3 The Fascist Labour Charter and its transnational spread

Matteo Pasetti

In May 1937, on the tenth anniversary of the Labour Charter (Carta del Lavoro), Mussolini's regime promoted a series of cultural activities to celebrate the event. Among others, a special issue of *Civiltà Fascista* – an important monthly review published by the National Institute of Fascist Culture (Istituto Nazionale di Cultura Fascista) – glorified the Labour Charter as the universal manifesto of corporatism. The aim was not to emphasize the role of the Charter in the construction of the Italian corporatist state, but its importance in the history of modern political thought and especially its influence abroad on the institutional systems of several nations. In particular, an article by Anselmo Anselmi – an official of the Italian Ministry of Corporations – took stock of the general situation, arguing that fascist corporatism had affected both dictatorial regimes (such as Portugal, Austria and Germany), democratic reformist plans (such as the New Deal in the United States) and left-wing governments (such as the Popular Front in France).[1] Furthermore, correspondents from all over the world described the influence of the Labour Charter in other countries, such as Spain, Romania, Hungary, Switzerland and even Japan.[2] Altogether, thanks to its corporatist policy, Fascist Italy appeared as an ideological lighthouse during the hard times of the Great Depression.

The propagandistic purpose of this fascist message is quite clear. At the same time it is equally clear that from the late 1920s the corporatist policy of Mussolini's regime and the Labour Charter resonated considerably around the world. Nevertheless, this transnational spread of fascist corporatism has received little attention in scholarship. Many treatises were published in the inter-war years that analysed, by means of a comparative approach, the similarities and differences between the various corporatist policies of that period.[3] However, there are very few historical studies that focus on the influence the fascist model had on the development of such political experiences.[4] This is specifically the topic of this chapter, in which we aim to trace the circulation of the fascist corporatist model, and in particular of the Labour Charter, as a 'travelling theory' in the political culture of inter-war Europe.[5] In other words, the subject is the perception, the attraction and the influence of fascist corporatism abroad. The purpose is to highlight its importance both to fascist supporters and to certain dictatorial experiments marked by a process of hybridization between authoritarianism and fascism.[6]

Indeed, corporatism – meant as both an ideological discourse and a set of concrete policies – provided legitimacy to the fascist option. Therefore, focusing on the transnational spread of the Italian corporatist model is important in order to revisit the history of Fascism and its significance in that epoch. Its spread revealed the influence of Mussolini's regime on the ideological debate, as well as on socio-economic policies and institutional reforms carried out in other countries. In short, during the inter-war period, fascist corporatism played a 'politically decisive' role in Europe and beyond.[7] By crossing borders, connecting intellectual circles and contaminating ideological currents, it influenced the evolution of political thought and policy-making as a real epochal factor.

In this regard, what Antonio Gramsci wrote in his notebooks during the first half of the 1930s is still striking. It is well known that in his *Quaderni del Carcere* he provided an ambivalent judgement on Fascism that was considered a reactionary, yet simultaneously innovative, response to the crisis of liberal democracy and to the unchaining of mass society. He recognized some elements of 'rationality' in the regime, beyond its anti-worker and anti-people nature.[8] Corporatism represented a good example of this ambivalence. In Gramsci's opinion, fascist corporatism behaved both as 'an economic police' that controlled the working class from above and as a tool of middle-class consent through its message of 'aversion towards the traditional forms of capitalism'. Moreover, it was a draft for the rationalization of the economic system, bringing about a mixed-economy that combined free market and state planning, but with no change to existing social hierarchies. Finally, corporatism looked to be able to provide a solution for the issue of the political representation of socio-economic interests, although – as Gramsci warned when writing in a fascist prison – 'to destroy the parliamentary system is not as easy as it seems'. For all these reasons, corporatism represented an option for current historical needs and was particularly suited to the new absolutism: namely, the new dictatorial regimes. In conclusion, while Fascism had a 'temporary' effect, corporatism had an epochal dimension.[9]

Corporatism as a keyword for the export of Fascism

The March on Rome at the end of 1922 attracted the attention of many foreign beholders, whose judgements ranged from condemnation to admiration.[10] While for many observers Mussolini's seizure of power was an unacceptable subversive act, many others did not see it as a taboo subject but, rather, as a new and stimulating way to take power. Over the following years, opinions expressing support for and, of course, opposition to the Italian regime continued to arrive from all over the world. On the tenth anniversary of the March, the Fascist propaganda machine had no difficulty putting together a wide selection of endorsements for celebratory purposes.[11]

As Wolfgang Schieder wrote when explaining the appeal of Mussolini's Italy in Weimar Germany, where thousands of articles and books on this topic were printed between 1922 and 1933, 'everyone viewed Fascism in their own way'.[12]

This is a key point to remember when addressing the issue of perceiving historical events. The reality of fascism has always been seen selectively: it is a matter of subjectivity, partiality of the human eye, deliberate choices and ideological convictions. Moreover, and especially during the 1920s, fascism was still evolving, so attempting to predict its future achievements would have been no easy task.[13] Undoubtedly, certain declarations of intent, as well as some legislative actions, unmasked the fact the Italian regime was moving towards totalitarianism. At the same time, the outcome of specific policies could not have been predicted precisely in its making. This is no excuse for those who were captivated by Italian Fascism. Instead, as Aristotle Kallis recently put it, in inter-war Europe the dynamic and multifaceted political space was crowded by actors who interacted with the emerging fascism, often regarding it with esteem or at least without negative preconceptions. They held different views of the evolution of fascism and borrowed different political 'lessons' from it.[14] This can help us understand both the movements that sought to emulate the Italian experience and the political forces which, with Fascism, shared *only* some ideals, values, purposes, enemies or fears. These forces were willing to defer on some aspects (even, for example, the systematic use of violence or the suppression of civil rights) if they saw in Fascism a potential solution to specific political issues. For this reason, corporatism was a keyword in the export of Fascism.

Even though interpretations of Fascism differed, due to divergent political sensitivities and ideological convictions, most observers were shocked by Mussolini's success and his ability to overthrow the liberal democratic order. Nevertheless, Fascism was initially described mainly as a purely reactionary phenomenon, simply another example of Bonapartism, and not as a new revolutionary dictatorship. In the opinion of some Fascists, this interpretation revealed a misunderstanding of the true nature of events in Italy – which, as Camillo Pellizzi suggested, had to be corrected. Professor of literature at the University of London from 1920 to 1938 and promoter of the local branch of the Italian Fasci Abroad (Fasci Italiani all'Estero), he recommended the Italian government invest 'energy and money in order to disseminate the principles, the systems and the real history of Fascism in all the major countries of the world'.[15] And it was precisely the corporatist programme that could work as the perfect tool for such a goal because it best expressed the social, revolutionary, universal and modern face of Fascism.

Indeed, of the watchwords of Italian Fascism, corporatism was one that from the outset attracted considerable attention abroad. In the early years of Mussolini's government, some Fascist proclamations – including those addressing the end of class struggle, the integration of organized interests in the state and the need for a new political representation as an alternative to liberal democracy – crossed national borders. Even before the introduction of a corporatist policy, which came with trade union reform signed by Minister of Justice Alfredo Rocco in 1926, these announcements aroused the interest of various protagonists of the corporatist 'revival' that European political culture was experiencing.

Corporatist programmes were widespread in many countries after the First World War. Sometimes these plans modernized old corporatist traditions from

the nineteenth century with new ideas. Even though the manifold formulations of corporatist theories do not lend themselves to being classified in a taxonomic scheme, it is possible to identify at least three main political currents with corporatist leanings: Social Catholicism (political parties such as Austria's Christian Socialists [Christlichsoziale Partei]), radical nationalism (movements like Integralismo Lusitano in Portugal and Charles Maurras' Action Française in France) and guild socialism (especially G. D. H. Cole and *The New Age* circle in the United Kingdom).[16] Moreover, the principle of corporatism inspired various reform programmes that, regardless of their political source, moved in two directions. On the one hand, corporatism seemed the best way to change the system of labour relations. By establishing institutional bodies capable of resolving disputes between workers and employers, it was able to promote a kind of self-government of the production system in order to regulate labour relations and eliminate social conflict. The aim was to develop collaboration between all the components of the production system, bring an end to class struggle and build a harmonious society. On the other hand, corporatism seemed the best tool to provide political representation of economic interests. By replacing the classic parliamentary system of the liberal state, which was based on a form of popular representation of an ideological or territorial type, with a system founded on direct representation of social groups, it could give voice to economic interests in the legislative assembly. The aim was the inclusion of organized interests in the political institutions, to manage both economic policy and the economy itself, and thus protect it from the anarchy of the free market.[17]

However, in the immediate aftermath of the war and the early 1920s, all attempts to proceed in one direction or another failed. With the exception of the short-lived regimes of Sidónio Pais in Portugal and Gabriel D'Annunzio in the Italian Regency of Carnaro, no corporatist parliament was provided for in any of the new constitutions (more than 20, according to the French-Russian jurist Boris Mirkine-Guetzevitch).[18] And none of the other reformist experiments (as, for example, the national economic councils established in Weimar Germany in 1920 [Reichswirtschaftsrat] and in France in 1925 [Conseil National Économique]) provided institutional tools for governing labour conflicts and managing the production system through formal collaboration between organized interests. This was because – at best – only advisory councils possessing no effective decision-making powers were provided.[19]

Nevertheless, the development of theories and programmes of a corporatist nature in many countries and different political circles meant corporatist rhetoric carried Italian Fascism across political boundaries. Not only did it place the 'modern' side of Fascism in the spotlight, but it attracted a broader political spectrum of followers. Indeed, of all the ideological ingredients of an extremist movement – its radical stance concerning the use of violence, the negation of pluralism, the cult of the leader, the exaltation of the nation and the revision of the international order – corporatism was the one that could most easily be extrapolated and shared. One example of this is James Ramsay MacDonald. From December 1922, before becoming the first Labour Prime

Minister of the United Kingdom, he exchanged ideas with the Italian Fascist Camillo Pellizzi on the new-born Mussolini government and its corporatist plan. The Labour leader acknowledged that perhaps it was 'wrong' to consider Fascism as the 'kind of counter-revolution' it was portrayed in the British press. He asked Pellizzi for a written text with a clarification and an explanation of the foundations of the fascist corporatist doctrine and its links with socialism.[20] Pellizzi agreed to this proposal and his article was published a few months later in the monthly review of the Labour Party.[21] In short, the keyword 'corporatism' was able to connect Fascism even with political circles as far afield as the British Labour Party.

An epoch-making turn

If from the early 1920s corporatist plans introduced fascism into certain environments of European political debate, further attention was drawn towards the Italian regime with the introduction of a policy to regulate labour relations. As yet the subject of little academic research, the general opinion is that fascist corporatism gained political importance during the 1930s in the wake of the Great Depression, when in fact its transnational success came earlier.

Corporatist institutions were introduced into Fascist Italy in 1926–27, and, as many foreign observers acknowledged at that time, it represented a turning point in the development of a new model for governing organized interests. For example, Eduardo Aunós Pérez, a Catalan jurist who had been appointed Labour Minister under the dictatorship of General Miguel Primo de Rivera, wrote that

> in the contemporary era, corporations reappeared nominally, for the first time, with the Charter of Carnaro, … but complete legislation was introduced in Italy on 3 April 1926 through the law providing legal regulation of labour, and which laid its foundations on official state recognition of associations.[22]

The main architect of the corporatist order constructed in Spain from November 1926 to the end of the decade, he admitted his intellectual debt to Fascism and the primacy of the Italian laboratory.[23]

In April 1926, the Italian regime approved a new legal order for collective labour relations drawn up by Justice Minister Alfredo Rocco, which was supplemented with two royal decrees in July. This law must be considered a cornerstone of the Fascist state. Its provisions defined three cardinal rules of corporatist policy: first, the authoritarian regulation of labour conflict through the abolition of the right to strike and lockout and the creation of the labour courts (Magistratura del Lavoro); second, the Fascist monopoly on labour relations through the legal recognition of a sole employer association and a single trade union for every sector; and third, the creation of the first corporatist bodies through the constitution of the Ministry of Corporations and the National Council of Corporations (Consiglio Nazionale delle Corporazioni – which became operative only

in 1930).[24] These elements created a new model of corporatism, a first for its authoritarian structure and its strict subordination to the state.

The following year, the Labour Charter provided this model with a sort of constitutional statute. The first nine of its 30 articles established the ideological framework, institutional structure and social ethics of the corporatist state. The others concerned the fundamental rules of collective bargaining, the functions of employment bureaux and the development of national insurance and professional training. Although the Labour Charter had no juridical value, it made the spirit of Fascist policy explicit. The first article provided that

> the Italian nation is an organism having ends, life and means that are superior, for potency and duration, to those of the individuals or groups of which it is composed. It is a moral, political and economic unity, realized wholly in the fascist state.[25]

Moreover, from its promulgation in April 1927, the Labour Charter was heralded by its promoter as a 'universal document': the official manifesto of Italian Fascism in the international arena. In a speech to the Chamber of Deputies on 1 June 1927, the undersecretary of the Ministry of Corporations, Giuseppe Bottai, stated that the Labour Charter should provide the *summa* of principles for 'a new epoch'. For this reason, he declared, 'it was winning great admiration all over the world', showing once again the revolutionary essence of Fascism. By that, Bottai did not support 'certain foreign interpretations that [were] seeing left-wing leanings in the development of Fascism' – he wished to extend his perspective beyond national borders: 'the Labour Charter is not only the document of great national thinking, namely Italy's, but also a manifestation of universal value'.[26]

In Bottai's words, therefore, through this corporatist charter Italy regained its pre-eminence among nations, placing itself at the cutting edge of the regulation of organized interests from above. Labour legislation, according to fascist rhetoric, created the all-important co-operation between all the social actors of the productive system in the national interest. Of course, this line of reasoning was nothing but a form of self-representation with propagandistic aims, and such co-operation was far from the reality. However, although the Labour Charter was devoid of juridical law, and its description of Italian corporatist order was only an ideological smokescreen, it did achieve fame throughout Europe and beyond. From the late 1920s to the end of the Second World War it was a central issue of political debate on corporatist reform of the capitalist state, drawing attention to the Italian regime at international level. Crucially, it was able to hide other aspects of Fascism, such as its totalitarian leanings. Moreover, as Bottai himself stressed when closing his parliamentary speech, fascist corporatism was more than a project, it was moving towards its fulfilment: 'the *practical* outcome of our legislation exceeds those of any others'.[27] And beyond so many empty words, this empirical realization of a corporatist policy was the real secret of the fascist model.

The Labour Charter seen from abroad

Political and juridical literature of the late 1920s and early 1930s referred to the Rocco Law as a turning point in the development of corporatism, and to the Labour Charter as its new manifesto. The four samples below sketch a fragmentary outline of the European attraction to the fascist model. Obviously, these few examples do not convey a complete picture, because the interpretations were manifold and contained different shades. Instead, they can be understood as some paradigmatic cases focusing the travelling potential of fascist corporatism, how it crossed national borders and entered various political areas, and not just specifically fascist movements and regimes. Interest in the Italian corporatist plan was demonstrated by exponents of the nationalist and radical right, Catholic and conservative milieu, reformist groups, international organizations and even socialist movements. Despite differing and, at times, divergent points of view, all acknowledged the political value of the Labour Charter.

A British conservative intellectual

If we seek an enthusiastic opinion on the Labour Charter and the fascist corporatist state, excluding those expressed by the Italian regime, it is difficult to find one more laudatory than the following:

> The Corporative solution is surely far the best and most human, for it educates both parties in the policy, the needs and welfare of the other, emphasizing their unity of interest in the industry, and draws out the energy and loyalty of both by the regular business of co-operation. The remuneration of the workmen is only one of the many questions decided in the common councils and thus is seen in due proportion to the rest. The Councils and Corporations and Intersyndical Committees have one task: that of harmonizing and reconciling and promoting the various elements of production and of distribution in accordance with the Charter of Labour, *an epoch-making public document*, which is not so much a code of laws as a code of equity, an ethic of Labour embodied in a number of maxims or guiding principles, many of which had already been implied in this administrative machinery. This Magna Carta of Labour was published on April 30th, 1926, [*sic*] and only the fact that it was issued in a language little known outside Italy … prevented it from being recognized as one of the cardinal documents of the modern world.[28]

The author was Harold E. Goad (1878–1956), an English poet and journalist who lived in Florence, where from 1923 he led the British Institute (an assignment that he held until 1939). He came from a conservative background, but during the long stay in Italy he got closer to Fascism and wrote some pamphlet on Mussolini's regime.[29] His aim was to illustrate the successes of the fascist corporatist policy to an English audience. This analysis was superficial and full of inaccuracies, as a few years later Gaetano Salvemini showed it with scornful

words.[30] However, Goad's praise provides an example of the transnational spread of a myth – that is the Labour Charter as an epoch-making document – which reached the foreign public opinion and connected different political circles. And as in other cases, Pellizzi was the main intermediary.[31]

A Dutch Catholic right-wing activist

Herman de Vries de Heekelingen (1880–1941) represented a classic exponent of that part of the Catholic world that sympathized with fascism. A Dutchman with Swiss citizenship and professor of palaeography at the Catholic University of Nijmegen from 1923, towards the end of the 1920s his involvement with fascism resulted in him collaborating with the Lausanne-based International Centre for the Study of Fascism (CINEF – Centre International d'Études sur le Fascisme) led by Major James Strachey Barnes.[32] He was then engaged in the anti-Semitic campaign launched by World Service (Welt-Dienst) in Erfurt. A prominent racial anti-Semite in France in the 1930s, he sought a 'solution' to the 'Jewish question' and supported Zionism in order to 'liberate' Europe from the Jews.[33]

In his 1927 book on Mussolini's regime, Vries de Heekelingen maintained that fascism realized a perfect synthesis of Catholic values and sheltered the Latin civilization from the excesses of capitalism and the threat of communism.[34] A key factor for its success lay in achieving social peace through corporatist policy. The legal recognition of trade unions, the effectiveness of collective agreements, the establishment of the labour court and the prohibition of strikes and lockouts were the four pillars of the new labour organization in Italy. A crucial aspect for him was that the Labour Charter finally provided an ideological framework and strengthened popular consent for the regime. The Italian people gradually began trusting Mussolini, and a reading of the fundamental principles of the Labour Charter was sufficient to explain 'why almost all of the workers were becoming fascist or pro-fascist'.[35] Therefore, the example of Fascism would lead Europe out of class struggle and create a spiritually, politically and economically homogeneous society, as prescribed by the Catholic Church.

Like other Catholics, Vries de Heekelingen considered Fascism a reaction to modernity and a political antidote to the liberal state. At the same time, he perceived the importance of the innovations introduced by the regime from the mid-1920s, in regard to the organization of the masses, the social control, the integration of the society in the state. From his point of view, the start of a corporatist policy was an essential component of a new legitimizing way of the dictatorship, based both on coercion and consensus. This instance shows that the meeting between intransigent Catholicism and Fascism might take place not only on behalf of reactionary aims, but also in the name of an alternative modernity.

A French social reformist and leader of an international organization

Of all League of Nations institutions, the International Labour Organization (ILO) was most closely involved in the debate on the trade union policies in its

member countries. As provided in its statute, its main purpose was to defend the freedom of association and workers' rights.[36] For this reason, the fact that Italy was a dictatorship raised an obvious problem. At ILO annual conferences in Geneva from 1923, the delegates of fascist syndicates (first Edmondo Rossoni, followed by Luigi Razza and then Tullio Cianetti) always met with protests. After the introduction of the legislation of 1926 the Fascist regime became the target of harsh criticism, especially from representatives of socialist trade unions, including Léon Jouhaux, leader of the General Confederation of Labour (Confédération Générale du Travail) in France. However, Fascist delegates were never prevented from attending, and it was not until 1936, when the Italian government itself was at odds with the international order.[37]

Besides, even within the ILO, certain authoritative voices defended fascist corporatist policy and showed an authentic interest in the Labour Charter. First, there is the case of Albert Thomas (1878–1932). A prominent French socialist and Minister of Armament during the First World War, in 1919 he became Director General of the ILO and sought social justice and the modernization of labour laws.[38] Along with other social reformists, he was aware of the appeal of fascist corporatism. He was attracted above all by its practical achievements, such as state unionism, collective agreements, labour courts and compulsory arbitration.[39] On 4 May 1928, when Thomas attended the inauguration ceremony of the Italian Ministry of Corporations alongside Bottai, he wrote in his travel diary:

> It is not just in Italy, but in all countries that trade unions are becoming increasingly prominent in state organizations. This is a widespread development.… The trade union state is taking shape everywhere.… It would be stupid, moreover, to refute the idea because of political circumstances and the dictatorial method that Italy has come up with new and more systematic formula than elsewhere for all these necessary developments.[40]

According Thomas, although it was expression of a dictatorial regime that denied some essential rights, the Labour Charter gave a theoretical arrangement to a general trend. As an Italian Fascist government official remarked in reply to criticism from a part of the ILO, he shared Thomas' view in that the Labour Charter aroused so much admiration and so much hostility because it was 'a historical document in the higher sense of the word, because finally it closed an era and it opened another one'.[41]

A Spanish left-wing writer (and other 'non-conformist' socialists)

The Spanish writer Juan Chabás (1900–54), a member of the group of poets known as the 27 Generation (Generación del 27), was a left-winger who became a communist in the 1930s and joined the Republican forces in the Spanish Civil War. He was familiar with Italy because he had lived in Genoa, where he worked at the university from 1924 to 1926 before being expelled in 1927 for his criticism,

published in the Spanish press, of Mussolini's regime. However, in a 1928 book on fascism, he was positive about the Labour Charter, which he judged to be 'the most important achievement' of the Italian government.[42] His reason was that it applied the concept of the corporatist state to labour legislation, entrusting the organization and control of trade unions to the state. As Chabás noted, 'corporations thus assume a public, general and compulsory character'.[43] For this reason, Fascism should be considered a revolutionary movement, and not a reactionary or conservative phenomenon. For him it would be possible to export its corporatist experiment on one condition: 'The law of Mussolini contains various aspects and principles that enable a universal application, but to be able to incorporate them in their labour statutes many countries should give themselves a definitely more socialist mark'.[44] In other words, according to Chabás, corporatist policy and the Labour Charter stamped a left-wing seal on Fascism.

Mainly in France many young left-wing intellectuals shared the idea that there was a vital socialist component within Fascism. The attraction of Marcel Déat and his group of neo-socialists to 'the magnetic field of Fascism', and Jacques Doriot's transition from communism to fascism, which was ideologically motivated by the 'social' dimension of the Italian movement, are both well known.[45] The most notorious instance, however, was probably that of Henri De Man's 'planism', although his 'corporatist temptation' was at least partially a result of the attempt to weaken the fascist message by exploiting its ideas. In the early 1930s the leader of the Belgian Workers' Party (Parti Ouvrier Belge) looked carefully at the Labour Charter and the fascist experience as he prepared to launch his 1933 Labour Plan (Plan du Travail) for the government of national economy through an institutionalized collaboration between the organized interests.[46] In one part of the European left, the search for a 'third way' between liberal capitalism and Marxist socialism found a reference point in fascist corporatism, even if it did not imply the acceptance of fascism as a whole.

Despite some differences in interpretation, these perceptions of fascist corporatism from abroad agreed on certain issues. First, in most cases emphasis was placed on the innovative nature of Italian legislation. Fascism did not foresee a purely reactionary scheme, namely the elimination of trade unions, but their forced integration in the state. Second, there was trust in the workings of the corporatist system and in its ability to put an end to the dynamics of class struggle. In Italy, this appeared to have been eliminated thanks not only to repressive legislation denying fundamental freedoms such as the right to strike, but also through the establishment of new instruments, such as a special court for labour disputes. Third, it is clear that attention to, and often the admiration of, the fascist experience was a geographically widespread phenomenon. Political opinions came from the far corners of the European continent and at the same time from different ideological positions. It was not only the ranks of the extreme right who observed the Italian laboratory with curiosity.

To summarize, from 1926–27, the effect of Fascist trade union legislation and the Labour Charter reverberated across national boundaries and, as shown above, those who took seriously the development of the corporatist system belonged to

different political families on the European continent. Fascist corporatism therefore provided a new political option, fully introduced into the public debate on the issues of the regulation of social conflict, the representation of economic interests and reform of the state. For its authoritarian and state-centric imprint, the fascist model differed from earlier corporatist plans, but it prefigured some developing directives with universal appeal because they appeared to have been implemented with certain effectiveness by the Italian regime.[47] In fact, unlike the ephemeral attempts of the early 1920s, the fascist solution demonstrated the technical feasibility of labour control by corporatist policy from above. Furthermore, the Labour Charter became a document of reference, which was able to influence both the theoretical debate and the implementation of institutional reforms and new constitutions.

The Labour Charter exported abroad?

An early example of the influence of the fascist laboratory on other corporatist experiments came from Spain, under the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera. Here, in November 1926, Labour Minister Aunós Pérez signed the law for the institution of the National Corporatist Organization (ONC – Organización Nacional Corporativa), which shared some similarities to the system created in Italy by Rocco's legislation. In particular, as in the fascist model, the ONC was a centralized and state-led organization with a pyramidal structure that provided control over labour relations, even though it was different for other aspects: some degree of trade union freedom, the maintenance of the right to strike, collaboration with a part of the socialist movement instead of banning it and greater attention to the defence of workers' interests in its conciliation activity.[48]

However, it was mainly during the 1930s, following the outbreak of the Great Depression, that corporatist policies and institutions spread throughout Europe and the world. The impact of the crisis increased the fascist model's popularity, which is why Italy seemed less affected by the economic crash than other states, although the historical research has demonstrated this to be a myth fuelled by regime propaganda, as even Italy suffered an important slump.[49] Moreover, in these years Fascist propaganda activities abroad were enhanced in order to organize a real international movement.[50] For this purpose, corporatism was more than ever a keyword. Its transnational fortune, however, did not depend only on the power of the fascist rhetoric, as claimed by certain anti-fascists, but also by the fact that corporatism met real and widespread expectations.[51]

During that decade, the fascist prototype was joined by other corporatist systems in Salazar's Portugal, Dollfuss' Austria, Pilsudsky's Poland, Metaxas' Greece, Tiso's Slovakia, in the authoritarian regimes of Baltic countries and under the royal dictatorships in Bulgaria and Romania. Further corporatist plans were put in place in Latin America, especially in Getúlio Vargas' Brazil, where the presence of a large Italian enclave fostered the circulation of fascist slogans.[52] Even in the United States, part of the talk of economic planning within the New Deal group was inspired by corporatist experiments in Mussolini's regime: here,

according to Daniel Rodgers, 'corporatism's reputation was still in its high tide in the early 1930s, even among those repelled by the thuggish side of Italian Fascism'.[53]

As well as the Spanish case in the 1920s, each of these experiences was influenced in part by the Italian predecessor and local features. Apart from the more controversial case of the New Deal, these regimes were authoritarian dictatorships with certain elements of fascist hybridization that 'tended to create political institutions in which the function of corporatism was to give legitimation to organic representation and to ensure the co-optation and control of sections of the elite and organized interests',[54] while ensuring the repression of labour movements. Compared with the 1920s, the main innovation concerned attempts to introduce corporatist parliaments or chambers within the political systems, although everywhere its power within the legislative process was modest. This was achieved in Portugal in 1933, Austria in 1934, Estonia and Romania in 1938, and then in Italy in 1939. Because of this delay, while Mussolini's Italy had an important role as a reference 'social corporatism', its influence on the side of 'political corporatism' was much more limited.[55]

An emblematic example can be drawn from the Portuguese experience, which in an interview with António Ferro, Mussolini considered to be – alongside the Italian example – 'one of the most intelligent in Europe'.[56] The creation of the Portuguese New State (Estado Novo) was formalized in 1933 through a new constitution that laid the foundations for a corporatist republic. As for the political system, the reform approved by Salazar established a single legislative chamber – the Assembleia Nacional – with its deputies elected from a single list. The regime also included a consultative corporatist chamber to represent local autonomy and social interests. As for regulation of labour relations, the touchstone of the corporatist system was the September 1933 National Labour Statute (Estatuto do Trabalho Nacional), which outlined a long series of intermediate unions of workers and employers that would lead to the creation of corporations.[57] The influence of the fascist model on the genesis of this statute was quite clear, given the first article was an almost exact copy of the first article of the Italian Labour Charter: 'The Portuguese nation is a moral, political and economic union, the aims and interests of which are superior to those of individuals and groups of which it is composed'.[58]

Even Marcelo Caetano, one of the architects of the Portuguese corporatist state, acknowledged this. In a 1938 book describing the National Labour Statute, he said:

> The Italian school has undeniably influenced the making of Portuguese corporatist policy, as seen in the constitution of the New State and the National Labour Statute. The latter, in its structure and purpose, corresponds exactly to the Italian Labour Charter, from which certain doctrinal formulas and organizational principles have been translated. Just like fascist corporatism, Portuguese corporatism does not allow union freedom, in every district it gives the functions of representation and of professional discipline to authorized unions: namely, the national unions.[59]

However, as Caetano admitted on the same pages, the Portuguese experience did not stem from Italian Fascism alone. According to him and other scholars, it was the result of a mix of ingredients: a transfer from fascism as well as domestic currents of thought (especially Integralismo Lusitano and the Catholic corporatist doctrine, which had a long tradition in Portugal), as well as some other foreign theories resulting from the works of Othmar Spann and Mihail Manoilescu.[60] Furthermore, as scholarship has demonstrated, Francisco Rolão Preto's National Syndicalism (Movimento de Sindicalismo Nacional) – which was the main Portuguese fascist movement – did not contribute to the construction of this corporatist system.[61] On the one hand, the Italian prototype was more influential on the Catholic background of Salazar than on Rolão's Blue Shirts; on the other, Salazar used his corporatist project to deprive the national syndicalists of an attractive idea.

Ultimately, like the others, this corporatist system was the outcome of the hybridization of different corporatist traditions and experiences.[62] This occurred within a transnational network of political exchanges, of which Italian Fascism was one of the main protagonists, but not the only one. The fascist model exercised a broad influence, but it was not replicated in any one place.

Concluding remarks

On the tenth anniversary of the Labour Charter in 1937, while the Italian regime celebrated the universal fame of its corporatist model, corporatism really appeared as the 'third way'. At the same time, a wave of disapproval rose up against this myth from within the anti-fascist field; however, across a broad sweep of political culture the new 'epochal doctrine' was not yet discredited.[63] On the whole, during the late 1930s, the corporatist turn seemed to be the dominant process across much of the European continent and beyond. Many states had either adopted corporatist programmes, or intended to do so. Their main purpose was to realize a system of controlling labour relations and a different method for the political representation of the economic interests. In this way, the economy was 'embedded' in politics and the state regained its authority over society.

In each case, the search for a corporatist order arose from the idea of a national regeneration and the will to restore state control on the socio-economic dynamics. From this point of view, the experience of Mussolini's Italy represented a stimulating prototype, even if it was incomplete and lacked a corporatist legislative chamber until 1939. In fact, the Fascist regime had user repressive policies to prohibit labour conflicts and had abolished social pluralism through the compulsory representation of organized interests. Therefore this first attempt at establishing corporatist order became the fundamental model for both the political and juridical debate and for a large number of policy-makers. The authoritarian and state-centric organization of fascist corporatism became a political option for right-wing movements and governments, while a minority on the left watched attentively while distancing itself

from the most dictatorial connotations of the Italian regime, such as the single-party system and the abolition of civil rights.

An effect of this widespread interest in the Italian corporatist laboratory was the inclusion of fascism among modern political forces as a movement capable of providing new solutions to certain problems common to mass societies. In this sense, as a young Fascist historian wrote in 1931, 'the true universality of fascism lies in the corporatist state'.[64] However, while the political influence of fascist corporatism during the inter-war period is difficult to deny, its transnational spread did not produce authentic imitations. While the Labour Charter was partially emulated and the authoritarian imprint of Italian legislation can be found in many other experiences, the fascist system was replicated nowhere. It represented a crucial element in a wider, transnational and polycentric circulation of new political models, which produced a general process of hybridization between institutional frameworks. In this way, the distinction between Italian Fascism and other regimes became more blurred.

Notes

1 A. Anselmi, 'La Carta del Lavoro all'estero', *Civiltà Fascista*, May 1937, pp. 342–350.
2 'Ripercussioni della Carta del Lavoro nei singoli paesi', *Civiltà Fascista*, May 1937, pp. 351–392.
3 G. Bottai, *Sviluppi dell'idea Corporativa nella Legislazione Internazionale*, Livorno, Raffaello Giusti, 1928; A. Aunós Pérez, *Principios de Derecho Corporativo*, Barcelona, 1929; J. Azpiazu, *El Estado Corporativo*, Madrid, Razón y Fe, 1934; F. Pergolesi, *Diritto Sindacale Comparato*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1934; E. Aunós Pérez, *La Reforma Corporativa del Estado*, Madrid, Aguilar, 1935; A. Muller, *La Politique Corporative: Essais de Organisation Corporative*, Brussels, Rex, 1935; M. S. Izquierdo, L. P. Castro and A. M. Casayus, *Corporatismo: Los Movimentos Nacionales Contemporáneos. Causa y Realizaciones*, Zaragoza-Granada, Imperio, 1937; F. Perroux, *Capitalisme et Communauté de Travail*, Paris, Librairie du Recueil Sirey, 1937; L. Baudin, *Le Corporatisme: Italie, Portugal, Allemagne, Espagne, France*, Paris, Librairie Generale de Droit et de Jurisprudence, 1942.
4 Among the exceptions, see A. C. Pinto, *The Nature of Fascism Revisited*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2012, pp. 119–150.
5 The reference here is obviously to Edward Said's 1982 essay, 'Traveling theory', in E. Said, *The Edward Said Reader*, New York, Vintage, 2000, pp. 195–217. On the circulation of the fascist corporatist model in the political culture of inter-war Europe, see M. Pasetti, *L'Europa Corporativa: Una Storia Transnazionale tra le due Guerre Mondiali*, Bologna, Bononia University Press, 2016.
6 On this theme, see A. Kallis, 'The "Fascist effect": On the dynamics of political hybridization in inter-war Europe', in A. Costa Pinto and A. Kallis, eds, *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 13–41.
7 See J.-W. Müller, *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2011.
8 For a recent overview of Gramsci's interpretation of Fascism, see D. D. Roberts, 'Reconsidering Gramsci's interpretation of fascism', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 2, 2011, pp. 239–255.
9 Gramsci's quotes are taken from *Quaderno 8* (1932), *Quaderno 14* (1932–35) and *Quaderno 22* (1934). See A. Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere*, Turin, Einaudi, 1975,

pp. 1089, 1742–1744, 2156, 2177. On his interpretation of fascist corporatism, see A. Gagliardi, 'Il problema del corporativismo nel dibattito Europeo e nei "Quaderni" ', in F. Giasi, ed., *Gramsci e il suo Tempo*, Rome, Carocci, 2008.

10 For the opinions on Fascist Italy by journalists, writers, scholars and foreign travellers, see E. Gentile, *In Italia ai tempi di Mussolini. Viaggio in compagnia di osservatori stranieri*, Milano, Arnoldo Mondadori, 2014, esp. pp. 149–176 on Mussolini's conquest of power. For an overview of representations of the March on Rome, see G. Albanese, 'Reconsidering the March on Rome', *European History Quarterly*, 3, 2012, pp. 403–421, esp. pp. 405–412 about the inter-war years.

11 E. Coselschi, ed., *Universalità del Fascismo: Raccolta di Giudizi di Personalità e della Stampa di Tutto il Mondo 1922–1932*, Florence, Vallecchi, 1933. On the resonance of Mussolini's seizure of power, see H. Woller, *Rom, 28. Oktober 1922: Die Faschistische Herausforderung*, Munich, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999; A. Bauerkämper, 'Transnational fascism: Cross-border relations between regimes and movements in Europe, 1922–1939', *East Central Europe*, 37, no. 2–3, 2010, pp. 218–225.

12 W. Schieder, 'Fascismo e Nazionalsocialismo nei primi anni trenta', in A. Del Boca, M. Legnani and M. G. Rossi, eds, *Il Regime Fascista: Storia e Storiografia*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1995, p. 53 (author's translation). See also W. Schieder, 'Fatal attraction: The German right and Italian Fascism', in H. Mommsen, ed., *The Third Reich between Vision and Reality: New Perspectives on German History 1918–1945*, Oxford and New York, Berg, 2001, pp. 39–59.

13 On the difficulties of a univocal and overall perception of the phenomenon, see R. Paxton, 'The five stages of fascism', *Journal of Modern History*, 1, 1998, pp. 1–23.

14 Kallis, 'Fascist effect', pp. 20–23.

15 C. Pellizzi, 'Fasci e propaganda in Gran Bretagna', *Popolo d'Italia*, 17 March 1923 (author's translation). On Pellizzi's political activity during the London years, see R. Suzzi Valli, 'Il Fascio Italiano a Londra: L'attività politica di Camillo Pellizzi', *Storia contemporanea*, 6, 1995, pp. 957–1001. For a biography, see D. Breschi and G. Longo, *Camillo Pellizzi: La Ricerca delle Élites tra Politica e sociologia (1896–1979)*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2003.

16 See M. Pasetti, 'Corporatist connections: The transnational rise of the fascist model in interwar Europe', in A. Bauerkämper and G. Rossoliński-Liebe, eds, *Fascism without Borders: Transnational Connections and Cooperation between Movements and Regimes in Europe from 1918 to 1945*, New York, Berghahn, 2017.

17 For a distinction between social corporatism and political corporatism, see Pinto, *Fascism Revisited*, pp. 121–126.

18 See B. Mirkine-Guetzevitch, *Les Constitutions de l'Europe Nouvelle*, Paris, Delagrave, 1928.

19 Here the classic reference is C. S. Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe: Stabilization in France, Germany and Italy in the Decade after World War I*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1975.

20 See the letter from James Ramsay MacDonald to Camillo Pellizzi, 25 December 1922, in Archivio Storico della Fondazione Ugo Spirito e Renzo De Felice, Fondo Camillo Pellizzi, Serie V, b.27, f.26.

21 C. Pellizzi, 'Fascismo and socialism', *The Socialist Review*, June 1923.

22 E. Aunós Pérez, *Las Corporaciones del Trabajo en el Estado Moderno*, Madrid, Juan Ortiz, 1928, p. 35 (author's translation).

23 On Aunós Pérez and the National Corporatist Organization (Organización Nacional Corporativa), see M. Á. Perfecto, 'El corporativismo en España: Desde los orígenes a la década de 1930', *Pasado y Memoria*, 5, 2006, pp. 185–218.

24 For an analysis of the reactions to the Rocco Law and its importance in the building of the Fascist dictatorship, see M. Pasetti, 'Neither bluff nor revolution: The corporations and the consolidation of the Fascist regime (1925–1926)', in G. Albanese and

R. Pergher, eds, *In the Society of Fascists: Acclamation, Acquiescence, and Agency in Mussolini's Italy*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 87–107. On the importance of this legislation in the development of the fascist corporatism, see A. Gagliardi, *Il Corporativismo Fascista*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2010, pp. 34–69.

25 *La Carta del Lavoro: Illustrata da Giuseppe Bottai*, Rome, Edizioni del Diritto del Lavoro, 1927, p. 136 (author's translation).
26 G. Bottai, *Esperienza Corporativa*, Rome, Edizioni del Diritto del Lavoro, 1929, pp. 95–96 (author's translation).
27 Bottai, *Esperienza*, p. 97 (author's translation and emphasis).
28 H. E. Goad, *The Making of the Corporate State*, London, Christophers, 1932, pp. 86–87 (author's emphasis).
29 Beyond Goad's *Making*, see H. E. Goad, *What is Fascism? An Explanation of its Essential Principles*, Florence, The Italian Mail and Tribune, 1929; H. E. Goad and M. Currey, *The Working of the Corporate State: A Study of National Co-operation*, London, Nicholson & Watson, 1933.
30 G. Salvemini, *Under the Axe of Fascism*, New York, and London, The Viking Press/ Victor Gollancz, 1936.
31 See the correspondence between Goad and Pellizzi in Archivio Storico della Fondazione Ugo Spirito e Renzo De Felice, Fondo Camillo Pellizzi, Serie V.
32 M. A. Ledeen, *Universal Fascism*, New York, Howard Fertig, 1972, pp. 117–121.
33 H. de Vries de Heekelingen, *Israël. Son passé. Son avenir*, Paris, Perin, 1937; *L'orgueil Juif*, Paris, Revue internationale des sociétés secrètes, 1938; *Juifs et Catholiques*, Paris, Grasset, 1939. On the Catholic anti-Semitism in France during the 1930s, see V. Galimi, *L'Antisemitismo in Azione: Pratiche Antiebraiche nella Francia degli anni Trenta*, Milan, Unicopli, 2006, pp. 120–136.
34 H. de Vries de Heekelingen, *Le Fascisme et ses Résultats*, Brussels, Social Éditions, 1927.
35 Ibid., p. 72 (author's translation).
36 See F. De Felice, *Sapere e politica. L'Organizzazione internazionale del lavoro tra le due guerre 1919–1939*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1988, pp. 54–75; G. Rodgers, E. Lee, L. Swepston and J. Van Daele, *The International Labour Organization and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919–2009*, Geneva, ILO, 2009, pp. 6–12.
37 S. Gallo, 'Dictatorship and international organizations: The ILO as a "test ground" for fascism', in S. Kott and J. Droux, eds, *Globalizing Social Rights: The International Labour Organization and Beyond*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 153–171.
38 For a biography, see B. W. Schaper, *Albert Thomas: Trente Ans de Réformisme Social*, Assen, Van Gorcum, 1959. On his political position, see M. Fine, 'Albert Thomas: A reformer's vision of modernization, 1914–32', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 3, 1977, pp. 545–564. On his activity as director of the ILO, see D. Guérin, *Albert Thomas au Bit 1920–32: De l'internationalisme à l'Europe*, Geneva, Institut Européen de l'Université de Genève, 1996.
39 See, for example, *Report of the Director-General: International Labour Conference – 10th Session*, Geneva, 1927, vol. 2, p. 6.
40 Quoted in Gallo, 'International organizations', p. 162.
41 G. Miceli Cirincione, *L'Internazionale e lo Stato Corporativo*, Rome, Edizioni del Diritto del Lavoro, 1928, p. 28.
42 J. Chabás, *Italia Fascista (Política y Cultura)*, Barcelona, Mentora, 1928, p. 110 (author's translation). On the figure of Chabás, see Javier Pérez Bazo, *Juan Chabás y su Tiempo: De la Poética de Vanguardia a la Estética del Compromiso*, Barcelona, Anthropos, 1992.
43 Chabás, *Italia Fascista*, p. 116 (author's translation).
44 Ibid., p. 118 (author's translation).
45 For the idiom 'magnetic field of fascism', the classic reference is P. Burrin, 'Le champ magnétique des fascismes', in P. Burrin, *Fascisme, Nazisme, Autoritarisme*,

Paris, Seuil, 2000, pp. 211–246. On French neo-socialism, see P. Burrin, *La Dérive Fasciste: Doriot, Déat, Bergery, 1933–1945*, Paris, Seuil, 1986.

46 On De Man and his plan, see, among others, Z. Sternhell, *Ni Droite, Ni Gauche: L'Idéologie Fasciste en France*, Paris, Seuil, 1983; A. Salsano, *Ingegneri e Politici: Dalla Razionalizzazione alla 'Rivoluzione Manageriale'*, Turin, Einaudi, 1987, pp. 24–46; G.-R. Horn, *European Socialists Respond to Fascism: Ideology, Activism and Contingency in the 1930s*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 74–95. On the corporatist temptation within the ranks of European socialism, see E. Rota, 'La tentazione corporativa: Corporativismo e propaganda fascista nelle file del socialismo europeo', in M. Pasetti, ed., *Progetti Corporativi tra le due Guerre Mondiali*, Rome, Carocci, 2006, pp. 85–98.

47 On the importance of the power of precedent to explain the influence of Italian Fascism abroad, see A. Kallis, 'Studying inter-war fascism in epochal and diacronic terms: Ideological production, political experience and the quest for "consensus"', *European History Quarterly*, 1, 2004, pp. 9–42, esp. pp. 22–32.

48 Beyond Perfecto, 'El corporativismo en España', pp. 213–217, see in particular S. Ben-Ami, *Fascism from Above: The Dictatorship of Primo de Rivera in Spain 1923–1930*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1983, pp. 303–310; E. González Calleja, *La España de Primo de Rivera: La Modernización Autoritaria 1923–1930*, Madrid, Alianza, 2005, pp. 153–163; M. Prat and O. Molina, 'State corporatism and democratic industrial relations in Spain 1926–1935: A reappraisal', *Labour History*, 2, 2014, pp. 208–227, esp. 211–214.

49 For a recent summary, see P. Frascani, *Le Crisi Economiche in Italia: Dall'Ottocento a Oggi*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2012, pp. 101–119.

50 The topic of Fascist propaganda abroad has received increasing attention in recent Italian scholarship. See, among others, B. Garzarelli, *'Parleremo al Mondo Intero': La Propaganda del Fascismo all'Estero*, Alexandria, Edizioni dell'Orso, 2004; S. Santoro, *L'Italia e l'Europa Orientale: Diplomazia Culturale e Propaganda 1918–1943*, Milan, Angeli, 2005; M. Ivani, *Esportare il Fascismo: Collaborazione di Polizia e Diplomazia Culturale tra Italia Fascista e Portogallo di Salazar (1928–1945)*, Bologna, Clueb, 2008; F. Cavarocchi, *Avanguardie dello Spirito: Il Fascismo e la Propaganda Culturale all'Estero*, Rome, Carocci, 2010. On the attempt to organize a Fascist International, see M. Cuzzi, *L'Internazionale delle Camicie Nere: I Caur, Comitati d'Azione per l'Universalità di Roma 1933–1939*, Milan, Mursia, 2005.

51 G. Santomassimo, *La Terza Via Fascista: Il Mito del Corporativismo*, Rome, Carocci, 2006, pp. 181–183.

52 F. Gentile, 'Il Brasile e il modello del corporativismo fascista', *Passato e Presente*, 91, 2013, pp. 35–58. For another important case study, see F. Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism: Ideology, Violence, and the Sacred in Argentina and Italy, 1919–1945*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2010.

53 D. T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 420.

54 Pinto, *Fascism Revisited*, pp. 126, 129–145 for a comparative overview on these experiences.

55 Ibid., pp. 146–148.

56 A. Ferro, *Homens e Multidões*, Lisbon, Bertrand, 1934, p. 183 (author's translation).

57 Within the literature on Portuguese corporatism focusing on the long Salazarist dictatorship, see F. Rosas, *Salazar e o Poder: A Arte de Saber Durar*, Lisbon, Tinta da China, 2012, pp. 281–317.

58 *Estatuto do Trabalho Nacional*, Lisbon, Sub-secretariado de Estado das Corporações e Previdência Social, 1933, p. 5 (author's translation).

59 M. Caetano, *O Sistema Corporativo*, Lisbon, O Jornal de Comércio e das Colónias, 1938, p. 28 (author's translation).

60 Ibid., pp. 25–30. On the ideological hybridization of Portuguese corporatism, see also D. Serapiglia, *La Via Portoghese al Corporativismo*, Rome, Carocci, 2011, pp. 174–181; L. R. Torgal, 'Os corporativismos e as "terceiras vias"', in F. Rosas and Á. Garrido, eds, *Corporativismo Fascismos Estado Novo*, Coimbra, Almedina, 2012, pp. 49–79.

61 A. C. Pinto, *The Blue Shirts: Portuguese Fascists and the New State*, New York, SSM-Columbia University Press, 2000.

62 Like in the entire literature on transfers and entanglements in history, hybridization has become a key concept in the most recent studies on transnational fascism. See in particular A. Kallis and A. C. Pinto, 'Conclusion: Embracing complexity and transnational dynamics – The diffusion of fascism and the hybridization of dictatorships in inter-war Europe', in Kallis and Pinto, *Rethinking Fascism*, pp. 272–282.

63 For a classic example of the anti-fascist criticism of corporatism, see Salvemini, *Under the Axe*.

64 D. Cantimori, 'Fascismo, nazionalismi e reazioni', *Vita nova*, January 1931 (author's translation).