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Alessio Gagliardi, Il corporativismo fascista [The Fascist Corporatism]

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Recently, the historical debate on the «nature» of fascism had a significant spurt, which firstly involved the increasing marginalization of reductive interpretations, which tended to describe fascism as a «regime by operetta», trumpeting programs that were not followed by facts, or even as an instrumental reactionary response against the labor movement, to benefit the social classes who held economic power. On the contrary, the historiographical positions which insist on the complexity of fascism were strengthened; they consider the fascism a political phenomenon and institution, and therefore tend to identify more souls or more endogenous tensions. Within this paradigm, it's still remained a certain discrepancy between the claims of Mussolini and the actual accomplishments, but rather than the simply influence of certain propaganda campaigns, we prefer to investigate the measures taken, because – although undersized, compared the rhetoric that animated them – they played a very significant role.

Within this current methodology, we can also place Alessio Gagliardi, a young scholar on fascism who conducts research at the universities of Rome «La Sapienza» and L'Aquila. The volume here reviewed – with a dry and clear title – is a very interesting contribution, which gives an account of a long and laborious research on primary sources, anticipated in part by articles in scientific journals and essays on miscellaneous books.

The fascist corporatism has long been at the center of the historical debate, not least because it is one of the crucial aspects of socio-economic policy of the regime, which – in its intentions – would represent the «third way»: an alternative to socialism and to capitalism, able to recompose the special interests in the context of a more important national interest. In this context of historiographical dynamism, the volume of Gagliardi is important for two reasons. First of all it sums up very clearly and in less than two hundred pages a very complex and dense topic, without abandoning the work on archival sources. Secondly, it focuses on three distinct levels, all equally important for the topic, i.e. the cultural origins of the corporate idea, the theoretical debate on corporatism, and the practical application of the same.

Within this architecture, he naturally gives account of the distance between proclamations and enactments previously quoted, but also of the specific effects that corporatism had when it started to work. This last part is probably the most interesting, given that

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historiography had already explored the theoretical framework of legislative action, but never analyzed on how real fascist corporatism worked. In particular, the author focuses on the relationship between institutions and representative umbrella organizations, with some sample reconstructions.

Without doubt, therefore, the volume of Gagliardi – located in the important series Quadrante, by publishing house Laterza – is proposed as a point of reference for any further study of corporatism. It's sorry a bit that only the co-operative enterprise is only quoted in passing, because in the interwar period the co-operative movement was subtracted from riverbeds ideology that had given birth – liberal, socialist and catholic – to be conducted in a theoretical limbo, which corresponded, however, a practical operation. Given that the co-operative experiments attempted to resolve the interests of «producers» with those of consumers, it could be interesting to relate this approach with that used in corporatism. Also because, especially in the thirties, a series of conferences and publications were devoted to the mode of conjugation between co-operation and corporatism.

In summary, the research by Gagliardi seems ideally close a rich historiography season dedicated to corporatism. And of course it lays the foundation for new avenues of research, for example, focused on the perception of the social groups about this policy, or on international comparisons, since – as a book edited by Matteo Pasetti helped to highlight – corporatism was not confined to the Italian case. More generally, the volume provides a further contribution to the study of fascism, and it helps to understand how, in terms of employment, the regime had scope to enhance the overall energy economy of the Nation, but then he ended up flattening positions pro-owners.