

What is fascism?

André Prudhommeaux

“Fascism will not pass!” This slogan, launched again by the Kremlin with a powerful orchestration and repeated in chorus by the Communist Parties of all countries, seems to be more effective the more ambiguous it remains.. The adversary is not designated with a name, and this allows anyone to depict it in the imagination on the bases of their own interests, prejudices or ideological conceptions.

It does not even get defined, and heaven forbid that one should say *what fascism is*, both through the analysis of concrete examples taken from the past and in terms of the political-social theory of the present-day world. In fact, the division of labor is as follows: the vaguely frightened or irritated *masses* demonstrate “against fascism”, meaning in this sense everything that they can fear or detest (war, police dictatorship, “reaction”,

caesarism, anti-working-class politics, violence, job insecurity, colonial adventurism, explosions of national chauvinism, the iron claw of big capital, the influence of the bosses, the banks, the army, the clergy, the “shops”, small rural property, bureaucracy, etc.). As to the *communists*, they reserve to themselves the task of giving all this ambiguous expression of extremely different political feelings an orientation and a point of application of which they remain the sole judges. For them, all that does not come into the current Party line is implicitly fascist, and what the Agit-Prop, in its latest leaflet or poster, has stigmatized as the number one enemy of the place and time is explicitly fascist.

This is why in the past every power, every party, every politician, every philosophy, every tendency that deviated even slightly from the official line of the Communist Party in any of its extravagant zig-zags have earned the label *fascist* from time to time. On the other hand, there is not a single power, politician, party, regime, even if we invoke Hitler, Mussolini or those who emulate them, who did not find grace on the occasion of a temporary alliance or an attempt at a “united front”, so that the label “fascist” disappeared as if by magic. All in all, in each moment and in each sphere infiltrated by a Party leader, whatever the Party chooses to define as fascist is fascist; and unfortunately, the opposers of *bolshevism* and of *fascism* have not figured out how to oppose a thinking and a vocabulary with a certain precision to this terminological arbitrariness. People commonly counterpose *fascism* and *democracy*, *fascism* and *progressivism*, *fascism* and *revolution*, *fascism* and *proletariat*, *fascism* and *socialism*.

Recently in a scholarly non-stalinist leftist journal in the United State, *Contemporary Issues*, L.W. Hedley, in the same article, defined fascism as absolute centralism, as chauvinist extremism, as social opposition to progress, as counter-revolution, as aristocracy, as defeatism (!) and as crazed individualism.

Obviously, these contradictory equivalences do nothing but feed the most complete confusion and reduce “anti-fascism” to an arbitrary word game.

Far from being equivalent to absolute “centralism”, fascism is perfectly adapted to the local arbitrary (or extra-legal) power of any mayor, *Gauleiter*, *Statthalter* whatsoever, backed by a clique in the manner of a gang leader. Far from being necessarily “chauvinist”, it is often accompanied by a semi-delirious xenophilia toward a dominant foreign model forcefully and unconditionally revered. Far from being “opposed to progress”, fascism is dynamic and futuristic to the highest degree, and insists upon abolishing all that opposes its totalitarian utopia. The spirit of “counter-revolution”, which means the return to an earlier historical condition, is unknown to it; on the contrary, it is a never-ending adventure toward industrial, military, state, ideological, demographic power: a will for nihilistic rupture. For all these reasons, it is the least “aristocratic” thing in the world: a movement of the mass man, a brutal revenge match of ignorance, baseness, low demagoguery and social climbing in all its forms, a social tsunami that puts under-humans and illiterates, idols of a proletariat going Dutch – formed, in their image, by politicized and maintained unemployed.

Fascism supports neither the traditional “values” of caste, which are an insult to its plebeian character; nor

the contact of “intelligence”, which is suspect and decadent in its eyes; not, above all, “individualism”, since it fiercely denies the individual and private life. Its vision of the world is not historical, but legendary and mythic. It raises the State or the Race to an absolute before which all rights, all freedoms, all particularities must be sacrificed in the unity. It exalts the collective passion of the power and violence of the People, considered as a transcendent reality by the persons that compose it, and strives to realize this transcendence through the political-military regimentation of the entire population.

In short, fascism is pure democracy (in the etymological and absolute sense of the term): uncontrolled democracy without moral or constitutional limits – *the dictatorship of democracy* or (if we refer to a negative meaning) democracy WITH NEITHER TOLERANCE NOR LIBERALISM, the law of the Lynch mob, *popular* (and plebeian) democracy.

An absolute and direct democracy, like the one conceived by J.-J. Rousseau in the *Social Contract*, in fact, has nothing to do with legal guarantees of the separation of powers, or of respect for minorities; *habeus corpus* is foreign to it, like the notions of an inner being and a private life. It proclaims not only anyone who *acts* – but also anyone who *speaks* or *thinks* “on the fringes of others” – fictitious and an enemy of the people. It allows no other attitude than permanent enthusiasm, no other behavior than the continual display of civic virtue and the spirit of sacrifice for the state. Finally, it knows no other hierarchy than that which sanctions the law of numbers and of success.

In essence, fascism is plebeian and plebiscitary – gregarious, caesarist, group-oriented and jacobin. The opposing pole and antidote of fascism is the broadminded and libertarian spirit – meant in the sense of the responsibility, reciprocity, balance and autonomy of individual persons – that develops within a society of individual men and women who have grown beyond the vulgar appetites for power, in and for freedom. Anarchism, well-conceived, naturally tends to generalize to all humanity the habits and rights of this elite of thinking and acting individuality. Fascism tends precisely to annihilate it and to build the social edifice on the greatest common denominator of the undeveloped human being – the will to alienated power socialized in the collective will to enslavement.

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Historically, a political official governing a district under Nazi rule. Now used more broadly as an insult for any overbearing official.

A regional administrator place in regional power by a superior (king, president, emperor, etc.)

I took the liberty here of using a synonym in my translation of “liberale”, since in American English these days, “liberal” has a specific political meaning which is not at all anti-authoritarian.

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