In the final analysis, precisely how ‘good’ Austrian government really was will continue to be discussed. What is not in doubt is that Laven has given the debate a new and exciting agenda. This book has much more to offer than simply a case study of one province under Austrian domination, for it offers powerful arguments about our understanding of nineteenth-century Italian history, as well as modifying our view of the Habsburg Monarchy under Francis I. It neatly dismisses the wilder notions that the Habsburg Empire was wilfully exploitative and offers a challenging new interpretation, which will oblige all scholars to re-consider Austria’s role in Northern Italy in the first half of the nineteenth century.

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Nicola Palombaro, Le sanzioni contro il fascismo nella provincia di Pescara, Ires Abruzzo Edizioni, Pescara, 2003, pp. 320, pbk, £15.00

Compared to other themes in Italian history, relatively little ink has been spilled over the 1943–48 purge of the state apparatus which had propped up the Fascist regime for the previous twenty years. The few studies available, such as those by Roy Palmer Domenico (Italian Fascists on Trial, 1943–1948, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1991), Claudio Pavone (Alle origini della Repubblica: Scrutti su fascismo, antifascismo e continuità dello Stato, Bollati Boringhieri, Turin, 1995), Hans Woller (Die Abrechnung mit dem Faschismus in Italien, 1943 bis 1948, R. Oldenbourg, Munich, 1996) and Romano Canosa (Storia dell’epurazione in Italia. Le sanzioni contro il fascismo 1943–1948, Baldini & Castoldi, Milan, 1999), are of a general character. In-depth studies of local cases, on the other hand, are virtually non-existent. Nicola Palombaro’s book is therefore a welcome contribution which closely scrutinizes the purge in the province of Pescara. The reconstruction is based on massive quantities of documentation from no less than nine state and private archives and from seven contemporary weekly and daily publications. Before coming to this, however, the author dedicates part I of the volume, divided into eight chapters, to the national purging programme and its application.

Chapters 1–4 outline the ascendant phase of the process. The arrival of the Allies in Sicily in July 1943 saw a purge of the local section of the Partito Nazionale Fascista (PNF), the Fascist unions and school textbooks. Subsequently, and with a view to belatedly dissociating the monarchy from Fascism, a royal decree of 2 August dissolved the PNF and the Chamber of the Fasces and Corporations. A second royal decree, dated 28 December, called for the public administration to be purged of anyone who had been an active member of the PNF, who had participated in squadrist actions and/or the march on Rome, who had been a high-level official in the regime, or who had benefited from a privileged position within the Fascist state in order to undermine personal freedom. In July 1944, and once more with a view to saving the monarchy, Vittorio Emanuele III ‘retired’ and his son Umberto became Lieutenant-General of the kingdom. Shortly thereafter, on 27 July, a viceroyal decree called for the punishment of perpetrators of Fascist-inspired crimes, including the creation of the dictatorship, the dragging of Italy into the catastrophic war, and collaboration with the Nazis during the Republic of Salò. It further outlined the need for a purge of the public administration, the expropriation of ill-gotten profits, the liquidation of Fascist property and the institution of a High Commissar for the purge. This document was, or at least should have been, the ‘Magna Carta’ of the purge.

Palombaro’s chapters 5–8 then deal with the curve’s downward trajectory, beginning with the crisis of the anti-fascist Comitati di Liberazione Nazionale (CLN) from November 1944, the progressive affirmation therein of the conservative anti-purge current and the consequent depoliticizing of the purge. A further decisive moment was represented by the amnesty of 22 June 1946 issued by Palmiro Togliatti, leader of the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) and at that time Minister for Justice in the first government of Christian Democrat Alcide De Gasperi. The final nail in the purge’s coffin came with the overwhelming victory of the Democrazia Cristiana (DC) in the general election of April 1948. De Gasperi had in reality already issued a decree in February of that year during his fourth government, but he followed this up with
a law of December 1949, and together these two measures allowed the release from prison of almost all of those Fascists who had not until that moment in time benefited from Togliatti’s amnesty. As regards overall figures for the national purge, these are anything but clear: Palombaro quotes Woller, who has estimated that between 10,000 and 20,000 Fascists were dismissed from their posts within the public administration. It should be noted, however, that these sentences were almost all subsequently overturned, as seen most particularly in the work of the special section of the Council of State which upheld 2,895 out of 3,200 appeals, equivalent to 90.5 per cent.

With the contextual framework in place, part II of Palombaro’s book turns to the purge in Pescara. When Mussolini erected the Republic of Salò in September 1943, Pescara was among the territories occupied by the German Army. Local Fascist leaders and functionaries, in particular the vice-prefect Cesare Pace, actively collaborated with the Nazis. When the Allies arrived in Pescara in June 1944, as in Sicily they began a purge of the school textbooks. But, as Palombaro shows in part II, chapter 1, they assigned this task to Luigi Polacchi, who had been responsible for the spread of Fascist culture and propaganda in the newspaper of the local fascio di combattimento. Palombaro then focuses primarily on the figure of local PCI militant Natale Camarra, the provincial delegate for the purge. In particular, he deals with Camarra’s head-on collision with Pace, who instead of being purged by the Allies was in fact promoted to full prefect. From part II, chapter 2, onwards Palombaro documents the obstacles faced by Camarra, whose zeal met with the resistance of a state apparatus that was now effectively investigating itself. Indeed, not only did Pace use his influence in high places to seek the removal of Camarra but, as Palombaro shows in part II, chapter 5, the prefect also manipulated the local carabinieri (who were only too willing to be thus manipulated) into furnishing ‘objective’ and, not surprisingly, favourable reports on the various suspects who had found their way onto Camarra’s eighty-four-person-long purge list.

Despite the conspiracy, however, Camarra’s determination eventually paid off. Palombaro relays in part II, chapter 6, that Pace’s head officially rolled on 18 January 1946 and, against the national trend, it was not among those restored on appeal. Palombaro explains that this ‘small victory’ was made possible not only by the obstinacy of the local Communist but also by the fact that it was not until the late spring of 1945 that the Pescara CLN underwent the crisis and disintegration that had beset the anti-fascist coalition at national level from late 1944 onwards. That said, the limits to this purge were no less serious than those of the national one. Despite the presence of the Communist aficionado in Pescara, there was no real attempt, as shown in part II, chapter 8, to purge the police and the carabinieri in that province.

It is also noteworthy that, of measures taken against the notorious Fascist secret police (OVRA), little or nothing is known in Pescara, apart from news in a local paper of a five-year internal exile meted out to one man for Fascist spying activity. As for the expropriation of profits derived from the Fascist clientele network, Palombaro’s part II, chapter 9, reveals that the results obtained in this ambit were in fact the worst of the entire purge process.

If Camarra did not face any direct obstruction from his own party, it is nevertheless the case that his efforts were not altogether appreciated by the Togliattian leadership of the PCI. Camarra assumed the position of delegate of the High Commissar in August 1944 with the July viceregal decree as his terms of reference, but at national level events took a turn as early as October when his ally Mauro Scoccimarro, a High Commissar of the national purge since July, began to seriously question the limits being imposed on the purge by the PCI’s CLN allies and even by Togliatti himself. Scoccimarro consequently resigned in September, and in November the government of Ivanoe Bonomi went into crisis, signalling a turn in the relation of forces within the CLN. Palombaro deals inadequately with the Scoccimarro case in his part II, chapter 3, seeing in his intransigence some type of difference in strategic perspective with Togliatti. But Scoccimarro’s criticism of the Togliatti line was arguably limited to the depth of the purge, and did not include a challenge to what Togliatti saw as the necessary subordination of socialism to the reconstruction of the capitalist state in alliance with the DC. It should be remembered, after all, that Scoccimarro would go on to become the Minister for Finance from June 1945 to February.
1947, a period that included the first two De Gasperi governments. Camarra, on the other hand, as Palombaro shows more convincingly in the same chapter, tended to link the local purge to a political strategy that went beyond alliances with the very political forces (the DC) who were drawing mass electoral support from the public administration which he so ardently wanted to purge. Palombaro suggests that it is this overenthusiasm which most likely accounts for the fact that Camarra never rose up through the ranks of the PCI to become a national leader.

One senses from all this that Palombaro is at times caught up in the very discourse that he is trying to unravel. Indeed, if one were to find fault with this book it would be precisely over its tendency to underplay the role of the PCI leadership in aborting the national purge and the effects of this in Pescara. Palombaro is of the view that Togliatti’s amnesty was in reality misunderstood and misapplied by contemporary magistrates, and that this explains the fact that perpetrators of Fascist-inspired crimes were released from prison or never sent there in the first place. Little or no analysis is made of how Camarra’s efforts were mired in the broader strategy of national and international Stalinism, and how this informed the PCI leadership’s subordination of the purge (as revealed most evidently in the amnesty) to a search for strategic alliances with the DC and its class allies. It is noteworthy in this regard that at the same time as Fascists were walking free, partisans, left-wing militants and striking workers were being victimized or executed, sometimes with the approval of Togliatti himself (as shown, for example, even by Togliatti sympathiser Giorgio Bocca in his Palmiro Togliatti, Laterza, Rome–Bari, 1973). Palombaro would have done well to dedicate a chapter to a discussion of the forms that this contradictory dynamic—an effective counter purge—assumed in Pescara.

It can also be said that while this book’s punctiliousness is one of its strong points, its evidential detail and even graphic layout make it more akin to a doctoral thesis than to a digestible book (the volume is in fact an extended rewriting of Palombaro’s tesi di laurea).

Yet despite this pedigree, another negative feature of the volume is the manner in which figures for the Pescara purge are dealt with. These are scattered and disorganized, and it is difficult if not impossible to discern exactly how many people on Camarra’s list were effectively purged and from which posts. Palombaro’s book is 320 pages long, of which thirty or so are dedicated to the national purge and around ninety to the purge in Pescara. The rest of the volume is accounted for by footnotes, photocopies of archive documents and a fifty-page appendix that includes the transcriptions of such texts as the purge decrees and Togliatti’s amnesty. These are useful, but there was clearly plenty of space for a table which could have grouped, summarized and made completely comprehensible the figures for the Pescara purge.

Finally, Palombaro contradicts himself somewhat when, in his conclusion, he argues that, while the purge effectively failed both nationally and in Pescara, it nevertheless functioned towards the moral and political re-education of the Italian people after the debilitating experience of the Fascist dictatorship. This tends to reiterate the liberal thesis on the origins and nature of Fascism, with all its negative consequences for an efficient purge (along the lines of ‘it is not the state which needs to be purged, but the people’s morality which needs to be re-forged’). This is a view that Palombaro himself quite clearly does not share; indeed Camarra is nothing if not the hero of this volume, and it is evidently a central thesis of this book that not moral re-education, but a few more Natale Camarras were needed if scores were to be settled with the Fascists. At any rate, Nicola Palombaro has promised a future volume on the role of the Allies in the purge, a study to which interested scholars have every reason to look forward.

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This recent collection provides a rich and useful sampling of the most up-to-date historiography of Italian colonialism in Eritrea. Studies of