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Outlines of Fascism

Will Fascism come in the wake of the New Deal? The writer surveys its rapid post-war spread through Europe, reviews its origins in the writings of Pareto and Sorel and indicates steps that lead to its establishment.

By Cedric Fowler

RECOVERY programs under capitalism have one thing in common the world over: they breed division. The difficulties of reconciling the two elements of a national plan—private profit and social need—inevitably promote struggle. The Roosevelt example is no exception. Under the New Deal administration, we are seeing (perhaps for the first time in our history) liberalism and conservatism fighting out their battle all along the line. Critics from all ends and corners of the country have been observing the struggle for months past. None of them yet knows which side will win. When the Roosevelt program veers momentarily leftward, conservatives are convinced the direction is socialist. On a conservative turn, liberals are convinced it is reactionary. Whither are we trending?—the perennial question—has become more popular than ever before. In a democracy, everyone can ask the question as loudly and as often as he likes, and the year's crop of political alarm has been by far the heaviest in a generation.

There is no doubt the crop has been well stimulated. Plan and counter-plan, shifts in policy and personnel, have produced the rich and humid atmosphere so conducive to speculation. Wars and rumors of wars from the Washington brain centers add to the confusion. Mumblings from the older school democrats hint at disaffection in the ranks. And out of the whole welter and riot of Washington doings, one clear question emerges: which direction is the national program taking? Is it Left, toward socialism—or is it Right, toward reaction?

Liberals, progressives, radicals and readers of the news-

papers have a word for the rightward swing. They call it Fascism. Within the past year this word has become one of the most popular, and one of the most overworked, in the political vocabulary. Since the rise of the Nazis it has been used to describe almost any political doctrine one dislikes, including such diversities as Mr. Hoover's late administration, Governor Rolph's sadistic witticisms,



heresies within the radical brotherhood and the occasionally conservative moods of Mr. Roosevelt. Even the editorial writers of our great dailies have caught on, and during the late fuss about freedom of the press the words, "dictatorship," "co-ordination" and similar Fascist terms were thrown into print with almost reckless abandon.

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But, in spite of some hysteria, there are good reasons for the excitement. Since Italy first promulgated the doctrine and word twelve years ago, a good part of the world has followed her example. Germany was the first great power, and so far has furnished the closest imitation of the Italian method. Among the smaller powers Turkey, with its Ghazi; Yugo-Slavia under Alexander; the Baltic states, hysterical with fear of Communism; Austria, where Dollfuss suppresses German Nazis only to encourage the native brand—lead the Fascist parade. Other countries have Fascist movements in embryo, some of them so advanced that time alone seems to condition their birth. Spain has a strong Fascist group under the son of Primo de Rivera, late monarchist dictator. Ireland's Blue Shirts under O'Duffy have become a first class menace to de Valera in less than six months. In Rumania the Iron Guard has been bullying Jews for more than a year, and recently rose to the level of public assassination. Even England has a Fascist group, with one of the Labor Party's numerous deserters as leader. The English Blackshirts have followed both Italy and Germany, distinguishing themselves so far by scuffling with Communists and beating aged Jews in the streets of London.

In all these examples, it can be observed that Fascist movements follow generally similar lines. Repudiation of democracy, opposition to socialism, suppression of labor and persecution of minorities are the common basis. Fascism, in spite of its intense nationalism, has a universal character. It has similar aims, recruits its supporters from similar social levels, meets a common "menace" and employs identical tactics the world over. It is a genuinely international movement, not in the gentler sense that it promotes peace and understanding, but in the sense that each Fascist group is a copy of the other. Incidentally, it may be mentioned that Fascism hereby follows the most important of the Marxist theses—the class character of social movements.

Such universality should hint at a common basis in political science and philosophy. Other movements have it. Socialism, the antithesis of Fascism, possesses a body of doctrine designed to fit every situation. Definitely accepting its international character, it acknowledges a common parent and a common book of laws. Democracy has ac-



cepted international models since its beginning, first from England and later from the United States. Monarchy claims its ultimate source in God, who is the same to all men and all countries.

Fascism, although its leaders would deny it, is open to the search for a common origin. Several names in political science and philosophy have been suggested since observers

first turned their attention to the movement. When the Blackshirts took power in Italy, students turned to Machiavelli for an explanation. Mussolini, they argued, had been reading "*The Prince*," that handy guide to the technique of autocracy. Mussolini was a dictator and a tyrant, and the unscrupulous Florentine his master—so it was said. The explanation, while satisfactory at the time, has not endured. Machiavelli was a mediaeval writer. He has said nothing on social questions as they confront us at the present time. Since the 16th century, a whole class has been created whose existence could not be conceived of then. His advice to princes, while admirable and concise, does not apply to modern conditions. Mussolini for all his autocratic rule is not a prince, and has shown no intention of becoming one. He is the leader of a mass movement, enlisting the support of the majority of his people. In Machiavelli's time, the majority of the people were hardly considered to exist, and certainly not considered as the source of political power.

Nietzsche has been another name advanced as the inspiration of Fascism. Here again the claim cannot be

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substantiated. Nietzsche, most turgid of philosophers, can hardly be accused of possessing a science of politics, much less of outlining the syllabus of mass power. Rhetoric on the superman is doubtless inspiring to the future dictator, but it will not help him to capture the hearts and minds of his people. The race theories of Huston Chamberlain, required reading for anti-semites, are intellectually contemptible. Hitler has learned nothing from them beyond a pseudo-scientific justification for his particular Nordic emotions.



A more nearly rational thesis for Fascism has been found in the work of Alfredo Pareto, the Italian sociologist. Pareto meets almost all the Fascist definitions. He is anti-Marxist, anti-democratic and opposed to social utopias. He is not primarily an economist, and therefore escapes the Fascist charge of materialism. By his reliance upon mathematics he imparts an exact air to his most dogmatic pronouncements. His writings, chiefly embodied in the *Trattato di Sociologia Generale*, are enormously long, and hence admirably suited to politico-religious interpretation. Though his work is not widely known, it has been established that Mussolini sat under him at Lausanne, and credit has been given him for converting Il Duce from his earlier socialism. It is doubtful if Hitler, Goebbels and Goering are aware of his existence.

Pareto's main thesis is the decay of the present "cycle of plutocratic demagogy" and the rise of a cycle of autocratic control. Just as feudalism fell at the hands of a determined middle class, the bourgeois-democratic system as we know it now is falling at the hands of men who are determined to rule in its place. In the "circulation of the elite" the parliamentary bourgeoisie is being replaced by individual leaders, an "elite" of dictators and autocrats. Social cycles, not being permanent, are under the control of men, and not conditioned by abstract ideas of ethics, social justice and humanitarianism. Such qualities do not exist beyond the minds of dreamers and visionaries. Dictatorship is the one reality. Previously this reality expressed itself through class control. Now in the apparent decay of democracy it is expressing itself through individual leaders. These leaders, incidentally, are justified in whatever means they employ to take over control.

It is easy to see how Fascists find comfort in the work of Pareto. It exalts their autocratic yearnings to the level of destiny, by informing them that their rise to power is inevitable. It underlines the rottenness of democracy, justifies reactionary tactics, makes the leader all powerful and puts the whole on a lofty scientific basis. By waving away all questions of social right as abstractions, it disposes of liberals, progressives and radicals in one simple positive breath. Combining with this the anarchist-syndicalist philosophy of Sorel, which regards violence and intuition as the main qualities for rulership, Fascism has found its nearest approach to a *rationale*.



But neither all Fascists nor a majority of them regard Pareto as a central authority. As mentioned above, Mussolini is the only dictator who has studied him. The Nazis, the Iron Guard, the Blue Shirts and the dozen other exponents of permanent autocracy have not learned their politics from books so much as they have learned them from their emotional reactions to present economic and social pressure. Fascism as we witness it in operation is a movement of direct action. It is not a product of scholars or philosophers. The Nazis and the Blackshirts are men of deeds, and seldom feel, or express, the need to explain themselves in rational terms. The hastiest glance at the writings of their leaders will prove this. Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, a mixture of bloodlust, neurotic hatreds and elliptical thinking, may be taken as an example. For an understanding of Fascism, therefore, it is necessary to study it as a living social movement.

Preliminary to such an examination is a glance into previous social conditions. Fascism, though a mass movement, is primarily a movement of the middle class. Storm troops and Blackshirts Militia are not recruited from the

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proletariat, but from the petty bourgeois, the small tradesmen and the white collar workers. To achieve Fascist revolt, this group must be large, discontented, and until the advent of Fascist captains, leaderless. Germany furnishes perhaps the best examples of these qualities. Since 1918, the German lower middle class has increased almost sixty per cent—two and a half times the rate of increase of the proletariat. Under the impact of successive post-war depressions, the majority of them were unable to find work. Faced with apparently permanent unemployment, they saw no better prospect than reduction to manual labor levels, a prospect that filled them with horror. Fear of proletarian status was combined with jealousy, for the industrial workers in Germany, through labor unions, were better off economically than the white collar workers. They were organized, received more social insurance benefits, were better protected from exploitation and more accustomed to the forcible expression of their dissatisfaction. Hitler appeared as the savior of the lower middle classes, offering them the same benefits and the same militant leadership their proletarian rivals had enjoyed. It is small wonder that they were glad to join him, and that once in power they proceeded to wreck the trade unions and the radical organizations they had so bitterly envied in the past.

With this increase in the lower middle class came an increase in the intellectual classes: students, professional workers and the like. These people also were faced with unemployment, both in Italy and in Germany. The German problem was particularly acute, for while the total number of university and technical school graduates increased roughly sixty per cent since the war, the number of positions fell. In the later post-war years, for example, there were some 26,000 graduates annually, with only 12,000 professional or technical jobs open to them. Most of these students felt the same fear of reduction to a lower social level. National Socialism promised an end to this situation.

A third element of discontent is furnished by a large and debt burdened peasantry. Italy, Germany and the other Fascist countries have appealed greatly to this class. It is especially responsive in times of world depression, when agricultural prices decline and mortgage rates remain stationary. Previous German governments fell one after another because they had no solution for this problem. The Nazis and the Communists were the only groups promising to end the intolerable situation. Since the Nazis proposed to give the land to the farmers in small holdings, rather than to socialize it in collectives, the peasants naturally supported the Nazis.

Defeat or disappointment in a major war provides a discontented mass of ex-soldiers, patriots and fire eating youth for the Fascist orators to work upon. The drastic injustice of the Versailles Treaty made almost every German into a nationalist. While no party disagreed on this issue, the National Socialists were the most vociferous about it, and therefore the most popular among patriotic Germans. In addition, the Nazis employed the Treaty for further attack on the radical and semi-radical parties, offering the ingenious "stab in the back" theory as an explanation of Germany's post-war sufferings. Since the Social Democrats had been forced to make peace with the Allies, the Nazis concluded that they were to blame for all Germany's humiliations and defeats. The explanation was simple. The fact that it was false did not destroy its appeal.



Italy, while nominally a victor in the World War, did not receive a tithe of what it expected from the Versailles loot. Secret treaties in 1915 had promised Italy almost all the territory patriotic greed could want. But when the Italian delegation in Paris tried to collect, it was rebuffed by the stronger Allies, and returned home comparatively empty handed. Nationalists were quick to fasten the blame upon the democratic parties then in power. D'Annunzio became a national hero when he seized Fiume in protest, and Mussolini used his deed to stimulate the patriotic frenzy necessary to Fascism.

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The tradition of military training is an ingredient that greatly simplifies the Fascist task. The essence of Fascist discipline is unquestioning obedience to authority. Universal military service is the ideal school for this quality. Soldiers are not expected to think, and they are punished if they question orders. The same thing is expected of Stormtroopers. They are allowed more play for their emotions, perhaps, but the same blind following of leaders is required. Fascism has its strongest appeal to the mass of people who prefer to be led. A strong military tradition, plus a comparatively short experience of democracy (the two go together), trains this class in the instinct of dumb obedience.



Finally, there is the required presence of a minority to act as scapegoat for popular discontent. In Italy, this minority was made up of the active Socialists and pacifists, and Fascism when it came to power took pitiless revenge upon their fancied treason. Germany has followed more classic lines in selecting the Jews as leading official whipping boys for the nation. In addition the Nazis have linked Jews, radicals and international bankers in a miraculous union of blame for economic ills. A restless middle class is not satisfied with abstract explanations of its troubles. Students, white collar workers, ex-soldiers and professional patriots require flesh and blood objects for their wrath. They are invariably found in some racial or national minority. If the minority is weak and incapable of striking back, so much the better, for Fascists are not unnecessarily heroic.

Given a discontented middle class, disappointment in war, a minority to persecute, and shrewd leaders, Fascist steps to power follow. First is the unremitting use of propaganda. In the unexpurgated version of his autobiography, Hitler remarks that there is no limit to the deception of the masses permissible. If it is effective, propaganda may be based almost wholly on lies. Any statement, however distorted, any promise, however faithless, is justified. The masses have notoriously short memory, and if angered at the repudiation of one slogan, can easily be diverted with another. Hitler cites the success of the Allies in persuading America to enter the war, and it must be admitted the model is good.

The use of the name "National Socialist German Workers' Party" gives the clue to the extent of this technique of deception. The Nazis did not hesitate to use radical and even revolutionary phraseology in their agitation. Section Eleven of the twenty-five point program, for example, demands "the elimination of income which is obtained without labor or effort." Useful as an appeal to the radical elements in Germany, it was immediately forgotten when the Nazis came to power.

It did not matter that "The leaders of the Party promise, if necessary under the pledge of their lives, to work ruthlessly for the carrying out of the promises above set forth." Even the communization of department and chain stores promised to the small tradesmen was laid aside, and within three months of power Hitler was ordering a halt to all attacks on them.

Fascists endeavor to be all things to all men. For working class propaganda, they employ radical slogans. For middle class agitation, they promise attacks on big trusts and bankers. For the quieter work on the aristocracy and the great industrialists, they promise to end strikes and to reduce wages. So far the Nazis and the Blackshirts have kept faith with only the last named class.

With the use of propaganda comes a more active form of agitation, the creation of disorder. Much has been heard about the chaos and anarchy of Italy before the



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March on Rome. The blame was laid on the radical organizations and the trade unions. Mussolini, we are told, brought order and civilization back to Italy. But as a matter of historical fact, the post-war confusion and upset had largely ceased before the Fascist Militia appeared on the scene. Trade and industrial production had resumed normal activity—as nearly normal as world wide conditions would permit. The Blackshirts revived the period of unsettlement, since it suited their purposes to alarm the nation with tales of imminent chaos. War was waged on working class districts, radical villages and city quarters were ravaged with machine gun and bomb. The Fascist Militia did not hesitate to sabotage factories and public utilities in the effort to produce a state of terror in the populace. The Nazis have followed the same tactics, with provocative raids on radical districts, pitched battles with Communists and Socialists, strike breaking activities and the like. The method is familiar. To justify dictatorship, it is necessary to produce evidence of hopeless public confusion. If the evidence does not already exist, it must be manufactured.

Propaganda and agitation cost money. Stormtroopers have to be fed on something more substantial than appeals to their emotions. A large and steady campaign fund is therefore necessary, a considerably larger fund than the more democratic parties require. The fund is raised in various ways. Small merchants are assured that only Fascism offers them protection from radical attack—a form of shakedown similar to our own racketeering. Professional people who fear socialism and the possibility of revolution are also warned. Finally big employers, reactionary industrialists and large landowners are approached. Once convinced that the safety of their profits demands Fascism, they will contribute heavily. In Germany, for example, Siemens, Krupp, Blohm and other great firms have long been supporting Hitler with funds. Wage reductions once the Fascists are in power amply repay their sacrifice.

Fascist parties (like their radical opponents) profess to despise democratic forms, but they do not disdain to run candidates in elections. Here the method varies in direct ratio to success at the polls. Early in the growth of the movement, the Fascist election tactics are as mild and gentle as could be desired. All legal forms are strictly observed. Intimidation, ballot stuffing and the other corruptions of voting are virtuously avoided. The Fascist deputies will even cooperate with opposition parties in strictly parliamentary tactics. As popular support grows, however, the method changes. Propaganda for votes merges with more direct ways of securing them. Given a majority, or even a near majority, in the parliament, the Fascist deputies proceed to change rules and practise as it pleases them. The final election before the Fascist Party assumes full power is usually a farce. No other parties are permitted to run campaigns. Meetings, radio talks, newspapers, all forms of opposition propaganda are forbidden. Naturally the election shows an overwhelming majority for the party in power. Once that majority is assured (again Fascists demonstrate a curious fidelity to forms), the *coup d'état* proceeds.

Steps to consolidate power are taken immediately. Under the slogan of the "corporative state" democratic forms of government are abolished. The ruling Party is identified with the state—becomes the sole national authority—and all other parties are banished. Labor organizations are liquidated, their funds seized and their leaders imprisoned. Terror becomes the principal weapon of government. At first this terror is confined to radical opponents and to the minority selected for persecution. Later as the Party grows in strength it is extended to the more moderate elements and even to former collaborators and allies. Fascism is greedy of power, and cannot endure the presence of outsiders. The abrupt and skillful way von Papen, Hugenberg and the Nationalists were shouldered aside by Hitler is an excellent example of Fascist monopoly. The fact that they had smoothed his way to the Chancellorship, agreed to all his demands and surrendered their own power to him, did not count in their favor.

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The process of incorporation extends all down the line. Cultural, religious, athletic and philanthropic activities are given the choice of submission to Fascist dictatorship or extinction. In Catholic countries and districts, an early rapprochement is arranged with the Church. In Italy, where the nationalist tradition has been in conflict with the Vatican, the concordat was delayed seven years, but Mussolini was finally able to secure a settlement that had baffled previous governments since 1870. Hitler has so far had less success with the Protestant clergy, but genuine pressure has not yet been applied. Coördination of all written expression of opinion and feeling follows, with sidelines of control over theatres, movies, pictorial arts and radio. Censorship is a vital necessity to any autocratic regime, for the truth carelessly handled is dangerous.

Military steps include increase of the regular army, the legalization of the Fascist Militia, and the early training of the young in war. An aggressive foreign policy is pursued, designed both to satisfy military desires and to prove to the population that "a ring of enemies" exists around the nation. Changes in the criminal code, making offenses against the Party punishable as treason to the state, put crime and political offenses on a court martial basis. An attack on Fascism becomes an attack on the nation, and the penalty ranges in severity from death to long imprisonment. The cult of the leader assumes a military tone, with *Duce* or *Fuhrer* elevated to the height of warrior king. Fascist dictators are selected from the soldier class, and their political conduct is accordingly warlike.

In that military character is Fascism's greatest danger to the world. Fascist leaders in interviews with foreign visitors profess a desire for peace, but the protests hardly accord with their monstrous preparations for war. Fascism expresses itself in militarism. Germany lives in a state of siege. Government policy and propaganda inflame nationalism to a constantly increasing pitch. Sooner or later the war emotion must boil over into action. All Europe is an armed camp. The Versailles Treaty fifteen years ago set the economic and geographic background for struggle. Fascism supplies the urge and will to settle its problems by war.