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Before the Conflagration

The twenty months between 8 September 1943 and 25 April 1945 formed a period in our lives that involved us in events far bigger than ourselves. Fascism had forced us to disregard politics, and then suddenly we found ourselves compelled to take part in politics in the exceptional circumstances provided by German occupation and the War of Liberation, for what might be called moral reasons. Our lives were turned upside down. We all encountered painful incidents: fear, flight, arrest, imprisonment and the loss of people dear to us. *Afterwards* we were no longer what we had been *before*. Our lives had been cut into two parts: a 'before' and an 'after', which in my case were almost symmetrical, because when fascism fell on 25 July 1943, I had, at the age of thirty-four, almost reached what Dante termed 'the middle of life's course'. In the twenty months between September 1943 and April 1945, I was born into a new existence, completely different from the previous one, which I came to regard simply as an apprenticeship to the real life I commenced in the Resistance as a member of the Action Party.

When I talk about 'us', I mean a generation of intellectuals who, like me, lived through that transition from one Italian reality to an opposing one. It was to this generation that I dedicated my collection of portraits and personal accounts which were published in 1964 by the youthful publishing house Lacaita di Manduria as *Italia civile* [*Civilized Italy*]. Curzio Malaparte's *Italia barbara* [*Barbarian Italy*], which was published by Gobetti in 1925, had suggested the title to me by way of contrast. As I explained in the new edition (Passigli: Florence, 1986), the characters that appear in *Civilized Italy* – and

the other two collections of portraits published by Passigli: *Maestri e compagni* [*Mentors and Comrades*] (1984) and *Italia fedele* [*Loyal Italy*] (1986) – belong to an ideal country, another Italy, which is free from the traditional vices of the old Italy. We always believe that we have left the reality of that old Italy behind, but then we suddenly find ourselves up against it again. I wrote that it was an Italy characterized by arrogance and self-importance at the top, and servility and idleness at the bottom. It was an Italy in which astuteness and intrigue were considered the ultimate art of government, and cunning and petty deceit the meagre art of survival. The people whose lives I have experienced and written about represent another Italy and a wholly different history.

Norberto Bobbio was born in Turin on 18 October 1909. A wave of protests, demonstrations, public meetings and parliamentary motions, appeals by intellectuals, trade union activities and diplomatic incidents had been rocking Europe for a week, following the shooting in Barcelona of the Catalan revolutionary Francisco Ferrer, who had been accused by the Spanish government of inciting revolt and found guilty in a trial in which no evidence was produced. In Italy, the Trade Union Confederation had declared a general strike in Rome and Turin. The political tension was further heightened by the socialist and anarchist hostility to the arrival of Tsar Nicholas II of Russia in Reggia di Racconigi.

On Monday 18 October, the registrar of births and deaths in Turin recorded twenty-two births – twelve boys and ten girls. The day was damp and cloudy. Emma Gramatica's theatre company was at the Teatro Carignano. Fiat, which had been founded in 1899, was producing about 1,800 cars a year. Aviation was so much in vogue that the Turin daily newspaper La Stampa published an advert under 'Situations wanted': 'A distinguished young man with a passion for aviation wishes to pilot aircraft.' Piero Gobetti, who Bobbio was never to meet, was eight years old and attended Pacchiotti Primary School. Cesare Lombroso, who had been a lecturer in medical law and public health at Turin University since 1876, died on Tuesday 19th, the day after Bobbio's birth.

My father, Luigi Bobbio, came from the province of Alessandria and worked as a consultant surgeon at the San Giovanni Hospital, one of the most prestigious in the city. My paternal grandfather, Antonio, was a primary school teacher, and later a director of education. He was a Catholic liberal, who worked on the Alessandria newspaper *La Lega*, and took an interest in philosophy. He published two critical works on the positivists Roberto Ardigò and Herbert Spencer, as well as a book on Manzoni whose title would now make

us smile: *Truth, Beauty and Goodness in 'The Betrothed'*.¹ Quite recently, the young historian from Alessandria, Cesare Manganeli, edited a selection from the unpublished diaries that my grandfather wrote throughout his life, under the title of *Memoirs*.² In the preface, I wrote: 'We youngsters always saw our grandfather as a venerable and venerated old man of whom we were slightly fearful, and about whom even his children spoke with admiration and reverence.'

My mother was called Rosa Caviglia, and she came from Rivalta Bormida, a village 8 kilometres from Acqui, which I still visit and to which I have always felt a strong emotional attachment. Giuseppe Baretti's family came from there, and I recall that the first magazine I subscribed to when I was at university was *Il Baretti*, founded by Gobetti. Croce, Cecchi, Montale and Saba were all contributors.

In *De senectute*, I indulged in a curious and light-hearted digression to illustrate aspects of my Piedmontese culture, whose strengths and limitations I am only too aware of:

I will start with the name: nomen omen, as once used to be said. Or to parody a famous title 'The importance of being Norberto'. I inherited this strange name of a German bishop who lived in the eleventh and twelfth centuries from my maternal grandfather, who was born in 1847 in a small village on the right bank of the Bormida between Acqui and Alessandria. Family legend has it that when my grandfather was born the last of a numerous family which had exhausted his parents' stock of the usual seven or eight family names, they decided to give him the name of a Piedmontese poet who was very fashionable at the time: Norberto Rosa. It has always been a mystery to me that this unexceptional poet from Val di Susa could have been so popular in Val Bormida, especially as I have attempted many times to read his poetry in deference to this name, but I have never got past the first fifty pages. The same family tradition has passed down the inaccurate story that Norberto Rosa was famous in the Alessandria area because he campaigned to collect the funds for the purchase of the Hundred Cannons which were supposed to defend the city's so-called 'external forts'. He did in fact do this, but not until 1857, when my grandfather was ten years old. The truth is that Norberto Rosa was made famous by his poetry. I leave to literary scholars the question of how and why he was so famous that he caused an unsuspecting child born in 1847 and his even more unsuspecting grandchild born 70 years later to carry a name so foreign to the Monferrato Region.³

I had a happy childhood and adolescence. My family was affluent, I lived in a nice house with two people in service, a private chauffeur working for my father during the more prosperous years from 1925 to 1940, and two cars. My brother Antonio was two years older than

me and somewhat different: extrovert, highly intelligent, always top of the class. He managed to get through the second and third year of senior secondary school⁴ by studying through the summer. He chose to follow our father into a medical career. He became the professor of surgery at Parma University. Unfortunately he became very ill before reaching the age of sixty, and died a few years later.

However there was a source of melancholy that ran through my conventional adolescence. I was a sick child and that illness has affected the whole of my life. Even though my father was a doctor, I never discovered the exact nature of my ailment. I can never forget that I went through the whole of the first year of junior secondary school⁵ with my arm in a sling, as though I had fallen and broken it. I started to write poetry very young, and I recently tore it all up. I wrote my first poems in 1923 when I was in the fourth year of junior secondary school, and they were a mixture of Leopardian pessimism and the *crepuscolarismo*⁶ of Gozzano. I can still remember the last verse of Gozzano's *Colloqui*:

I will be the tender timeworn son,
The one who sighed at starry rays
Whose mind did to Friedrich and Arthur run,
But abandoned the page of rebel displays
To bury unburied swallows
And offer grass blades to legs that craze
On desperate overturned beetles.

Arthur is Schopenhauer and Friedrich is Nietzsche. I remember that poetry now, because ultimately it reflects a state of mind I can identify with.

My passion for reading started late, but immediately became intense and all consuming. An idea of this obsession can be found in the lists of books I read each month, carefully written down on my father's prescription pads. For instance in December 1928, during my first year at university, I read eighteen titles, ranging from religious and political works to biographies, poetry and plays.⁷ I had clearly taken advantage of the Christmas holidays and one of the works, G eraldy's love poetry, was evidence of the dispersive interests that are typical of a voracious reader. While I read French in the original (as I had studied French at school), I read English works in translations, as testified by Shelley's poetry in Italian, which also appeared in the list. I did not start to learn English until I went to university, which was generally the rule in that period.

One of my friends at the time was Cesare Pavese, who had attended the modern senior secondary school rather than the classical

senior secondary school. The ‘modernity’ of these schools resided precisely in the fact that they taught English instead of Greek. When he heard that I was learning English on my own, he suggested that we should read some of the best-known texts together. For a period of time, we met at my house in the morning. In order to avoid being disturbed, we would shut ourselves in the waiting room of my father’s office where he saw his patients in the afternoon. Pavese was the teacher, and I was the student. He would read the text, translate it and comment upon it. I can remember Shelley’s ‘To a Skylark’ very well, because I attempted to do my own translation, as can be seen from a note in the same prescription pad on a slightly later page.⁸

I was never a great novel reader. I read a lot of Balzac, because we had a book series, which included many of his novels. Of course I read all the great nineteenth-century novelists, such as Stendhal, Flaubert, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, who were considered essential reading at the time, but apparently no longer are. The writer, whose works I have read almost in their entirety during various periods of my life, is Thomas Mann. How could I ever forget the famous conversation between Settembrini and Naphta in *The Magic Mountain*? Or the parting from John Castor, ‘the honest Benjamin of life’, on the last page. Or the final words: ‘Out of this universal feast of death, out of this extremity of fever, kindling the rain-washed evening sky to a fiery glow, may it be that Love one day shall mount?’

In my family, I was never made aware of the class conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. We were brought up to look on all men as equal, and to think that there was no difference between the educated and uneducated, or between the rich and the poor. I referred to this upbringing to a democratic way of life in *Left and Right*, and confessed to always being uncomfortable with the spectacle of differences in wealth between those at the top and at the bottom of the social scale, while fascist populism was attempting to regiment Italians in a social organization that wanted those inequalities to be set in stone:

These differences were particularly evident during the summer holidays in the countryside where we city lads played with the sons of peasants. To tell the truth, our friendship was based on a perfect understanding, and the class differences were completely irrelevant, but we could not help noticing the contrast between our houses and theirs, our food and theirs, and our clothes and theirs (in the summer they were barefoot). Every year when we started our holidays, we learnt that one of our playmates had died the previous winter from tuberculosis. I do not remember a single death amongst my schoolfriends in the city.⁹

However, it was not at the family hearth that I developed my aversion to Mussolini's regime. I belonged to a family that supported fascism, as did the majority of the middle class. I remember very well the conversation we had in our home, when the fascists came to power in October 1922 at the time of the March on Rome. I was thirteen years old. I have vivid memories of the last democratic elections held in 1921, because the daily newspaper in Turin, *La Gazzetta del Popolo*, had organized a competition with prizes to be won by whoever managed the closest forecast to the real results. My brother and I took part in the competition and followed all the events in the electoral campaign with enthusiasm. At that time there was no television or even radio campaigning, so the poster campaigns were hard-fought affairs. Via Sacchi, where we lived, was covered with election posters all the way along. The War Veterans' Party supported two lawyers, Bardanzellu and Villabruna, and the Peasants' Party presented just one candidate, a sitting member of parliament called Stella. We may not have won the competition, but because of it we became very interested in elections, as though they were football matches or cycle races.

I can remember very well the great strike of the summer of 1922: the hotly debated 'Legalitarian Strike' which lasted from 1 to 3 August. It was the last act of popular resistance to fascist violence. We were coming home by train with our parents after our holidays at the seaside in Spotorno on the Ligurian riviera, but we had to interrupt our journey at Novi Ligure. I can still see clearly the station surrounded by darkness, the train stationary along the platform, the fascist Blackshirts securing the railway. I feel as though I can still hear the reactions of the upright middle-class people like my father: they were saying that if we did not defend ourselves, we would be taken over by 'subversives' or 'Bolsheviks', as socialists and communists were called without distinction. My family, like many other bourgeois families, greeted the March on Rome with approval, partly because it was widely believed that fascism was just a passing phase. It was considered useful for stopping those who wanted to be 'like Russia'. There can be no doubt that the Russian Revolution represented a danger to the middle classes, a 'terrible fright'. The fascist gangs were frightening too, but the attitude towards them tended to be more benign.

From 1919 to 1927, I was fortunate enough to study at Massimo D'Azeglio School, where the majority of our teachers were anti-fascists. I will mention two of them: Umberto Cosmo had been the literary critic for *La Stampa* when it was run by Frassati and took a neutralist position during the First World War in support of Giolitti.

He was a great Dante scholar and the author of well-known critical works such as *Vita di Dante* (1930) and *L'ultima ascesa* (1936), both published by Laterza. He was accused of defeatism and anti-nationalism, and attacked in Parliament on May 1926 by the prominent nationalist and fascist professor of Italian literature at Turin University, Vittorio Cian, for 'opposing the directives of the national government'. After having been asked to explain himself to the then minister Pietro Fedele, he was suspended from teaching in October and deprived of his university post the following year.¹⁰

The other anti-fascist teacher was the professor of philosophy, Zino Zini, who was first a socialist, and then a communist. He wrote for *Ordine Nuovo* and was a friend of Antonio Gramsci.¹¹ He was loathed by the Fascists because he wrote a book considered outrageous at the time, *Congresso dei morti*, in which he had famous warlords and criminals from the past meet in the next world to justify war and crime. By contrast, he praised the 'soldier of Lambessa' who threw away his weapons and declared himself a Christian.¹² I was often at Zini's home, even after leaving D'Azeglio School, as I was a friend of his daughter, who was a few years older than me, and his cousin, Carlo Zini, a young lawyer: both were among my closest companions during my youth.

I learned about politics at school rather than at home. Augusto Monti, who taught the B stream, was later to become an author who wrote partially autobiographical novels set in Piedmont. At the time, he was known as a friend of Piero Gobetti and a dedicated contributor to Gobetti's magazine *La Rivoluzione Liberale*. But some of my friends were also important, particularly Leone Ginzburg. He was like a man from another world. He was a Russian Jew from Odessa, whose family left Russia following the Revolution and moved to Berlin. They had been in the habit of visiting the Italian seaside for their holidays. When the First World War broke out, they decided to leave the then five-year-old Leone behind with a very close Italian friend, thinking that the war would be over in a year. Thus he stayed on in Viareggio by himself, and spoke Italian better than us, because he had a Tuscan accent. When the war ended, he joined his family in Germany, but in 1924 his mother returned to Italy with her children, so that the eldest, Nicola, could study at Turin Polytechnic. So we ended up as school companions in the first year at senior secondary school. He had an extraordinary brain: the recently published writings of his youth are more than sufficient to demonstrate his precocious mind.¹³ He was even then an out-and-out anti-fascist. I do not remember many political discussions amongst my other fellow pupils, so it was the time I spent with Leone Ginzburg and Vittorio

Foa during my university days that gradually drew me away from the pro-fascism of my family. Foa, who was in Monti's stream, was also extremely intelligent and an anti-fascist from the very beginning.

You can get an idea of what kind of school Massimo d'Azeglio Secondary School was, if you read the chapter on how it resisted the first decade of fascism in Augusto Monti's account of his teaching career. It refers to many people who were close to Bobbio: Cesare Pavese, 'sharp-featured, you never knew if he was paying attention or dreaming'; Giulio Einaudi, nicknamed Giulietta because of 'his tendency to blush and burst into tears'; Massimo Mila, 'a fair-haired youth with eyes that were still dreamy but already unflinching'; Renzo Giua, killed in 1938 in the Spanish Civil War; Emanuele Artom, partisan in Giustizia e Libertà ['Justice and Freedom'],¹⁴ murdered by the Fascists; Gian Carlo Pajetta, who was expelled from all the secondary schools in the kingdom for having distributed 'Marxist' leaflets; Vittorio Foa, "a rocket" that "took off" in the second year, entering the third year in July with an average of eight points in his results, and he then took his final exams in October and achieved one of the highest results'; Felice Balbo, 'a prim and proper youth, clearly much cared for by his mother'; and Tullio Pinelli, with whom 'we had arguments over the beast in the first canto of the Divine Comedy and Dante's use of allegory which were not at all bad'. Monti also wrote: 'Massimo D'Azeglio School was truly a breeding ground for anti-fascism, but not because of any faults or merits amongst the staff. It was just something in the air or in the soil of that Turin and Piedmontese "environment"'. That school was like one of those houses in which "you can feel something", where its subsequent occupants are visited by spirits and souls in their sleep, or even when they are awake.'¹⁵

Although I was in the A stream, and Monti taught the B stream, as soon as I went to university, I joined a group that he had set up with his most loyal students. It used to be called the 'gang', or 'confraternity' as Mila renamed it. During its meetings, Monti would on occasions read aloud, chapter by chapter, from his autobiographical novel *Sansôssi*, in which a father was reborn through his son, just as the generation of democrats defeated by fascism was being reborn in the generation that was to fight anew against fascism. Those readings left a strong impression in my memory:

When I read Monti, it is as though I can still hear him speaking. Every word contains his lively character whose voice captivated us. He was austere and tolerant but never easy-going. He could appear melancholic, yet he also knew how to be cheerful. He liked to tell stories

about everyday things in a light-hearted almost jaunty manner, while at the same time imparting a lesson without appearing to do so. That lesson was always meaningful, and concerned respect for oneself through respect for others, a question of resoluteness and dignity.

When asked what Monti's secret was, Carlo Mussa Ivaldi, one of his pupils who was never to forget him, replied that it was the ability to translate literary values into inner qualities and civic virtues. He remembers an incident in which Monti was arrested. Referring to the other persons arrested who were nearly all his students, the OVRA¹⁶ official asked: 'What do you teach at school?' And Monti replied: 'To have respect for ideas.' 'But what ideas?' The succinct response was: 'Their own.'¹⁷

As I have already said, Leone Ginzburg's powerful personality represented the model of political education within that circle of friends. He was top of the class at school, and he read everything from the classics to the latest novel. He bought two newspapers every day, *La Stampa* and *Corriere della Sera*, and read them with extreme thoroughness. He often visited our home, and launched into lengthy discussions with my father and brother about current affairs and books that had enthused him. While we were still at school, he translated Gogol's *Taras Bulba* for Alfredo Polledro's newly established Turin publishing house, Slavia. Immediately afterwards, he started on Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. He was also often a guest at our country home in Rivalta Bormida. Leone was passionate about his friendships:

His nature was well-balanced, and this was demonstrated by the fact that his intellectual rigour had nothing to do with moralistic pedantry or the punctilious adherence to personal responsibilities, but was concerned with self-improvement solely as the means for better relationships with other people. The customary scrupulousness with which he fulfilled his duties might have led you to believe he followed an ethic of perfectionism. However, in his treatment of others, particularly within our circle of friends, it became clear that he had a much greater, more inclusive and more human ideal, and that was the ethic of companionship. He loved conversation, company and the world at large. He was sociable and could not be alone. He needed to be expansive, to communicate and to know a lot of people in order to exchange ideas and impressions on events, books and other people, and current news (thus he was always very well informed about all manner of things). His network of relationships was vast and complex. He always liked to meet new people, whom he analysed, assessed, catalogued and added to his collection of character types. Fundamentally, human beings were the thing that most interested him, with their virtues, vices and oddities (his secret ambition was to be a writer of psychological stories). He loved the company of his contemporaries, but also of older people,

who generally admired him and held him in esteem for his wisdom and his balanced judgement and opinions. He was happy in the company of girls of our own age, whom he met at school, on holiday or in society. He treated them as equals, without shyness or conceit, without an inferiority complex or a constant desire for conquests. He entered into their confidence, and they into his. He admired their grace and kindness, and that feminine sensitivity for matters of the heart which makes teenage life less savage, arduous and truculent. He was extremely warm with his friends: the continuous pursuit of friendship was an important part of his life.¹⁸

On finishing school in 1927, I went to Turin University to study law. The university environment also contributed to my slow political education, through the teachings of lecturers such as Francesco Ruffini, Luigi Einaudi and Gioele Solari, and through the disputes with the regime which involved both teachers and students. I will just refer to a couple of the better-known incidents. In 1928, a demonstration in support of Ruffini, who had opposed the anti-democratic electoral law in the Senate, turned into a brawl with fascist students. In 1929, a letter in support of Benedetto Croce, whom Mussolini had called a 'malingerer from history' because of his opposition to the Lateran Pacts, led to the arrest of Antonicelli, Mila and other friends of mine. I had not taken part.

While sitting my exams, I tried my luck in a competition organized by the Turin University Association for student revues, together with some friends I had met on holiday. These included Riccardo Morbelli, who a few years later was to come to prominence for co-writing a serialized radio dramatization of *The Three Musketeers* with Angelo Nizza. To my great surprise, the competition was won by our revue *Fra donne e colonne*, the music for which had been written by my cousin Norberto Caviglia. The jury was chaired by the conductor Blanc, the author of the song 'Giovinezza', which later, following changes to the words, was to become the fascist anthem. The revue was put on by a student company (which also did the female parts, with the exception of the prima donna who played the title role in *La Madone des sleepings*, the famous novel by Maurice Dekobra).

In reality, fascism was by then a part of the daily lives of most Italians. I myself was a member of the Fascist University Groups. It is thought that there were personal conflicts over politics, but this was not the case. Sitting next to Leone Ginzburg through secondary school was Ludovico Barattieri, the most fascist of us all. We often met at his home to discuss things.

I was published for the first time while at university: an anonymous review, little more than a summary, of Monti's *Sansôssi*. It was

published by Ceschini, and appeared in *Giornale di Acqui* on 16–17 November 1929. In 1931, I graduated in law with a thesis on the philosophy of law. My supervisor was Gioele Solari, who in 1922 had filled the same role for Gobetti, and then for several other figures who became involved in Piedmontese anti-fascism: Mario Andreis, Dante Livio Bianco, Aldo Garosci and Renato Treves. Sandro Galante Garrone, Giorgio Agosti and Franco Antonicelli (who took an arts degree) all graduated at the same time as myself. Solari's teaching was inspired by the civic role of the philosophy of law:

The civic nature of that teaching was precisely that it kept the attention of young people on the general problems of the state and law, which were much more complex and profound than orthodox interpretations would lead you to believe. It consisted of elevating political questions into philosophical ones, and therefore ultimately into matters of conscience, or in other words, it turned that which in average behaviour had become complacent conformism into something highly dramatic. In that lecture hall on the ground floor of the old university building where he spoke from a lectern which looked like a pulpit, authority, obedience and power were no longer dogmas but questions to be analysed, politics was no longer an oracle but a science, and the state was no longer a fetish but a concept. Thus we observed the propriety and continuity of an open-minded cultural tradition.¹⁹

I had never had any real political vocation, unlike Vittorio Foa who had a very powerful one, and so I decided to continue my studies. With my father's approval, I started the third year of philosophy with the intention of obtaining a second degree. In 1933, I graduated with a thesis on Husserl's phenomenology. My supervisor was Annibale Pastore who had given a series of lectures on Husserl's philosophy, which I had attended assiduously. It was my intention to study the early writings, published at the time, of jurists who were guided by phenomenology. In truth, my passion for the philosophy of law represents the only link between the *before* and *after* of my life.

In 1932, I went to Germany with Renato Treves and Ludovico Geymonat, after having had a few German lessons from Barbara Allason,²⁰ the eminent writer and German scholar. At the beginning, we were in different cities: Treves was in Cologne where he met Hans Kelsen, Geymonat was in Göttingen where the university was famous for its teaching of mathematics, and I was in Heidelberg where Gustav Radbruch, previously minister of Justice in the Weimar Republic, was well known at the time for his teaching of philosophy of law. Jaspers was also in Heidelberg, and I saw him at one of his lectures. I remember that distant sojourn in Heidelberg, which lasted about a

month, as a wonderful time. I met up with Treves and Geymonat again in August at a summer course at the University of Marburg. In the dining room at the house where we lodged, there was a large photograph of a young man who had died in the First World War, and I never knew whether it was the landlady's husband or son. At the end of the stay, we had learnt to converse a little in German.

Following the second degree, I wrote my first academic article.²¹ In 1934, Treves and I both qualified to teach at university level. My studies on Husserl, the subject of my first article for *Rivista di Filosofia*,²² for which I have been writing now for sixty years, led to my very close friendship with Antonio Banfi, who had been the first to become involved in the applied phenomenology of law and whom I used to visit at his home in Milan.

At that time, the first half the thirties, I was a frequent visitor to Barbara Allason's palatial house on the Po riverfront. It was one of the salons where opponents of the regime used to meet in Turin. Barbara Allason herself recalled these encounters in her memoirs.

Because of my contacts with anti-fascist circles, I was arrested during a police round-up in May 1935, which the regime hoped would destroy the core of the Justice and Freedom organization. I was not an activist. I had not taken part in the kind of anti-fascist activity in Turin which Leone Ginzburg, Vittorio Foa and Massimo Mila had been involved in. What did it mean to take an active part? Mila explained it very well in his *Scritti civili*:²³ it meant for example taking news of the movement to the exiles in France, bringing clandestine material such as anti-fascist books, pamphlets and posters to Italy, and getting articles by activists in Italy to Paris for publication by Justice and Freedom. They therefore needed people like Mila who were capable of taking the mountain routes and passing the border in secret. Of course, they knew everything about everyone at the police headquarters: they knew who was really involved. Indeed, I was given the lightest punishment, a caution. Only a few of us ended up before the special tribunal. I was one of a group of friends who used to meet outside on the corner of Corso Sommeiller in front of Caffè Strocchio (later Varesio). The police would listen to our telephone conversations and put our walks under surveillance, even when they had nothing to do with politics. I remember that we were all fascinated by Giorgina Lattes, who was a few years younger than us and lived in Corso Sommeiller in the same block as Antoncelli. Giorgina was a student of Casorati and has left us a beautiful portrait of Leone Ginzburg. The police spied on our comings and goings, but never managed to understand which political activist was animating our group. It was Giorgina, but not for political reasons. It was her beauty

and good nature that attracted us, and she and her youthful parents were always very welcoming.²⁴

I found a passage devoted to this circle in a report by the fascist police on myself in 1935, which, in spite of the bureaucratic style, gave a fairly lively picture. Apart from the bad grammar, there were several errors in the information: Vittorio Foa became Foà, and Guido Solari instead of Gioele. More amusingly, my nickname Bindi which was used by old friends, appears in this statement as a different person from Bobbio. As can be seen, the fascist police were not known for their efficiency.

It has been ascertained that in 1933–34 Bobbio frequently visited the well-known anti-fascist circle of the well-known Prof. Barbara Allason, where well-known opponents of the regime would meet, including Dr Mario Levi, now abroad, Dr Leone Ginzburg and Dr Sion Segre who have been found guilty by a Special Tribunal of activities against the regime, as well as the lawyer Vittorio Foà and Dr Giulio Muggia, supporters of the Justice and Freedom movement in Turin. It has been shown that Dr Bobbio belongs to this movement not only through his frequent visits to Allason's circle, but also because of the persistence with which he has frequented supporters of the said movement, such as the aforementioned Vittorio Foà, Dr Giulio Muggia, etc. Indeed, informant 282 has confirmed the frequent contacts between Bobbio, Vittorio Foà, Alberto Levi, Prof. Franco Antonicelli, Carlo Luigi Zini and Piero Luzzatti, in his reports of 4 and 24 February 1935. These reports are backed up by wire-tap no. 1166 of 3 March 1935, from which we detected the following statement by Vittorio Foà to a person unknown (possibly Alberto Levi, see wire-tap no. 1167 of the same day): 'I'm going out to get a little sun with Bobbio, Antonicelli and Muggia – (Where am I going) . . . I don't know, I cannot tell you. I will let you know later.'

He writes for the well-known magazine *La Cultura*. The report on Justice and Freedom of February 1935 from the Police Headquarters of Turin, states that: 'Dr BOBBIO . . . identified as: Norberto BOBBIO, son of Luigi and Rosa Caviglia, born in Turin on 18.10.1909, resident there at Via Sacchi no. 66. Contacts with Prof. Antonicelli have not yet been ascertained. An examination of the correspondence shows that on 23 February, he received, through Solari (Guido) a letter from a Piero Martinetti, resident in Castellamonte (Aosta), which states:

'Those of us who are getting on in years must find some satisfaction in seeing new and promising forces rising up after us, who will perpetuate the values of our generation, perhaps better than we did. We thought we were doing a service by keeping the magazine going as an expression of unbiased and independent thought. I hope that the group of young people who are working with us will soon be able to take on all of this work, which, whatever its effects on the outside

world, is a worthy end in itself and can, in some circumstances, be a moral duty.'

And Solari added, in sending on Martinetti's letter: 'I am increasingly certain that you are doing the right thing by entering into the company of persons capable of disinterested love for their duty.'

The report on Justice and Freedom of March 1935 from the Police Headquarters of Turin, states that: 'Norberto Bobbio: on 3 March, he took part in a meeting with Vittorio Foà, Antonicelli, Muggia and a fourth individual who has not been identified. On the 19th, at a meeting with Zini, Martinetti, Bindi and Foà at the home of Vittorio Foà. On the 24th, at the home of the notary Annibale Germano, with the same person and another person who has not been identified.

From wire-tap no. 1530 on 19 March 1935, we discovered:

From telephone no. 51244 (Vittorio Foà) the said person phoning. id. no. X phoning Mr Carlo Zini.

F. – We have decided to go to Barovero's at 21.30.

Z. – In my current state of health, I cannot go out. Come to my house, and as Bobbio is coming, I'll keep him here.

F. – Alright.

This meeting was confirmed in a later wire-tap on the same day 19 March no. 1529:²⁵

From telephone no. 51244 (Vittorio Foà) the said person phoning. id. no. X phoning an unidentified person.

F. – I'm free this evening, so we can meet up with Bindi, Carlo Zini and Bobbio at Barovero's (down below) at 21.30.

X. – Have you mentioned anything to Bindi?

F. – No. He'll have worked it out himself.²⁶

The Justice and Freedom group in Turin was the one that suffered the most police repression, but it always managed to rebuild an embryonic organization. The first serious blow was suffered in December 1931 and January 1932, when the original leader, Mario Andreis, was arrested, beaten and tortured in order to get him to talk. The Special Tribunal gave him an eight-year prison sentence, along with a young university teacher, Luigi Scala, while Aldo Garosci managed to escape to Paris. Franco Venturi and his father, Lionello (the art historian who had refused to take the oath of allegiance to fascism), were already in exile in the French capital. Several students were picked up with Andreis and Scala, and these included Renzo Giua, one of Monti's pupils: the tribunal found them 'unstable', but not beyond reform, so it discharged them. Monti recalled in account of his teaching how Renzo Giua, suffering from a fever, stood up and protested: 'But there's a Dante lesson this afternoon.' This Dante enthusiast was also to reappear in France, and then died at

Estremadura on 17 February 1938, leading a battalion of the XII Garibaldi Brigade. In the meantime, however, he had also involved his father, Michele, in the Justice and Freedom movement.

Two years later, the police struck again: Sion Segre and Mario Levi, brother of the novelist Natalia Ginzburg and an official representative of Justice and Freedom, were surprised by the authorities on 11 March 1934 while returning across the border from Switzerland with a bundle of anti-fascist pamphlets. The police in Turin then carried out a series of arrests which led to the imprisonment of Leone Ginzburg, the central link with the exiles in Paris, Barbara Allason, the young physicist Carlo Mussa Ivaldi, and the famous professor of anatomy and father of Mario, Giuseppe Levi. The press release with the list of persons arrested called them 'anti-fascist Jews in the pay of exiles'. As Luigi Salvatorelli has pointed out, it was one of the first cases in which the repression of an anti-fascist conspiracy was used to foster anti-Semitism.²⁷ The Special Tribunal, in a ruling that declared Justice and Freedom to be a revolutionary and subversive association, found only Ginzburg and Segre guilty, and sentenced them to four and three years of imprisonment respectively. These sentences were reduced by two years as part of an amnesty which gave out remissions. On completing his sentence, Ginzburg remained on probation from 1936 to 1940, when, at the outbreak of war, he was condemned to enforced residence in a remote village in the Abruzzi until the fall of fascism. He was to die on 5 February 1944 in the Regina Coeli prison hospital in Rome.

The file on Bobbio does not have a date, but it is very probable that it was opened just before the police operation on 15 May 1935. Wire-taps, tailing and opening post were used in the investigations into Justice and Freedom, as well as inside information from Dino Segre, code name Pitigrilli, who was an OVRA agent. Franco Antonicelli, Norberto Bobbio, Giulio Einaudi, Vittorio Foa, Michele Giua, Carlo Levi, Piero Martinetti, Massimo Mila, Augusto Monti, Cesare Pavese and Carlo Zini were all arrested, as were two of the 'unstable' students discharged in 1932, Vindice Cavallera and Alfredo Perelli. The latter's father, Giannotto, worked for the provincial authorities in Cuneo.

The police had struck somewhat randomly, as they locked up both real activists like Foa and Mila, who liaised with the anti-fascist exiles, and intellectuals who had only put up a kind of moral Resistance to the regime, such as the philosopher Piero Martinetti. In 1931, at the age of fifty-nine, he and Lionello Venturi were among the eleven Italian academics out of 1,200, who refused to take the oath of allegiance to fascism. He had to abandon his teaching of theoretical philosophy and moral philosophy at Milan University and

withdraw to his books and the family home in Castellamonte to the north of Turin, a house that was always crawling with cats. His bluff manner, typical of country people in Piedmont, disguised a good heart. He was the editor of *Rivista di Filosofia* in all but name, as it was considered more opportune to have his loyal friend Luigi Fossati appear as such. He gave his consent to my article on Husserl, although he found it 'a little obscure'. He was the Martinetti whose letter was quoted in the police report about me as proof of anti-fascist involvement. In reality, it was just a postcard congratulating me on becoming a member of the editorial committee of *Rivista di Filosofia*.

The commitment to maintain the independence of *Rivista di Filosofia* was taken as evidence, if not conclusive proof, of conspiratorial activity. I heard a wonderful account of Martinetti's arrest from Solari's widow. The philosopher was expected for breakfast at the Solari home on the morning of 15 May. The circumstances of the arrest are like something out of a film:

That morning police officers arrived at the Solari home (at around six o'clock) and started to search the house. Amongst other things, they found some 'stones' in Mrs Solari's chest of drawers. They were a handful of earth from Gobetti's tomb which had been brought there by a friend from Paris. At ten, Martinetti arrived from the country with some asparagus. He did not notice the uproar. Solari went up to him and greeted him loudly and, as they were passing the detective in charge of the search of the premises, said: 'Let me introduce my dear friend, Professor Piero Martinetti.' 'Well, precisely the man we were looking for,' replied the detective with obvious satisfaction. According to Mrs Solari, Martinetti suddenly poured abuse on them, saying amongst other things a line that I have heard many times: 'I am a European citizen who has, by chance, been born in Italy.' Mrs Solari was adamant that the detective could not arrest Martinetti in their home. By agreement, Martinetti was taken back to Castellamonte where he was officially arrested.²⁸

Martinetti, the amiable author of *Introduzione alla metafisica* (1904) and *La libertà* (1928), published under fascist rule, spent a few days in prison in Turin, without knowing the reason for his imprisonment. Like all intellectuals who became acquainted with the inside of a cell for political reasons and were confronted with something outside their experience, Martinetti analysed his imprisonment and what prison represents with moral candour in a brief note to Gioele Solari:

During my brief imprisonment I had the opportunity to make several observations. The first is that in general the prison staff are more

human than is often imagined: I did not see any signs of mistreatment and the governor seemed to me to be a very understanding person. The second is that there are just as many decent men in prison as there are on the outside. I saw some evil-looking faces, especially amongst the old lags, but I also saw many faces that expressed humanity and goodness, especially amongst the young. First offenders should carry out their sentence in special institutions, separated from re-offenders. I believe that in this way half those who have committed crimes could be saved.

. . . The regulations are the main cause of cruelty, they are a fetish that insensitively dominates and often obstructs decency. Only those who have spent at least a month in prison should be allowed to draw up such regulations. But the truth is that in many areas they are not applied.

. . . The removal of freedom is itself a cruel punishment. In prison, you feel life passing as something useless and empty: you live like a dead person in a cement coffin. Imprisonment should be imposed as a punishment much less often. But above all, they should remove one of the major causes of suffering: the isolation from the outside world.²⁹

Martinetti was released after a few days, while Bobbio got away with a caution and a curfew, which required him to stay at home from nine in the evening to six the following morning. A few were forcibly removed to remote areas (Antonicelli, Pavese and Carlo Levi). In the trial of 27–8 February 1936, the Special Tribunal handed down prison sentences on Vittorio Foa (15 years), Vindice Cavallera (8 years), Alfredo Perelli (8 years), Massimo Mila (7 years), Augusto Monti (5 years) and Giannotto Perelli (5 years). The harshness of the punishments was attributed to Mussolini's anger that they had 'to try unrepentant anti-fascist intellectuals' during the critical period of the Ethiopian enterprise.³⁰ In any event, fascist repression had effectively destroyed Justice and Freedom's organization in Turin: the leaders and activists were mainly in prison or exile. There remained a few, including the magistrate Giorgio Agosti and the lawyer Dante Livio Bianco, who were left to 'weave together the threads of a debilitated movement'.³¹ An era was coming to an end, even though anti-fascism survived as an intellectual and moral viewpoint.

Perhaps the truest and most touching picture of the inextricable mix of private lives, public commitments, personal relationships and political positions that typified middle-class anti-fascism in Turin in the early thirties was given by Franco Antonicelli. He was a supply teacher at D'Azeglio School, who remained a friend with Bobbio throughout his life. In a brief work written in memory of an old friend, Gustavo Colonnetti, the professor of construction engineering

*at the Polytechnic, he wrote: 'There was an unforgettable period in which a small group of trusted friends would meet with spontaneous desire to liberate their souls from the distasteful burden of suspicion, discreet silences, anxiety and sudden dangers. This happened in many houses and many cities. The period I am referring to was the period of fascism.'*³² One of the houses that offered such hospitality belonged to the notary public Annibale Germano, who became Franco Antonicelli's father-in-law. Indeed, Germano's daughter Renata married the elegant man of letters when he was forced to live in the remote town of Agropoli in the province of Salerno. Some amusing photographs of that marriage survive: the bridegroom wearing an impeccable morning suit and top hat, and the bride in a white dress with a train, standing in a scene of poverty amongst bemused youngsters from the village. The notary's house in Corso Galileo Ferraris and his villa in Sordevolo near Biella were familiar and even fashionable meeting places for intellectuals of different generations and different educational backgrounds, but united in their hostility towards the regime. They included Benedetto Croce, who had a holiday home in Pollone, a few kilometres from Sordevolo. The picture which Antonicelli paints is of a middle-class circle living as outcasts, who distanced themselves from the viciousness of fascist life and nurtured a current of opposition that was to swell with the introduction of the race laws and entry into the war.

After securing the qualification to teach philosophy of law at university level, I obtained a teaching post in 1935 at the University of Camerino. It was in this period that I wrote a letter that was fished out of the archives nearly sixty years later, stirring up controversy in the newspapers that lasted for several days. It was a registered letter sent directly to 'His Excellency Sir Benito Mussolini, head of the government, Villa Torlonia':³³

Turin, 8 July 1935 XIII

Excellency!

I hope Your Excellency will excuse me if I am so bold as to contact you directly, but the matter with which I am concerned is of such great importance that I do not believe that there is any better and more certain way of finding a solution.

I, Norberto Bobbio, son of Luigi, born in Turin in 1909, graduate in law and philosophy, am currently a teacher in philosophy of law at this university. I am a member of the Fascist National Party and the Fascist University Group since 1928, when I went to university. I became a member of the Youth Vanguard in 1927, when the first group of the Vanguard was set up at D'Azeglio Senior Secondary School as

the result of an assignment entrusted to comrade Barattieri of San Pietro and myself. Because of a childhood illness that left me with ankylosis in the left shoulder, I was rejected at the medical check-up for military service, and was unable to join the Militia. I grew up in a patriotic and fascist family (my father, consultant surgeon at the San Giovanni Hospital in this city, has been a member of the Fascist National Party since 1923, one of my two uncles on my father's side is a general in the Armoured Corps in Verona, and the other is a brigade general at the Military School). During my time at university, I took an active part in the life and work of the Turin Fascist University Group, organizing student magazines, single issues and student trips, to the extent that I was given the task of giving commemorative lectures on the March on Rome and the Victory to secondary-school students. Finally, in recent years, after having completed my degrees in law and philosophy, I have devoted myself entirely to studying philosophy of law and publishing the articles and papers that have earned me the qualifications to teach at university level. The theoretical basis of these studies has helped me to consolidate my political opinions and deepen my fascist convictions.

On 15 May of this year, I was searched by the political police (a search that was extended to my mother and father), and even though nothing of any significance was found during the search, I was arrested and held in prison for seven days awaiting interrogation. Following an interrogation lasting a few minutes, for which a statement was drawn up, I was immediately released. All this occurred without my being told the reasons that had led to these measures being taken against me, given that during the interrogation I was not confronted with any specific accusations, but was merely asked for information about my acquaintance with persons who are not fascists. I answered these questions, as written in the statement, by stating that 'I could not help knowing them, as they were at school with me and of my own age'. I was then asked why I had written for *La Coltura*, something that I have already justified in a letter dated 27 June, as required of me by His Excellency Starace, through the Fascist Provincial Headquarters in Turin.

I had good reason to believe that the unfortunate incident had been resolved, but today I received an instruction to appear on the 12th of this month before the Commission of the Provincial Magistrature in order to submit my defence. I was informed that 'having examined the report on your caution, . . . and the related documents, it appears that you have become a danger to the lawful order of the state through your activities carried out in consort with persons recently committed for trial by the Special Tribunal for membership of the Justice and Freedom sect'.

I do not know what documents could possibly be the basis for this series of accusations, given that neither the search nor the interrogation were able to come up with anything against me. Equally, I do not

consider that the discovery of a photograph of Dr Leone Ginzburg dated 1928 in my possession constitutes grounds for prosecution (as we were both nineteen years old at the time and schoolfriends). Still less can the same be said of my writing for *La Coltura* (which was only a review published in the March issue of this year), as this is one of the oldest and most renowned Italian literary magazines. This article, for obvious reasons, could not have disguised any political insinuation either by myself or by those who asked me to write the article, and simply demonstrates my desire to make a modest and honest contribution to a cultural activity that is valued by the public and subject to control.

I declare in good faith that the above-mentioned accusation, which is not only curious and unexpected, but also unjustified, given the results of the search and interrogation, deeply hurts me and offends against my consciousness as a fascist, about which you can obtain valid evidence from the opinions of those persons who have known me and kept my company as friends in the Fascist University Groups and the Fascist Provincial Branch.

I renew my apologies to Your Excellency for having been so presumptuous as to write directly to you, but I was moved by the certainty that, with your elevated sense of justice, you will wish to release me from the burden of this charge, which can have no basis in my activities as a citizen and scholar, and contradicts the oath that I loyally gave.

With devotion,

Norberto Bobbio
Via Sacchi 66, Turin

This letter brought me face to face with another self who I thought I had defeated forever. I was not disturbed so much by the controversies that surrounded my character, as the letter itself and the fact that I had written it, in spite of its being, in a sense, part of a bureaucratic practice whereby the fascist police themselves asked you to humiliate yourself: 'Now, if you were to write to the Duce . . .'.

Almost sixty years later, Bobbio's letter came out of the archive and appeared in a weekly magazine. The journalist Giorgio Fabre published it in Panorama on 21 June 1992, as part of the documentary evidence for an article on collusion by anti-fascist intellectuals. He demonstrated that Cesare Pavese had written two of these letters of 'submission' and that Giulio Einaudi gave information on the anti-fascism of some of those arrested during the interrogations of 1935. He cited letters to Mussolini from Antonicelli and Mila. The magazine also published a brief interview of Bobbio by Fabre, in which the philosopher declared:

Anyone who has lived under a dictatorship knows that it is a state different from all other states. Even this letter, which now appears shameful to me, demonstrates this. Why did a person like me, who was an academic and of a middle-class family, have to write a letter of this kind? A dictatorship corrupts people's souls. It forces hypocrisy, lies and servility upon you. This is a servile letter. Although I acknowledge that what I wrote was true, I exaggerated my fascist credentials in order to gain advantage. This is by no means a justification. In order to save yourself under a dictatorship, you need strength of character, generosity and courage, and I recognize that at the time, having written this letter, I did not have these. I have no difficulty in examining my own conscience, as I have already done many many times.

The letter to Mussolini, following advance warning from Panorama, became an issue for the national press. Most commentators felt that the letter had little sense if not put in the context in which it was written. 'Especially amongst the young', explained the philosopher Eugenio Garin in La Repubblica:

those who had decided to stay in Italy were obliged to accept the consequences of that decision. Even if they were privately opposed to the regime, and even if they took part in clandestine activities aimed at overturning it, they had to maintain an outward appearance that would allow them to continue with their own business. Croce used to say that the important thing was to write a good comment on a Petrarchan sonnet. It was not a matter of a heroic attitude, it was an attempt at self-defence; this was the room for manoeuvre left in the difficult daily business of living under a dictatorship. If you didn't opt for exile, you had to operate in a situation that was conspicuously ambivalent. You had to lie and you had to wear a mask. Descartes said '*Larvatus prodeo*' – I go forward behind a mask.³⁴

Typically, the journalist Giorgio Bocca attacked the publication of the letter:

These people do not know what a dictatorship is. They don't understand that they sent you to prison and took away your means to earn a living. In the same situation, I would have written not one letter to Mussolini, but ten! In 1935, even communists in exile wrote a letter to their 'Comrades in black shirts', because it was the year in which the [Italian] Empire was founded, and Togliatti felt that there was no longer anything they could do against fascism. We should not forget that only thirteen professors refused to take the oath. Now they're taking it out on Bobbio: there is no respect for one of the few decent people around today.³⁵

Vittorio Foa was interviewed in La Stampa. What did this old friend think about the fact that Bobbio claimed to be a good fascist in the letter?

We shouldn't get confused over this. It was one thing to be a fascist, and quite another to be a member of a fascist organization. Many of my friends, including my brother, were members of the Fascist Party, even though they weren't fascists, and were often clearly anti-fascists. The fascist membership card was in many cases a requirement for being able to do a job commensurate with your own abilities, and sometimes just to have a job at all.

Foa also looked on the letter as justifiable self-defence:

Let me say straight away that that letter is completely irrelevant from a political, moral or any other point of view. The caution was a violence against him. It was a punitive measure that put restrictions on his personal freedom and his ability to travel and work. It was an act of violence against which Bobbio was entitled to defend himself: I would call it justifiable self-defence. He defended himself as he was fully entitled with shrewdness by extending his previous fascist sympathies up to the present. That letter should be read as an appeal against a bureaucratic procedure.³⁶

The historian of the Action Party, Giovanni De Luna questioned the use to which the letter was put in the context of the political struggle that was taking place during the last two years of Cossiga's presidency, following the demise of the Communist Party.

It can also be read as part of the attempt to take away the First Republic's legitimacy, by challenging the constituent DNA which it inherited from anti-fascism. With the communist tradition out of the picture, there remained the 'respectable' democratic anti-fascism of Justice and Freedom, and the Action Party. Once this had been destroyed, there would not be anything left of anti-fascism, thus removing an inconvenient package of moral values and civic commitment.³⁷

The affair went beyond Norberto Bobbio's reputation. It concerned 'abolition of the distinction between past and present', as the historian from Turin, Marco Revelli, pointed out in an article in Il Manifesto, where he distanced himself from the wave of emotion that had overtaken it and analysed its more general significance. 'The organic nature of the past is broken up and reduced to individual "exhibits" or items of evidence susceptible to consumption by an insatiable but inattentive public: at any time splinters of history can leap out of an

archive.’ This procedure reduces the whole of the past to the present, cancels out the hiatus that divides them and confuses the language of today with that of yesterday ‘in an indistinct and misleading murmur’. The context is everything. But this use of history also cancels another fundamental distinction. Revelli wrote:

The most typical and disturbing aspect of the use of history for the purpose of scandal, is the abolition of any differentiation between the public and private spheres. It is the attribution, without making any allowances, of public significance to even the most intimate acts, those that are most directly linked to the inner person. This is the real ‘scandal’, the subjection of essentially private matters to public judgement. This is the violent and contrived manner in which the darkness of the unfathomable centre of the private world with its contradictions, uncertainties, ambivalence and weaknesses, is brought together with the clearly defined and glossy public world.³⁸

In 1935, Bobbio succeeded in getting his caution removed. However, he was still considered an ‘anti-fascist element’, in spite of the letter, as can be seen from a report sent to Turin Police Headquarters by the Ministry of Internal Affairs on 27 June 1936:

Some elements who have already drawn attention because of their close relations with suspect or arrested persons belonging to the Culture Group, have turned up in the university with various duties and all wear the party badge. Example: Bobbio (resident in Via Sacchi, brother of the surgeon, previously close friend of Antonicelli) currently secretary on the Examinations Committee at the Faculty of Law; Artom, also living in Via Sacchi, arts student. They meet up with Guaita, who has returned from enforced residence in a remote place (subject of a recent report).

The party badge allows these meetings to appear normal, but there is no logical reason to believe that these meetings are normal or free from political content, if you take into account their previous form. Naturally prudence makes it difficult to get more than superficially close to these conversations between elements who have become extremely circumspect.

But we can report a general impression amongst students and others: their . . . ‘conversion to the party, expressed by the badge’ is not convincing and can only be an appearance.³⁹

I taught at Camerino for three years. I had moved to that small town from a large northern city. The journey had been very long and uncomfortable. I taught the philosophy course and had very few students, not more than ten. The majority of my colleagues, mainly of my own age, were not fascists. I recall with affection the pharmacist Luigi Scremin, who died many years ago now. From Verona,

he was a very principled Catholic and an implacable anti-fascist. There was also the future President Giovanni Leone, a lecturer in criminal law, with whom I entered into a good-natured friendship. We had full board in a hotel also called Leone, whose owner, a Mr Tirabasso, had written a cookery book called *Il cuoco classico*. In November of 1935, I gave my first lecture at Camerino University. The day of my first lecture was tense, and the anxiety was increased at the last moment before entering the lecture hall when Leone shouted out to the other colleagues 'Let's go and listen to Bobbio!' I can remember that the small and elegant lecture hall and the presence of my colleagues so unnerved me that I only managed to speak for half an hour.

At the same time, I was studying for the exam to obtain a permanent teaching post. The notification of the exam came in 1938, the year of race laws. As a result, Renato Treves was not allowed to take part, and he decided to leave Italy for Argentina. However, shortly before the examination committee met, I received a brief letter from the education minister Bottai, no more than three or four lines of official language, which, coming straight to the point, informed me that my certificates were being returned. I decided to resist what I considered an enormous injustice, namely that I was not to be allowed to take part in the promotion procedure simply because somebody had revealed that I had been arrested for anti-fascism. I had an uncle who was a general in the army and a friend of the leading fascist Emilio De Bono.⁴⁰ He drew De Bono's attention to my situation, and De Bono took the matter up with Mussolini. A couple of months later I received another equally bureaucratic letter, inviting me to resubmit my certificates.

Inevitably this incident was also used to stir up controversy. The newspaper *Il Tempo* published De Bono's letter to Mussolini asking for me to be readmitted to the selection procedure on two different occasions, in 1986 and again in 1992. This same letter was referred to by a right-wing intellectual, Marcello Veneziani, the author of a pamphlet *Sinistra e destra* written in response to my book *Left and Right*.⁴¹ 'If an anti-fascist like Bobbio could have a successful career under fascism, then that means either that fascism was not the totalitarian and oppressive regime that Bobbio claims it was, or that Bobbio was a supporter of the regime.'⁴² In reality, De Bono's letter to Mussolini is just an insight into the behaviour and phraseology of the fascist nomenclature:

Dear Head of Government,

I'm going to have to bother you again, but it really isn't my fault.

The last time I came to see you, I mentioned among other things a favour that General Bobbio had asked of me. You'll remember that it concerned his nephew, the son of Professor Bobbio, the consultant surgeon in Turin, who was not admitted to the promotion procedure for the professorship of philosophy of law, and it would appear that this was for ill-founded political reasons. You kept the letter, the memorandum sent to you by Professor Bobbio the father, and you told me using these exact words: 'He's a member of the party, I deal with this.' 'How?' I asked. 'I'll tell Bottai.' You said 'I'll tell', not 'I'll talk about it'. I therefore thought that the matter was settled, so I asked if I could pass on the news to General Bobbio. You answered in the affirmative and I told Bobbio: 'Rest assured.' Now, I get another letter from the same Bobbio in which he tells me that his nephew still *hasn't* received any invitation to resubmit his certificates for the promotion procedure, and the deadline will be passed in a few days. Listen, boss, you're entitled to do what you want, but for some time you have been happily taking me for a ride, much to my amusement. I would ask you to give me an unambiguous reply: one of those 'monosyllables' that you have asked of me in difficult times and which I have always telegraphed back to you without argument. You must understand that being able to say yes *in your name* and then having to say or write 'no' is humiliating for me, because people will end up thinking that I am *all mouth*, something I have never been in my whole life. Surely it can't be that you haven't understood me yet! I must be mistaken: you'll take me for a nuisance and positively understand me to be *a complete fool*. Thy will be done!

Yours truly,
E. De Bono⁴³

This letter was published in order to imply that I had obtained a university chair because of my fascist credentials, whereas what happened was exactly the opposite. The fascist regime attempted to stop me from taking part in the university promotion procedure, in spite of my qualifications. They did not want to give me the chair, they wanted to take it away, as I explained to Veneziani in a letter which he published with my consent in *Corriere della Sera*:

Clearly the reason for my exclusion was political, and it was therefore an abuse of power. Why was I supposed to accept it? I resorted to the only available methods in a state where the rule of law does not exist . . . It appears that you do not realize that by attacking the expedients by which people defend themselves under dictatorships, you are taking the part of the dictatorship, which by definition is always right. You put yourself on the side of the dictator when you do not say a single word to condemn the arbitrary decision, but you are strident in denouncing someone who was trying to get by, using the only methods the dictatorship allowed.⁴⁴

In the same letter, I asked whether it was worse that university professors took the oath of allegiance to fascism or that the minister forced them to take that oath? Who is more morally reprehensible: those who had to swear or those who made them?

However, I have to admit that the subterfuge to which I resorted (I wrote a servile letter to the minister Bottai) was repugnant, even though it was the only alternative to submission, particularly because it was a remedy only available to those who had the support of persons in high office, while other poor devils had put up with the abuses of power in silence. Anyone who uses such a stratagem was forced to lie in the most shameless manner. My protectors and myself were obliged to declare in bad faith that the supplicant, in spite of a few indiscretions attributable to his youth, was in reality a loyal subject to the regime. This was not true, particularly by the time of this incident, when I was close to the Liberal-Socialist Movement.

The book which Bobbio wrote for the promotion procedure, L' analogia nella logica del diritto, was published in 1938 by the Law Institute of the University of Turin. The examination committee's report gave the following portrayal of the successful candidate:

Norberto Bobbio, who graduated in law in 1931 and in philosophy in 1933, has been a qualified university teacher in philosophy of law since 1935, and has been employed since then by the University of Camerino. He has a sophisticated grasp of law and philosophy, and has carried out a wide-ranging study of institutionalist and social currents of legal thought in France and phenomenological currents in Germany. From the latter, he has inferred the need for new thinking in relation to questions of corporate franchise, concepts of society and its interpretation, as well as the discipline's general direction. Even for those of us who remain unconvinced by his conclusions or who find them unacceptable, we are happy to acknowledge that the candidate has unique critical abilities, excellent methodology and effective prose, so that all the examiners agree that he achieved the purpose of this selection procedure. We expect Bobbio to clarify his theoretical ideas, and also to extend his speculative interests beyond phenomenology, so that he can put his capacity for systematic analysis to better and greater use, with a more solid independence of thought.⁴⁵

Having been successful in the selection procedure, Bobbio was then summoned to Siena University at the end of 1938. He stayed there for two years. In December of 1940, he obtained the chair of philosophy of law at the Faculty of Law at Padua University. It was at this stage that he entered the ranks of active anti-fascism.