale per la Protezione della Maternità e dell'Infanzia: Relazione presentata dalla presidenza al consiglio centrale nella seduta del 10 dicembre 1926', *MI*, 1 (December, 1926), pp. 55–64, 61.
 35. Inquest findings reported in the proceedings of the Second Conference Of Nipiology at Bolzano, 4 June 1930: F. Valagussa, *Ciò che l'ONMI ha fatto per la nipiologia, dal congresso di Ancona (1928) al congresso di Bolzano (1930)* (Rome, 1930), p. 8.,
 36. Inquest results reported in G. D'Ormeo, *I brefotrofi: Relazione al congresso nazionale di nipiologia* (Rome, 1928), p. 4.
 37. G. D'Ormeo, 'Brefotrofi', *MI*, 1 (November, 1926), pp. 30–4, 30.
 38. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
 39. *Ibid.*, pp. 30–1. D'Ormeo also reported other irregularities, the most common of which were the following: the lack of isolation wards for sick infants and the resulting prevalence of infectious diseases in institutions; the lack of hygiene in the preparation of baby bottles and in feeding practice; and the lack of cleanliness in dormitories.
 40. *Ibid.*, p. 34; see also G. Pazzi, 'Una ispezione ad un brefotrofo', *MI*, 5 (September, 1927), pp. 68–73, which provides details of the inspection of the foundling home in Ascoli-Piceno, one of the most serious defects of which was considered to be the routine practice of 'artificial feeding'. Pazzi held this responsible for the high mortality of infants in the summer months especially, due to poor hygiene leading to gastro-intestinal disorders.
 41. ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–1943, Sileno Fabbri, b. 1261, f. 509817, sf. 3, Fabbri's Prospettive assistenziali della prima infanzia, October 1932, p. 8.
 42. The full text of the *regio decreto-legge* of 8 May 1927, n. 798, on the 'Ordinamento del servizio di assistenza dei fanciulli illegittimi abbandonati o esposti all'abbandono' in Min. Interno, *Estratto dal boll. ufficiale di legislazione e disposizioni ufficiali*, n. 24–25, 21 August–1 September (Rome, 1927), pp. 1–9, 1.

43. See, for example, A. Carelli, 'Sei anni di attività dell'opera nazionale maternità e infanzia', *MI*, 7 (October, 1932), pp. 972–91, 973.
44. *Regio decreto-legge* of 8 May 1927 in *Estratto dal boll. ufficiale di legislazione e disposizioni ufficiali*, pp. 1–2.
45. The full text of the *regio decreto* of 29 December 1927, n. 2822, can be found in Min. Interno, DGAC, *Regolamento per l'esecuzione del r. decreto-legge 8 maggio 1927, n. 798, sull'ordinamento del servizio di assistenza dei fanciulli illegittimi abbandonati o esposti all'abbandono* (Rome, 1928), pp. 3–19, 5.
46. *Estratto dal boll. ufficiale di legislazione e disposizioni ufficiali*, pp. 1–2.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
48. ONMI, *Raccolta delle leggi sull'ONMI*, art. 14, pp. 10–11.
49. *Estratto dal boll. ufficiale di legislazione e disposizioni ufficiali*, p. 4.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
51. *Ibid.*, art. 12, p. 6.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
53. A. Montani, *Tre anni di presidenza al Brefotrofio di Roma, luglio 1923 – agosto 1926* (Rome, 1927), pp. 11–13.
54. *Estratto dal boll. ufficiale di legislazione e disposizioni ufficiali*, art. 4, p. 3; and *Regolamento per l'esecuzione del r. decreto-legge 8 maggio 1927*, art. 5, p. 6.
55. *Estratto dal boll. ufficiale di legislazione e disposizioni ufficiali*, pp. 5–6.
56. *Ibid.*, art. 9, p. 5; *Regolamento per l'esecuzione del r. decreto-legge 8 maggio 1927*, cap. iv, arts. 21–24, pp. 12–13.
57. 'Circolare n. 46 del 25 aprile 1930–viii' in *Documenti ufficiali*, *MI*, 5 (May, 1930), pp. 427–30.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 428.
59. See G. Bock, 'Antinatalism, Maternity and Paternity in National Socialist Racism', in *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States, 1880s–1950s*, ed. G. Bock and P. Thane (London and New York, 1991), pp. 233–55 on the compulsory sterilization of those categories of unmarried mothers, such as bastard-bearing recidivists, who were deemed to be biologically worthless to the race. S. Pedersen's *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State: Britain and France, 1914–1945* (Cambridge, 1993) does not say much about welfare provision for unmarried mothers in Britain and France. According to T. Skocpol's *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1992), p. 678, only a few American states permitted unmarried mothers to go on welfare during this period. Because they were poor, 'deviant', or institutionalized, some would have been vulnerable to compulsory sterilization on eugenic grounds.

9 From Public Beneficence to Public Welfare: The Roman Experiment, 1927–1938

1. 'Documenti ufficiali', *MI*, 1 (November, 1926), pp. 78–80, 79. The other appointees to the *consiglio direttivo* of ONMI's provincial federation in Rome were the following: Professor Mario Flamini, Donna Bice Tittoni, Duchess Maria Salviati, Professor Vittorio Ascoli, Donna Carolina Maraini, Professor Cesare Micheli and the lawyer, Amedeo Sandrini.
2. On the rise of this newly-titled family by means of state service in eighteenth-century Piedmont, see A. L. Cardoza, *Aristocrats in Bourgeois Italy: The Piedmontese Nobility, 1861–1930* (Cambridge, 1997), intro. esp. p. 18.

3. C. Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism*, pp. 120–25.
4. On Olga Modigliani, see V. De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, esp. pp. 234–5.
5. At the social services division of the commune of Rome, I found relevant ONMI documents from the fascist period which are not in a formal archive: these bear their original file numbers because they have not been catalogued. Details of Daisy di Robilant's *Assistenza Materna* are found in this holding: Comune di Roma, Servizio VIII, Assistenza e Servizi Sociali del Comune (Via Merulana, 123), ONMI – federazione e comitato di patronato, f. 724, sf. 1, zona Appio-Latino–Metronio; f. 731, zona Casilina; f. 755, sf. 1, zona Esquilino Celio; f. 791, zona Gianicolense; f. 7114, sf. 1, zona Monte Mario; f. 7181, comitato di patronato dell'Urbe.
6. G. A. Blanc and B. Graziani, *Report on the Development*, p. 74.
7. Italian women only gained access to universities in 1874: S. Franhini, 'L'istruzione femminile in Italia dopo l'unità: Percorsi di una ricerca sugli educandati pubblici di élite', *Passato e presente*, 10 (1986), pp. 53–94; by 1900, 224 women had received undergraduate degrees, the majority of which were in the arts, but a substantial proportion of these women were foreign. Upper-class women were excluded from most professions because of educational, legal, and social discrimination: according to the 1901 census, for example, Italy had only 29 female doctors (but 22 139 male doctors) and 18 female dentists, 13 886 women midwives, and no women lawyers, architects, notaries, accountants or engineers. In the careers opening up to them, like teaching, women were doing much better, but their numbers were very low compared with other countries. Min. AIC, DGS, *Censimento della popolazione del regno d'Italia al 10 febbraio*, vol. 1, pp. 188–9; vol. 5, pp. lxxxv.; vol. 3, pp. 16–23 (Rome, 1904).
8. The notion of a public–private split is still useful, particularly for a country like Italy, where the realm of the home and the family constituted the primary source of female identity and experience, even though women had social lives and economic roles. Some recent re-evaluations of the worth of this construct are to be found in the compilation, *Gender and History in Western Europe*, ed. R. Shoemaker and M. Vincent (London and New York, 1998), section III.
9. See, for example, J. Lewis, 'The Working-Class Wife and Mother and State Intervention', in *Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family, 1850–1940*, ed. J. Lewis ed. (Oxford, 1986), pp. 99–120, on Britain's system of home visiting. On the rise of social work and nursing in Imperial Germany, see P. Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics*, pp. 206–8, 282 *et passim*. And, on the involvement of American women in the building of the welfare state, see T. Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, esp. pt III.
10. See the essays by G. Bini and M. Moretti on female schoolteachers in *L'educazione delle donne: Scuole e modelli femminili nell'Italia dell'ottocento*, ed. S. Soldani (Milan, 1981), pp. 331–62 and 497–530.
11. A downward trend in the crude marriage rate and in the probability of marriage continued, with minor fluctuations, until 1936: see D. V. Glass, *Population Policies and Movements in Europe* (1940; reprinted. New York, 1968), p. 261–4. The number of nuns rose from 71 000 in 1921 to 129 000 in 1936, according to M. Clark, *Modern Italy*, p. 256.
12. See I. Vaccari, *La donna nel ventennio fascista, 1919–1943* (Milan, 1978), pp. 114–15; S. Pivato, 'L'organizzazione cattolica della cultura di massa durante il fascismo', *Italia contemporanea*, 30: 132 (July–September, 1978), pp. 3–25.
13. ONMI, *L'ONMI dalla sua ...*, p. 110.

14. Min. Interno, *Esercizio ostetrico delle levatrici, regolamento, istruzioni tecniche, relazione illustrativo* (Rome, 1930), pp. 25–33 *et passim*.
15. V. De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, pp. 68–69.
16. M. Fraddosio, 'Le donne e il fascismo: Ricerche e problemi di interpretazione', *Storia contemporanea*, xvii:1 (February, 1986), pp. 95–135, 133; P. Meldini, *Sposa e madre esemplare: Ideologia e politica della donna e della famiglia durante il fascismo* (Rimini and Florence, 1975), p. 19.
17. Though fascism gave the initial impetus, real expansion in the social work and health visiting professions occurred after 1945: see ONMI's *Norme sul funzionamento del comitato comunale e delle dipendenti istituzioni* (Rome, 1961), esp. p. 9.
18. See, M. Ostenc, 'La conception de la femme dans l'Italie mussolinienne', *Risorgimento*, 3 (1983), pp. 155–74. To maintain that, by limiting women's public roles to that of *assistenti sociali*, fascism deprived them of all power and influence would also be inaccurate. This view simply sees women as victims of fascism with no agency or autonomy. Daisy di Robilant, for example, attempted to use her new position of social leadership to advance her own feminist agenda.
19. On the construction of 'the social', see D. G. Horn, *Social Bodies: Science, Reproduction, and Italian Modernity* (Princeton, NJ, 1994), esp. p. 6. It is worth mentioning too that the view which sees women as inhabitants of the 'social' world and men as conquerors of the 'political' world ignores the fact that fascism provided few opportunities for men to engage in real politics; the roles of male party leaders and members were increasingly restricted to cultural, propagandistic, and recreational activities too as the PNF became domesticated and depoliticized in the 1930s.
20. These women were also involved in the creation of a citizenry, as evidenced by another female social action movement, which focused on the aim of creating *asili infantili* for the offspring of needy workers, peasants, artisans and widowed parents. Lay Catholic benefactors founded Italy's first *crèche* in Cremona in 1827 and placed this *opera pia* under the protection of the diocese. By 1843, 1487 such kindergartens were providing some 90 000 children in Lombardy, Piedmont, Tuscany and elsewhere with free tuition. According to practice, cardinals issued permits to women who wanted to be infant school teachers, and many Catholics did qualify. Others became involved by founding, funding, and directing these institutions, all of which were devoted to giving poor children between the ages of 3 and 7 a 'moral and civil education as a preparation for life'. See the *Statuto per la Società degli Asili d'Infanzia* (Rome, 1883), pp. 5, 6, 23, which is held in the commune of Rome's *Archivio Storico Capitolino*; and see, L. Volpicelli, *Prima storia degli asili infantili a Roma* (Rome, 1977), pp. 7 and 42. While liberalism tried unsuccessfully to develop its own secular nursery school system, fascism encouraged and harnessed private initiative in this area of social provision.
21. See, for example, the list of members of ONMI's provincial directorate in Ferrara in ASF, *archivio di opera nazionale maternità e infanzia*, b. 451, m. 19, r. (*registro*) 288, *atti contabili, consuntivi*, 1928–44, *verbale dell'adunanza del consiglio direttivo della federazione*, 11 May 1939. Only two women (and eight men) served on ONMI's directive council in Ferrara: these were the Signora Eugenia Sani Caroli and the Marchesa Maria Mosti di Bagno, who (unusually) was also vice-president of the board.
22. As a point of contrast, it is worth mentioning that Catherine M. Prelinger contends that the active involvement of women in charity which evolved in

- Catholic countries in the early modern period had no counterpart in Protestant Europe: see her 'Prelude to Consciousness: Amalie Sieveking and the Female Association for the Care of the Poor and the Sick', in *German Women in the Nineteenth Century: A Social History*, J. C. ed. Fout (New York and London, 1984), pp. 118–32, 120.
23. ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–43, f. 163.643, b. 428, Contessa Bice Brusati Pedotti, contains information of a personal nature.
 24. 'Documenti ufficiali', MI, 1 (November, 1926), pp. 78–80.
 25. The commune of Rome's *Archivio Storico Capitolino* houses the archives of this charity, amongst which is the following: ASC, ComR, f. 11714 (28), Opera Pia 'Asilo Materno' di Roma, *Resoconto statistico finanziario dal 15 sett. 1903 al 31 dic. 1922* (Rome, 1923), pp. 9–10.
 26. F. Pieroni Bortolotti, *Femminismo e partiti politici in Italia, 1919–1926* (Rome, 1978), p. 243; M. Fraddosio, 'Le donne e il fascismo: Ricerche e problemi di interpretazione', p. 127; and A. De Grand, 'Women under Italian Fascism', *The Historical Journal*, 19:4 (1976), pp. 947–68, 956.
 27. See V. De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, pp. 36–7 for details of the decision in 1925 to privilege only 'special' categories of women, like war widows, with the right to vote in local elections.
 28. Even though he headed ONMI, the Baron Gian Alberto Blanc felt no need to hide the fact that he remained a liberal. ACS, SPD, CR, 1922–1943, b. 81, f. W. R., sf. 1, Gian Alberto Blanc, *appunto* for the Duce, 27 February 1930.
 29. See P. G. Zunino, *L'ideologia del fascismo: Miti, credenze, e valori nella stabilizzazione del regime* (Bologna, 1985), p. 120. Zunino makes the point that many women supported fascism because of this 'authentic faith' in its ability to effect profound changes in Italian society.
 30. M. De Giorgio adjudicates thus in her book, *Le italiane dall'Unità a oggi* (1992; 2nd ed Rome-Bari, 1993), p. 511.
 31. See A. Buttafuoco, 'Motherhood as a Political Strategy: The Role of the Italian Women's Movement in the Creation of the *Cassa Nazionale di Maternità*', in *Maternity and Gender Policies*, pp. 178–95, esp. 178–81, on the consensus amongst Italian prewar feminists that motherhood should be endowed and dignified by the state.
 32. See V. De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, ch. 8, esp. 236–8; that this kind of feminism was truly 'Latin' is doubtful, however, since so many feminists in Europe and America devised programmes for social betterment based on calls for the protection of motherhood and infancy. See also S. Koven and S. Michel, 'Womanly Duties: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, 1880–1920', *American Historical Review*, 95:4 (October, 1990), pp. 1076–114; see n. 9, p. 1079; these authors prefer to use the term 'maternalist' to describe this 'social'-centred politics.
 33. From her letter to the Marchese Medici del Vascello, dated 25 July 1936, in ACS, PCM, anni 1934–6, titolo dell'affare–Roma, Assistenza Materna, f. 1/6–2, n. 7258.
 34. See C. Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics* (1986; pb edn London, 1988). Although Koonz is primarily concerned with exploring how German women willingly gave their support to a ruthless, anti-feminist regime, she also documents the pressures they faced to conform.
 35. G. D'Ormeo, 'Asilo infantile "Vincenzo Macchi di Cellere"', MI, 2 (January, 1927), pp. 40–54, 43.
 36. *Ibid.*, pp. 46–7.

37. 'Documenti ufficiali', *MI*, 1 (December, 1926), p. 56 gives details of how ONMI established a functional inspection system by co-ordinating efforts nationally and working through prefectures, local governments, party secretariats and its own provincial and municipal organs. Between 1926 and 1930, ONMI officials inspected 3111 of the 8223 existing welfare institutions for mothers and children; and by the 1930s, the organization had put into place a system of regular inspections: see the *Report on the Development*, p. 29. There is no doubt that fascism enlarged the state's powers of supervision and control of charitable establishments.
38. ACS, Fondo S.P.D.- CO, n. 610, D. di Robilant, *L'assistenza obbligatoria agli illegittimi riconosciuti: Note ed appunti di assistenza sociale* (Turin, 1937); this contains copies of all her reports to ONMI's provincial federation from 1927 to 1936. Daisy di Robilant became a major public figure. In 1931, she was appointed to the presidency of the National Council of Italian Women (*Consiglio Nazionale delle Donne Italiane*); in the same year, she was elected to the presidency of the International Commission for the Protection of Infancy by the International Council of Women, an organization representing 44 nations and over 40 million women worldwide. See 'Documenti ufficiali', *MI*, 5 (July, 1930), p. 661. The countess served as an international spokesperson for the regime and represented ONMI abroad at conferences on the welfare of women and children. She also acted as an official liaison with the League of Nations' Protection of Childhood Committee, which investigated fascism's new legislation towards illegitimates.
39. D. di Robilant, *L'assistenza obbligatoria agli illegittimi riconosciuti*, p. ii.
40. Claudio Pogliano makes reference to Daisy di Robilant's passionate pronatalist address at a conference on social welfare in Frankfurt in 1932; see his 'Scienza e stirpe: Eugenica in Italia, 1912-1939', in *Passato e presente: Rivista di storia contemporanea*, 5 (1984), pp. 61-99, 84. Her condemnation of birth control, however, can be interpreted in this context as a criticism of calls for compulsory eugenic sterilization and other antinatalist measures.
41. D. di Robilant, *L'assistenza obbligatoria*, p. ii.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 6, 43, and 68. See W. Z. Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge, 1993), ch. 7, for a discussion of the role of abortion in socialist population policy.
43. *L'assistenza obbligatoria*, p. 11 *et passim*.
44. The 1948 constitution of the Italian Republic began to clarify the legal position of children born from adulterous and incestuous unions: on this complex issue, see G. Fuà, 'Considerazioni sulla necessità di coordinamento della tutela dei cosiddetti "illegittimi" nel diritto pubblico e nel diritto privato: Esame di possibili riforme', in *I cosiddetti illegittimi*, pp. 200-17, esp. 205-6.
45. The law afforded young victims of rape or sexual abuse little protection: Italian jurists admitted that they had difficulty dealing with such cases because the law was woolly and biased. The fascist penal code dealt with rape and abuse under the heading of 'the corruption of minors', so defence attorneys succeeded at getting clients cleared by alleging that the victim was not a virgin at the time of the offence and could therefore not be corrupted. And in cases involving girls between the ages of 14 and 16, a presumption of a 'capacity to consent' to the sexual act biased prosecutions against plaintiffs; see case note files in *Rivista penale*, vol. iv (July-August, 1933), pp. 982-97.
46. *L'assistenza obbligatoria.*, pp. 11-12 *et passim*.

47. V. De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, pp. 62–3; on Teruzzi's leadership of the former National Union of Socialist Women, see F. Pieroni Bortolotti, *Sul movimento politico delle donne: Scritti inediti*, ed. A. Buttafuoco (Rome, 1987), pp. 49, 260.
48. ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–1943, b. 1261, f. 509817, sf. 3, correspondence from Regina Teruzzi to the PNF secretariat: see, for example, her letter of 4 April 1934, and the undated response from the Ministry of Justice; and see sf. 1, compagna per i figli illegittimi, which includes details of the letter campaign. Regulations on civil status were finally reformed in 1950 and 1955, when new laws outlawed reference to bastardy in state civil certificates, identification documents, and official acts: see G. Fuà, 'Considerazioni sulla necessità di coordinamento della tutela dei cosiddetti "illegittimi" nel diritto pubblico e nel diritto privato: Esame di possibili riforme', in *I cosiddetti illegittimi*, pp. 200–17, 200.
49. ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–1943, ONMI, b. 1261, f. 509817, sf. 3, Fabbri's *Prospettive assistenziali della prima infanzia*, pp. 29–30; and see the *Report on the Development*, pp. 52–3.
50. The code struck a compromise between the conservative values of an aristocratic age and the liberal principles of a bourgeois society. See G. Vismara, 'Dalla famiglia aristocratica alla famiglia borghese', in Comitato italiano per lo studio dei problemi della popolazione, *Demografia, storia e condizioni economico-sociali*, vol. 3 (Rome, 1974), pp. 61–82, esp. 80–1.
51. As early as the Ciceronian era, fathers began to circumvent the ban against female inheritance by establishing a *fedecomesso*, or trust, through a male third party, who would then pass on the family estate to a woman. The Napoleonic Code introduced the principle, if not the practice, of the equal division of patrimony amongst all children, regardless of gender; the 1865 code rescinded this egalitarian provision and reasserted the old customs of male inheritance, entail, and primogeniture. See R. P. Saller, 'Roman Heirship Strategies in Principle and Practice', in *The Family in Italy from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. D. I. Kertzer and R. P. Saller (New Haven and London, 1991), pp. 26–47, 34; and, on inheritance rights, as set out in the third book of the 1865 code, see M. Bellomo, *La condizione giurica della donna in Italia*, pp. 120–2, 124–8.
52. On Oviglio's appeals in the chamber and the senate, see Camera dei Deputati, Legislatura XXVII, *La legislazione fascista, 1922–1928*, vol. 1 (Rome, 1929), pp. 295–7.
53. See his 'Discorso per l'inaugurazione dell'anno giudiziario della cassazione', in *Rivista penale*, vol. iii (January–June, 1932), pp. 1–21, 2.
54. During the war, politicians grew fearful that Italian women were being raped and impregnated by Germans. The exceptional legislation of 1919 was partly in response to those anxieties; for a justification of abortion, on those grounds, see G. Sabatini, 'Stato di necessità e dolo in tema di aborto procurato', *Rivista penale*, new series, vol. lxi (January and May, 1935), pp. 308–22.
55. S. Longhi, 'Discorso per l'inaugurazione dell'anno giudiziario della cassazione', in *Rivista penale*, vol. iii (January–June, 1932), pp. 1–21; and see, C. Predella, 'La piccola adozione', in *Rivista penale*, new series, vol. lxi (January–May, 1935), pp. 349–55.
56. Reformers argued that in cases involving cohabitating unmarried parents there should be a presumption of paternity in the same way that the children born to married people were presumed to be the husband's.
57. *La legislazione fascista, 1922–1928*, vol. 1, p. 332.

58. *L'assistenza obbligatoria*, pp. 9; 11–12.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
60. See, for example, *ibid.*, p. 100.
61. *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11; 17; 20; 23–33; 41; 70.
62. ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–1943, ONMI, b. 1261, f. 509817, sf. 3, letter from the countess dated 12 July 1937 and Sebastiani's undated *appunti* for the Duce.
63. *L'assistenza obbligatoria*, pp. 37; 63.
64. *Report on the Development*, p. 22.
65. ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–1943, ONMI, b. 1261, f. 509817, sf. 3, letter from di Robilant to Mussolini, 17 November 1933.
66. ACR, ASS, ONMI – federazione e comitato di patronato di Roma, ispettorato dell' ONMI, f. 755, sf. 1, zona-Esquilino Celio, refettorio gestito dall'assistenza materna, letter of 27 May 1936 with details of these arrangements.
67. ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–43, ONMI, b. 1261, f. 509817, sf. 3, di Robilant's lengthy appeal to Mussolini, sent in July 1937, p. 7.
68. *L'assistenza obbligatoria*, pp. 54; 91.
69. See the documents pertaining to the second shelter, which was opened in 1929 in Trastevere, in ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–43, b. 346, f. 120.135, Roma-Casa di Assistenza Materna. A list of house rules therein reveals that residents had to attend mass, wear simple dress, and get permission to leave the *casa* and have contact with anyone on the outside. The divide between state-run welfare and Catholic-controlled charity still remained blurred: *Regolamento della Casa Assistenza Materna* (Rome, 1930), pp. 2–7.
70. *Ibid.*, letter of 20 July 1931, from Mussolini's secretary to the home; letter of 29 October 1931 from the shelter to the Duce.
71. *L'assistenza obbligatoria*, p. 38.
72. ACR, ASS, ONMI – federazione e comitato di patronato di Roma, ispettorato dell'ONMI, f. 755, sf. 1, zona-Esquilino Celio, refettorio gestito dall' assistenza materna, reports of 27 May 1936, 3 June 1936, and 27 April 1937 from the accounting office of ONMI's communal committee in Rome.
73. *L'assistenza obbligatoria*, p. 105; ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–1943, ONMI, b. 1261, f. 509817, sf. 3, Di Robilant's 1937 report to Mussolini, p. 2.
74. *L'assistenza obbligatoria*, pp. 15–16; 24–6; 37–9; 51; 62.
75. ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–43, ONMI, b. 1261, f. 509817, sf. 1, letter from Blanc to Mussolini, 15 March 1928.
76. ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–1943, ONMI, b. 1261, f. 509817, sf. 3, di Robilant's letter to Mussolini, 17 November 1933.
77. *L'assistenza obbligatoria*, pp. 31–33; 105.
78. *Ibid.*, pp. 17–23.
79. ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–43, ONMI, b. 1261, f. 509817, sf. 3, undated record of a telephone conversation between a local patronessa of ONMI and a member of the organization's provincial federation.
80. See, for example, IPAIL, Provincia di Roma, riservati personali, file named Comune di Poli, letter dated 13 November 1933 from the president of ONMI's provincial federation to the president of its committee of patrons in Poli concerning protests over the late payments of subsidies.
81. *L'assistenza obbligatoria*, pp. 71; 80–82.
82. A. Montani, *Tre anni di presidenza al Brefotrofio di Roma*, pp. 24–7.
83. ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–43, Istituto Materno Regina Elena, b. 218, f. e/pse 487, letter dated 28 April 1930 from the lawyer and sub-commissioner of ONMI's

- provincial federation in Rome, Carlo Scotti, to the Duce. Scotti also served as the prefectorial commissioner of Rome's Congregation of Charity; in this capacity, he played a big part in the foundation of the institute, which relied on private funding, and was jointly managed by the congregation and ONMI.
84. *L'assistenza obbligatoria*, pp. 62; 69; 79; 87.
 85. *Ibid.*, pp. 113–15, for the text of the law; and see, *L'ONMI dalla sua ...*, p. 88.
 86. *L'assistenza obbligatoria*, pp. 82; 91.
 87. *Ibid.*, pp. 105; 110.
 88. ACR, ASS, ONMI – federazione e comitato di patronato di Roma, ispettorato dell'ONMI, f. 755, sf. 1, zona-Esquilino Celio, documents concerning an inspection in 1937, which was clearly a set-up, and letters from di Robilant to the ONMI patronato in Rome, 6 August 1942 and 19 August 1943.
 89. ACS, PCM, 1937–9, f. 1/6–2, n. 7258, Roma – Assistenza Materno, letter from di Robilant to Marchese Medici del Vascello, under-secretary to the president, 25 July 1936, documenting inspections by the ONMI doctors, Michele and Cagliardi, at her refuges. See also, ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–43, ONMI, b. 1261, f. 509817, sf. 3, testimony of the Contessa Codurri Borromeo, 8 November 1933, concerning an inquest into the management of di Robilant's centre.
 90. ACS, CO, 1922–43, b. 346, f. 120.135, Roma – assistenza materna, protest letter from Maria Magri Zopegni, 31 March 1940; protest letter from Cornella Bianchi and Margherita Gatti, 30 July 1942.
 91. Frontoni served as president until May 1943. *L'Opera Nazionale per la Protezione della Maternità e dell'Infanzia*, pp. 64; 222.
 92. ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–1943, ONMI, b. 1261, f. 509817, sf. 1, booklet entitled *Realizzazioni del fascismo: L'asilo materno dell' ONMI in Monterotondo* (Rome, 1939).
 93. On the term 'secular' or 'political' religion, see E. Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, trans. K. Botsford (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1996), esp. pp. 153–61.
 94. ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–43, ONMI, b. 1261, f. 509817, sf. 3, Sileno Fabbri's *Prospettive assistenziali della prima infanzia*, pp. 14–15.
 95. *L'ONMI dalla sua ...*, p. 88.
 96. S. Fabbri, *Direttive e chiarimenti intorno allo spirito informatore della legislazione riguardante l' ONMI e alle sue pratiche applicazioni*, pp. 24–44; C. Bergamaschi, *L' ONMI – Motivi e proposte di riforma*, pp. 19–21.
 97. *L' ONMI dalla sua ...*, pp. 88; 216; 219.
 98. ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–43, ONMI, b. 1261, f. 509817, sf. 3, letter from Blanc to Mussolini, 15 March 1928; *L' ONMI dalla sua ...*, p. 87; A. Blanc, 'Relazione sullo sviluppo dell'attività dell'ONMI', *MI* (November, 1931), pp. 1080–146.
 99. *L' ONMI dalla sua ...*, p. 88.
 100. 'Documenti ufficiali', *MI* (February, 1931), pp. 143–5; 'Documenti ufficiali', *MI* (April, 1932), pp. 459–62.
 101. See, for example, A. Lo Monaco-Aprile, 'Il valore etico dell'assistenza alle madri illegittime', *MI*, 4 (November 1930), pp. 1111–18; *Report on the Development*, p. 6; S. Fabbri, *Prospettive assistenziali*, p. 14. Di Robilant accused critics of the 1927 reform of indulging in the 'politica dello struzzo'. These 'ostriches', she claimed, preferred the old foundling home system because of their prejudice and ignorance: *L' assistenza obbligatoria*, p. 1.
 102. *The Papal Encyclicals: 1903–1939*, ed. C. Carlen Ihm (Raleigh, NC, 1981), pp. 223; 411–12.
 103. G. Giannini, 'Il convegno nazionale dei delegati provinciali dell'ONMI', *MI*, 6 (July, 1932), pp. 629–51, esp. 632–6.

104. *L' ONMI dalla sua ...*, p. 88.
105. On local government finance in the interwar years, see D. J. Forsyth, *The Crisis of Liberal Italy*, pp. 275–7.
106. ASM, GP, cat. 12, ONMI, b. 378, contains a full list of ONMI staff in Milan, dated 4 December 1930.
107. ACS, Fondo S.P.D.- CO, n. 2023, S. Fabbri, *L'Attività della federazione provinciale milanese dell' ONMI durante il 1928* (undated), pp. 40–1.
108. ACS, PCM, 1928–30, f. 1, sf. 6.2, p. 6968, Milano – federazione provinciale dell' ONMI, Relazione di Bianca Fabbri, March 1931, p. 13; and ASM, GP, cat. 12, ONMI, b. 378, which contains reports from ONMI's provincial federation to the prefect; in particular, see the one dated 10 January 1933.
109. S. Fabbri, *Prospettive assistenziali della prima infanzia*, pp. 23–6.; and his *Direttive e chiarimenti*, p. 44–5.
110. ACS, PCM, 1928–30, f. 1, sf. 6.2, p. 6134, Mantova – federazione provinciale dell' ONMI, Raccolta della più importanti circolari emanate dalla federazione, Atti della federazione, and Memoriale dalla federazione alla sede centrale dell' ONMI.
111. ACS, Min. Interno, GB, ONMI, b. 1, f. 97, Situazione illegittimi (1940–41), pp. 2–3 *et passim*.
112. 'Le nascite illegittime in Italia dal 1924 al 1937', *MI* (July–October, 1938), pp. 314–16, 315.
113. ACS, Min. Interno, GB, ONMI, b. 1, f. 97, Situazione illegittimi (1940–41), pp. 4–5.
114. *Inchiesta sui brefotrofi*, p. 30.
115. F. Rasi, 'Stato attuale delle istituzioni I.P.A.I. in Italia', *I cosiddetti illegittimi*, pp. 10–39, 19.
116. G. Alessandri, 'La delinquenza nei minorenni', *MI*, 2 (January, 1927), pp. 30–3.
117. Ministero di Grazia e Giustizia, *Lavori preparativi del codice penale e del codice di procedura penale*, vol. v (Rome, 1929), p. 8; N. Mezzetti, *Alfredo Rocco nella dottrina e nel diritto della rivoluzione fascista* (Rome, 1930), pp. 14–20.
118. Documenti ufficiali, 'I centri di osservazioni per minorenni nelle direttive dell' ONMI', *MI*, 10 (May, 1935), p. 18.
119. Documenti ufficiali, 'Contributi dell' ONMI all'antropologia e psicologia criminale', *MI*, 10 (June, 1935), pp. 1–7.
120. ASM, GP, categoria 12, b. 378, minorenni fermati per misure di p.s. od abbandonati, 1927–32, contains numerous documents from Milan's chief of police concerning the operations; see especially letters to the prefect, dated 6 May 1927 and 22 March 1927. And on the role of private charities in the battle against child crime and the abandonment of children, see ACS, PCM, 1926–30, f. 1, sf. 1.6, P. 2023, Milano–Opera Cardinal Ferrari, nuovo palazzo per rieducazione delle anime travagliate, 14 August 1926.
121. ASCP, CS, no. 56, categoria 5, 1935–40, lavoro delle donne e dei minorenni, letter of 21 May 1935 from the inspector of corporations to the mayor of Pavia; letter of 31 May 1935 from PNF secretary to the mayor of Pavia outlining the system.
122. Documenti, 'Abbandono di persone minori', *Rivista penale*, vol. iv (July/August, 1933), p. 956.
123. 'Statistica delle carceri', *Rivista penale*, vol. lxxv (1907), pp. 247–9 gives the 1902 figure of imprisoned minors as 8827; G. Spano, *Notizie sui reformati e sulle sezioni per minorenni nelle carceri giudiziarie* (Rome, 1923), p. 219; ISTAT, *Statistica degli istituti di prevenzione e di pena, 1938–1948* (Rome, 1954), p. 60.
124. On the compulsory sterilization of mothers of more than one illegitimate child under Nazism, see G. Bock, 'Antinatalism, maternity, and paternity in National

- Socialist Racism', *Maternity and Gender Politics*, pp. 233–55, 239; and, by the same author, 'Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilization, and the State', in *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, ed. R. Bridenthal, A. Grossmann and M. Kaplan (New York, 1984), pp. 271–96.
125. C. Saraceno, 'Women, Family, and the Law, 1750–1942', *Journal of Family History*, 15:4 (1990), pp. 427–42, 436.
 126. P. Ungari, *Storia del diritto di famiglia in Italia* (Bologna, 1974), pp. 229–32.
 127. G. Maranini, 'Gli illegittimi nel progetto del nuovo codice civile', *MI* 12 (May–June, 1938), pp. 188–93, 189.
 128. *ONMI dalla sua ...* pp. 93–9.
 129. See, for example, ISTAT, *Statistica giudiziaria civile e commerciale per gli anni 1936–xiv-1937–xv* (Rome, 1939), pp. xxiii–xxiv.
 130. G. Maranini, 'Gli illegittimi nel progetto del nuovo codice civile', p. 191.
 131. C. Torricelli and G. Bizzi, 'Risultati dell'assistenza medico-sociale elargita dagli istituti provinciali di assistenza all'infanzia e proposte per un ulteriore miglioramento', *I cosiddetti illegittimi*, pp. 17–39, 30; C. Saraceno, 'Trent'anni di storia della famiglia italiana', *Studi storici*, 4 (1979), pp. 833–56, 851.
 132. On the survival of patriarchal attitudes in Italian culture today, see T. Lagostena Bassi, 'Violence Against Women and the Response of Italian Institutions', *Visions and Revisions: Women in Italian Culture*, ed. M. Cicioni and N. Prunster (Providence, RI and Oxford, 1993), pp. 199–212; V. A. Goddard, *Gender, Family and Work in Naples* (Oxford, 1996), ch. 8.

10 An Italian Social Revolution?

1. On the concept of civil society, see J. R. Llobera, *The God of Modernity: The Development of Nationalism in Western Europe* (Oxford and Providence, RI, 1994), pp. 124–31.
2. E. Holt, *The Making of Italy, 1815–1870*, intro., L. Barzini (New York, 1971), p. 11.
3. F. Della Peruta, 'Sanità pubblica e legislazione sanitaria dall'unità a Crispi', *Studi storici*, 21 (1980), pp. 713–60.
4. The epithet comes from the famous pamphlet written by Gaetano Salvemini in 1909, *Il ministro della malavita, con scritti di Ugo Ojetti e Luigi Lucatelli* (2nd edn Rome, 1919); and see G. Ansaldo, *Il ministro della buona vita: Giolitti e i suoi tempi* (Milan, 1949).
5. G. M. Leubbert, *Liberalism, Fascism or Social Democracy: Social Classes and the Political Origins of Regimes in Interwar Europe*, preface by D. Collier and S. M. Lipset (New York and Oxford, 1991), p. 95.
6. T. Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (1979; reprinted Cambridge, 1980), ch. 1, esp. pp. 4 and 33.
7. On the narrow parasitism and parochialism of provincial bourgeois politics in liberal Italy, see J. Morris, *The Political Economy of Shopkeeping in Milan, 1866–1922* (Cambridge and New York, 1993), pp. 90–1, which argues that even in such a cosmopolitan city as Milan, middle-class burghers were not prepared to endorse any project to build a strong central state. Regionalism, municipalism, and campanilism were impediments to the development of a national bourgeoisie with a sense of civic duty and a welfare consciousness.
8. The term appears in W. Harbutt Dawson, *Social Insurance in Germany, 1883–1911* (London and Leipzig, 1912), p. 1.
9. J. Hage and R. A. Hanneman, 'The Growth of the Welfare State in Britain, France, Germany and Italy: A Comparison of Three Paradigms', pp. 56–60.

10. A. De Swaan, *In Care of the State*, pp. 1, 11–12.
11. A. Shola Orloff and T. Skocpol, 'Why Not Social Protection?: Explaining the Politics of Public Social Spending in Britain, 1900–1911, and the United States, 1880s–1920', *American Sociological Review*, 49 (December, 1984), pp. 726–50, 733–5. And see *Il liberalismo in Italia e in Germania*, ed. A. Lill and N. Matteucci, (Bologna, 1980).
12. D. Preti, *Economia e istituzioni nello stato fascista*, pp. 207–15, 210.
13. A. Lyttelton, 'Italian Fascism', *Fascism: A Reader's Guide*, ed., W. Laqueur (1976; reprinted Aldershot, 1991), pp. 125–50, 127.
14. R. Vivarelli, 'Interpretations of the Origins of Fascism', *Journal of Modern History*, 63:1 (March, 1991), pp. 29–43.
15. In examining the impact of the 'fascist social revolution', some significant interpretations of Nazism focus exclusively on class as the sole category of analysis: see, for example, P. Baldwin, 'Social Interpretations of Nazism: Renewing a Tradition', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 25 (1990), 5–37; T. W. Mason, *Social Policy in the Third Reich: The Working Class and the 'National Community'*, translated by J. Broadwin, edited by J. Caplan, and introduced by U. Vodel (Oxford and Providence, RI, 1993), esp. ch. 5; and I. Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (1985; 3rd ed. London and New York, 1993), ch. 7. see also R. J. B. Bosworth, *The Italian Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of Mussolini and Fascism* (London and New York, 1998), ch. 6. Though somewhat marred by its concern to dethrone Renzo De Felice, Bosworth's work does posit a broader definition of fascist social ideology and policy that, for example, considers such important determinants as gender.
16. ACS, SPD, CR, 1922–43, b. 32, Gran Consiglio, n. sf. 15, problemi demografici, inserto A, marzo 1937–xv, 'la relazione Bottai.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., S. E. De Stefani, ministro di stato, 'L'Obbligo del matrimonio e della filiazione', 2 marzo 1937.
19. Ibid., details of intercepted telephone calls of a German journalist, working for newspaper in Munich, and another German journalist, working for a newspaper in Berlin, 2 March 1937; and Felici's 'Brevi considerazioni'.
20. ACS, SPD, CO, 1922–1943, ONMI, b. 1261, f. 509817, sf. 1, report on the functioning of the union, June 1937.
21. F. E. Loffredo, 'Problemi demografici', *Difesa sociale*, 16 (January/February, 1938), pp. 191–5.
22. Reported in Anon 'Il partito e il razzismo italiano', *La difesa della razza*, I (5 August 1938), p. 2.
23. G. Bernadini, 'The Origins and Development of Racial Anti-Semitism in Fascist Italy', *Journal of Modern History*, 49 (1977), pp. 431–53.
24. On ONMI's confused attempts to make sense of the implications of racism for welfarism, see C. Bergamaschi, 'La difesa della razza e L'ONMI', *MI*, 13 (July/October, 1938), pp. 243–51; for the 1938 anti-semitic legislation, see *LEX: Provvedimenti legislativi*, vol. xlvii (Turin, 1938), pp. 1658–9, 1665, and 2097–9; and, for examples of the thinking behind the new biological racism, see R. Sertoli Salis, 'La definizione del concetto giuridico di razza', *La difesa della razza*, III (5 April 1940), pp. 36–9; and G. Lampis, 'La tutela della razza nel libro I del nuovo codice civile', *Razza e civiltà*, I (March, 1940), pp. 69–81.

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Gabinetto

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Segreteria Particolare del Duce (1922–43)

Carteggio Ordinario

Carteggio Riservato

B. Archivio del Comune di Roma (Via Merulina, 123)*

Assistenza e Servizi Sociali

Ispettorato dell'ONMI

*These sources do not belong to a formal archive. The department of social services in Rome granted me permission to examine their own records, which contain documents from the fascist period.

C. Archivio dell'Istituto Provinciale di Assistenza all'Infanzia Illegittima, Provincia di Roma (Viale Villa Pamphili, 84)*

Archivio della Federazione Provinciale di ONMI e del Comitato di Patronato di Roma
Schedari Personali Riservati dell'ONMI

*This building is the former Holy Saint Foundling Hospital in Rome which has been converted into a branch of provincial social services. The ONMI documents do not belong to a formal repository and are in great disorder. I have adhered to the classifications as they appear on records. I also consulted a number of sources there which are located in their large library.

D. Archivio di Stato di Alessandria*

Gabinetto della Prefettura

Cartelle Speciali

*At the time of research, the documents from the Alessandria archive lacked a catalogue, which was being compiled. I have adhered to the classifications as they appear on records.

E. Archivio di Stato di Ferrara

Gabinetto della Prefettura

F. Archivio di Stato di Milano

Gabinetto della Prefettura

Categoria 5 (Questura)

Categoria 12 (ONMI)

Categoria 24 (Demografia)

Categoria 42 (Sanità)

G. Archivio di Stato di Torino

Gabinetto della Prefettura

H. Archivio di Stato di Vercelli*

Gabinetto della Prefettura (Serie I)

Archivio dell'ONMI

*At the time of research, the fascist archives in Vercelli were being reordered and moved to new buildings. Some of the files in the holdings of the prefecture were already given new numbers, but there was no table of equivalence. In my references I have cited both the new classification where such exists and the original number which appears in parentheses: such as *mazzo* 71 (86). My classification is subject to change.

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