

# Nuova Rivista Storica

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## Abstracts

EUGENIO DI RIENZO, *Le scelte di un liberale conservatore. Benedetto Croce e il fascismo. Una rilettura*

*Croce initially supported Mussolini's Fascist government that took power in 1922. However, the assassination of the socialist politician Giacomo Matteotti by Fascists, in June 1924, shook Croce's support for Mussolini. In May 1925, Croce was one of the signatories to the Manifesto of the Anti-Fascist Intellectuals which had been written by Croce himself. However, in June of the previous year, he had voted in the Senate in support of the Mussolini government. He later explained that he had hoped that the support for Mussolini in parliament would weaken the more extreme Fascists who, he believed, were responsible for Matteotti's murder, and absorb the Fascist movement into the liberal system.*

*After 1925, Croce voted against the so-called "leggi fascistissime" which effectively abolished the liberal system of government, born in 1861, and frequently provided moral assistance to anti-Fascist writers and dissidents, as well as those who wanted to maintain intellectual and political independence from the regime, and covertly helped them get published. Croce's house in Naples became a popular destination for anti-Fascists, and after the war, even some leaders of Communist Party reflected that Croce offered aid and encouragement to both Liberal and Marxist resistance members during the crucial years of regime.*

*Croce was seriously threatened by Mussolini's regime, though the only act of physical violence he suffered at the hands of the fascists was the ransacking of his home and library in Naples in November 1926. Although he managed to stay outside prison thanks to his reputation, he remained subject to surveillance, and his academic work was kept in obscurity by the government, to the extent that no mainstream newspaper or academic publication ever referred to him. When Mussolini's government adopted anti-Semitic policies in 1938, Croce was the only non-Jewish intellectual who refused to complete a government questionnaire designed to collect information on the so-called "racial background" of Italian intellectuals.*

*Croce later coined the term onagrocrazia (literally "government by asses") to emphasize the anti-intellectual and boorish tendencies of parts of the Fascist regime and also described Fascism as *malattia morale* (literally "moral illness"). However, turning Gobetti's interpretation - the Fascism as "autobiography of the Nation - Croce claimed that the Fascism had been a parenthesis on Italy's history, likening the "coup d'état" of 28 October 1922 to the invasion of the Hyksos. In fact, the Mussolini rise to power was the liberal elite's response to the forces that animated the revolutionary pressure of 1919-1920. Far from being a parenthesis or aberration, Fascism was the dominant coalition's reaction to the grave threat to extant social order.*

Keywords:

*Political biography of Benedetto Croce*

*Italian liberal conservatism*

*Liberal elite's response to the revolutionary pressure of "biennio rosso" (1919-1920)*

*Rise and triumph of the Fascist movement*